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Building Influence and Strengthening Partnerships: Pakistan's Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy towards Africa

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Abstract

Cooperative maritime diplomacy is the peaceful use of a nation state's maritime forces to achieve foreign policy-related goals. This article examines Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy as an important component of Pakistan's engagement efforts with Africa. Since the launch of Pakistan's 'Look Africa' policy in August 2017, Islamabad has employed Pakistan Navy to play a key role to foster closer ties with Africa. The main objectives of this cooperative maritime diplomacy are building confidence, influences and partnerships across the Continent. In this regard, Pakistan Navy conducts its cooperative maritime diplomacy at three levels: goodwill visits, joint naval exercises, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations in Africa. The paper argues that Pakistan Navy cooperative maritime diplomatic efforts dovetail with state's foreign policy goals to build strong economic and strategic relations with Africa and project Islamabad as trustworthy, influential and reliable partner in the Continent.

Key words: *Pakistan Navy, Engage Africa, Naval Diplomacy, Port Calls, HADR Operations, CPEC.*

Introduction

Pakistan's relations with Africa have long focused on historic, cultural and diplomatic connections yet the relationship remains short of realizing its true potential. In recent years, the relationship saw a transformation in the wake of Pakistan's 'Engage Africa' initiative which aims to expand Islamabad's trade, commercial and strategic ties with African states. The African continent is the 'Continent of Opportunities' with its diverse culture, bountiful natural resources, strategic seaports, business and investment potential. Africa consists of 54 states and has the youngest average population amongst all the continents (Raza,

2020). Agriculture is the main sector but coal, petroleum, minerals and services are also the drivers of the continent's economic growth. The region has witnessed a growing middle class, rapid urbanization, rising health standards, expanded access to smartphones and social media which brings new opportunities for political engagement, economic growth and social mobilization. In 2018, African states concluded an agreement for establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which entered into force in April 2019 and formally took effect in January 2021. The agreement created the largest free trade area in the world with the aim to develop the Continent's industrial sector (Husted et al., 2021). According to the World Bank report, most African states will reach middle-income status by 2025. In this context, the rich natural resources and untapped markets of the Continent present tremendous opportunity for Pakistan-Africa partnership due to operationalization of Gwadar port and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Raza, 2020).

Though Pakistan enjoys cordial relations with African states, trade volume remains low. Pakistan's trade with Africa is only 0.8 percent of the total African trade volume and stands at a negligible value of mere 5 billion dollars in comparison to that of India and China, which stands at 80 billion dollars and 200 billion dollars respectively (Basit, 2021). Nevertheless, Africa's diplomatic capital and economic potential has captured Islamabad's political attention in recent years. In August 2017, Pakistan approved 'Look Africa' policy which prioritized trade with 10 states of Africa: Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan in North Africa; Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania in East Africa; Senegal and Nigeria in West Africa; and South Africa in Southern Africa. These 10 states comprise 72 percent of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Africa. Therefore, 6 new commercial stations were set up in addition to the already existing 4 stations to cover top ten economies of Africa. In 2019, the Ministry of Commerce under 'Look Africa' policy declared to increase trade up to 10 billion dollars from approximately 4.3 billion dollars at that time. In November 2019, Pakistan declared its 'Engage Africa' policy during a two-day Envoy's Conference at Islamabad. While addressing the conference, Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi declared that Pakistan aims to engage Africa with a "distinct economic thrust to our overall diplomatic" relations. Commenting on the opportunities provided by CPEC and BRI, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Commerce, Textiles and Production, Abdul Razak Dawood noted that Pakistan and African countries "can reap the benefits accruing out of these increased economic activities" (Engage Africa, 2019).

