

Policy Paper

April 2023

North Africa's Invisible Partner: Exploring India's Political and Economic Influence in the Region

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PP - 04/23

This policy paper examines India's growing engagement in North Africa, focusing on five countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. Despite lacking a distinct regional policy for North Africa, India has amplified its bilateral engagement with these countries, underpinned by a steadfast commitment to the principle of South-South cooperation. Through its strategic moves in North Africa, India has established a powerful southern-west axis for its foreign policy that stretches from Iran to Morocco, enabling it to effectively cover the entire southern Mediterranean region. This paper traces the trajectory of India's relations with North Africa, from an ideological approach to a more pragmatic approach focused on economic and security cooperation. It also highlights India's economic engagement in the region, which has enabled it to emerge as one of the top trading partners for Morocco, Egypt, and Algeria. Based on this analysis, the paper concludes with recommendations to deepen India's engagement in North Africa, and to enhance its regional presence.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, India has emerged as a notable external actor in Africa, particularly in North Africa, through multifaceted initiatives encompassing politics, economics, and culture. Though it lacks a distinct regional policy for North Africa, India has amplified its bilateral engagement with Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Libya, underpinned by a steadfast commitment to the principle of South-South cooperation. India's strategic moves in North Africa have enabled it to establish a powerful southern-west axis for its foreign policy that stretches from Iran to Morocco. This geopolitical pivot has given India the ability to effectively cover the entire southern Mediterranean region, and through this axis, India has strengthened its regional presence, including by being an observer member of the Arab league, enhanced its economic ties, and expanded its geopolitical influence, cementing its position as a rising power in the international arena.

This paper analyses India's engagement in five North African states: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. It is also important to highlight the absence of the term 'Maghreb' in Indian foreign policy discourse. Instead, Indian officials refer simply to North Africa, thus including Egypt, but also extending to Mauritania, South Sudan, and Sudan. In accordance with the Indian foreign policy framework, the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) region is perceived to encompass all Arab nations, as well as South Sudan, with North Africa being considered a direct extension of the Middle East.

In view of this geographic division, Egypt's strategic location as a central gateway between the Maghreb and the Arab Peninsula has fostered robust political and economic ties between Cairo and New Delhi. Moreover, India's growing engagement with Morocco and Algeria has opened up new avenues for collaboration in trade, energy infrastructure, construction, financial cooperation, tourism, and political and security matters. India's rising presence can be attributed in part to a notable shift in its foreign policy towards the developing world. Historically, India's approach from 1947 to 1991 was significantly influenced by ideology. However, since the implementation of liberal reforms during Manmohan Singh's tenure in 1991, India's foreign policy has followed an interest-based approach that centers around economic and security cooperation, with strategic autonomy and non-alignment serving as its pillars. This shift has enabled India to emerge as a major global economic player. Increasingly cognizant of India's growing economic influence, North African states have prioritized the development of economic ties with India, in order to diversify their international partnerships and reduce reliance on the Western world. As a result, India has secured a position as one of the top six trading partners of Morocco, Egypt, and Algeria.

1. From Ideology to Pragmatism: Tracing the Trajectory of India-North Africa Relations

The North African region has traditionally been prominent among India's foreign policy priorities, with successive Indian governments extending support to anti-colonial liberation movements in the region, and working closely with North African states in global forums including the Non-Aligned Movement and the G77. However, economically, North Africa did not feature prominently among India's policy priorities, as its economic policies were largely domestically oriented. It was only after India's economic liberalization in the early 1990s that North African nations emerged as significant economic partners for India, particularly in light of India's increasing energy demands. However, the Arab Spring of 2011 marked a shift in India's policy outlook towards North Africa.

1.1. The Legacy of Non-Alignment: India's Early Relations with North Africa

The Bandung Conference of 1955 marked a seminal moment in India's engagement with North Africa, bringing together dignitaries including Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and delegates from various North African nations, including Morocco's Istiqlal party, Algeria's National Liberation Front, and Tunisia's Neo Destour party, thus cementing India's evolving relationships with these nations. India's policy for the region had initially outlined two primary objectives. The first was the determination of the prospective status of the ethnic Indian communities residing in North Africa. The second priority was to extend support to anticolonial liberation movements, for example during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) and by supporting Egypt in the Suez Crisis. India did this through representations at the United Nations (UN), and by advocating for international support through the Non-Aligned Movement, the G77.

Despite the prevalence of opportunities for economic engagement, India refrained from pursuing such interests in North Africa until the Cold War's end. Instead, India extended diplomatic and financial aid to the newly independent North African states, as part of its overarching foreign policy objective. A pivotal aspect of this strategy was the promotion of South-South cooperation, which was facilitated by the inception of the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation program in 1964. Notably, this program, which continues to be operational, comprises the participation of numerous representatives from North African states.

1.2. Diversifying Ties: India's Multi-Dimensional Approach to North Africa

In 1991, India departed significantly from its hitherto existing paradigm of domestic, market-oriented development, marking a pivotal juncture. The balance-of-payments crisis, compounded by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, India's primary trading partner at the time, necessitated far-reaching economic policy reforms¹, marking the economic liberalization policy which prompted India to adopt a more pragmatic orientation to its foreign relations, characterized by a reduced emphasis on ideology. A key tenet of this shift was the reliance on foreign direct investment, technology transfer, export promotion, and greater integration into the global market, as the fundamental framework for its economic policy. This paradigm has been consistently adhered to by all successive Indian governments since 1991.

As such, Indian foreign policy in North Africa incorporated its ambition to expand economic relations, but simultaneously other factors emerged, including import diversification and China's intention to incorporate the Middle East and North Africa into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These political and economic dynamics have forced New Delhi to reassess its North African strategy, grounding

1. Christian Wagner, Page 10, (2019).

the region as a permanent diplomatic priority for its foreign policy.

