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Editor

Rajeesh Kumar

Associate Editor

Abhishek Mishra

Assistant Editor

Mohanasakthivel J.

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Editor's Note

This issue of Africa Trends delves into pivotal developments that are reshaping the continent's position on the global stage. We commence with Dr. Saurabh Mishra's in-depth analysis of Kenya's anti-tax protests, which have escalated into violence against President Ruto's administration in response to the historic Finance Bill 2024. Dr. Rajeesh Kumar provides a critical evaluation of the G7's commitment to Africa's development, underscoring a persistent history of unmet promises and the urgent need for the genuine implementation of pledges. Dr. Abhishek Mishra examines the implications of the phased withdrawal of the Southern African Development Community Mission from Mozambique and the ensuing challenges for the incoming Rwandan-led forces. Mr. Mohanasakthivel J explores the landmark Ethiopia-Somaliland agreement that facilitates Ethiopian access to the Red Sea, analysing its potential regional repercussions. Finally, Ms. Ishita Paul reviews Yuan Wang's book on Railpolitik, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of Sino-African infrastructure development. This issue provides a rich array of perspectives on Africa's evolving political and economic landscape.

We welcome your feedback!

Cover Story

ANTI-TAX PROTESTS IN KENYA: NO EASY SOLUTIONS

In June 2024, Kenya witnessed widespread anti-tax protests, particularly against the passage of the Finance Bill 2024. The protests, initially peaceful, escalated into violence, resulting in the death of 39 protesters and widespread vandalism. The bill aimed to raise KES 302 billion, the largest increase in Kenya's history, amid high inflation and economic challenges. The government's insistence on passing the bill despite public outcry fuelled distrust in President William Ruto, who had campaigned on a platform of reducing the cost of living. The protests, which started as opposition to the tax hike, evolved into a broader movement against Ruto's leadership. Kenya's economic challenges, including high public debt and sluggish growth, have limited the government's options for addressing the crisis. While Ruto's administration has attempted fiscal consolidation, the protests underscore deep-seated discontent with the political and economic status quo

Saurabh Mishra*

Thousands of uncontrollable protesting youth stormed the Kenyan Parliament, torched and vandalised sections of it on 25 June 2024. Few other government buildings were also put on fire by the enraged masses. Reportedly 39 protesters were killed, hundreds wounded and more arrested in police action by 30th June.[1] Similar clashes between thousands of protestors against the passage of The Finance Bill 2024 and police forces took place across cities and towns putting the country in chaos. This is how Kenya Government faced a serious challenge as it planned to increase its annual revenue through the finance bill. The mob demanded revocation of the bill that was approved and passed by the Kenyan Parliament despite wide-scale discontent and protests. The bill intended to mop additional KES302 billion to the treasury, which is the largest ever increase (43 per cent over the previous bill) in the history of independent Kenya.[2]

Anti-tax sentiments gathered momentum since the introduction of the bill in the second week of May 2024, and transformed into huge protests in the month of June.[3] The protests initially were largely peaceful that later escalated into violence due to the Government's

* Research Fellow, Africa, Latin America, Caribbean and United Nations Centre, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi.

intransigence for not acceding to the people's demand, and determination to achieve the revenue increase. Although the government retracted taxes on certain essential items under people's pressure, it simultaneously was determined to tax other items to meet the target. William Ruto, the President of Kenya faced the wrath of the youth and the common *mwananchi* (citizens). The protests that began with the objective of the government dropping the raise in taxes snowballed into a movement against President Ruto despite his refusal to finally sign and enact the bill. Protestors expressed their distrust for Ruto as he had taken a strong line against the violent protestors on 25th June, saying the symbols of the State of Kenya were being targeted by 'criminal elements' who had intruded into the protests. For people, it was too late for him to take a U-turn and retract the bill. The issue no more was the financial bill but the deeper underlying structures of the Kenyan politics and economy that President William Ruto represents. This article, therefore, explores the structural reasons for people's rage against the William Ruto Government. It also analyses options available to the government for resolving the crisis and addressing the underlying problems leading to such chaos.

What Triggered the Protests?

The Financial Bill 2023 signed and enacted by President Ruto was unpopular for imposing housing levy.[4] The bill was challenged in court which declared it unconstitutional. However, Ruto found another way to bring back the levy through Affordable Housing Bill, 2023.[5] This affected working class as the tax was to be collected directly from their gross salary and income. This led to protests which were primarily organised by political parties in opposition to Ruto Government. However, it is not the case in 2024.[6] No leading organisation has taken responsibility for the protests. The movement began as small youth agitation that snowballed into mass movement that primarily included millennial students and youth who were later joined by professionals, families and civil society members united with rising costs of living in Kenya.

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People were dissatisfied with the bulldozing attitude President Ruto had shown towards the court's decision regarding housing levy and the Finance Bill in 2023. Ruto had shown resolve to increase revenue even if people were not happy with it. To get his way, he was even inclined to not adhering to relevant provisions of the constitution. It was also felt that the 'public participation' process during consultations on the bill was 'cosmetic', 'inadequate' and 'mockery' of the sovereignty of the people.[7]

The purchasing power of Kenyan consumers is relatively lesser than before. They are compelled either to reallocate spending or consume lesser. High inflation due to prolonged drought and supply chain conditions, because of the Ukraine war, has in general raised the prices of

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food, energy and transportation.[8] Accumulated anger towards the rising cost of living, a consistent phenomenon in relation to increases of income over years, erupted with the new proposed tax regime.

The State of Kenyan Economy

Current price GDP of Kenya in 2023 was USD108.92 billion,[9] putting it in the league of ten largest economies in Africa. With a fluctuation between 0.2 and 8.1 per cent, the country was able to maintain an average annual real GDP growth rate of 5.58 per cent during the 15 years (2005-2019) before 2020 (when the global catastrophe of COVID-19 pandemic struck the country leading to a contraction of the real GDP by 0.3 per cent). The real GDP growth rate after the COVID year (during 2021-23) has been 5.9 per cent on an average, which is significantly lower than its agenda 2030 target of achieving an annual growth rate of 10 per cent.[10]

The country however has not been able to register itself among the fastest growing economies in Africa. The average 12-month inflation between July 2023 and June 2024 has been 6.36 percent, showing an improvement from the past.[11] The unemployment rate, which was almost stagnant around 2.8 per cent till 2016, however, has seen an annual rise with an average 0.4 per cent since 2017. The rate of unemployment in the year 2023 was 5.7 per cent.[12]

The 29th Kenya economic update released in June 2024 has shown improvements on growth and inflation front. The report, however, expects the economy to slow down slightly and remain around 5 per cent in 2024. Service sector, especially Tourism and finance, is the largest contributor to Kenya's GDP[13] with around 55 per cent share in 2023.[14] Although exports are the third largest contributor in the economy, export-GDP ratio has been falling over the last decade. The export-GDP ratio of Kenya is about one-third of a country with a comparable economy in size. The country faces competition in terms of competitive advantage and has also not been able to add new products of value in its basket for quite some time. Agricultural products, minerals and chemicals are the three largest contributors to the country's export basket.[15] The economy is structured traditionally, and the exports are of low value. The country, therefore, is not able to generate enough revenue to invest or fund developmental projects, leading to accumulation of public debt over years.

