

# Africa Report

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## China Brings Africa's Post-COVID Development to UN Security Council

From its position as rotating chair of the United Nations Security Council, China has chosen to prioritize the issue of Africa's post-pandemic recovery. On May 19, at the initiative of China, the Security Council held an Open Debate via video link, on "Peace and Security in Africa: Addressing Root Causes of Conflict in Post-Pandemic Recovery in Africa." "The aim of China convening this UNSC open debate is to promote the international community to attach importance to the severe challenge posed by the pandemic to Africa's peace and development, build consensus and synergy, and work with African countries to overcome the pandemic," the Chinese government said in a statement ahead of the meeting.

China has prioritized the need to bridge Africa's "pandemic gap" including vaccines and physical medical supplies; the "peace deficit" of terror and war; the "development gap" including debt relief and industrial modernization; and "unfair governance" of biased international relations.

The debate was led by Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Wang emphasized that China is willing to "stand together with its African brothers through thick and thin and cooperate with international partners to play a positive role in promoting peace and security in Africa and make unremitting efforts to build a community with a shared future for

mankind," according to the statement.

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## Sudan Becomes Darling of the West: \$1.5 Billion in Arrears to IMF Cleared

Debt relief for Sudan was the subject of a conference in Paris on May 17. There, the African country's arrears to the IMF were cleared through a bridge loan of \$1.5 billion from other IMF member countries. The poor, but strategically located country will now be eligible—provided it eliminates critical fuel subsidies, and devalues its currency once more—for new credit under the IMF's HIPC program, for Highly Indebted Poor Countries.

In addition, France announced its "intention" to write off an additional \$5 billion of Sudan's bilateral debt to the nation, as did Italy, Germany and Norway, for a total of \$6.8 billion (non-G7 member China has also previously forgiven a portion of its bilateral debt to Sudan). This leaves Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as Sudan's largest creditors, each with nearly \$10 billion.

Behind this sudden largesse is raw geopolitics. In November 2020, Sudan agreed to allow a Russian naval facility and military base at Port Sudan on the Red Sea, less than 200 miles from Mecca in Saudi Arabia—Russia's first official military base on the continent. (China's sole African base is in Djibouti, since 2017.) In the flurry of "diplomatic" activity which followed, both AFRICOM's commander, General Steven Townsend, and AFRICOM "ambassador" Andrew Young made separate visits to Khartoum, and Secretary of State Tony Blinken has spoken

with Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok twice since January. In April, Sudan "unexpectedly" reneged on its agreement with Russia in the crudest fashion—literally waiting until the Russian vessel was about to dock before announcing that it would not be allowed to unload its cargo of radar and other military equipment.

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## Kenya Officially Opens Lamu Port for Corridor to Ethiopia, South Sudan

The Indian Ocean has a new port on its shores, as Kenya last week opened Lamu Port, the anchor of its LAPSSET Northern Development Corridor to Ethiopia and South Sudan. The LAPSSET project—the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor—envisions road, standard gauge rail (SGR), and pipeline connections from the port into southern South Sudan and Ethiopia as eventual developments.

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta presided over the official launch ceremony May 20, at which he castigated the naysayers, saying they would be "put to shame" by the eventual expansion enabled by the new infrastructure. The ceremony included the launch of an access highway for the port, and the commissioning of a second, 110 km access road.

As of now, the deep-water port has a single functioning berth, but expansion plans foresee a total of 32 berths by 2030, including the development of a completely new industrial and residential metropolitan region, which could eventually rival the nation's sole existing port complex at Mombasa. The construction and financing for the port have been provided by the China

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Communications Construction Company. Fully developed, the LAPS-SET project is anticipated to cost 2.5 trillion Kenya shillings, or \$24 billion.

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## Liberia-Guinea Agreement Eases Access to Huge Iron Ore Deposit

The Liberian House of Representatives approved on May 4 an agreement that would allow iron ore from Guinea to cross into Liberia, for transport by rail to the Liberian port of Buchanan, 250 km to the southwest. The ore would travel on Liberia's longest functioning rail line, a 250 km standard gauge line that was rehabilitated by the ArcelorMittal steel company in 2011.

The agreement—characterized as a “win-win” venture by both countries—could provide early access to one of the largest and richest iron ore deposits on the continent and in the world—the largely undeveloped fields at Simandou, Guinea in a remote mountain region.

But transport of ore to a Guinean port is also planned. In 2019, the consortium that is Guinea's leading exporter of bauxite won the concession to mine two of the Simandou blocks by agreeing to build a 650 km SGR rail line (the North Trans-Guinean) to Conakry and a deep-water port there. That project is in its early stages of development, with completion expected in 2025. The consortium is led by the Singapore-based SMB-Winning shipping/mining group, whose investors include the Guinean government and Chinese aluminum producer Shandong Weiqiao, part of China Hongqiao.

The Simandou deposits have been the focus of long and heated battles for control of its four blocks, involving such billionaires including DeBeers sightholder Beny Steinmetz and international currency speculator George Soros.

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## Ethiopia To Start Power Production at Grand Renaissance Dam

Ethiopia has now officially declared that it plans to begin generating power from the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile in a few weeks, during the June-August rainy season. The country had already announced that it intends to begin a second stage of filling the reservoir with the onset of the seasonal rains. Transmission lines are already in place to distribute what could eventually become 6,400 MW of hydro-power from the northern dam as far as 1,000 km south across the entire country and into Kenya.

In the continuing saga of diplomacy around the water rights of countries below the dam (Egypt and Sudan), the UAE stepped in, in January, 2021, offering to host the latest rounds of talks, a move endorsed by African Union chair Felix Tshisekedi. Ethiopia has been determined—against the suggestions of Egypt—not to “internationalize” the GERD dispute, preferring that any mediation be done by a regional (most preferably an African) party.

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## South African Military Losing Skills, Yet Budget Cuts Contemplated

The advanced-technology, skilled-labor segment of the South Africa National Defense Force (SANDF) is slowly disintegrating as the nation struggles under the weight of the pandemic and financial collapse. Not only are national tax and revenue sources reduced under the weight of the lockdowns, but expenses have risen to new highs, as in other nations.

The country's state-owned advanced-technology defense contractor,

Denel, has struggled to make payroll in recent months, and the nation has watched as valuable trained engineers and technicians have left the company because of the financial difficulties.

Defence Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, in addressing the parliament May 29, noted that during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns, the SANDF had done double duty with 8,000 of its personnel re-deployed to civil support. According to *Defense Web*, she said that in the last year, “the SANDF conducted 12,452 road blocks, 7,800 vehicle check-points and 35,000 patrols.” South Africa continues under lock-down.

She implored the legislators to allocate the full R46 billion (\$3.34 billion) budgeted for her department, and not impose the R15 billion (30%) cuts as proposed, in which case basic defense services would be threatened.

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## Rolling Blackouts in South Africa Threaten Health as Winter Approaches

South Africa's state-owned electric power company, Eskom, announced May 3 that it will be unable to meet demand, and that rolling blackouts—known locally as “load shedding”—will be implemented during the peak evening hours of 5:00 to 10:00 p.m., probably throughout winter—June, July and August—when a large part of the country that is above 1500 m elevation experiences near-freezing temperature lows. Households typically depend on electricity for heating.

The company has been plagued with ongoing maintenance issues, and last week sustained simultaneous failures at multiple generating units. The company is also struggling under a heavy debt load, and is currently a prime target for the green enforcers, who seek the eventual shutdown of its entire coal-driven generating capacity.