Furthermore, owing to the crucial geostrategic location of North African states as gateways to sub-Saharan Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe, New Delhi has fostered balanced relationships with North Africa, as shown by its neutral stance on the Sahara regional dispute to avoid jeopardizing its partnerships with both Morocco and Algeria. The present strategic stance is designed to bolster India's ability to reach its main foreign policy goals, chiefly its aspiration to reform the UN by securing a permanent seat on the Security Council².

- **India's Political Relationship with Egypt**

India and Egypt have a long history that dates back to cultural and economic exchanges in ancient times. In modern times, India and Egypt have enjoyed a friendly and cooperative relationship, based on shared common interests in regional and global issues including counterterrorism, regional stability, and trade promotion and economic cooperation. One significant area of cooperation between India and Egypt is defense. India has supplied weapons and military equipment to Egypt in the past, and the countries have conducted joint military exercises³. India has also trained Egyptian military personnel.

Since 2015, political cooperation between the two countries has intensified, with regular interactions between leaders and ministers, and various bilateral institutional dialogues at different levels. The 11th round of Foreign Office Consultations was held in Delhi in December 2015, marking the beginning of a series of high-level meetings, including the first Joint Working Group on Cyber Issues, the 4th Joint Committee Meeting on Science & Technology, the 7th round of Joint Commission Meetings, and the 8th and 9th Joint Defense Committee meetings.

The cultural influence of India in Egypt is also important, as evidenced by the growing number of events promoting Indian soft power. One example is the annual Indian cultural festival, 'India by the Nile', widely considered to be the largest foreign cultural festival in Egypt.

- **India's Political Relationship with Morocco**

The historical ties between India and Morocco can be traced back to the fourteenth century when the renowned Tangier-based explorer and writer Ibn Batuta made his journey to India. In contemporary times, India demonstrated active support for the Moroccan independence movement at the United Nations and extended immediate recognition to the country on its attainment of independence in 1956. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1957, the relationship between India and Morocco has remained amicable, but the partnership between the two nations has gained notable momentum since the accession to the throne of HM King Mohamed VI. The Moroccan Head of State's meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 resulted in the elevation of diplomatic relations to the level of Strategic Partnership. Since then, there have been no fewer than 23 visits by ministers in both directions, leading to the signing of more than 40 agreements and memoranda of understanding in counter-terrorism, cyber security, agriculture, and vocational training, underscoring the significance of the partnership⁴.

Recently, Morocco has diversified its military procurement by forging closer ties with the Indian market. Indian manufacturer TATA Advanced Systems provided tactical military transport trucks,

2. Siyech, M. (2021). North Africa in the Indian foreign policy matrix. Observer Research Foundation.

3. Ibid.

4. India-Morocco Bilateral Relations. (2023). Indian Embassy in Morocco.

LPTA-715, to the Moroccan army in 2022, along with 90 Tata LPTA 2445 6x6 tactical transport trucks. Similarly, military cooperation between Morocco and India has taken on a more structured form. Morocco and India held joint-military exercises in 2021, Morocco participated in the 2nd India-Africa Defense Dialogue in October 2022, and the Moroccan Armed Forces took part in the 2nd India-Africa Field Training Exercise in March 2023, which focused on peacekeeping operations and humanitarian action. The diversification of Morocco's military procurement and its increasing engagement with India underscores the country's strategic efforts to expand its military partnerships beyond its traditional allies.

- **India's Political Relationship with Algeria**

The political relationship between India and Algeria is also underpinned by four key factors. First, both countries demonstrated bilateral support for leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement, particularly during the Cold War, forging a strong political bond in multilateral forums. Second, Algeria's role in supporting India's African policy was highlighted by the maiden maritime partnership off the Algerian coast in the Mediterranean in August 2021, which underscored India's commitment to enhancing its maritime presence in the region. Third, Algerian then-Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal expressed full support for India's stance on Jammu and Kashmir during a meeting with the Indian Vice President in 2016, further strengthening the two nations' shared interests in global affairs. Finally, Algerian government contracts and commercial opportunities have emerged as a vital area for Indian companies, while Algeria's recent mining ventures offer new prospects for India's continued pursuit of raw materials.

- **India's Political Relationship with Tunisia**

India and Tunisia have had friendly and cordial relations since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1958. In recent years, both countries have cooperated in the phosphates sector, and have supported each other's candidatures in international forums, including the UN. In this perspective, Indo-Tunisian relations have experienced a qualitative leap in recent years, with several high-level visits from both sides, including the visit of India's External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid to Tunisia in February 2014. During this visit, Khurshid conveyed India's readiness to share its expertise in building durable institutions of democracy, particularly in connection with voting methods and the work of the Election Commission. In addition, Rached Ghannouchi, President of Ennahda Party, visited India in April 2015 and met with Vice President M. Hamid Ansari and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj. Tunisia's Foreign Minister, Mr. Taieb Baccouche, also attended the 3rd India Africa Forum Summit in New Delhi in 2015, where he met the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This facilitated the signing of the roadmap between Tunis and New Delhi in 2017, which aimed to invigorate the bilateral relationship. Despite the initial optimism that this initiative generated, it appears that it has not been successful in fostering a closer relationship.