Debt Situation and Servicing

The Kenyan economy, if not fast, grew well above the world average rate of 2.7 per cent in 2023,[16] and it is not growth but the type of growth in the root of the economy's problems. It is heavily indebted and has few means to increase revenue for debt-servicing and developmental needs. Kenya's total public debt at the end of financial year (FY) 2022-23 was 72 per cent of the GDP which is estimated to come slightly down to 68 per cent in 2023-24. This is, however, still too high in relation to the acceptable standards, and the larger share of borrowings in recent years have come from external sources.[17]

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President Kenyatta relied on debt led growth as he wanted to capitalise on the status of Kenya as a "frontier market" in Africa. Debt financed grand infrastructure projects that have not yet been able to give much returns have raised questions regarding who benefitted out of these projects.[18] The Kenyan debt to GDP ratio has almost doubled in the last decade as it was only 41 per cent in 2014. The estimated debt servicing ratio for the FY 2023-24 is 5.7 per cent of the GDP, which would stand around 37.9 per cent of the estimated tax revenue.[19] The pressure to remain solvent, therefore, leaves little room to invest in the long-term priority areas for the economy to grow at a faster rate. Requirement to keep the economy growing, catering to people's needs and demand, compels the government to borrow and be trapped in a vicious cycle of debt. Although Ruto Government has shown determination to cut fiscal deficit by increasing revenue through taxation, this has backfired putting his government's survival at stake.

Expectations from William Ruto

William Ruto, who was sworn in as President of Kenya only two years ago in September 2022, is facing a formidable challenge to keep his government functional. He was elected with a small margin over his major opponent Raila Odinga with 50.49 per cent of votes which was challenged and validated in court later. Many felt that his election was not very popular and was highly contested. Ruto had come to office with a promise of bottom-up agenda for 2022-27, projecting his humble background of "street chicken seller" and a narrative of his rise from the grassroots.[20] He has a trajectory of rise that the common masses can look up to for inspiration. The expectations from President Ruto as a "hustler", however, were much more than others as the common people chose to believe him to be different among the 'legacy' candidates. Despite his association with Uhuru Kenyatta under whom he served as Vice President for nine years, he campaigned on this 'difference' and raised unrealistic hopes. Ruto's primary election promise was to bring down the cost of living, which seems to be a distant dream, as he desperately attempted to raise revenue for the exchequer of Kenya through taxation. He also blamed his predecessor for ruining the economy by increasing subsidies and "avoidable" borrowings. He knew that the country had been "living large and way beyond" its means.[21]

Ruto's primary election promise was to bring down the cost of living, which seems to be a distant dream, as he desperately attempted to raise revenue for the exchequer of Kenya through taxation.

Ruto awakened class issue in the Kenyan politics and termed the main political opponents as leaders with "pedigree" who have inflicted a "state capture" by manipulating institutions of the nation.[22]

This worked for him as the people had been looking for a fresh air in a political environment captured by political legacies. But it meant he would be under acute scrutiny by opposition and all other stakeholders. His steps to collect more for the government coffers to deal with burgeoning debt and deliver his promises were no respite. People looking forward to immediate relief interpreted it as betrayal. The opposition also got the opportunity to settle scores, as Ruto has not been following the tacit consensus among the political elite to protect

the predecessors. There have been action by state agencies against the family members of former President Kenyatta, other opposition members and their assets.[23] The political elite had not expected this. Ruto, therefore, is a target for both, the people as well as the opposition.

General Discontent with Politicians

The immediate interpretation of attempts to increase revenue through taxes as deceit, is a result of the long-term experiences of Kenyan people. For common *mwananchi*, corruption in Kenya is on "a grand industrial scale" and politicians have used the "state as a site for personal accumulation and enrichment" by marginalising the masses.[24] Kenya stood 126th out of 180 countries in list of most corrupt countries in the world in 2023.[25] The changes in the rankings and overall perceptions of corruption in the administration over the years have not been very encouraging. People distrust the politicians and their means of accumulating wealth.

Options for Solution

The problems of Kenyan economy, although complicated by dismal conditions of the global economy, is "largely homemade." The solutions, therefore, must come out of the Kenyan economic and political decision-making processes. The government has been borrowing and investing in grand public infrastructure like roads, rails, and port, keeping the growth rate steady.[26] But this has not yet given expected returns and acceleration to growth.[27] On the contrary, this has added to public debt.

Increasing exports and harnessing demographic dividend can be other means to accelerate growth. However, governments in Kenya have failed to benefit as their policies could not increase exports and generate jobs or required skills in the available working force.[28] Increasing exports and demographic dividend needs systematic economic and educational reforms that need sustained investments over time.

In 2021, Kenya had to go to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for stabilising its fiscal conditions.[29] But this is rather a problem than solution in the Kenyan context.[30] Ruto Government, therefore, has planned a "multi-year fiscal consolidation effort centred on raising tax revenues and tightly controlling spending."[31] The strategy has slightly improved the economy in the last financial year with respect to current account balance and fiscal deficit. But public expenditure in a country like Kenya cannot be strictly tightened for long, as this may impede an already stagnated growth or induce political consequences like this episode of intense protests.

China is the largest bilateral creditor to Kenya. Given the Chinese mercantilist as well as strategic approach regarding their loans, it is not easy to re-negotiate the debt without additional concessions to them.

Debt restructuring is another option but it takes time and diplomatic efforts to negotiate. China is the largest bilateral creditor to Kenya.[32] Given the Chinese mercantilist as well as strategic approach regarding their loans, it is not easy to re-negotiate the debt without additional concessions to them. Multilateral financial institutions are also going to take a cautious approach

towards any restructuring, as the share of Kenyan multilateral debt is already over 25 per cent.[33] This, too, makes it difficult for the country to get a new round of loans.

Grants are the best option to finance Kenya in the current situation, but they are very limited as developed countries have grown more cautious and circumspect in giving grants due to their own economic and geopolitical uncertainties. Developing countries have limited capabilities even if they resort to providing on account of helping a friendly country or investing in an economy of future currently mired in poor financial governance and decision making. However, in empirical and practical terms, grants have never been a solution to economic problems of a country. The grant component in the Kenyan GDP for the FY 2022-23 was a negligent 0.2 per cent while estimates for FY 2023-24 are only 0.3 per cent.[34]

Conclusion

The Kenyan debt crisis reveals that the leadership chose easier, faster and optical rather than robust way to economic growth. The strategy of borrowing to finance growth and development has failed. People have only seen inflation and lack of returns on economically questionable projects. Given President Ruto's involvement in the preceding government as Vice President, expectations from him to be a saviour of the poor were fragile. His strong statements against the protestors, and use of heavy force by police killing many, worsened the crisis. Protestors want Ruto out of office, but they do not have any alternative leadership that could be fundamentally any different. The realistic means to a long-term solution to the Kenyan economic problem is to raise revenue through taxation or other means. All other means than taxation appear to have either reached their economically viable limits or would require further investment and diplomatic efforts involving time and uncertainty. The most robust solution, therefore, is to increase revenue domestically and sustainably, but this can be done only in a calibrated manner in the longer term. Relying heavily on taxing people's needs and daily lives to get immediate results has backfired. Rolling back the Financial Bill 2024 is a move to calm people down, and there is no easy and immediate alternative to taxation. The problem is not Ruto specific, but as President he has to be more creative and defter in exploring the right combination of all possible means of revenue in small measures over longer period of time. He is a victim of the expectations that he had raised to get elected. Not only him, but all Kenyan Governments have to be patient to criticism as they cannot bring the economy back on track immediately with drastic measures.