The introduction of 'Engage Africa' policy was certainly a step in the right direction. Subsequently, Pakistan has pursued robust engagements at all strata of foreign policy including maritime cooperation. Africa has a vast coastline with thirty-eight states being either coastal or island nations, thereby making the maritime cooperation central for political, economic and security relationships. Pakistan Navy (PN) has vast experience operating abroad due to its mobility and flexibility and as contributor to maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). It was the first regional navy to join Combined Task Force, CTF-150 in 2004 to deter maritime terrorism. In 2009, PN has joined CTF-151 to counter the increasing acts of piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Horn of Africa. Pakistan has also initiated its own Regional Maritime Security Patrol (RMSP) in 2018. In an interview with *Defence News* in June 2020, the then Pakistan Naval Chief, Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi stated that Pakistan Navy conducts RSMP along the Arabian Sea, the central Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa to maintain security at sea and to engage with the regional navies to enhance mutual collaboration and interoperability (Ansari, 2020).

In support of Pakistan's 'Engage Africa' initiative, Pakistan Navy conducts cooperative maritime diplomacy towards the Continent to achieve foreign and security policy outcomes. This study examines Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy towards Africa and aims to:

1. Underscore objectives of Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy towards Africa.
2. Analyse forms of Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy towards Africa and their contributions to Pakistan's foreign policy goals.

The article proceeds as follows. The first part introduces the topic, explains the concept of cooperative maritime diplomacy and details Pakistan's objectives of cooperative maritime diplomacy towards Africa. The second part describes research methods for this study. The third part details execution of Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy to strengthen ties with African states. The final part concludes the article and offers recommendations.

Conceptual Framework: Pakistan's Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy towards Africa

Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy: All navies have the ability to shape and influence foreign policy through military means, policing and diplomacy. In that sense, Booth writes that "the diplomatic role of navies is concerned with the management of foreign policy short of the actual employment of force" (Booth, 2014, p. 16). A state employs maritime diplomacy in 'maritime domain' to further its foreign policy interests. Le Mière (2016) in his most prominent work *Maritime Diplomacy in the Twenty-first Century*: *Drivers and Challenges*, classified maritime diplomacy as persuasive maritime diplomacy, coercive maritime diplomacy and cooperative maritime diplomacy (p. 7). In all its forms, navies employ maritime diplomacy to send tacit or explicit signals to allies and adversaries of a state's intents and capabilities (p. 3). In the display of persuasive maritime diplomacy, a state persuades others that its navy is present and effective without necessarily seeking to influence the preferences of another state (p. 12). Coercive maritime diplomacy uses hard power or maritime assets to compel or deter an opponent to achieve the political goals of a state (p. 27). Cooperative maritime diplomacy is the peaceful use of maritime forces for negotiations, collaboration and inspiration to assure and bolster the relationships with friends and partner states (p. 11). According to Geoffrey Till (2004, pp. 260-261), a renowned naval historian, navy has variation of assets, extensive reach, flexibility to deliver influence and better capability to shape outcomes. Till describes expeditionary operations, humanitarian operations, picture building and coalition building as different forms of maritime diplomacy (p. 34). Given that soft power is "the ability of a state to attract, rather than coerce" (Blannin, 2017), cooperative maritime diplomacy is 'an exercise in soft power' of a state to achieve foreign policy goals. Le Miere (pp. 7-8) describes activities such as goodwill visits or port calls, training and joint military exercises and peaceful humanitarian missions as forms of *cooperative maritime diplomacy* to build mutual trust, increase influence and strengthen partnerships and coalition [Table 1].

Table 1: Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy

Forms of Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy	Goals of Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy		
	Confidence Building Measures	Influence Building	Partnership/Coalition Building
Port Calls	X	X	
HADR	X	X	
Military Exercises	X		X
Joint Maritime Security Operations	X		X

Note: Adopted from Le Mière, C. (2014). *Maritime Diplomacy in the Twenty-first Century: Drivers and Challenges*. Routledge.

This expands the role of maritime forces from fighting war on battleships to 'diplomats in white uniform' who communicate, negotiate and resolve disagreements, promote prestige and influence, provide relief and assistance in times of disaster, help train and advice navy officers, thereby achieving the country's political and diplomatic goals. Indeed, naval forces are well positioned and best suited to perform the activities of cooperative maritime diplomacy. Navy vessels can be sent to almost all places across the seas to conduct operations (Bull, 1976) since they sail in open oceans "independently of nearby bases." Moreover, maritime forces can conduct sustained operations in distant areas and without excessive reliance on logistical support (Wilden, 2011).