- **India's Political Relationship with Libya**

During the reign of Muammar Khaddafi in Libya, India maintained amicable relations. The then-Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, even visited Libya in 1984, marking the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to the country. India has consistently supported Libya in international forums and welcomed the UN Security Council's 2003 resolution lifting sanctions on Libya. When the Libyan civil war broke out, India voted in favor of UN Security Council resolution 1970 condemning the use of lethal force by the Libyan government against protestors. However, India abstained from voting on resolution 1973, which authorized NATO's intervention in Libya. After the ouster of Muammar Khaddafi, India extended assistance to the Libyan National Transition Council. In 2012, India and Tripoli signed a Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation in the field of elections. Ali Al-Issawi, the Libyan ambassador to India, expressed Libya's desire to learn from India's experience

in drafting the constitution and rebuilding the economy. He emphasized the need for support in areas such as the parliamentary system and local administrative setup, citing the necessity of building the system from scratch⁵. Despite India's humanitarian aid to help wounded Libyans and evacuate Indian nationals during renewed fighting near Tripoli, India withdrew its peacekeepers from Libya, closed its embassy, and reduced engagement in Libya⁶. However, there is the possibility of revitalizing bilateral relations as India's Permanent Representative to the UN congratulated the establishment of the new unified interim executive authority and called for broad-based dialogue with all stakeholders to prepare for the Libyan elections of December 2021. Although Libya remains politically fragmented, India is exploring the reopening of its embassy in Libya, and supporting the National Unity Government⁷.

1.3. Perspectives for India and North Africa Relations: A Partnership for Development

Over the past two decades, the emergence of India as a global economic powerhouse has been closely observed by North African states, prompting them to seek enhanced cooperation with India. However, the Arab Spring presented a formidable challenge to India, leading it to adopt a non-aligned approach, ostensibly aimed at safeguarding its economic interests, and at ensuring the safety and security of the Indian diaspora. Nevertheless, this issue acquired significant salience in Indian public discourse, academic circles, and think tanks, impelling the Indian government to undertake a critical reevaluation of its policy towards the emergence of a new regional order in North Africa, and to reconfigure its engagement accordingly.

India's approach towards North African states is based on a distinctive doctrine, which prioritizes equal partnership, mutual benefits, and non-interference in internal affairs. Unlike Western nations, which tend to link economic and development cooperation with convergence towards their political norms, India refrains from engaging in traditional development cooperation and instead places greater emphasis on South-South cooperation. This term has been deliberately crafted to differentiate India's approach from the prescriptive nature of Western cooperation, since India's South-South rhetoric encourages a range of instruments aimed at capacity-building, lending, and promoting exports and economic growth for Indian firms, as well as highlighting India's commitment to advancing agricultural technology, combating issues such as climate change and terrorism, and generating employment for young people in North African states. In this way, India demonstrates its willingness to assume greater responsibility in the region, while navigating the challenges posed by the resurgence of great power rivalry, and its impact on geopolitical balances in the Mediterranean and Africa.

2. Uncovering India's Economic Engagement in North Africa

India has emerged as a major global economic power, with a specific emphasis on forging economic alliances to cement both economic and cultural influence. India's economic cooperation doctrine is compatible with that of North African states, with its emphasis on South-South solidarity, non-interference in internal affairs, and neutrality, which underpins win-win trade, investment, and financial partnerships. These principles have been pivotal in the development of a shared understanding, making India a well-perceived foreign actor in the region.

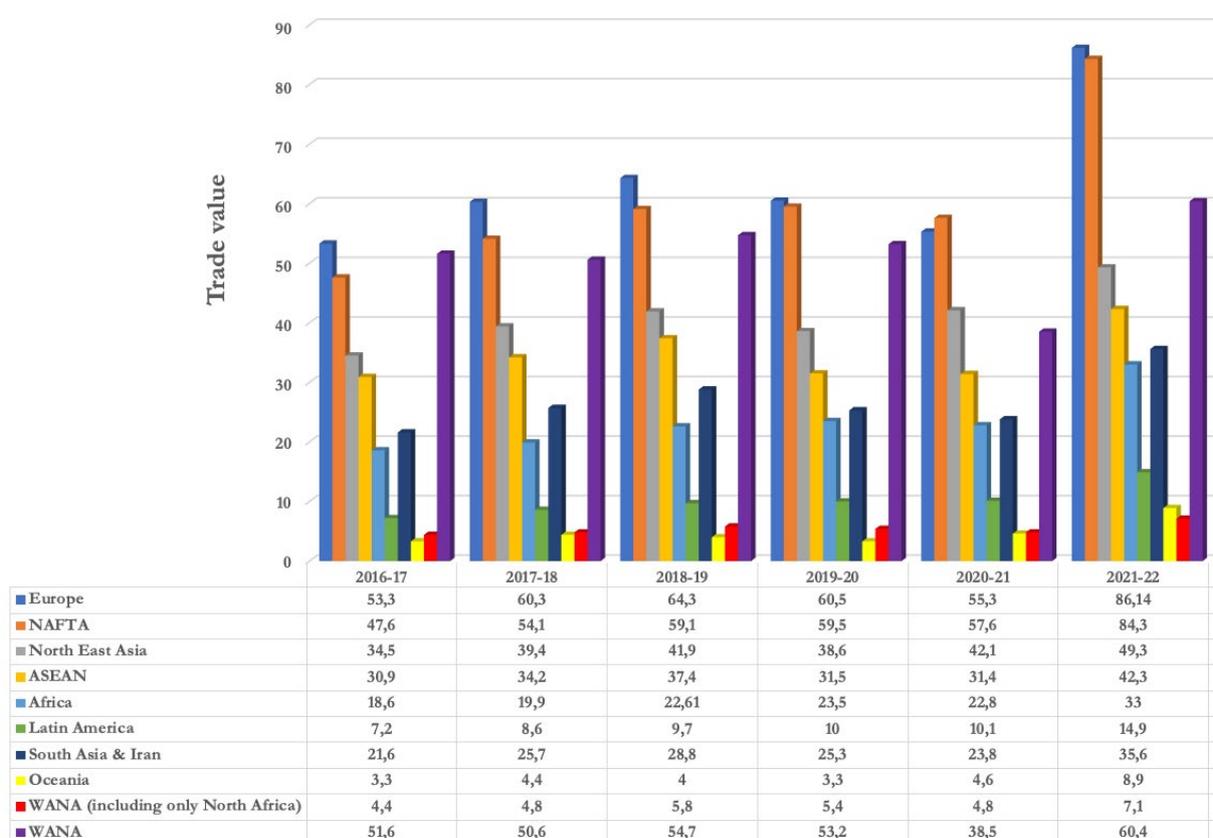
5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Alharathy, S. (2023). India studying the possibility of its diplomatic mission's return to function from Libya. *The Libya Observer*.