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Commentary

THE G7'S AFRICAN AGENDA: PROMISES UNMET

During the 50th G7 summit in Italy, Africa took centre stage in the development discussions, with the G7 committing to align its initiatives with the African Union's Agenda 2063. Noteworthy efforts included the 'Energy for Growth in Africa' project, which focuses on advancing clean energy and providing technical assistance. However, doubts remain due to the G7's history of unmet commitments. Despite numerous promises concerning infrastructure, debt relief, and health security, the G7's aid to Africa has often been insufficient. Over the years, a significant gap has emerged between the G7's pledges and their actual implementation, with aid levels declining since the 1970s and worsening challenges like food insecurity and health crises across the continent. To regain trust, the G7 must ensure that its promises are fully and promptly fulfilled, adopt a comprehensive approach to debt relief, prioritize sustainable agricultural practices and resilient health systems, and support African-led initiatives that empower local communities and strengthen governance.

Rajeesh Kumar*

At the 50th G7 summit, held in Italy in June 2024, Africa was a central focus in the development agenda, reflecting a significant commitment to the continent's growth and sustainability. Under the Italian presidency, the G7 pledged to align its efforts with the African Union's Agenda 2063, prioritizing improvements in infrastructure, trade, agricultural productivity, and food security.[1] A key outcome of the summit was launching the 'Energy for Growth in Africa' initiative, aimed to foster the development of clean energy projects and to enhance financing through technical assistance and capacity building.[2] This strategic alignment highlights the G7's recognition of Africa's pivotal role in the global economy and its potential for future growth.

A key outcome of the summit was launching the 'Energy for Growth in Africa' initiative, aimed to foster the development of clean energy projects and to enhance financing through technical assistance and capacity building

* Research Fellow, Africa, Latin America, Caribbean and United Nations Centre, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi

However, the G7's track record of supporting Africa's development has often fallen short, raising questions about the credibility and sincerity of their commitments. Previous initiatives have frequently been criticized for lacking substantial follow-through, insufficient funding, and disconnect between promised goals and actual outcomes. This skepticism is compounded by historical patterns of unmet pledges and the perceived prioritization of G7 member states' strategic interests over genuine developmental needs in Africa.

G7 and Africa: A History of Pledges and Inaction

Historically, the G7 has positioned itself as a leader in addressing global challenges, including those affecting Africa. Over the years, the G7 has made numerous pledges, including commitments to infrastructure development, debt relief, and aid for sustainable development. However, many of these promises have remained unmet or only partially fulfilled. This gap between pledges and outcomes highlights a significant issue in the G7's approach to Africa's development.

Historically, the G7 has positioned itself as a leader in addressing global challenges, including those affecting Africa.

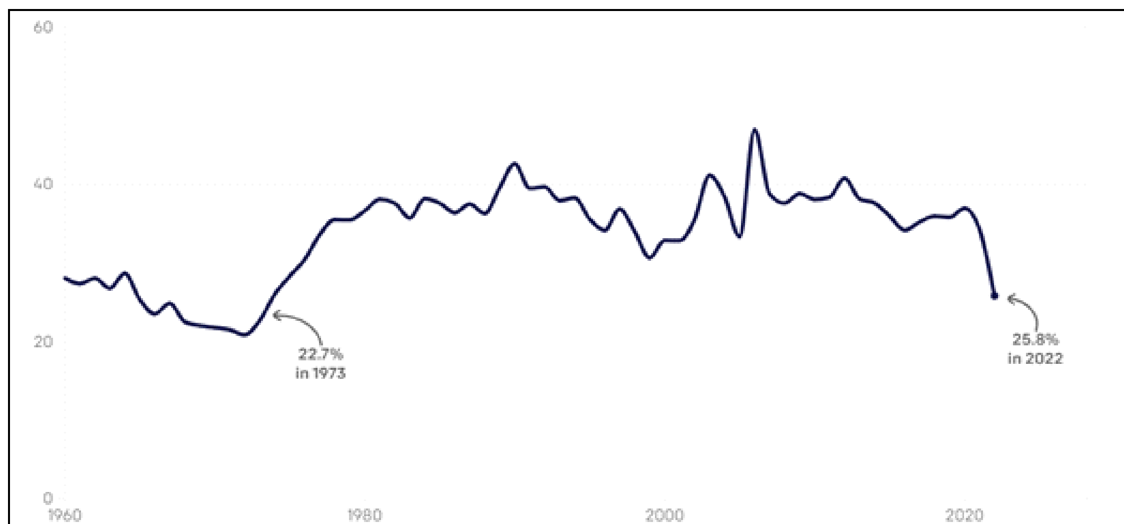
To support Africa's economic transformation, the G7 has made several important commitments. For instance, a decade ago at the Lough Erne Summit in 2013, the Group pledged to enhance trade and infrastructure in Africa.[3]

This commitment was reaffirmed at several subsequent summits, including the 2021 Carbis Bay Summit, where the G7 announced the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII). This initiative aims to mobilize up to USD 600 billion for quality infrastructure projects in emerging economies.[4] Additionally, the G7 promised USD 100 billion in drawing rights for African countries[5] and over USD 80 billion in private-sector investment over the next five years.[6]

...the G7's aid to Africa fell to its lowest level since the 1970s by 2022, representing a significant shortfall compared to the pledged amounts.

Despite these promises, the G7's aid to Africa fell to its lowest level since the 1970s by 2022, representing a significant shortfall compared to the pledged amounts. In 1970, developed countries committed to allocating 0.7 percent of their gross national income (GNI) to Official Development Assistance (ODA). By 2023, they had only provided 0.27 per cent. Between 1970 and 2022, G7 countries contributed a total of USD 2.8 trillion in ODA, resulting in a cumulative shortfall of USD 4.49 trillion.[7] Aid to Africa decreased from 46.7 per cent in 2006 to 25.8 per cent in 2022. The OECD and WTO-led Aid for Trade (AfT) initiative revealed that from 2009 to 2019, G7 countries disbursed 19 per cent less than committed, with Japan disbursing 32 per cent less, resulting in a shortfall exceeding USD 33 billion.[8]

Figure 1: Share of G7 and EU institutions' ODA to Africa (%), 1960-2022



Source: https://devpolicy.org/global-development-finance-outlook-and-prospects-part-1-20240729/

Though total G7 aid to Africa increased by 1.8 per cent in real terms from 2022 to 2023, aid as a share of national income (ODA/GNI) has barely risen over the last decade, going from 0.31 per cent in 2010 to 0.37 per cent in 2023.[9] Moreover, no major G7 economy, except the UK, has reached the 0.15 per cent target in the last decade. The UK exceeded 0.2 per cent for nine of ten years from 2011 to 2020, but aid cuts in 2021 reduced its ODA to LDCs from 0.21 per cent in 2020 to 0.14 per cent in 2021, failing to meet even the lower target.[10] Between 2002 and 2019, G7 countries disbursed nine per cent less bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) than initially committed. EU institutions provided 24 per cent less development finance than promised, resulting in an USD 84 billion shortfall.[11]

These resolutions, which called for an immediate ceasefire and did not condemn Hamas, faced opposition from Israel and its allies.

