

India and the World: A perspective from Africa

By

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Protocols

1. Allow me to begin by expressing my appreciation to the Board, management, and staff of the world famous Centre for Policy Research (CPR) for the kind invitation extended to me to speak to you today as part of the lecture series on India and the World. My understanding is that today's lecture is the third in the series. Although the invitation to speak reached me at a very busy time in my schedule - but, frankly,

there is hardly an idle moment or a low season in my current role. Before I proceed, it is important that I state that I currently serve as Chief of Staff to the President, however, I am here today as part of this series in my personal capacity and as a scholar of International Relations. Nonetheless, inspite of the demands in my role, it is with much gratitude that I accept the honour and my acceptance of this invitation is a mark of immense admiration I have for the CPR and the respect I have for India with which my country has had more than six decades of unbroken and mutually beneficial relations.

2. Like some of the regions of Africa, India is an old civilization with an illustrious history that dates back

to ancient times. History tells us that way before the advent of the first European adventurers in Africa and the Indian sub-continent, the two regions of the world already had flourishing relations between them. Much of these relations were built around commerce across the Indian Ocean and involved the movement of population, the transfer of technology, and the exchange of ideas, including food cultures.

3. The colonial imposition that saw both Africa and India fall under European rule was to disrupt and distort the substance of the relations between them, although it was only a matter of time before knowledge gained and experiences built by the British in their rule over India were to be applied in

Africa. Of particular interest to me is the importation of the Indirect Rule system that had been tried out by British colonial administrators in India to my own country Nigeria. Lord Frederick Lugard, the primary exponent of the Indirect Rule system in Nigeria had cut his teeth as an administrator in India. Also, on the strength of the lessons of experience from the building of a trans-India railway system to facilitate colonial administration and commerce, indentured labour from the sub-continent was exported by the British to Africa, especially Eastern and Southern Africa.

4. The deep historical bonds that have tied Africa and India to each other manifested themselves in good

times as in seasons of adversity. As the august audience participating in this lecture will know, Mahatma Gandhi, the founding spirit of independent India who became the scourge of British - nay, European - colonialism in the Southern Hemisphere, and successfully championed the use of non-violent mass resistance and boycotts to help dismantle Western imperial rule. Coming of age in South Africa where he came face-to-face with white racism which he resented and protested vehemently, Gandhi subsequently decided to return to India where he began the fight against continued colonial rule in the sub-continent. He carried memories and influences from South Africa with him as he sharpened his

understanding of the inherent injustice that was embodied in colonialism.

5. Gandhi's campaign of non-violent mass disobedience and civil resistance successfully mobilised the people of India behind the movement towards independence. It also, importantly, fired the imagination of all colonised and oppressed peoples around the world. Indeed, consciousness that arose from the movement that he led was refracted into the strategy and tactics of resistance across Africa. In Nigeria, for example, young nationalists organized into the Zikist Movement, organized in support of the political activities of the founding fathers of our country, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe popularly known as Zik,

that used the Gandhian tool of boycotts to pile pressure on the colonial administration. Their slogan of “Boycott the Boycottables” marked the onset, in earnest of the Nigerian independence campaign.

6. The independence of India in 1947, when it happened, both challenged African nationalist politicians to organise and step up their struggle for an end to colonial rule. Indeed, with India independent, the question across Africa was no longer one if independence was possible but when and how quickly it would happen. Independence contributed immensely to the complex of factors that turned the table on direct colonial rule and ushered in a new chapter in global affairs. In this way, Indian

independence not only inspired, it also bestowed an important leadership on the country in the global South.

7. The leadership role that befell independent India did not take long to be tested as the world was gradually ushered into an era of East-West Cold War and an accompanying arms race and ideological battle. With many African countries coming into independent nationhood from the mid-1950s onward even as the Cold War spread and consolidated, India's Pandit Nehru, a much respected statesman who exemplified dignity and vision, worked with key like-minded African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Egypt's Gamal Abdel Naser, Sukarno of

Indonesia, and Josef Broz Tito of Yugoslavia to establish the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

8. The NAM in its time played an important moderating and balancing role in a deeply polarised global system, in addition to ensuring that its members, based on its founding principles, did not get drawn into partisan partnerships that would by definition inflame an already factionalised international order. Through the Movement, Africa and India worked together within the United Nations system to coordinate the voices of the countries of the global South, most of them agreeing to be part of the Group of 77 countries. They pressed the case for a new international economic, political, and communication

order, and supported the adoption of General Assembly resolutions on the first and second UN development decades in favour of Africa ,beginning from 1970.