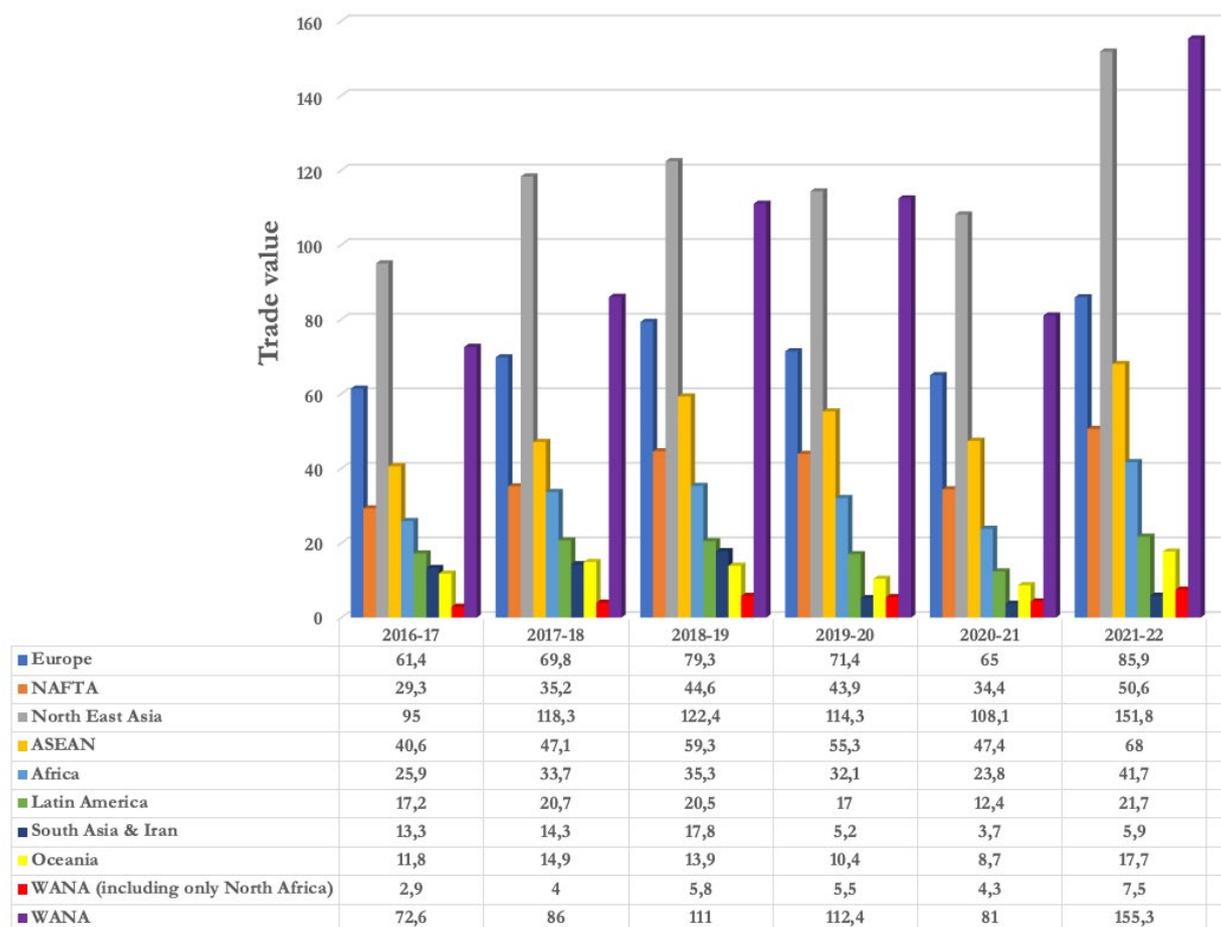
In North Africa, India has implemented a strategic deployment of its means of influence, utilizing multinational corporations and public enterprises to capitalize on the eagerness of various North African nations to diversify their economic relationships. In doing so, India has made significant headway into a regional marketplace consisting of more than 200 million inhabitants, traditionally dominated by the European Union, and more recently, China. Furthermore, the European Union, which is the region's largest trading partner, has failed to provide substantial economic dividends to North African states, as its focus on the southern rim of the Mediterranean is excessively centered on security and migratory concerns. Combined with India's projected rise in population, expected to make it the most populous country by 2030, North African states are keen to facilitate New Delhi's increasing economic influence and access a large consumer market. The latter is assured, given the significance of the commodities exported by North African states to satisfy India's domestic needs.