Objectives of Pakistan's Maritime Cooperative Diplomacy: Pakistan is strategically located on the northern shores of the Indian Ocean and at the junction of three regions, West Asia, Central Asia and South Asia. With operationalization of Gwadar port and CPEC, Islamabad can act as a strategic fulcrum to build a multitude of partnerships across the regions including Africa. In this context, the role of PN is important and its diplomatic engagement further the foreign policy interests of Islamabad. Pakistan Navy defines maritime diplomacy as: "an activity to influence behaviour of other states employing navy as a diplomatic instrument" to pursue its foreign policy goals (Basit, 2021). Islamabad essential approach to maritime cooperation with African states revolves around economic interests, counterterrorism and anti-piracy missions in maritime domain as well as leveraging Africa's diplomatic potential for building Pakistan's political influence in the Continent. In this sense, Pakistan Navy seeks to compliment Pakistan's economic foray in Africa through cooperative maritime diplomacy. The broader purpose of Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy is as follows: First, it is used to build mutual trust and confidence to pursue Pakistan's commercial, political and security interests in Africa; Second, Islamabad seeks to accommodate influence and strategic sway and project its soft power and prestige in the Continent; Third, cooperative maritime diplomacy is conducted to strengthen ties and build partnerships with African states. Pakistan Navy in a display of cooperative maritime diplomacy has increased port calls, training and exercises and provision of humanitarian assistance to the shores of African states to influence outcomes in its favour. Korybco (2019) argues that China, India, US and Russia continue to expand their footprint in Africa and CPEC provides the perfect opportunity for Islamabad to "pivot to Africa." Pakistan's initiative to commence RMSP all through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region to safeguard African-Chinese trade and shipping routes is a step in the right direction. Korybco suggests that "the next step is to leverage the military relationships that Pakistan is building in this strategic maritime space to create economic opportunities for its businesses."

Materials and Methods

This study is qualitative and adopts a deductive approach as the concept of cooperative maritime diplomacy is used to analyze Pakistan's engagement efforts with Africa. Both primary and secondary source documents were used to collect and analyze data. Primary documents included official statements, reports, agreements, Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs), official visits and their agendas. Secondary documents included journal articles, books and newspaper articles. The purpose of document analysis was to examine rationale and forms of Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy towards Africa and provide policy recommendations.

Results and Discussion

Pakistan conducts cooperative maritime diplomacy towards Africa through three forms: goodwill visits, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations and joint naval exercises. Ship visits are an important tool of cooperative maritime diplomacy. Till (2009) maintains that "ship visits can be a useful

form of diplomatic exchange, help maintain or secure good relations, and win popular favour." In that sense, goodwill visits build trust and influence by facilitating interaction and dialogue between Pakistan Navy and foreign navies. During goodwill visits PN conducts a range of activities including meeting with defence and civilian officials of the host country, table-top discussions with foreign naval officials, mutual exchange of visits to ships, seminars, training workshop, socio-cultural events, various philanthropic and sports activities. Often the Ambassador of Pakistan in the host country or commanding officer of the ship host reception for navy officers, diplomats, media, business leaders and community representatives on board the ship. Such activities not only aim to create mutual understanding and trust but also influence foreign policy makers as well as public in the broader fields of security, commerce and trade. Particularly, the port calls provide a unique platform for policy discussion in matters related to maritime collaboration, counterterrorism and counterpiracy operations in IOR, commercial ties and opportunities offered by CPEC project as well as Pakistan's stance on Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) dispute.

Secondly, HADR operations are crucial part of Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy towards Africa. These operations aim to relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger or hardship due to the occurrence of a disaster and to aid in recovery (Tezgel, 2015). In this regard, HADR operations are increasingly viewed as soft power diplomacy to advance a nation state's foreign policy interests. The international response to the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of 2004 provides the best example of HADR operations. The US Navy, for instance, since 2006 deploys one of its two large hospital ships Comfort and Mercy in annual missions to the Asia–Pacific, Central and South America to provide people in need with free medical care. Forster (2015) argues that these HADR missions increase US soft power capital by improving the image of the US and its navy, building trust and relationships with host nation governments and the local population.

