
III. Replace Geopolitics with Development

TRIPOLI TO CAPE TOWN

Turning Libya into an African Gateway to Europe Will Bring Peace to North Africa

by Dean Andromidas

Jan. 31—The Moscow and Berlin conferences on the Libyan conflict in January have given hope that the nine-year war will soon come to an end, especially since Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, has taken the initiative to ensure that success. By calling for a summit of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, the UK, and the U.S.—Putin is putting together a concert of powers, thus dragging the European powers, France, Great Britain, Germany, and Italy behind the effort. Nonetheless success can only be assured by the implementation of a vigorous reconstruction and development of war-torn Libya, greater North Africa, and also the Sahel region, which has been engulfed in poverty, terrorism and instability.

Putin's efforts parallel the efforts of Schiller Institute Chairperson Helga Zepp-LaRouche, who has called on the United States and China, to join together in China's Belt and Road Initiative, through which a powerful impetus for peace and economic development can be mobilized. The reconstruction of Libya can create a gateway for a powerful development corridor from Tripoli north to Europe, and south to Cape Town.

Unlike Syria, Libya has not suffered mass destruction, but economic stagnation, instability and conflict.



Russian President Vladimir Putin (middle) with German Chancellor Angela Merkel (on his right) and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (on his left) before the beginning of the International Conference on Libya in Moscow, January 19, 2020.

The major powers have to reverse the regime-change policy carried out by Britain, France and the Obama administration that violently overthrew the Muammar Qaddafi regime through the mobilization of the British-backed Muslim Brotherhood-linked terrorist militias, which led to the collapse of the unity of the country. This has left Libya divided between the so-called Government of National Accord (GNA) headed by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj based in Tripoli, and enjoying nominal international recognition; and the Interim Cab-



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Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj (left), who heads the Government of National Accord in Tripoli; and Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, who commands the Libyan National Army from Benghazi. Russian President Putin has taken the initiative to reconcile the two, and thus end Libya's nine-year war.

inet and national parliament, which decamped from Tripoli and moved to Benghazi in the east of the country. The latter, supported by the Libyan National Army commanded by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, is recognized by the United States, Russia, France and other countries as a major player in any settlement.

Rapid Reconstruction of Libya

It is the task of the major powers is to restore unity in the country through an economic development initiative to provide a powerful incentive to achieve cooperation. As a major oil and gas producer and exporter, Libya has the resources to rapidly restart its economy and play a major role in the economic development of Africa.

The one commitment that the two warring sides share, is to restart the infrastructure projects that were underway prior to the regime-change war forced on the country. At the center of those infrastructure projects was the construction of a railway line to form the final, missing link of the Maghreb Railway along the Mediterranean coast—stretching from Alexandria to Casablanca, linking Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco—in a powerful east-west economic corridor. It forms a part of the African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network conceived by the African Union.

Drafted in the early years of the last decade, the plan was to construct a 3,170 km standard gauge rail line, of which the section between Ras Ejder on the Tunisian-Libyan border to Sirte in Libya via Tripoli, was to be completed by 2012, if the regime-change war had not intervened.

The China Railway Construction Corp. (CRCC) had been in the process of building 352 km of the section stretching from Sirte westward to El-Khums. Russian Railways had already conducted a feasibility study and signed a contract to build the section from Sirte eastward to Benghazi in 2008. Another 800 km section was to be built from the iron ore deposits at Wadi Shati, near Sebha in the south of the country, to the Libyan Iron and Steel Company's (LISCO) steel mill at the coastal port city of Misrata. The U.S.'s General Electric had signed contracts in 2007 for 15 locomotives, and Italy's Finmeccanica was contracted to supply the signaling equipment.

Abdul Hadi al-Hweij, the Foreign Minister of the Benghazi-based parliament and Interim Cabinet, attended the Africa Summit in Moscow last year, where he requested that Russia take up the completion of the \$2.2 billion Sirte-Benghazi railway project. In October 2018, a high-level delegation from the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), led by Economy and Industry Minister Nasir Shaglan, held meetings in Moscow with the leadership of the Russian Railways (RZD) company on the completion of the line from Benghazi to Sirte, despite the fact that the GNA did not have control over this territory.

In September 2019, General Electric signed a binding memorandum of understanding with the GNA to strengthen Libya's power sector by adding up to 6 gigawatts (GW) of power over the next five years, with up to 2 GW expected to be added by 2020.

In June 2019, the Libyan Iron and Steel Company (LISCO) launched a billion-dollar tender to expand its Misrata steel mill complex, already one of the largest in North Africa. These are only a few of the deals worth billions of dollars that could be signed, once the country is politically stabilized.

Nonetheless, in the context of greater African development, Libya offers a far greater potential. It can provide a great opportunity for Europe, in cooperation with China's Belt and Road Initiative as well as Russian and American interests, to take responsibility for the development of Africa. With its 1.2 billion people, Africa is the world's next China. Its industrialization will provide the same huge market for European industrial

Trans-Maghreb Rail Corridor from Casablanca to Cairo, Partially Built



products and services as China, as it becomes fully integrated with the world's industrialized regions.