Table 1: G7 countries' ODA in 2023 as a share of their national income

Country	ODA as % of GNI in 2023
Germany	0.79%
France	0.50%
United Kingdom	0.50%
Italy	0.30%
Japan	0.30%
Canada	0.30%
United States	0.17%

Source: https://focus2030.org/Slight-increase-in-Official-Development-Assistance-in-2023

The G7 has also made several health-related commitments, including efforts to support African health security. In 2015, the group pledged to end child deaths, improve maternal health, and lift 500 million people from hunger and malnutrition by 2030.[12] While progress was made through initiatives like the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, significant gaps remain. In 2020, the G7 emphasized equitable vaccine distribution, but initiatives like COVAX faced significant challenges, with the G7 at the center of vaccine nationalism.[13] In 2021, the G7 pledged 1 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses to low and middle-income countries, however, failed to deliver even 50 per cent by the following year.[14] G7 countries prioritized their own vaccination programs, disregarding the urgent requests from African governments for vaccine supplies. This neglect significantly undermined vaccination efforts across Africa.

G7 countries prioritized their own vaccination programs, disregarding the urgent requests from African governments for vaccine supplies.

Similarly, G7 leaders have also repeatedly committed to enhancing global food security and nutrition, focusing on Africa, across several summits. In 2015 under the German presidency, the G7 emphasized the need for increased investments in agricultural development and improved nutrition programs to address hunger, especially in vulnerable regions like Africa.[15] The 2017 summit in Taormina reaffirmed this commitment, focusing on boosting agricultural productivity, supporting smallholder farmers, and fostering sustainable food systems.[16] In 2022 summit, the G7 had further highlighted the importance of international cooperation to tackle the root causes of food insecurity, such as climate change, conflict, and economic instability, underscoring the need to support African nations in developing resilient food systems and improving nutrition.[17]

Despite these high-profile commitments, food security in Africa has worsened over the years. Since 2015, food insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa has escalated significantly. In 2015, approximately 52.3 million people faced severe to moderate food insecurity. By 2017, this number had increased to 56.7 million. The situation deteriorated further by 2020, with around 66.2 per cent of the population experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity, including 30 per cent with severe food insecurity and nearly 37 per cent with moderate food insecurity.[18]

The Global Report on Food Crises 2024 highlights that among the ten countries with the world's largest food crises in 2023, five are in Africa: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Yemen.[19]

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This historical pattern of unmet pledges undermines G7's credibility in Africa. Despite recent initiatives like the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) and the 'Energy for Growth in Africa' initiative, aid to Africa often falls short in both financial support and tangible outcomes. Persistent challenges in health and food security highlight the need for

a more robust and transparent aid approach. To effectively support Africa's sustainable development, the G7 must ensure that commitments lead to substantive, long-term progress.

Way Forward

The G7's broken promises to Africa reflect broader challenges in the international community's approach to development assistance and global cooperation. To restore credibility and make a meaningful impact, the G7 must take concrete steps to bridge the gap between its commitments and actions.

The G7's broken promises to Africa reflect broader challenges in the international community's approach to development assistance and global cooperation.

First, the G7 should ensure that aid pledges are met in full and on time. This requires transparent mechanisms for tracking commitments and disbursements, as well as accountability measures to hold member countries to their promises.

Second, the G7 must adopt a holistic approach to debt relief that addresses both traditional and emerging sources of debt. This includes engaging with new creditors and supporting debt restructuring processes that prioritize sustainable development goals.

Third, timely and effective responses to health and humanitarian crises must be prioritized. Building resilient health systems and ensuring equitable access to medical resources, including vaccines, are critical steps in this direction.

Fourth, the G7 should invest in sustainable agricultural practices and local farming infrastructure to enhance food security. Supporting agricultural research and development to improve crop yields, pest resistance, and climate adaptability is essential.

Finally, the G7 must support African-led initiatives and partnerships that empower local communities and governments. This support should include not only financial assistance but also capacity-building efforts that strengthen institutions and promote good governance.

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Commentary

SADC MISSION WITHDRAWAL FROM MOZAMBIQUE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST INSURGENCY IN CABO DELGADO

In July 2021, the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) was deployed to Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, to combat terrorism and violent extremism. Troops from eight SADC member states supported the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces (FADM) in addressing the insurgency led by Ansar al-Sunna, a group affiliated with the Islamic State. Despite initial successes in reducing violence and reclaiming territory, SADC announced the mission's phased withdrawal by July 2024, to be replaced by a larger Rwandan force partnered with the EU. However, a resurgence of insurgent attacks and rising displacement has raised concerns about the timing of SAMIM's withdrawal and the ability of FADM to maintain security. The mission faced challenges, including outdated military equipment, funding constraints, and divided attention due to simultaneous deployments in the DRC.

Abhishek Mishra*

On 15th July 2021, the South African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) was deployed in the Cabo Delgado province in northeastern Mozambique as a regional response to support Mozambique in combatting terrorism and acts of violent extremism.[1] The mission comprised of troops from eight South African Development Community (SADC) member-states namely, Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Lesotho, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, working with the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces (FADM). Surprisingly, in early April, the SADC stated that by 15th July 2024, the mission is expected to complete its phased drawdown in lieu of the gains the mission has achieved in restricting insurgent activities. In its place, the SAMIM

The mission comprised of troops from eight South African Development Community (SADC) member-states namely, Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Lesotho, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, working with the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces (FADM).

* Associate Fellow, Africa, Latin America, Caribbean and United Nations Centre, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi.

mission will be replaced by a larger deployment of the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) in partnership with the European Union (EU).

The mission's withdrawal leaves several questions behind – Why did SADC intervene in Mozambique? Did SAMIM achieve its mandate in Cabo Delgado? Although SAMIM's initial operations effectively contributed to its mandate of combatting terrorism in Cabo Delgado, the decision to withdraw from SAMIM now seems to be premature due to a surge in insurgent activities once again. In this context, this article takes a stock of the genesis of civil war in Cabo Delgado and discusses some of the pre-deployment considerations the SADC had to take. The article assesses the degree to which the SAMIM missions' objectives were met and highlights the primary challenges faced by the mission. The is followed by a summarisation of the implications of SAMIM's withdrawal for regional security and possibilities that lie ahead.