Similarly, the Chinese hospital ship Peace Ark provided humanitarian medical services to people in eight countries in Africa and Asia during the 2017 'Harmonious Mission' (Zhihao, 2017). Peace Ark is certainly a means to enhance China's prestige and influence. Pakistan Navy also sees HADR operations to project its soft power in Africa. To further mutual confidence and influence, PN has increased humanitarian assistance and delivery of relief supplies to African states in times of distress. This form of cooperative maritime diplomacy aims to construct Pakistan's image as a reliable partner in the eyes of policy makers as well as citizens of African states.

Finally, Pakistan uses joint naval exercises to build capacity of African partners enabling them to assume greater responsibility for their own defence and security in maritime domain. Multinational military exercises have strategic significance as the exercises reassure friends and allies, deter potential adversaries and enhance interoperability between the militaries. Military exercises also facilitate better coordination, test new procedures, operational concepts and technologies (Frazier & Huto, 2017). In this context, Pakistan's participation in joint naval exercises is a significant confidence building measure to bolster partnerships among navies, enhance interoperability and strengthen broader security and economic relationship. This also projects Pakistan's role in safeguarding regional peace and stability.

Pakistan's Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy in Practice

Goodwill Visits

Port calls are key instrument of Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy. In recent years, goodwill visits have become a regular feature of Pakistan Navy deployments in Africa.

Port Calls to East African States

Goodwill visits are considered as a means of boosting Pakistan's ties with East African states and stimulating Pakistan's economy as these states are most closely connected to CPEC's trade and transit routes. Some insights into ship visits reveal the robustness with which PN is engaging the navies, diplomats, government officials and citizens of East African states to boost maritime cooperation and expand bilateral friendly relations. In January 2018, PN Task Group comprising Pakistan Navy Ship (PNS) Khaibar and PNS Nasr visited East African states and Island States of Indian Ocean Region: Seychelles, and Mauritius. Both Seychelles and Mauritius are small yet strategically located islands along key Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) in Western Indian Ocean. During the visit to Port Victoria, Seychelles, PN officials held important meetings with leaders of Seychelles on strengthening bilateral ties. Pakistan Navy officers also visited Regional Coordination Operations Centre to discuss the importance of information sharing in maritime domain ("Pakistan Navy Ships Visit," 2018).

The visit to Port Louis, Mauritius was of significance as PN joined the 50th independence celebrations of Mauritius. Moreover, the day also marked the fifty-year anniversary of Pakistan and Mauritius diplomatic relations. In this connection, a reception dinner was hosted onboard PNS Nasr which was attended by Mauritius political leadership, diplomats, government officials, Pakistani community and members of civil society. The activity generated goodwill and forged people to people contacts through information, diplomacy and social events. Pakistan Navy officials held meetings with President of Republic of Mauritius, Ameenah Gurib Fakim; the Prime Minister, Fazila Daureeawoo and other civil and defence officials to discuss political and security matters and explored avenues for deepening cooperation. To strengthen maritime collaboration with Mauritius, Pakistan Navy organized a Maritime Interdiction Operations & counter piracy workshop on PNS Nasr for Mauritius Coast Guards. They also visited Mauritius Coast Guard Training Centre ("Pakistan Navy Ships Join," 2018).

Pakistan Navy sailors on visits abroad also undertake community work to foster goodwill among the local community. During a goodwill visit to Tanzania in 2018, PN sailors visited Kigamboni Community Orphanage and Kigamboni Health Centre and distributed food hampers and medicines. In a similar fashion, during the visit to port Mombasa in Kenya, navy officials visited Noor Orphanage and Little Sisters of the Poor (Old Homes) and distributed food items, school bags and stationery ("Pakistan Navy Ships Reach," 2018).

