

Africa Briefs

Jihadi Attack Targets Belt & Road in Northern Kenya, As Horn of Africa Heats Up

Terrorists destroyed at least eight large road works trucks engaged in a Belt & Road project in northern Kenya Jan. 23, setting them on fire and detonating explosives. Local media blamed al-Shabaab, the regional jihadi group based in neighboring Somalia. The trucks belonged to the Chinese Construction Company.

Security agencies had reported, the day before, that they were on high alert, as they had word that terrorists in Lamu were going to attack the LAPSSET port and road. LAPSSET is the Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport corridor. China has constructed the brand new, \$2.1 billion Lamu Port (the first three berths, with a draft of 17.5 meters), and is now involved in building a supporting roadway.

When complete, the LAPSSET corridor will include a standard gauge rail (SGR) line from the Lamu Port, giving both South Sudan and Ethiopia a southern access to the sea.

Ten days earlier than the attack in northern Kenya, on Jan. 13, the Institute for Security Studies (Johannesburg) had put out a report suggesting that Kenya's increasing port capabilities opened it to a growing crime wave, one spearheaded by al-Shabaab, since it "notoriously focuses on state infrastructure, damaging property and fostering fear in local communities." Al-Shabaab does continue to be a problem throughout northeast Kenya, but now its attacks may be taking on an added strategic significance.

These developments are embedded

in a larger context. In the wake of China's Jan. 6 proposal that it could appoint a peace envoy for the Horn of Africa—with special reference to the war in Ethiopia—events in that region have taken on a new intensity, with the UK and U.S. determined to stop Chinese influence in the Horn at seemingly any cost.

On the same day as China's announcement, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced David Satterfield, the then ambassador to Turkey, as the new U.S. envoy for the Horn, who began by touring Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Ethiopia Jan. 17-20 with Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee, to attempt to recoup and reorganize the declining U.S. position there. A larger tour of the region, to get leverage on Sudan, will have followed, including Kenya, Egypt, the UAE, Turkey, and Israel.

Tanzanian President Suluhu Prioritizes SGR to Burundi and Uganda

Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan issued a directive Dec. 28, 2021 to prioritize the construction of Tanzania's current standard gauge rail (SGR) project, which runs from coastal Dar es Salaam northwest to Burundi and Uganda. At the same time, she signed a \$1.9 billion contract for Phase III of the project, a 368 km stretch between Makutupora and Tabora, across the center of the country, expected to be completed in four years.

On Jan. 17, Tanzania and Burundi signed an MOU for a 282 km SGR line between the far western Tanzanian town of Uvinza and Gitega, the new capital city of Burundi, expected to cost \$900 million. The climb from

coastal Dar es Salaam to the high plateau of Gitega is 1,500 meters—nearly a mile.

Another cross-border SGR link—between Tanzania and Uganda—was discussed at the fourth meeting of the Uganda-Tanzania Joint Permanent Commission, held in Kampala, Uganda, January 17-19, although nothing was signed.

Tanzania's 2,561 km SGR line (1,591 miles) is being built in five phases. Phase I, 300 km from Dar es Salaam to Morogoro, is now operational. Phase II, 422 km from Morogoro to Makutupora, is nearing completion and is undergoing testing. Construction is being done by Yapi Merkezi (Turkey) and Tanzania Railways and is planned to be completely electrified. Tanzania has so far invested \$6.5 billion in its SGR.

Tanzania is also modernizing and upgrading its ports at Dar es Salaam, Mtwara, and Tanga, for which large sums were specified in the budgets of 2021-2022.

Electricity Infrastructure Attacks across Africa: More than Vandalism?

In recent months, major instances of "vandalism" have been directed against producers of electricity from coal and gas across sub-Saharan Africa. Seen in their entirety, however, they may include instances of irregular warfare in the drive to reverse Africa's struggle to industrialize. Klaus Schwab, executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, is notorious for his recent demand that Africa must not be allowed to industrialize, in his 2021 book, *Stakeholder Capitalism*. Examples of suspected sabotage follow.