Indian Exports and North Africa's Position from 2016 to 2022 (in billion USD)



Data Sourced from the Indian Department for Commerce and Industry

India's Global Imports and North Africa's Position from 2016 to 2022 (in billion USD)



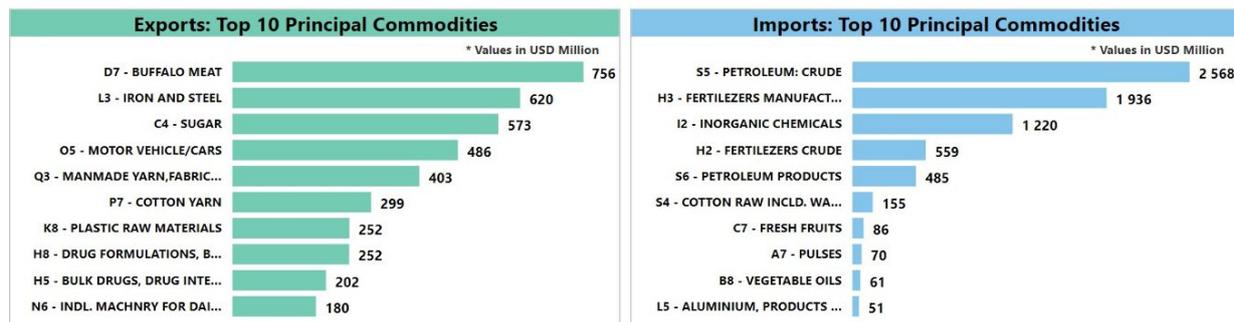
Data Sourced from the Indian Department for Commerce and Industry

2.1 Mapping India's Economic Footprint in North Africa

Since 2016, India's exports and imports from North Africa have increased, with a substantial focus on natural resources. However, this growth in trade with North Africa has overshadowed India's trade interests in other regions. The concentration of Indian imports on critical commodities such as natural resources has highlighted the importance of North African states in ensuring a stable supply for India's economy. As India has limited domestic energy resources and energy imports constitute a significant portion of its imports, ensuring a reliable and long-term energy supply has become a matter of utmost importance for the Indian government. In addition, the nation's significant food demands and the need to strengthen the agricultural sector have made food security a crucial national priority.

To secure a steady and secure supply of vital commodities including petroleum and fertilizers, the Indian government has recognized the need to establish longer-term commercial contracts. North Africa has assumed a leading position in the Indian fertilizer import market, ranking behind only China in 2022. Morocco and Egypt respectively held the third and sixth positions among the major suppliers of fertilizers to India. Such steps taken by the Indian government underscore the importance of North African states as reliable sources of vital commodities for India's economic growth and stability.

Top 10 Indian Exports and Imports from North Africa in 2022



Source: Indian Department for Commerce and Industry

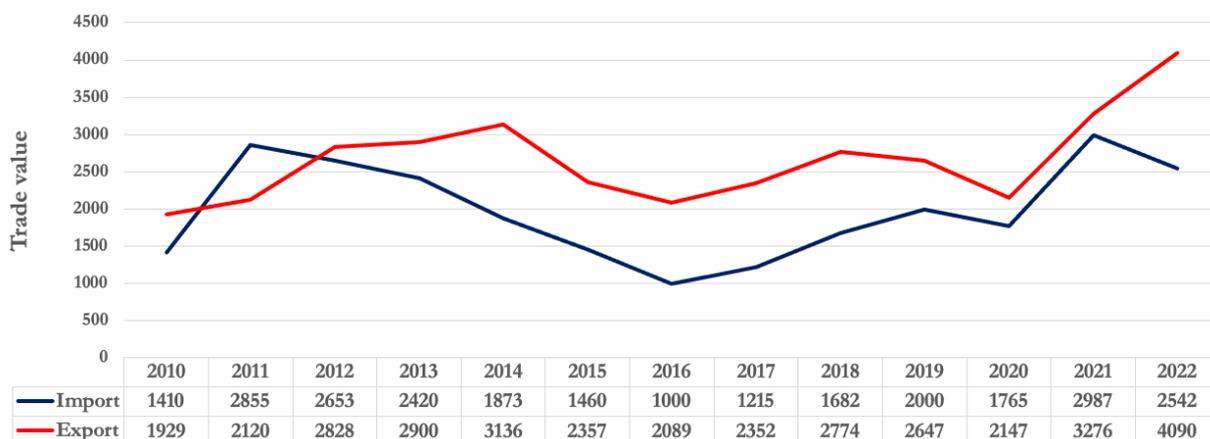
- **India's Economic Presence in Egypt**

The bilateral trade agreement established between Egypt and India in 1978, based on the most-favored nation clause⁸, has traditionally been one of the most significant trading partnerships for India in the African continent. Egypt is India's largest trading partner in North Africa, with 47 Indian companies currently operating in the country. In 2022, the total value of trade between the two nations reached \$7.2 billion, with Egyptian exports to India accounting for \$3.5 billion. Of these, crude petroleum made up the largest share, exceeding \$1.7 billion, while fertilizers comprised \$671 million. In contrast, Indian exports mainly consist of meat (\$740 million), followed by iron and steel (\$517 million). Egypt's strategic position as a major energy hub in the eastern Mediterranean, along with its control over one of the most crucial maritime corridors, renders India's growing presence in the country vital for its economic interests. By 2030, India aims to become a gas-based economy⁹, and Egypt's transformation as a significant liquified natural gas hub provides a significant opportunity for India to achieve this target. The Gas Authority of India, a natural gas company operating under the administrative control of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, has already partnered with several Egyptian companies on gas projects. As such, the economic cooperation between India and Egypt is poised to remain pivotal to India's economic presence in North Africa.