Port calls also support Pakistan's diplomatic and political perspective on a range of issues including the Indian illegal and brutal occupation of the State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). According to Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) Pakistan, during a goodwill visit to port Mombasa, Kenya in March 2021, Pakistan Navy officer held meetings with Kenyan Principal Secretary for Defence, Deputy Governor Mombasa and Commander Kenyan Navy and highlighted the illegality of India's 5th August 2019 unilateral actions to change the status of J&K (Inter Services Public Relations, 2021a).

Port Calls to North, West and Southern African States

Pakistan is expanding partnerships in North, South and West Africa through leveraging its naval forces and assets. In September 2018, PNS Saif made a port call at Alexandria, Egypt for goodwill and training visit. During the visit, Pakistan Navy officials held meetings with Egyptian civilian and defence officials and discussed PN role in ensuring maritime security. Pakistan Navy officials visited Egyptian navy ships Anwar-El-Sadat and Tahya Misr whereas Egyptian Navy officers visited PNS Saif. Both the navies also played a friendly football match (Inter Services Public Relations, 2018c).

From November 2019 to January 2020, PNS Moawin and PNS Aslat sailed off to Africa on goodwill visit to ports of Morocco, Mauritania, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa, besides East African states of Tanzania and Kenya. During ship visit to South Africa, a reception dinner was hosted onboard PNS Moawin and senior officers of South African Navy, civil and defence officials and prominent local community attended the event (Inter Services Public Relations, 2019b). Pakistan and South Africa have robust security and defence relations. During his visit to South Africa in 2019, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa had comprehensive negotiations with South African military leadership to boost defence cooperation ("Pak- South Africa Bilateral Ties," 2021). South Africa has long coastline along the crucial trade routes of the world and hence, security of maritime interests is a strategic priority. In this context, cooperation between Pakistan and South Africa could prove valuable for boosting maritime security in the region. Pakistan Navy goodwill visit to South Africa aim to develop cooperation in maritime domain and to strengthen overall defence, political and trade ties.

The port call to Nigeria was of strategic importance as it was the first visit by Pakistan navy ships to port Lagos, Nigeria. Nigeria is the largest economy in the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) and is exceptionally important player to enhance commercial and institutional linkages with ECOWAS member states. During interactions with Nigerian Navy officials, discussions were held focusing on training exchange programmes, counterterrorism operations, intelligence sharing and efficacy of Pakistan's RMSP to ensure peace and stability in IOR (Ahmed, 2019).

It is important to note that except for Tanzania, all other states, to which PNS Moawin and Aslat paid a goodwill visit, are signatories to China's Belt and Road Initiative and eager to send their products to China and Central Asia through CPEC. Islamabad and Beijing will also reap economic benefits from this initiative as their products will gain easier access to African markets. Furthermore, Pakistan under its 'Engage Africa' initiative aims to tap the maximum share in economy of Africa by doubling Pakistan-Africa trade volume to eight billion dollars from existing four billion dollars by 2025. In this regard, naval visits continue to build mutual understanding and confidence to broaden political and economic relations and explore potential business avenues in the Continent (Mustafa, 2020).

Naval Exercises

Training and international naval exercises constitute an important tool of Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy intended to bolster the capacity of the maritime forces of partner states of Africa to improve their planning, preparation and interoperability in addressing the maritime challenges. Joint naval exercises also provide opportunities to develop trust, increase familiarity between militaries and shape the maritime security environment. Majority of the navies of African states have limited naval capacity, hence Pakistan's experience in CTF-150, CTF-151 and its initiative of RMSP provides an excellent opportunity to foster closer defence ties with coastal and Island states of Africa. Against this backdrop, PN has placed much focus on joint naval exercises. In September 2018, Pakistan Navy conducted joint exercises with Egyptian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea. An Egyptian Navy official said that exercise aimed to "exchange expertise in order to promote maritime security and stability in the region" ("Egypt, Pakistan's Naval," 2018).