Turning Libya into 'Africa's Gateway to Europe'

In 2010, Libyan academics Dr. Rajab Abdullah Hokoma and Dr. S.P. Bindra authored a [paper](#) titled, "Libyan Railway: A Gateway to Europe." Published before the murder of Qaddafi, this forward-looking paper not only reviewed the railway developments in Libya, but presented Libya as Europe's "Gateway" to Africa. Qaddafi's Libyan railway project was seen as part of a larger Grand Design for a pan-African railway network, one that is now coming into being in the form of the African Union's (AU) African Integrated High Speed Rail Network (AIHSRN). The Libya line was to be the missing link in the Maghreb Railway, but also the launching point of the 9,000 km Tripoli-to-Cape Town, South Africa rail corridor, now designated by the AU as L48 at the Tripoli end and ending in the L59 segment that reaches Cape Town (see map of AIHSRN [here](#)).

Qaddafi had been in discussions with the governments of both Chad and Niger to extend the Libyan rail network into those countries. Today, the African Union's planned L48 segment of the Tripoli-to-Cape Town corridor does exactly that. A new Libyan government should be encouraged to do its part to get this segment built.

It is necessary to develop this corridor on a priority basis to create a powerful north-south axis of develop-

ment through Central Africa. The African Union priority railway corridors in the construction of such a pan-African network are described in the Schiller Institute's [The New Silk Road Becomes the World Land-Bridge: A Shared Future for Humanity, Vol. II](#) and [Extending the New Silk Road to West Asia and Africa, A Vision of an Economic Renaissance](#). Much planning has been done, and ambitious projects have been completed, such as Ethiopia's line from Addis Ababa to Djibouti, Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway, Morocco's high-speed line from Tangier to Casablanca, and segments in Nigeria. Nevertheless, under current conditions, a fully pan-African network is decades away. What is needed is to throw away the anti-industrial Malthusianism now dominating western policy concerning Africa.

A consortium of national governments could be created—including the countries through which the railway will pass, but also the governments of the major powers, including Russia, China, the U.S., and European nations such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain—to finance railway development through low-interest, long-term credit. New financial institutions could be created, including an Africa Infrastructure Bank and a European-African Infrastructure Bank, similar to the Asian Infrastructure Bank initiated by China.

The African railway corridors will take a lesson from the transcontinental rail corridors of the Trans-Siberian Railway and the more southerly railway through Kazakhstan and China. More than just promoting trade, these corridors are becoming part of the in-

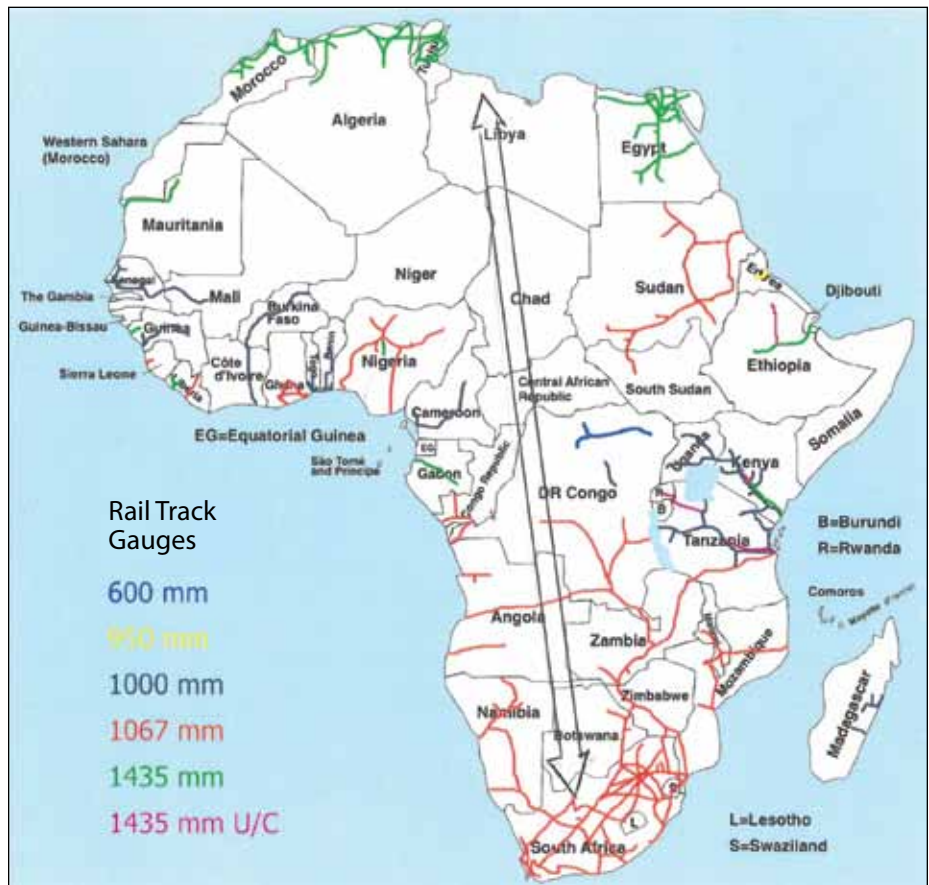
dustrial supply chain between Europe and China and between Europe and northeast Asia including the Russian maritime regions, northeast China, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan.