Genesis of civil war in Cabo Delgado

Since October 2017, militant insurgency in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province has threatened to turn the Mozambique Channel, a key waterway and global shipping route, into the next major security hotspot in the Indian Ocean. The insurgency began when a group of armed men, calling themselves Ansar al-Sunna ("followers of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings"), invaded three police stations in Mocimboa da Praia district. Vicious poverty, a deep sense of marginalisation, and inequality among locals and elites provided the motive for these attacks. The fighter's primary aim was to establish a counter-society ruled exclusively by the Islamic law (Sharia) and gain access to resources and power.

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In 2010, large number of natural gas reserves were discovered off the coastal town of Palma in Cabo Delgado. Anadarko, an American hydrocarbon company had shown interest in the prospective gas project that was subsequently taken over by the French energy giant TotalEnergies in 2019. In Cabo Delgado, vast deposits of minerals like rubies and graphite which are an essential component in electric vehicle batteries could be found. While the province attracted international attention, extremist preachers capitalised on socio-economic frustration, turning dissatisfied youths to jihadist militancy. In June 2019, Ansar al-Sunna formally affiliated with the Islamic State Central African Province (ISCAP). This helped to expand the group's financial and technical resources. Following this, the Islamic State Mozambique (ISM) was designated as a distinct province of the Islamic State (IS) in May 2022. There is little available information on the nature of relationship the ISM and the senior IS leadership enjoys. However, a rise in insurgent attacks in recent months may imply the onset of a closer relationship.

What were SADC's pre-deployment considerations?

Before SADC's troops were deployed in Mozambique, several questions were raised as to how and what role should the organisation take in combatting acts of terrorism in Cabo

Delgado. Much thought had been given to the nature and type of response the organisation had to conduct to counter the insurgency threats. Before SADC authorised the final deployment, a report by the Chief of Staff of the SADC Standby Brigade, Brigadier Michael Mukokomani recommended five objectives for the mission.[2]

These involved providing support to Mozambique to combat insurgent attacks in Cabo Delgado by combatting terrorists and restoring security; maintaining peace and security, restoring law and order in affected communities; work in collaboration with humanitarian agencies to provide relief to populations affected by terrorist activities, including internally displaced persons (IDPs); support FADM's operational capabilities by providing air and maritime support; and provide logistical support and training to the FADM. On 23rd June 2021, the SADC authorised the deployment of SAMIM for an initial period of three months with an estimated budget of EUR 10 million.[3]

Did the mission achieve its mandate?

With the withdrawal of SADC's intervention force in Cabo Delgado province, various questions were raised about the mission's performance and achievements. Did the mission finish its mandate it set out to achieve? Was the withdrawal timely or premature? The SADC mission's objectives were twofold - a combination of both offensive military operations against the insurgents and civilian and humanitarian efforts. When the mission was deployed in 2021, it was successful in directly targeting Ansar al-Sunna and retaking the port town of Mocimboa de Praia. The combined efforts of SAMIM along with FADM, Rwandan forces and local militias were able to push back the insurgents and reclaim important territories. During 2023, there was a 71 percent decrease in violence in Cabo Delgado province due to the mission's operations.[4] Some reports indicated that SADC was successful in regaining control of 90 percent of territory from the insurgents by the end of 2023.[5]

The advances the mission made in combatting the insurgents between 2021 and 2023 led to two crucial decisions. Firstly, SADC announced that the mission's deployment would evolve from simply conducting offensive operations to a broader focus on civilian and police services. Subsequently, the mission's objective shifted from conducting purely offensive operations against the insurgents to an emphasis on restoring law and order on the ground. Secondly, SADC announced that it would begin its phased withdrawal from Mozambique due to the mission's "success" in fighting the insurgents. However, from January 2024 onwards, there has been an uptick in violence and sporadic attacks which has resulted in an increase in the number of civilians that are internally displaced. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), more than 110,000 people have been displaced since the end of 2023 due to resurgence in insurgent activities.[6] This showcases the limits of a counterinsurgency strategy heavily focused on a military approach.

Another mandate of the mission was to provide training and enhance the capabilities of the FADM to conduct counter-insurgency operations in the future. This included providing air and maritime support to the FADM. Some reports suggest that the South African Navy's Makhanda 'warrior-class strike craft' was reportedly deployed in the region along with Tanzanian Navy's patrol vessels.[7] In terms of the provision of air support, there is uncertainty

around the kind of air support the troops had – whether reconnaissance, mobility or combat. Additionally, it also remains unclear the extent to which SAMIM provided logistics and training to the FADM. Most efforts in this regard were led by the European Union and the United States, particularly the European Union Training Mission in Mozambique (EUTM) which had an estimated budget of EUR 15 million.[8]

Following SADC's decision of its intent to withdraw its troops from Mozambique, insurgents have taken advantage of the security vacuum leading to an uptick in violence and displacement.[9] On 10 May 2024, Islamic State-linked insurgents attacked the town of Macomia in one of its most daring attacks which resulted in almost 700 people fleeing and 10 soldiers losing their lives.[10] According to Human Rights Watch, the insurgents reportedly used boys as young as 13 to raid and loot shops and warehouses in Macomia.[11] The upsurge in attacks is indicative that people of Cabo Delgado are far from safe and the threat of violence from insurgents continue to disrupt daily life. Yet, the Mozambican government continues to downplay the insurgents' threat, and insist that the security forces baked by SADC and Rwanda have the situation under control.[12] With SAMIM's withdrawal from Cabio Delgado underway, it remains to be seen whether the FADM can effectively take SAMIM's place in the province.

Challenges faced by the mission

The South African National Defence Force (SANDF), which is the primary provider of soldiers for the mission, faced funding constraints and has been overstretched.

It is difficult to answer the question of whether SAMIM mission successfully achieved its mandate. However, the mission did face two major challenges. Firstly, the military equipment's used in the mission were outdated in addition to facing funding constraints and lacking appropriate assets. The South African National Defence Force (SANDF), which is the primary provider of soldiers for the mission, faced funding constraints and has been overstretched.[13] The average age of deployable soldiers in the SANDF is 40 years. Additionally, the Casspirs armoured personal carriers that were deployed is old with only 3 of 36 in operational condition.[14]

The second major issue confronting the mission was its divided attention. On 15th December 2023, the SADC authorised the deployment of its mission in neighboring DRC known as the SAMIDRC, which led to two concurrent deployments.[15] With limited financial and logistical capacities, the wisdom of such a decision is open to debate. An early premature withdrawal from Mozambique and setting an unrealistic expectation in DRC, where the task of fighting the notorious M23 rebel movement is far larger in scale and complex, could lead to potentially lethal consequences for regional security. The likelihood of the SAMIDRC achieving its objectives in DRC remains to be seen.

An early premature withdrawal from Mozambique and setting an unrealistic expectation in DRC, where the task of fighting the notorious M23 rebel movement is far larger in scale and complex, could lead to potentially lethal consequences for regional security.

However, what could be argued is that the decision to withdraw from Cabo Delgado and concurrently engage in another conflict in DRC did side-track the SAMIM in Mozambique.[16]

Going forward, the Rwandan forces are expected to deploy its own mission in Mozambique which is going to be independent of the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU). This naturally raises some questions about Rwanda's counterinsurgency doctrine or the conduct of its army. Rwanda's decision to deploy its troops is informed by several factors. Its troops have been able to limit civilian casualties while battling insurgents and have actively patrolled and interacted with local communities to gather information.[17] Their knowledge of Swahili language also enabled them to communicate directly with locals. Some reports suggest that due to surge in violent attacks, Rwanda is deploying an additional 2500 soldiers to help the FADM contain the spread of insecurity.[18]

...Rwandan forces are expected to deploy its own mission in Mozambique which is going to be independent of the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU).