In January 2020, Pakistan Navy conducted an exercise with Kenyan Navy to enhance interoperability and naval collaboration ("Pakistan, Kenya Hold Joint Navy Drill," 2020). In August 2021, PN conducted bilateral naval exercises with Algerian Navy. In the same month, PN and Royal Moroccan Navy (RMN) also conducted naval exercise. The exercise with RMN included advanced maritime maneuvers, Maritime Interdiction Operations, boarding and force protection drills ("PNS Zulfiqar," 2021). A statement from

Pakistan Embassy in Rabat stated that the naval exercise featured different maneuvers to improve interoperability and cooperation with Moroccan Navy (Kasraoui, 2021). Navies of Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Libya and Sudan also participated in Pakistan's multinational naval exercise, Aman 2021 in February 2021. Pakistan Navy host Aman series of exercise biennially since 2007 for ensuring maritime security and promoting collaboration in Indian Ocean (Khalid, 2021).

Maritime security cooperation particularly naval exercises and training is an effective tool to build confidence and partnerships. This could, in turn, pave the way for closer commercial and trade relations with Africa. Most importantly, cooperative maritime diplomacy supports Pakistan's broader security interests by raising the country's prestige and profile in the host state. Given Pakistan's vast experience in counterterrorism operations and in African peace missions, Islamabad could also build strong defence partnerships with African states. Korybco (2019) suggests that "the military component of Pakistan-Africa engagement "scouting" via the RMSP could also include bilateral training agreements which could provide an institutional arrangement for the training of African partners. Korybco notes:

"The Pakistani Armed Forces have proven their world-class capabilities in defeating terrorism and sharing their experiences with African colleagues could be very useful to many of them as they try to thwart the threat that terrorists in their own countries pose."

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Operations to Africa

Africa is vulnerable to disasters which require prompt humanitarian and relief missions. Pakistan Navy has crafted a strategy to increase its HADR operations in states of Africa in line with its 'Engage Africa' policy. These "influence operations," demonstrate that Islamabad is vigorously responsive to regional challenges in times of distress and dismay and committed to well-being of people and prosperity of the continent.

During the African continent deployment in January-February 2020, free medical camps were set up to treat local patients. For instance, Pakistan Navy doctors treated 2700 people at port Lagos, Nigeria ("2700 Treated," 2019). Similarly, over 2000 people were provided with treatment, medicines and operations at port Nouakchott, Mauritania ("Pak Navy Organizes," 2019). At a free medical camp established in port Mombasa in Kenya, navy doctors treated 2200 local patients and provided them medicines. Some patients were also operated onboard PNS Moawin, which is fitted with advanced medical facilities ("Pak Navy Ships Visit Kenya," 2020). Establishment of the medical camps by Pakistan Navy generated goodwill amongst local people and built bridges of cooperation to further Pakistan's interests in the region.

Such successful humanitarian assistance efforts paved the way for more HADR operations in Africa. In 2021, PN delivered 1000 tons of rice to people in Sudan, Djibouti, Niger and Benin. The HADR operation was planned after Niger was hit by flash floods and drought in 2020, causing widespread devastation. The HADR efforts contributed to a sense of confidence and mutual trust among governments of host countries and Pakistan ("Pak Navy Ship Returns after Mission," 2021). Benin, bordered by the Niger to the north, is strategically important for its transit position to market of goods in neighbouring countries. Some companies of Pakistan, dealing in food items, have recently established offices in Benin to coordinate exports from Pakistan to the region. Hence, Pakistan Navy's HADR efforts will pave the way for traders, diplomats and overseas communities to further expand their footprints in the region. Moreover, these HADR efforts contributed to consolidate Pakistan's image as a reliable partner in the eyes of the political elites and people in Africa (Mushtaq, 2021). These kind gestures also build everlasting bonds of friendship and trust.

Pakistan's Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy and Economic Prospects in Africa

Pakistan Navy's cooperative military diplomatic efforts seek to further country's interests in Africa. In this context, Chief of the Naval Staff of Pakistan Navy, Admiral Amjad Khan Niazi stated in interview with *Global Times* in February 2021:

"The PN, through naval diplomacy, contributes to the nation's foreign policy objectives by showing Pakistan's flag in countries far and wide; through key leadership engagements; navy-to-navy expert level talks; overseas deployments; and participation in bilateral/multilateral exercises on a regular basis. In 2019-20, PN ships proceeded on deployment around Africa in line with the government's 'Engage Africa Policy.' A PN ship is currently on a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and goodwill mission to extend support and deliver food aid to African countries hit by floods and droughts" (Xuanzun & Yuandan, 2021).