8. India-Egypt Relations. Bilateral Brief. (2018). Indian Foreign Ministry.

9. Energy News Monitor. (2021). Observer Research Foundation.

Indian Trade with Egypt from 2010 to 2022 (in million USD)

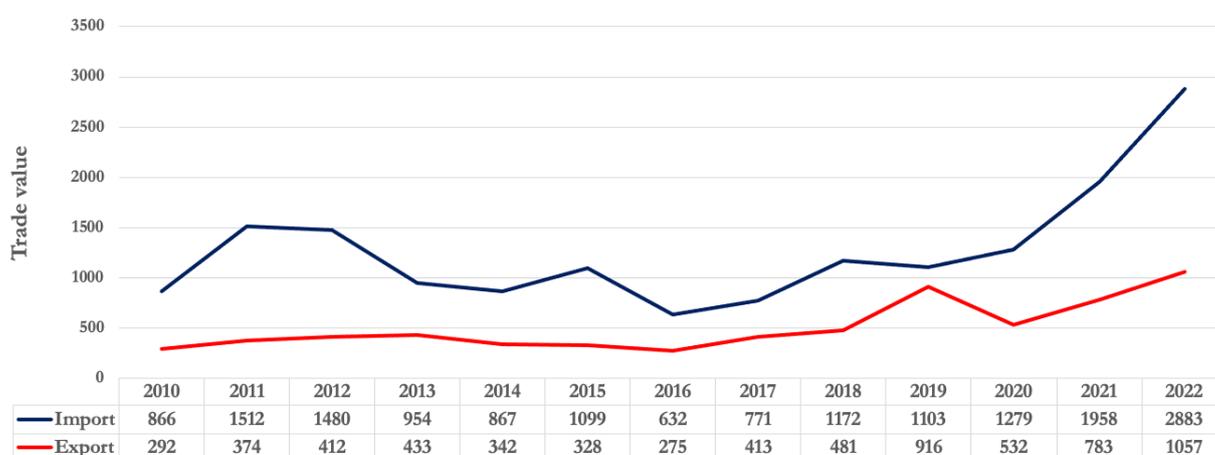


Data Sourced from the Indian Department for Commerce and Industry and UN Comtrade

- **India's Economic Presence in Morocco**

India's economic engagement with Morocco has increased steadily in recent years. Stronger political consultation at the end of the 1990s provided a framework for stronger economic cooperation, leading to enhanced trade relations and the establishment of more than 20 Indian companies in Morocco. India's trade with Morocco has grown significantly, with bilateral trade reaching more than \$3.9 billion in 2022, marking a substantial increase from \$907 million in 2016. This growth has been driven by India's imports of phosphate fertilizers from Morocco, which constituted the first imported commodity from North Africa in 2022. India's exports to Morocco have diversified to include various products such as textiles, vehicles, pharmaceuticals, and machinery. The establishment of joint ventures and investment opportunities in diverse sectors including renewable energy, tourism, and agriculture, provides further impetus to strengthen the economic relationship between the two nations. As such, Morocco has emerged as an essential partner for India's economic presence in North Africa, providing a stable source of vital commodities and new investment opportunities.

Indian Trade with Morocco from 2010 to 2022 (in million USD)

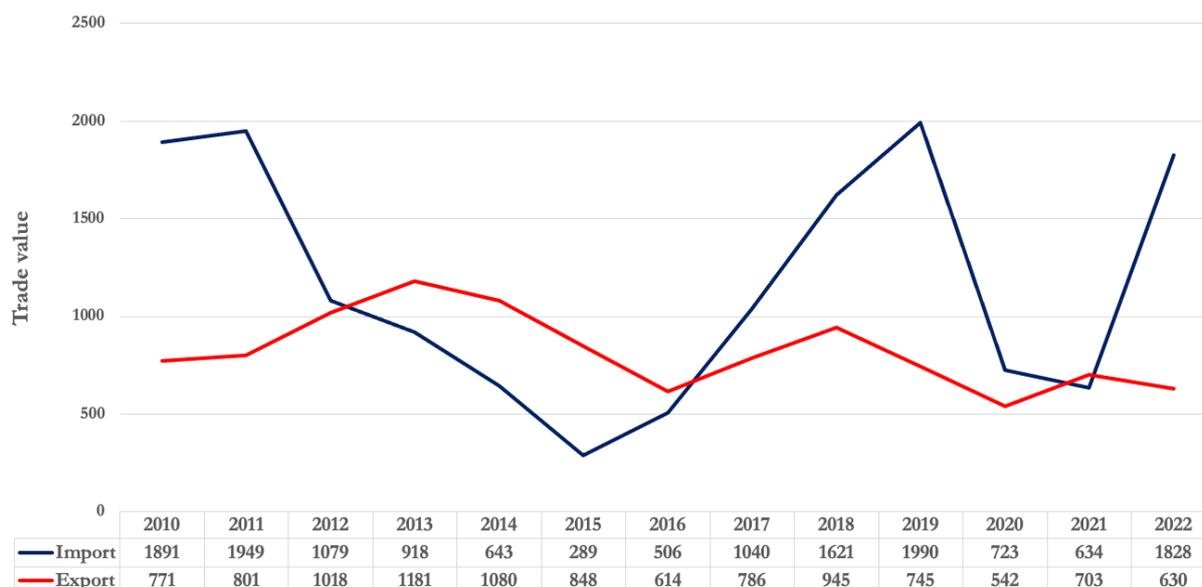


Data Sourced from the Indian Department for Commerce and Industry and UN Comtrade

- **India's Economic Presence in Algeria**

India's economic presence in Algeria has been growing steadily, with the two countries enjoying a close and cordial relationship. India is among Algeria's top ten trading partners, and is a significant buyer of Algeria's crude oil, which accounts for over \$1.1 billion of India's imports from Algeria. In 2022, bilateral trade between the two nations stood at \$2.45 billion, with India's exports to Algeria primarily comprising pharmaceuticals, vehicles, and food products. There has been a surge in Indian investment in Algeria, with Indian companies including Tata, Mahindra, and Kirloskar Brothers setting up operations in the country. These companies have established joint ventures in diverse sectors including automobiles, engineering, and energy, demonstrating India's commitment to building a long-term partnership with Algeria by developing joint natural gas projects and investing in new areas of cooperation, such as renewable energy, agriculture, and pharmaceuticals, which provide opportunities to diversify and strengthen the economic relationship further. As such, India's economic presence in Algeria has the potential to grow in the coming years, with both nations committed to enhancing their partnership and exploring new avenues for collaboration.