Insurgents in Mozambique continues to be active and have not been contained. This necessitates the continued presence of troops from neighboring countries if peace and stability is to be maintained. Some reports even indicate that South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has extended the deployment of its soldiers to Mozambique until 31st December 2024.[19] Even Tanzanian troops may continue to remain deployed in Cabo Delgado province.[20] Additionally, there could be a change in leadership as Mozambique is set to hold its presidential elections in October later this year. The ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) party has chosen Daniel Chapo as its presidential candidate.[21] If the new leadership comes to power, the question of continuity or discontinuity in the government's approach to peace and security could become a vital point of contention. This would have a direct bearing on Mozambique's ability to fight insurgents and provide relief to affected communities.

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Viewpoint

ETHIOPIA'S MARITIME AMBITIONS: SECURING RED SEA ACCESS AND REGIONAL REPERCUSSIONS

On 1 January 2024, Ethiopia and Somaliland signed a landmark agreement granting Ethiopia access to the Red Sea through a 20-kilometer strip of Somaliland coastline, enabling the construction of a naval base for 50 years. In return, Somaliland is set to receive shares in Ethiopian Airlines and formal recognition as an independent state. This deal aims to alleviate Ethiopia's reliance on the Port of Djibouti, which handles 95% of its trade but presents logistical and cost challenges. The agreement has provoked diplomatic friction with Somalia, which views it as a threat to its sovereignty and has reacted with protests and efforts to counterbalance Ethiopia's influence with regional countries support. Additionally, the establishment of a naval base raises security concerns, particularly in light of the upcoming withdrawal of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia and potential regional instability.

Mohanasakthivel J *

On 1 January 2024, Ethiopia and Somaliland inked a landmark agreement that promises to reshape the geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa. This historic deal grants Ethiopia, a landlocked nation, access to the Red Sea through a 20-kilometer strip of coastline along Somaliland. The agreement is set to last for five decades, during which Ethiopia will build a naval base in the region. In exchange, Somaliland is purportedly set to receive shares in Ethiopian Airlines and official recognition as an independent nation[1]. This accord could have extensive implications for Ethiopia, Somaliland, Somalia, and the broader Horn of Africa region. Ethiopia's quest for maritime access is deeply rooted in its historical context. The country's previous attempt to establish a naval presence date back to the early 1950s when it established the Imperial Ethiopian Navy (IEN) as part of its broader military modernization efforts. Under the leadership of Admiral Desta, the IEN successfully developed naval infrastructure in Eritrea and built a fleet that peaked at 1,380 active-duty officers and sailors by 1974. However, Eritrea's secession in 1991, following a prolonged struggle for independence, rendered Ethiopia landlocked[2]. The dissolution of its naval assets and the loss of direct sea access left Ethiopia dependent on neighbouring countries for trade and logistics. The historical significance of maritime access for Ethiopia cannot be overstated.

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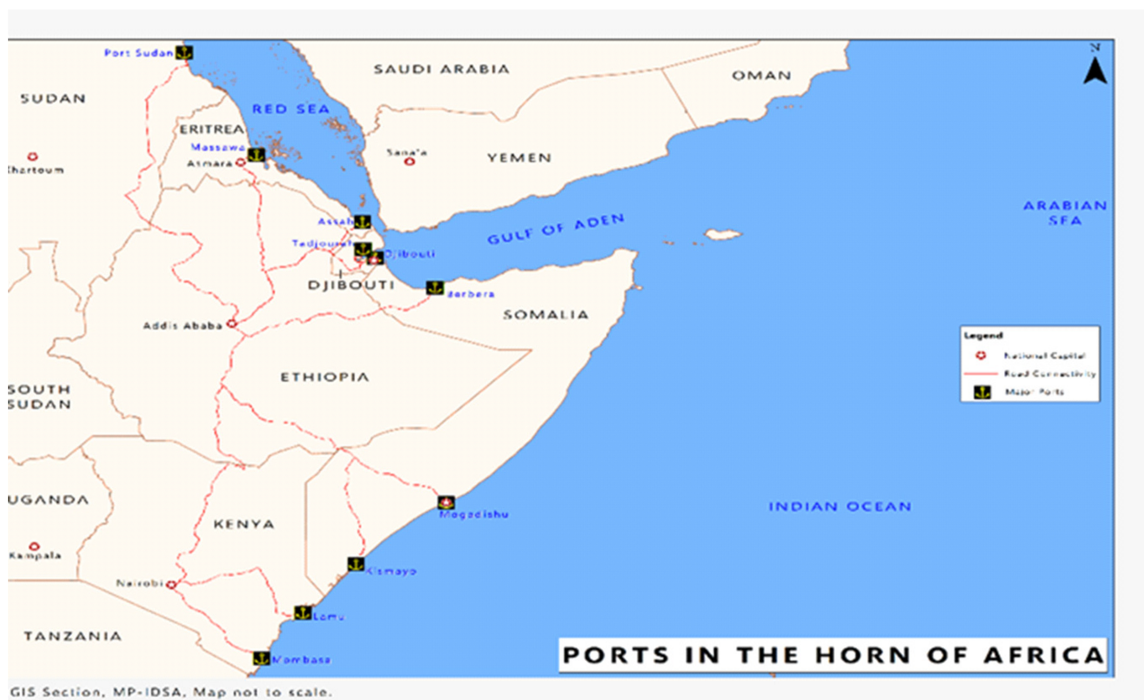
* Research Analyst, Africa, Latin America, Caribbean and United Nations Centre, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi

Prior to Eritrea's independence, Ethiopia had maintained a strategic naval presence, which was integral to its economic and military posture.

Prior to Eritrea's independence, Ethiopia had maintained a strategic naval presence, which was integral to its economic and military posture[3]. The recent deal with Somaliland represents a calculated effort by Ethiopia to re-establish a maritime foothold, thereby reducing its reliance on neighbouring ports and mitigating the risks associated with political instability and conflict in the region.

Current Port Dependencies and Challenges



GIS Section, MP-IDSA, Map not to scale.

Being a landlocked nation, Ethiopia is heavily dependent on ports for conducting its trade. The Port of Djibouti is the primary gateway for Ethiopian trade, handling an overwhelming 95% of the country's foreign trade[4]. This reliance on a single port underscores Ethiopia's vulnerability to disruptions in Djibouti's political and economic stability. The other alternative ports in the Horn present its own set of logistical challenges. For instance, Port Sudan and the Eritrean ports face limitations due to ongoing conflicts and strained diplomatic relations. The Port of Djibouti, despite its crucial role, poses its own set of challenges, including high costs and logistical complexities associated with Ethiopia's trade which costs $1bn a year[5].