9. Apart from the expansion of economic relations with Africa, especially in trade and investments, India supported African post-independence efforts through assistance in the fields of education and health, with thousands of teachers, especially in the sciences, and health professionals, helping to operate the continent's growing educational and public health systems. India was not only a strategic political ally to Africa but also one of its most important economic and development partners. That role has

continued to this day even though the times have changed radically since the 1960s and 1970s. This is clearly displayed in the significant growth of the Indian economy from an approximate figure of \$30bn to around \$3trillion. This growth has largely been driven by significant investment in education and legislating education as a fundamental right of children in the 6 -14 year age group, which has been made into law via the 86th amendment, introduction of mid-day meals program in the 1990s and today India has over 1000 Universities spread over public and private ownership structures. A critical space where this growth has also been recorded is in the Technology and Services Sector where it has grown over the last 50 years from 30% of its GDP to over 50%

of its GDP , and is the largest sector of the economy at over a trillion dollars with well known multinational companies and more interesting, its talented human capital are the spine of various technology innovation hubs and tech inspired businesses.

10. The end of the old Cold War that was signaled by a series of events - the reunification of Germany, the dissolution of the USSR, COMECON, and the Warsaw Pact, etc. - carried a promise of ushering the world into an era of peace whose dividends would be especially reaped by the countries of the global South. It was, however a short lived truce between the West and the East during which Africa experienced a spate of intra-state wars and India, on

account of various security tensions in South Asia, went nuclear and joined the league of countries with the capacity to deploy the atom bomb for military purposes.

11. Although in the wake of the end of the Old Cold War and developments such as the dissolution of Tito's Yugoslavia, the NAM was to experience a crisis of mission and relevance, Africa and India continued to work together for the creation of a fairer multilateral system. Despite its size and weight, India, like all African countries collectively, campaigned for the reform of the United Nations Security Council so that they could be accommodated as permanent members. They also collaborated on the making of the UN-adopted Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs), the forerunner to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030.

12. India's success with its economic reforms and the successful leveraging of its Diaspora have resulted in important gains in GDP expansion, poverty reduction, the growth of its middle class, and an increase in its global reach. This has positioned the sub-continent to play an enhanced role in Africa's own search for greater investments that could help to underwrite its efforts at structural transformation. The launching of the Africa-India summit to structure cooperation between the two partners represented an important step in the right direction, as was the

participation of India in the BRICS alliance with China, Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa.

13. The world is, however, changing rapidly and the intensification of a new Cold War between the West and Russia has created an evolving environment that will require deliberate steps to be taken to secure world peace, revive the international development agenda, focus on global terrorism and tackle the global climate crisis, enhance cooperation to tackle trans border pandemics, and reform the multilateral system so that it can be better reflective of the changes that have taken place in the world since the present system was established in the 1940s. On these issues, India as a credible and capable global

actor shares a community of interests with Africa that should be consolidated for their mutual benefit and for the advancement of international stability.

14. In the wake of the new Cold War, and in view especially of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, some have made the case for a revival of a NAM-type framework that will serve as the collective platform for countries of the global South to protect their interest not in getting caught up in partisan of other conflicts. There have also been calls for a reimagination of the UN system in order to save it from the certain paralysis into which it will be plunged by the dynamics of the new Cold War. These are just two examples of the kinds of issues for which

deep reflection is required in order for strategic choices to be made. India is well-positioned to help steer the collective reflections required. In Africa, it will find willing and eager partners to engage with. The time has come to open a new chapter in Africa-India relations taking advantage of the uncertainties of the time to build new partnerships for development, peace, and progress.

15. Congratulations to the Nation and People of India on its 75th Anniversary.

16. I thank you for your kind attention.