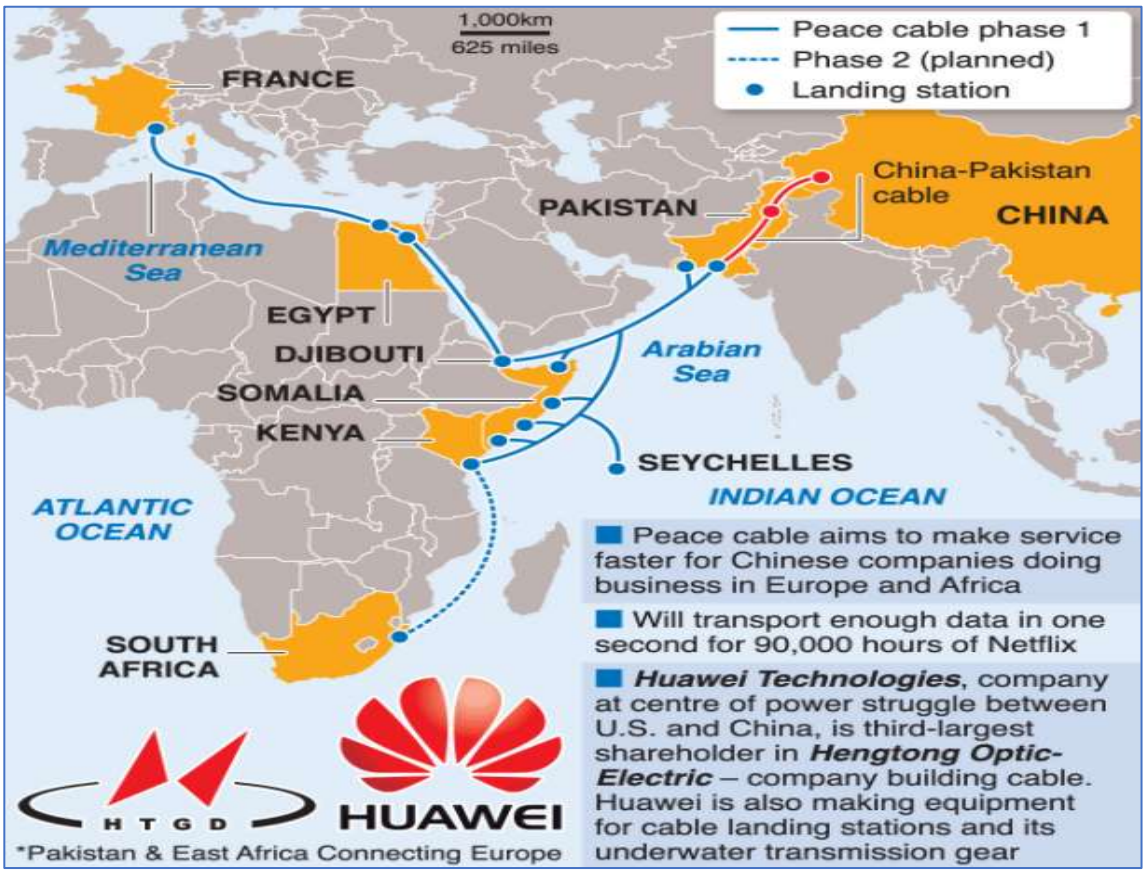
It is noteworthy that cooperative maritime diplomacy has created a favourable environment for boosting trade and economic ties between Pakistan and Africa. In that context, Islamabad has set up its focus on East African states. Khalid (2020) notes that Pakistan's economic prosperity "hinges on stability in the Western Indian Ocean" as well as strong partnerships with East African states. In fact, East Africa provides Pakistan, the necessary "maritime strategic depth" for successful execution of CPEC project. For that, connectivity is the key to harness the true potential of trade and investment. In this context, China is installing Pakistan-East Africa Connecting Europe (PEACE) fibre cable in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean as shown in Figure 1.