Additionally, Ethiopia's access to the Eritrean ports of Assab and Massawa was blocked following the border war of 1998-2000. Restrictions imposed by Eritrea on Ethiopian use of

its ports further exacerbated these challenges, creating a pressing need for Ethiopia to secure alternative and more secure maritime access. The proposed deal with Somaliland seems to address these concerns by offering Ethiopia a direct and secure route to the Red Sea. The establishment of a naval base in Somaliland further enhances Ethiopia's strategic position, providing it with increased control over maritime activities in the region.

Political Dynamics: Ethiopia-Somaliland Relations and Somalia's Reactions

The bilateral relationship between Ethiopia and Somaliland has been defined by shared strategic interests and mutual benefits. Ethiopia has been instrumental in supporting Somaliland's pursuit of international recognition and has served as a guarantor of its security. This partnership aligns with Ethiopia's broader objective of stabilising the Somali region and ensuring its own security by fostering strong alliances in its neighbourhood. Somaliland, for its part, views Ethiopia as an important partner in its pursuit of recognition and security. The support from Ethiopia has been instrumental in bolstering Somaliland's position in the region, providing it with both economic and strategic benefits[6].

Ethiopia has been instrumental in supporting Somaliland's pursuit of international recognition and has served as a guarantor of its security.

However, the deal has sparked significant diplomatic friction with Somalia, which views the agreement as a direct challenge to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Somalia's response has been marked by a series of diplomatic protests, including the expulsion of Ethiopia's ambassador, the recall of its own ambassador from Addis Ababa, and the demand for the closure of Ethiopian consulates[7]. These actions underscore the tension between Somalia's central government and the autonomous region of Somaliland, as well as the broader regional dynamics at play. Somalia's reaction to Ethiopia's deal with Somaliland includes efforts to counterbalance Ethiopia's influence. Turkey has emerged as a key security partner for Somalia, reflecting a strategic move to offset Ethiopia's growing presence in the region[8]. Somalia's President, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, has even signed a parliamentary bill declaring Ethiopia's agreements with Somaliland as 'null and void', further escalating the diplomatic conflict[9]. Public opposition in Mogadishu, including protest marches against Ethiopia's plans, highlights the depth of the disagreement and the potential for ongoing tension in the region[10].

Turkey has emerged as a key security partner for Somalia, reflecting a strategic move to offset Ethiopia's growing presence in the region.

Security Implications and Regional Reactions

The establishment of a naval base in Somaliland and Ethiopia's broader maritime ambitions have significant security implications for the Horn of Africa region. The potential resurgence of militant groups like Al-Shabaab poses a serious threat to regional stability as the group has pledged to strike strategic locations such as the Berbera Port. While Al-Shabaab does not have a physical foothold in Somaliland, it still retains a capacity to strike critical

infrastructure[11]. The anticipated withdrawal of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) by the end of 2024 adds another layer of complexity to the security landscape[12]. The drawdown in international peacekeeping forces could create a security vacuum and potentially allow terrorist groups to regain strength and influence in the Horn[13]. Ethiopia's new maritime ambitions may exacerbate these security challenges, as regional actors and militant groups respond to the shifting dynamics.

The anticipated withdrawal of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) by the end of 2024 adds another layer of complexity to the security landscape.

In neighbouring countries like Djibouti, the economic model centers on shipping services and maritime logistics, primarily serving Ethiopian needs. With over 95% of Ethiopia's trade passing through Djibouti's port, this sector significantly contributes to Djibouti's GDP. In fact, more than 75% of Djibouti's GDP depends on transport services to Ethiopia[14]. Despite this substantial economic interdependence, Djibouti grapples with challenges such as unemployment and poverty and is burdened by a high level of public debt, much of which is owed to China.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi stated that Egypt stands shoulder to shoulder with Somalia[15]. He called on Ethiopia to seek benefits from seaports in Somalia and Djibouti through transitional means, rather than attempting to control another country's territory. Egypt's opposition to Ethiopia's agreement with Somaliland is also influenced by its ongoing dispute with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Nile River. Egypt's interests in Somaliland include countering Ethiopia's regional influence and securing access to the Nile by being close to Ethiopia's capital[16].

Finally, the one country that has acutely felt the threat is Eritrea. After Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's speech on 13 October 2023, Eritrea and Ethiopia moved troops to their shared border[17]. Although Abiy Ahmed and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki met in 2018, they worked together to implement a momentous peace deal, which led to the reopening of diplomatic relations, trade, and travel between the two nations. However, cooperation began to sour amid growing unresolved issues and lingering hostilities[18]. A joint military campaign was launched by Eritrea and Ethiopia against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in 2020, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis and heightened regional tensions. The Pretoria Peace Agreement, signed in November 2022 between the TPLF and the Ethiopian government, excluded Eritrea and Amhara militias from negotiations, leaving unresolved grievances. Eritrea supports Amhara militias against the Ethiopian government. Amhara militias hold key strategic territories in Tigray and have access to Eritrea. Ethiopia's potential focus on the Assab Port is significant, given its history of conflicts with both Somalia and Eritrea over their contested borders—in 1977-78 and 1999-2000, respectively—and the powerful emotions these territorial threats still stir up in the Horn of Africa.

Conclusion

Ethiopia's maritime ambitions of pursuing a naval base and securing direct access to the Red Sea has flared geopolitical and diplomatic tensions in the Horn of Africa region. In such an unfolding scenario, achieving any sustainable resolution will require political will, broader regional cooperation and the establishment of effective mechanisms to manage maritime affairs. While Ethiopia's ambitions may drive new investments and development projects, the likelihood of a formal maritime treaty or widespread recognition of Somaliland remains uncertain. For a stable and mutually beneficial resolution, it is essential for littoral states to collaborate and establish a regional mechanism for managing the Red Sea. This approach could help address Ethiopia's concerns while maintaining regional stability and minimising the risk of conflict. However, given the existing geopolitical divisions and interests of various regional actors, achieving such a cooperative framework may prove challenging. The role of Ethiopia, Somaliland, and other regional players in shaping the future of maritime access and regional cooperation will be crucial in determining the outcome of these ambitions. While a maritime treaty or formal recognition of Somaliland could potentially lead to increased investments and development, the immediate focus will likely be on managing tensions and navigating the complex regional dynamics. As Ethiopia navigates its maritime ambitions, the interplay between historical context, current dependencies, political dynamics, and security implications will shape the future of its maritime strategy and regional relationships. The success of Ethiopia's endeavours will depend on its ability to manage these complexities and foster cooperation with its regional partners while addressing the broader geopolitical and security concerns that underpin its maritime aspirations.

For a stable and mutually beneficial resolution, it is essential for littoral states to collaborate... Ethiopia's concerns while maintaining regional stability and minimising the risk of conflict.

