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# International Briefs

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## African Nations and China Promote Negotiated Peace in Ukraine

A group of six African countries, led by South Africa, is preparing an initiative for peace between Russia and Ukraine. The first step will be visits to Moscow and Kiev by an African delegation.

On May 16, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said the matter has already been discussed with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who have each agreed to receive the African delegation in Moscow and Kiev, respectively. Ramaphosa said he had informed U.S. President Joe Biden, while other South African officials say that Washington and London have signaled their “cautious support” for the peace plan.

Ramaphosa has also responded to accusations that South Africa is allied with Russia, and is even shipping it arms. According to TASS, Ramaphosa said South Africa will not depart from its decades-old foreign policy of non-alignment, despite considerable external pressure:

“Throughout, we have been firm on this point: South Africa has not been, and will not be, drawn into a contest between global powers. We do not accept that our non-aligned position favors Russia above other countries. Nor do we accept that it should imperil our relations with other countries.”

This initiative includes many of the same African players who recently managed to end the conflict in Ethiopia between the government and its regional state of Tigray on the basis of dialogue and of finding African

solutions for African problems. The Chinese were very much involved in achieving peace in Ethiopia, as they are also in war in Ukraine.

China’s Special Representative for Eurasian Affairs and special envoy for the Ukraine crisis, Li Hui, held his first meetings in Kiev, May 16–17. Li met separately with the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Andrey Yermak; Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba; Defense Ministry representatives; Ukrainian agencies in charge of infrastructure construction and energy; and President Zelensky.

Li said that Beijing would adhere to the four principles set forth by Chinese leader Xi Jinping: respecting sovereignty, observing the UN Charter, taking into account security concerns of both sides, and using peaceful methods to settle the conflict.

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## Kiev’s CCD Hit List vs. Zepp-LaRouche and Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Ukraine’s Center for Countering Disinformation (CCD) has once again named the Schiller Institute’s founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche, this time for interfering in the military buildup of Ukraine. On May 15, Zepp-LaRouche had [tweeted](#) a photo of Zelensky in the UK from the UK *Telegraph*, with the comment: “British imperial strategy and #Geopolitics push Ukraine to trigger a Nuclear Showdown with Russia.”

The next day the CCD [tweeted](#) “Helga Zepp-LaRouche promotes narratives that feed into Russian propaganda suggesting that Western support for #Ukraine threatens to provoke a larger-scale conflict with Russia. The goal is to end military aid to Ukraine.”

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., broke the silence among U.S. presidential candidates on the CCD’s hit list with his May 14 [tweet](#):

“Scott Ritter and many other Americans are on this kill list. Think about that—the US government is paying the Ukrainian intelligence service to kill Americans. So much for Constitutionally protected free speech.”

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## U.S. National Security Experts: ‘U.S. Should Be a Force for Peace in World’

The following is an abridged version of the full-page ad in the May 16 edition of the *New York Times*, by the Eisenhower Media Network of veteran military and national security experts:

“The solution to this shocking violence is not more weapons or more war, with their guarantee of further death and destruction. As Americans and national security experts, we urge President Biden and Congress to use their full power to end the Russia-Ukraine War speedily through diplomacy, especially given the grave dangers of military escalation that could spiral out of control. Sixty years ago, President John F. Kennedy made an observation that is crucial for our survival today. ‘Above all, while defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy—or of a collective death-wish for the world.’

“The immediate cause of this disastrous war in Ukraine is Russia’s invasion. Yet the plans and actions

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to expand NATO to Russia's borders served to provoke Russian fears. And Russian leaders made this point for 30 years. A failure of diplomacy led to war. Now diplomacy is urgently needed to end the Russia-Ukraine War before it destroys Ukraine and endangers humanity.

"Russia sees NATO enlargement and presence on its borders as a direct threat; the U.S. and NATO see only prudent preparedness. In diplomacy, one must attempt to see with strategic empathy, seeking to understand one's adversaries. This is not weakness: it is wisdom.

"We advocate for a meaningful and genuine commitment to diplomacy, specifically an immediate ceasefire and negotiations without any disqualifying or prohibitive preconditions. *Deliberate provocations delivered the Russia-Ukraine War. In the same manner, deliberate diplomacy can end it.*" [Emphasis in the original.]

The text cites the problem coming from "neoconservatives and top executives of U.S. weapons manufacturers [who] formed the U.S. Committee to Expand NATO. Between 1996 and 1998, the largest arms manufacturers spent \$51 million (\$94 million today) on lobbying and millions more on campaign contributions."

And it concludes: "NATO expansion ... may well be our undoing, unless we dedicate ourselves to forging a diplomatic settlement that stops the killing and defuses tensions. Let's make America a force for peace in the world."

The full statement, with a list of signatories, is [here](#).

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## Russia-Iran and Italy Make Major Strides in Infrastructure Development

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi signed an agreement by video

call May 17 to build a new rail line between the northern Iranian cities of Rasht and Astara, a short (162 km) but key link in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project which is finally advancing after two decades of planning. The 7,200 km corridor will link St. Petersburg and Moscow to India's Mumbai through Iran's Chabahar Port on the Indian Ocean, connecting ship, rail, and road routes for cargo among India, Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Central Asia and potentially Europe.

The \$1.6 billion equivalent contract, primarily funded by Russia, was signed by Russia's Transport Minister Vitaly Savelyev and Iran's Roads and Urban Development Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash, with Putin and Raisi present by video.

In other news, the long-awaited great project connecting Sicily to mainland Italy, the Messina Bridge, took a big step forward when the Italian Chamber of Deputies approved, 183–93, the government decree with "urgent measures for the stable connection between Sicily and Calabria," i.e., the construction of the bridge over the Messina Strait. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) attacked the decision, falsely claiming that neither financial nor environmental feasibility studies had been made. The Italian Senate's approval is expected shortly.

The Messina Bridge, together with the extension of the high-speed rail connection to Palermo (ca. 660 km), will finally complete the Scandinavian-Mediterranean Corridor, connecting and integrating the poorest regions of Italy with the rest of the country and northern and eastern Europe. A leading labor consulting studio in Florence has calculated that in Sicily alone, the construction of the bridge will add €20 billion to GDP and create 90,000 jobs. With its 3.3 km span, the Messina Bridge will be the longest

single-span suspended bridge in the world.

If the upgrading of ports in the two regions is also accomplished, southern Italy will be equipped to play a major role in the Maritime Silk Road—provided that the Italian government does not back down to Anglo-American pressures to exit the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Insiders have informed *EIR* that they are optimistic that Rome will renew the BRI Memorandum.

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## 'Sound and Resilient'? Fed Knew in February It Had Put U.S. Banks at Risk

In a [report](#) dated Feb. 14 and titled, "Impact of Rising Rate on Certain Banks and Supervisory Approach," the Federal Reserve headlined for internal users, "Financial Risks Are Growing for Many Banks," while claiming that "most banks are generally benefiting from rising interest rates."

The *Daily Hodl*, a website oriented to cryptocurrencies, emphasized that the Fed's economic staff had found that 700 banks—about 15% of all those based in the U.S.—were (as of early February) facing "significant safety and soundness risk" due to those unrealized losses. Since March, when the first mid-sized U.S. banks failed, both Fed and Biden Administration officials (along with Wall Street bankers led by Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan Chase) have constantly intoned that "the U.S. banking system is sound and resilient."

In one highlighted quote from the report, the authors partially admit the Fed's own responsibility for the dangerous situation:

"The rising interest rate environment is increasing financial risks for many banks. We are concerned with banks that have investment portfolios with large unrealized loss positions."