Indian Trade with Algeria from 2010 to 2022 (in million USD)



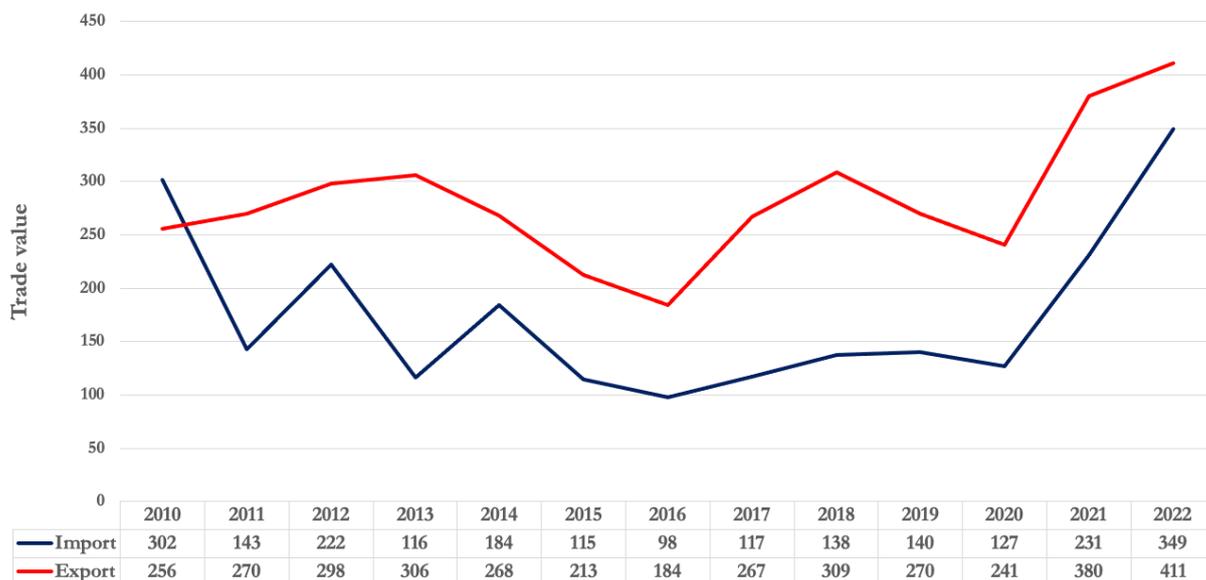
Data Sourced from the Indian Department for Commerce and Industry and UN Comtrade

- **India's Economic Presence in Tunisia**

India's economic presence in Tunisia has been increasing steadily, although at a slower pace than in Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt. Total bilateral trade between India and Tunisia has grown, reaching \$760 million in 2022, with India importing phosphates and chemicals from Tunisia. India's exports to Tunisia mainly comprise textiles, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods. Indian companies have shown interest in Tunisia, with some companies establishing a presence in the country. In recent years, there has been a push to enhance cooperation in diverse sectors including renewable energy, tourism, and agriculture. The establishment of the India-Tunisia Joint Commission in 2017 has provided a platform for both nations to explore new avenues for trade and investment in renewable energy, infrastructure, transport and automobiles, textiles, agriculture, drugs and pharmaceuticals,

healthcare, ICT, and energy¹⁰. Nonetheless, the prevailing political crisis in Tunisia has contributed to an atmosphere of economic uncertainty, which limits the scope of further economic cooperation, with Indian economic interest likely to remain modest in the future.

Indian Trade with Tunisia from 2010 to 2022 (in million USD)



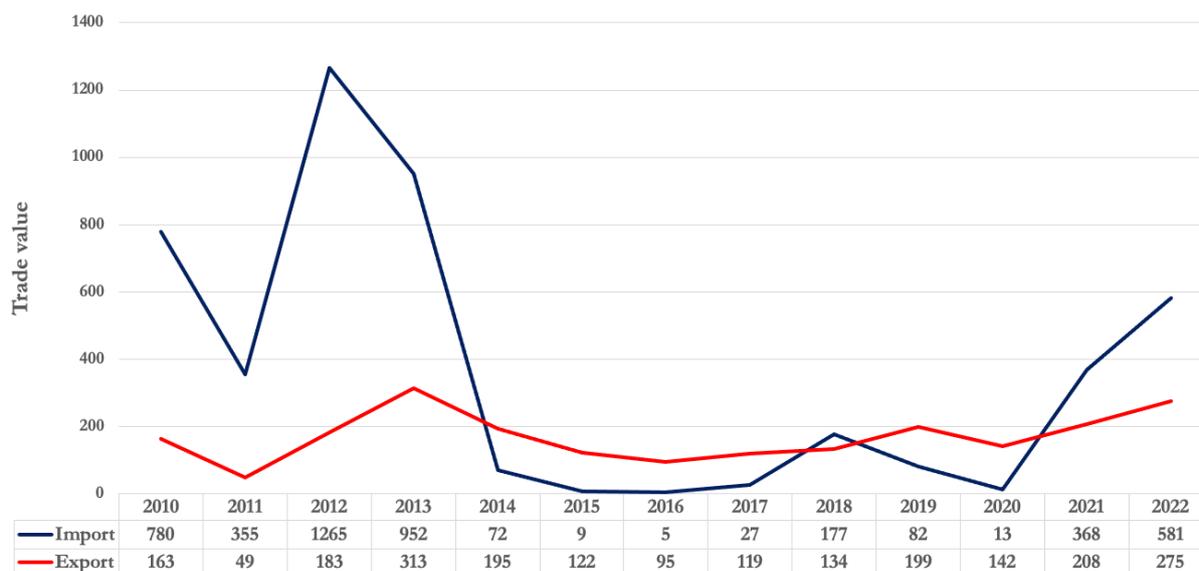
Data Sourced from the Indian Department for Commerce and Industry and UN Comtrade

- **India's Economic Presence in Libya**

India has historically had a strong economic presence in Libya, particularly in the oil and gas sector. Indian companies including ONGC Videsh and Essar Oil have made significant investments in Libya's oil and gas industry. However, because of the ongoing political crisis and instability in Libya, India's economic engagement with the country has been limited in recent years. Total bilateral trade reached \$856 million, with India's exports to Libya mainly comprising pharmaceuticals, food products, engineering goods, and chemicals. Meanwhile, India's imports from Libya consist primarily of crude oil.