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Book Review

YUAN WANG, THE RAILPOLITIK: LEADERSHIP AND AGENCY IN SINO-AFRICAN INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT, OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (2023) pp. 288

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Ishita Paul*

In "*The Railpolitik: Leadership and Agency in Sino-African Infrastructure Development*", Yuan Wang tackles an intriguing and under-explored question: *why do Chinese-financed and constructed infrastructure projects in Africa, despite their similarities, show such varied effectiveness across different countries?* By comparing railway projects in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Angola, Wang seeks to uncover the underlying reasons for these disparities. She introduces the "*political championship*" theory (p. 8), emphasizing the critical role of African political leadership in determining state effectiveness. Wang's analysis highlights the interaction between individual leadership and broader structural and institutional factors, offering a nuanced perspective on the outcomes of these projects. Through interviews and participatory observation, the book delves into the complexities of Sino-African relations and the challenges of infrastructure development.

To begin with, the book is meticulously structured, beginning with an introduction that contrasts the varied outcomes of the railway projects in the three countries. The *Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway* ("**SGR**") is highlighted as largely successful, the *Ethiopian Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway* ("**ADR**") experienced delays but is now functional, and the *Angolan Benguela Railway* ("**CFB**") suffered from a lengthy construction delay and operational struggles. Wang attributes these differences to the level of political commitment and leadership in each country. She also presents alternative theories that attribute the variation to Chinese contractor capacity or African bureaucratic effectiveness. Wang elaborates on her theoretical framework and outlines her process tracing tests to evaluate the competing explanations in the initial chapter. She defines *state effectiveness* as the ability of states to achieve policy objectives, with railway effectiveness measured by timely completion and regular operations. Wang then critiques the Chinese agency argument, which focuses on the capacities of Chinese

* Research Intern, Africa, Latin America, Caribbean and United Nations, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi.

state-owned enterprises, and the bureaucratic capacity thesis, which emphasizes the effectiveness of African railway corporations. Her political championship theory suggests that African executive leadership, driven by electoral competition, plays a crucial role in overcoming obstacles to project delivery. Following chapters, from Chapter 2 to 4 present Wang's empirical analysis through detailed case studies. She employs fine-grained process tracing supported by extensive fieldwork and over 250 elite interviews. The analysis reveals that political championship was instrumental in the successful outcomes in Kenya and, initially, in Ethiopia, but was largely absent in Angola. Chapter 5 synthesizes the evidence, emphasizing the significant role of African agency in the context of China-Africa structural asymmetries. Wang illustrates how African presidents strategically utilized the Chinese railway projects for domestic political purposes, such as electoral campaigns and industrialization efforts.

A major strength of Wang's work is its focus on African domestic politics and the agency of political leaders in explaining the outcomes of Chinese infrastructure projects. Her *political championship* theory challenges the conventional emphasis on institutional and structural factors, bringing out the importance of leadership in driving infrastructure effectiveness. This perspective aligns with theories on "big man" politics in Africa, where leaders' political survival strategies can coincide with public goods delivery.

Empirically, Wang's comparative analysis of the three railway projects is unparalleled in depth and quality of evidence. Her multi-year fieldwork and extensive interviews provide rich and authentic process tracing. The detailed documentation of railway project processes, high-level politics, and participatory observations with railway workers supports her theoretical claims. Shadow cases on industrial parks and housing projects further affirm Wang's thesis. Wang also notes that leadership authority often extends beyond constitutional frameworks, suggesting a complex and multifaceted relationship between political leaders and technocratic institutions. Wang's findings have significant policy implications. While concerns about neo-colonial relationships in external bilateral infrastructure financing persist, Wang finds that African agency often "*extraverts*" projects to fulfill domestic ambitions. Her research highlights African state heterogeneity and suggests that constructive leveraging of policy space is crucial, while respecting local ownership.

While the book offers valuable insights and makes significant contributions to the understanding of Sino-African relations, there are areas where it could benefit from further exploration and critique. One critique is the limited geographical scope of Wang's analysis. The focus on three case studies— SGR, ADR, CFB provides depth but may not capture the full diversity of experiences across the continent. Expanding the analysis to include more countries could offer a broader perspective on the varying dynamics of Sino-African infrastructure projects. This would enhance the book's applicability and allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how different political, economic, and social contexts influence project outcomes. Also, while Wang's focus on political leadership is a strength, the book could delve deeper into the gender dynamics and diversity within leadership and bureaucratic structures. Exploring how gender and other forms of diversity impact the

leadership styles and effectiveness in these projects would add another layer of complexity to the analysis. This could also address potential biases and offer a more inclusive view of the factors that contribute to successful infrastructure development.

The concept of "*political championship*" is presented as a key driver of project success, yet Wang's thesis appears almost universally applicable across the cases studied, with few identified conditions under which it might not apply. Further research could explore the limits of this theory, such as its relevance in long-term investments not tied to regime survival or in highly diversified neo-patrimonial regimes less susceptible to political shocks. Unpacking the interactions between political leadership and institutions like *pockets of effectiveness* ("**PoEs**") would also be valuable. Wang notes that leadership authority often extends beyond constitutional frameworks, suggesting a complex and multifaceted relationship between political leaders and technocratic institutions.

Another area for further exploration is the financial aspects of these railway projects. While Wang touches on the role of Chinese *state-owned enterprises* ("**SOEs**") and the concept of "*debt diplomacy*," a deeper analysis of project financing and the implications of Chinese loans would be beneficial. Understanding the financial underpinnings of these projects, including the terms of loans and the long-term economic impacts on African countries, is crucial for a comprehensive evaluation of their effectiveness and sustainability. Wang's analysis could also benefit from a more thorough assessment of the environmental and social impacts of railway construction. While the book focuses on the political and bureaucratic dimensions, considering the ecological sustainability and community well-being is essential. Balancing economic development with environmental protection is a critical challenge, and a deeper exploration of how these projects address—or fail to address—environmental and social concerns would provide a more holistic understanding of their impact. In policy terms, while Wang's findings emphasize the importance of strong political leadership, they also raise concerns about the potential for projects to be leveraged for patrimonial purposes or electoral goals. This shows the need for policy conditionalities around transparency and good governance. Wang's research highlights African state heterogeneity and suggests that constructive leveraging of policy space is crucial, while respecting local ownership. However, the book could offer more concrete policy recommendations for African governments and Chinese investors to optimize leadership agency and bureaucratic effectiveness.

To conclude, "*The Railpolitik*" is definitely a thought-provoking work that bridges political science, development studies, and infrastructure economics. Wang's detailed analysis sheds light on the complexities of railway development in Africa, making it essential reading for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike. Her focus on African political leadership as a key driver of project outcomes challenges existing narratives and provides valuable insights into the dynamics of Sino-African infrastructure development. While Yuan Wang's "*The Railpolitik: Leadership and Agency in Sino-African Infrastructure Development*" is undoubtedly informative, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of Chinese-sponsored railway projects in Africa, it occasionally feels repetitive and could benefit from a more engaging narrative.

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Articles could be of approximately 2000 words. Commentaries can range between 1,000-1,500 words (excluding footnotes) and book reviews between 600-1,000 words. Guidelines for contributors may be found at: http://www.idsa.in/africatrends. Submissions may be emailed to the Editor at idsa.africatrends@gmail.com.

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Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses
No.1, Development Enclave,Rao Tula Ram Marg,
Delhi Cantt., New Delhi - 110 010
Tel.: (91-11) 2671-7983 Fax: (91-11) 2615 4191
Website: http://www.idsa.in