The PEACE cable will build the safe, cost-effective and quick internet route between Pakistan, participating countries in China's BRI in Africa and Europe (Haq, 2021). This digital component of BRI is well aligned with Pakistan's 'Engage Africa' initiative and likely to play a central role in promoting Pakistan-Africa trade and commercial ties.

In East Africa, deepening Pakistan-Kenya ties have resulted in Pakistan-Africa Trade Development Conference (PATDC) in 2020 in Kenya, which was attended by business delegations from Pakistan besides more than 600 participants from 21 African states. Pakistan's policy makers viewed the conference as a valuable platform to explore and engage African states for expanding trade and commercial ties. Inaugurating the event, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta stated that "the potential for development of trade and economic ties between Pakistan and Africa is enormous" ("Kenyan President," 2020). Kenyatta noted that AfCFTA will add impetus to the east African branch of the BRI as epitomized by the Standard Gauge Railway and the CPEC, linking the East African coast to central Asia ("Pak-Africa Trade," 2020).

Besides East Africa, Islamabad is also expanding its economic footprint in West Africa. In this regard, the 2nd PATDC was held at Lagos in Nigeria from 23 to 25 November 2021. The conference was attended by Pakistani businessmen representing various sectors including pharmaceuticals, surgical instruments, chemical, tractors & agriculture machinery, cosmetics, IT services, sports goods, food electronics and engineering goods. Business and official delegates from the ECOWAS member states also attended the conference. Advisor to Pakistan's Prime Minister on Commerce, Abdul Razak Dawood observed that "despite challenges, there would be a steady, gradual but persistent growth in Pakistan-Africa trade with enhanced level of engagement by both sides, public officials as well as private sector" ("2nd Pakistan-Africa Trade," 2021). Indeed, Pakistan Navy cooperative maritime diplomatic efforts are successfully building trust, prestige and influence as Islamabad is reaching out to the wider African political and business community.

Figure 1: PEACE Cable Connecting China, Pakistan, East Africa & Europe



Note: PEACE submarine cable is 12000 kilometers long, targeting for completion in 2022. China building internet cable to Europe. (2022, January 21). *Graphic News*. https://www.graphicnews.com/en/pages/41107/telecoms-chinas-peace-cable.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Under 'Engage Africa' initiative, Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy towards Africa has significant strategic importance. Goodwill visits and HADR operations have emerged as a catalyst for boosting the image of Pakistan Navy and furthering Islamabad's influence in Africa. Pakistan Navy attempts to educate and train partners to promote cooperation and counter threats to regional maritime environment also aim to enhance its sway and strengthen partnerships across the Continent. Certainly, the maritime component of Pakistan's 'Engage Africa' policy focus on Islamabad's political and security ties and its economic growth both at bilateral and multilateral levels. This article provides some recommendations which could be considered for advancing the goals of Pakistan's cooperative maritime diplomacy towards Africa:

1. There is a need for increased and sustained Pakistan Navy port calls to Africa which will compliment economic outreach through 'Engage Africa' initiative.

2. Pakistan naval forces and assets should be readily available in situations of disaster for leveraging of humanitarian assistance and relief missions to secure diplomatic and political outcomes. In this regard, the financial and operational constraints should be addressed for prompt rescue and relief missions.
3. Bilateral naval exercises and capacity-building training for the less well-trained navies of several states of the region should be a priority for Islamabad.
4. More African states should be invited to participate in Aman naval exercises to promote cooperation and collaboration in ensuring maritime security in IOR.
5. Pakistan should focus its attention on Joint Maritime Security Operations with capable and willing partners in Africa. Pakistan Navy could invite the regional states particularly countries from East and Southern Africa to become collaborative partners of RMSP initiative. This will further support Pakistan's engagement efforts by helping build Islamabad's influence and partnerships as well as ensure security of CPEC trade routes in Western Indian Ocean that makes commerce and economic growth possible.

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