On Jan. 18, the entire nation of Kenya was thrown into a blackout lasting most of the day. There had been a series of three attacks on long-distance transmission towers, by “vandals” seeking to steal the copper wire in the transmission lines. In response, President Uhuru Kenyatta issued a ban on the export of scrap metal to reduce the incentive for destruction of the national infrastructure.

On Nov. 17 in South Africa, an electric transmission tower providing power for the coal conveyor belt at national power producer Eskom’s Lethabo power station near Vereeniging (south of Johannesburg) was cut down—and cut so that it would fall on and disable another tower, according to the forensics. Lethabo is Eskom’s best-performing coal-fired plant and has a capacity of 3,600 MW.

In the same week, at the Matimba power station in South Africa’s Limpopo province, someone dropped an extension cord on a transformer, bringing down three of its six units, or half of its 3,990 MW capacity.

In light of these two instances, Eskom CEO André de Ruyter and Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan suspect sabotage. De Ruyter said security—overt and covert—would be strengthened in and around power stations.

Then on Jan. 11, an Eskom security guard in Soweto was killed and six other employees injured when they were attacked by “approximately 30 heavily armed suspects,” during an alleged attempt to steal copper cable outside the Eskom Klipspruit Customer Network Center.

In Nigeria, following what *Vanguard News* called an “attack” on Jan. 7 on a gas pipeline feeding a power plant, the Niger Delta Power Holding Co. announced the shutdown of its 504 MW Alaoji Power Plant in the rural southern Imo State, an uncommon occurrence.

Military Coup in Burkina Faso: Army Says It Needs Means To Defeat Jihadis

A military coup unfolded in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso, Jan. 23-24. The army detained President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, dissolved the government and parliament, and suspended the constitution.

On state television, an army spokesman said the army had seized power because of the “ongoing degradation of the security situation” in the country—a reference to the continuing jihadi attacks—and the “incapacity of the government” to unite the people. Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba was presented as the coup leader.

In the enthusiastic crowds, in the capital and elsewhere, the possibility of Russian help was sometimes mentioned, and there was an occasional Russian flag.

The African Union and ECOWAS promptly denounced the coup. Damiba gave his first speech to the nation on Jan. 27, in which he said that Burkina Faso needed international partners “more than ever,” without naming any options. The next day, ECOWAS met and suspended Burkina Faso.

Damiba’s book, published in June 2021 (Paris, *Les trois colonnes*), is titled, *West African Armies and Terrorism: Uncertain Responses?*

He writes: “Since the Arab springs and the Libyan and Malian crises (2011-2012), the terrorist threat has continued to consolidate in the Sahara as far as the Lake Chad basin, notwithstanding a significant increase in the numbers and military resources involved. The contrast between the growing military commitment of the armies of the region and the continuous expansion of the terrorist influx is the *raison d’être* of this study, the value of which is to contribute to the evolution

of current military operational strategies, the results of which are for the moment very difficult to read. The various commitments of the author in military operations to fight against terrorism, enabled him to endure the harsh reality, to experience the evolution of armed violent extremism and to partially measure the complexity of the issues and challenges.”

The background is that after an attempted coup in 2015, the then government weakened the security and intelligence apparatus to prevent a recurrence. Now, six years later, jihadis have massacred thousands and more than 1.4 million people have been displaced. The army wants to replace the military and intelligence leaderships. And it wants better care for the wounded and the families of the dead.

Food Shortages in Mali As ECOWAS Sanctions Squeeze the Poor

After the military government in Mali refused to promptly return to the barracks, as demanded by ECOWAS—the Economic Community of West African States—the latter imposed harsh sanctions on the country on Jan. 9. At the same time, it exempted food, medicine, and other necessities from its blockade for “humanitarian” reasons. But it cut off access to the commercial credit necessary for imports and exports of food, medicine, or anything else.

According to France 24 on Jan. 24, the sanctions “are causing inflation and food shortages in markets in the capital, Bamako.”

Unfortunately, neither the ECOWAS association of governments, nor the new military governments in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso can at present answer the legitimate objections of the other.