

Africa Briefs

China Offers an ‘Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa’

An offer from China for an “Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa” was one of the results of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s visits to Eritrea, Kenya, and Comoros this month, and implicitly, of his visit to Ethiopia in December. It is formulated in an official [statement](#) of Jan. 7.

China’s proposed initiative includes strengthening intra-regional dialogue to overcome security challenges; accelerating regional revitalization to overcome development challenges; and exploring effective approaches to overcome governance challenges in the region.

The proposals were elaborated more fully in a Xinhua [release](#) the same day, which quotes Wang as saying that the region should hold its fate in its own hands through equal consultation, disregarding the geopolitical competition of major powers. He suggested that the region’s countries should hold a peace conference to conduct in-depth discussions, reach political consensus, and coordinate joint actions, and that China is ready to appoint a special envoy for Horn of Africa affairs to provide support for this process.

Wang made reference to the need to accelerate infrastructure plans in the region that are part of the African Union’s Agenda 2063, according to Xinhua: “The region should expand and strengthen, and extend to neighboring countries in a timely manner, the two main axes of the Mombasa-Nairobi railway and the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway, while accelerating the development along the coasts of

the Red Sea and of East Africa to form a development framework of ‘two axes plus two coastal areas.’ To keep pace with the times, countries of the region should also speed up the building of industrial belts and economic belts, create more jobs and promote growth, and enhance capacity for independent development, he said.”

Wang added that China would seek greater synergy between the Belt and Road Initiative and Africa’s development strategies.

Thousands Demonstrate Against ECOWAS Sanctions To Crush Mali

Thousands of Malians demonstrated Jan. 14 in Bamako, the capital, against the extreme and illegal sanctions imposed on Mali last week by the 15-nation trade bloc ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States, with especially French support. There were also mass demonstrations in Timbuktu in the north and Kadiolo and Bougouni in the south. Some demonstrators held hand-made signs attacking France as a “vampire state” or condemning France for genocide.

ECOWAS announced the suffocating sanctions against the impoverished and struggling nation of Mali at a meeting Jan. 9, citing the transitional government’s decision not to hold elections on Feb. 27, but to have a five-year controlled transition to civilian rule as the country struggles against jihadist terror. The bloc agreed to a trade embargo; a blockade of Mali’s borders; interdiction of all financial aid from abroad; and the freezing of Mali’s assets (public and private) in all regional central and commercial banks, in violation of [international law](#). The sanctions do not apply to essential

consumer goods, medical goods, oil and electricity. ECOWAS is supported by French hysteria and is backed up by Britain, 14 other European governments, and the U.S., but Mali’s neighbor Guinea, also very poor, says it will not follow ECOWAS orders.

The sanctions are part of the battle to determine whether Mali will free itself from the control of France, its colonial master, whose assistance against the jihadis has been habitually ineffective. That was the issue behind the coup of May 2021 that brought the current military government to power, with implications for all of the western Sahel.

Russian advisors and Russian military hardware, requested by the transitional government, have arrived in Mali. According to the government, the advisors are not mercenaries, but sent by the Russian Federation. Russian military hardware is not unusual in Africa; some Russian fighter jets and helicopters are in service, for example, in Nigeria.

WHO’s Tedros: 185 Days To Global 70% COVID Vaccination Target

At his year-end press conference Dec. 29, World Health Organization (WHO) Director General Tedros Ghebreyesus sought to unite global forces for the push to the target of a worldwide 70% COVID vaccination level by July 1. Speaking from the new WHO hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence based in Berlin, he said, “This is the moment for leaders to banish the politics of populism and self-interest, which are derailing the COVID-19 response and *threatening to undermine the response to the inevitable next disease.*” [emphasis added]

While most of the “developed” countries have already reached an approximation of that 70% level, a majority of the undeveloped world has not. The continent of Africa is not even 10% vaccinated, with a few small tourist-attraction island nations being the rare exception. Nigeria, Africa’s most-populous nation, is 3% vaccinated, and like others, is being submerged by a Fourth Wave of pandemic, led by the Omicron variant.