10. Sangeeta, N. (2017). India, Tunisia sign agreements to boost bilateral relations. Jagran Josh.

Indian Trade with Libya from 2010 to 2022 (in million USD)



Data Sourced from the Indian Department for Commerce and Industry and UN Comtrade

2.2. Building Stronger Economic Ties

The trade relations between India and North African states hold immense significance for the parties. However, there is untapped potential for exploring new avenues to further enhance cooperation. The ongoing war in Ukraine presents opportunities for India to leverage its existing presence by investing in renewable energy and food supply chains, while simultaneously transitioning towards sustainable and ecologically-friendly economic partnerships to counteract and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Given the pressing nature of these challenges, India and North African states should consider scaling up their collaboration.

- **Renewable Energy**

The Indian government and businesses have shown significant interest in the opportunities presented by North Africa’s green energy potential, with solar power and green hydrogen being recognized as significant areas for potential collaboration. As India pursues its own goal of achieving energy independence by 2047 through ambitious clean energy initiatives, and seeks to attain net-zero carbon emissions by 2070, it has the potential to establish strategic partnerships with North African states in their shift away from fossil fuels.

Several North African nations have already initiated green hydrogen projects. For example, Morocco recently announced the HEVO Ammonia Morocco project, based in Rabat, which will have a production capacity of 1.83 million tons of ammonia and will reduce carbon emissions by up to 280,000 metric tons. The domestic production of hydrogen will also reduce the importation of grey ammonia for phosphate production, and several Indian energy companies are increasingly seeking to develop green hydrogen and methanol in Morocco¹¹. Meanwhile, in Egypt, ReNew Power, India’s largest renewables company, will invest \$8 billion in a green hydrogen plant in the Suez Canal, following an agreement with the Egyptian government¹².

11. Zouiten, S. (2023). India’s ReNew Energy Global Eyes Morocco’s Green Hydrogen Market. Morocco World News.

12. Ghantous, N. (2022). Egypt and India to develop green hydrogen plant in the Suez Canal. Energy Monitor.

The geography of North African states means they host some of the most favorable sites for solar and wind energy generation, owing to vast coastal plains and year-round sunshine. However, there is a discrepancy between potential and actual clean-energy utilization, with the latter requiring financial investments and technologies. India can leverage its private companies as well as international initiatives, such as the International Solar Alliance, a common platform for cooperation among sun-rich countries that was launched by India at the UN Climate Change Conference, to mobilize private investment, promote technologies, new business models, and infrastructure for clean energy.

- **Food Security**

North African states have faced significant food security challenges since the outbreak of the Ukraine war, with Egypt and Tunisia relying heavily on Russia and Ukraine to meet their wheat demand. The wheat shortage has hit Egypt particularly hard, as it remains the world's largest importer of the grain¹³. Similarly, Tunisia is grappling with a mounting economic crisis, leading to shortages of essential commodities, including dairy products and bottled water, resulting in empty supermarket shelves and people scrambling to stock up on basic commodities¹⁴.

In the context of North African states, India has the potential to serve as a dependable and alternative source of a steady food supply. This can be attributed to India's status as the world's largest producer of milk and edible oils, and the second-largest producer of wheat and rice¹⁵, which has resulted in a substantial buffer stock and vast cereal production capacity. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has even declared that India's farmers can feed the world, but it remains to be seen if India's food production can fulfil both domestic and global needs, as this would require significant time and investment to augment production capacities.

3. Looking Ahead: Recommendations for Stronger India-North Africa Ties

India maintains a notable presence in North Africa, yet it lacks the capacity currently to match the influence exerted by other external actors. Given the significant geopolitical tensions in North Africa, India's diplomatic approach, characterized by the pursuit of close economic partnerships through South-South cooperation, may encounter difficulties in implementation, but remains essential to develop ties. However, there is still significant potential for closer relationships in several domains:

- **Strengthening trade and investment:** North Africa and India have untapped potential for trade and investment. For instance, North Africa should make the supply of Indian high-tech products and expertise a priority, while India should further open its market to North Africa states. Encouraging investment and trade fairs, facilitating investment flows, and exploring new private business opportunities will prove critical.
- **Enhancing cultural exchange:** North Africa and India share a rich cultural heritage that dates to ancient times. Increasing cultural exchange programs, including student exchanges, cultural festivals, and art exhibitions, as well as increasing connectivity via flights, can promote mutual understanding and boost economic exchanges as well.
- **Supporting infrastructure development:** Infrastructure is essential for economic development. North Africa and India need to work together to develop infrastructure in various sectors,

13. Wheat. Observatory of Economic Complexity.

14. Tunisia food-makers starved for supplies amid crisis. (2022). France 24.

15. India at glance. FAO.

including transportation, clean energy, and telecommunications. India has expertise in building affordable and sustainable infrastructure, while North Africa has the potential to become a hub for regional trade and transportation.

- **Strengthening political and diplomatic ties:** India and North African states share common interests and concerns, including climate change, economic development, and a fairer international system that integrates the needs of the Global South as a priority. Regular high-level visits and dialogues between leaders can help to build trust and cooperation. Furthermore, promoting regional forums like the African Union and the Arab League, and the participation of North African states in the Indian Ocean Rim Association, can facilitate joint efforts to address common challenges.

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