In September, the WHO started a drive to vaccinate 40% of Africa by year’s end, a target that only seven African countries were able to reach. As of January 3, confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the 54 African countries reached almost 10 million, at 9,775,425, according to WHO figures, with deaths just over 228,000, 40% from South Africa alone.

While the lack of access to vaccines—vaccine apartheid—is a problem, the challenges to meeting Tedros’ target go beyond that, to the level addressed by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, in her Global Health initiative of the Schiller Institute. To provide for the health of the millions in Nigeria, Haiti, and Afghanistan (to name only three), the strategy must start with basic infrastructure—potable water, decent sanitation, hospitals, and the dependable power supply to run them all, including the refrigeration necessary for storing vaccines.

“I ask everyone to make a New Year’s resolution to get behind the campaign ... We have 185 days to the finish line,” Tedros said.

Morocco, China Agree To Implement Belt and Road

Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nasser Bourita, and Ning Jizhe, Vice-Chairman of the Chinese National Commission for Reform and Development, signed on Jan. 5 a joint Belt and Road Implementation Plan to “facilitate trade, research and

technological cooperation.”

Morocco already has the first truly high-speed rail line (lines reaching about 250 km/h or more) on the African continent, *al-Boraq*, from Casablanca to Tangier. For part of that route, it can travel up to 320 km/h.

Morocco deployed the first Chinese air defense system on the African continent in mid-2021, according to *Defensa* Dec. 19. The Chinese FD-2000B air defense system, it says, is “part of a multi-layered air defense network Morocco is building using Chinese systems.”

Kenya: Whiplashed by COVID and Drought, Millions Face Starvation

The number of Kenyans facing starvation increased from 2.1 million in August to 2.8 million at the end of the year (5% of the population), the Kenyan National Drought Management Authority reports, as a result of the failed October-November-December “short rains” (in the secondary, short growing season). President Uhuru Kenyatta had already declared a State of Emergency on September 8 because of drought in the earlier, main season. Livestock mortality was high in 2021 with an estimated loss of 1.4 million head. Across most of Kenya, the maize crop is now expected to be 35-50% of normal. Much of the country is arid or semi-arid.

At the same time, the COVID pandemic has degraded the functioning of the economy and had a punishing effect on family incomes. The combination of drought and the pandemic is severely affecting household food security throughout the country.

Meanwhile, Kenya has more than 200 stalled irrigation, water, and environmental projects—stalled for a range of reasons, but the strain on the government budget and local government budgets from the COVID-drought combination is a major one.

According to Kenya’s *Business Daily* Dec. 29, “The World Bank and the IMF have asked the government to cancel some of the stalled projects in exchange for multibillion shilling loans to plug revenue shortfalls.” And so the process continues.

While Kenya has relatively greater state capacity to get help to the most severely affected areas, other, similarly affected parts of Africa do not have much state capacity. In neighboring Somalia, 25% of the population is currently suffering from acute hunger. Authorities are currently reporting deaths from starvation in central and southern Somalia.

Despite such incredibly adverse conditions, Kenya is making some headway in other sectors of the economy.

Kenya Reaches Milestone in Building LAPSSET Northern Corridor

In December, a Kenyan milestone was reached in the African Union’s continent-wide Agenda 2063 program—in the portion designated LAPSSET, the Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia northern development corridor. The first phase of the new port at Lamu was completed, providing three berths and yards, with an optimal annual capacity of 1.2 million TEUs with an assumed average dwell time of four days. These facilities are designed to handle container, general, and bulk cargo. The Kenya Ports Authority is acquiring three mobile harbor cranes and ship-to-shore gantry cranes for the port.

The government may now contract with private companies to build 20 more berths in public-private partnerships.

Also in December, in Mombasa, President Uhuru Kenyatta commissioned the Kenya Shipyards Limited (KSL) Mombasa Shipyard, which has a 4,000-ton slipway for shipbuilding work. KSL was initiated by the government in May 2021 to expand shipbuilding in East Africa.