North, South, East, and West

Going north from Tripoli, the rail connection will link to Europe, through a proposed tunnel to Italy. Going west and east, it will link the more developed North African countries, especially Morocco and Algeria in the west and Egypt to the east. Going south, the railway will extend to South Africa, the most developed country in sub-Saharan Africa. This railway network will become a powerful tool in the construction of the other forms of infrastructure and the mega-projects required to transform one the poorest and least developed regions of the planet.

The connections would include double-tracked railways capable of carrying heavy cargo and passengers at relatively high speeds. The railway would facilitate the construction of parallel underground oil and gas pipelines; fiber optic communications cables; and superconducting electricity pipelines, rather than the far less efficient and insecure overhead power lines. Water pipelines could also be added, Parallel to these would be one of the pan-African highways.

The corridor beginning at the Libyan Port of Misrata will intersect the East-West Maghreb Railway. While already one of Libya’s most important ports prior to the conflict, Misrata was under development to become Libya’s largest and most modern port. Known as one of the country’s most commercially oriented cities, Misrata is home to the government-owned LISCO steel mill complex. With a capacity of more than 1.3 million tons of liquid steel, it is the third largest steel mill among the Arab countries. Despite the conflict last summer, the company issued a tender worth nearly \$1 billion to build two more mills in the complex, primarily because of the expanding market in



Schematic representation of the proposed North/South rail corridor from Tripoli, Libya, to Cape Town, South Africa. The map shows existing rail and rail under construction (U/C).

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North Africa. Because of the lack of a rail line to large iron ore deposits in the south of Libya, LISCO buys and ships in iron ore pellets from as far away as Brazil, Sweden and Canada.

North, to Europe

To the north, the railway could access a proposed rail tunnel between Capo Bon in Tunisia and Sicily, from which, on the Sicily side, a rail line is to pass over a proposed bridge across the Messina Strait to the boot of Italy—a land-bridge to Central Europe. Another proposed tunnel, this one across the Adriatic to Albania, would give direct access to the Balkans and entry into Eurasia, while boosting the development of Italy’s less developed southern Mezzogiorno region and South Eastern Europe. Both projects are among those detailed in the Schiller Institute reports cited above. See also the January 3, 2020 issue of *EIR* for a [report](#) on the “Ulysses Corridor” unifying all the connections between Italy, Albania, and Greece.

Until the tunnel and bridge are built, a direct rail

connection can easily be created by establishing a railway ferry service from Misrata to the Italian port of Taranto, on the Gulf of Taranto. With a draft of 16 meters, this deep-water port is capable of receiving post-Panamax ships. Built in the 1960s as a major transshipment point for Italy, as well as to serve Italy's (and Europe's) largest steel mill that is based there—currently threatened with closure.

The collapse of the Italian economy as a result of the European Union's austerity policies, led to the closing of Port Taranto's container terminal in 2015. In August 2019, the port was given a new lease on life when the Turkish port operator, Yilport signed a 49-year lease to operate the port. Yilport is reportedly determined to turn the port into a major hub, and has set a target of processing 1.5 million containers a year.

Yilport, which operates 22 ports in Turkey, North and South America, and Western Europe, including the container terminal in Malta's free port, is part of the Yildirim Group, one of Turkey's leading industrial firms, which is active in the construction, engineering, shipping and energy sectors. It is no doubt looking across the Mediterranean to Africa, where Turkish companies have been especially active building hotels, infrastructure, railways, etc. A fast train ferry modeled after those in the Baltic, capable of carrying as many as 160 railcars, could travel between Misrata and Taranto and other Adriatic and Mediterranean ports.

South, to Cape Town

To the south of Libya, the rail corridor will follow the 15th meridian, to the city of Sebha in the vicinity of rich iron or deposits at Wadi Shati, enabling this ore to feed the LISCO steel mills in the north. Sebha, an oasis city of more than 100,000 citizens in the Libyan desert, is situated near major oil fields and could become a major metropolis in the Libyan desert, drawing labor not only from Libya but other North African countries as well.

Continuing south, the railway will run along the north-south border between Niger and Chad in the middle of the Sahel, one of the poorest regions in Africa, an area dominated by the smuggling of weapons, drugs, and people, and plagued by terrorism.

Yet this region is rich in natural resources. To the west of the railway is the Agadez region in southwestern Niger. The provincial capital of the same name is known as a key transit point for migrants making their way north to an uncertain fate awaiting them at the Mediterranean. It is also a drone base for the U.S. military. The region is home to Africa's richest uranium

mines at the desert city of Arlit, which supplies France with most of the uranium for its nuclear power plants and nuclear weapons. Yet Arlit is a city of mud houses, the only paved road being the "uranium highway," which trucks out the uranium for export to France.

Both Niger and Chad are rich in resources, including uranium, gold, aluminum and iron ores, as well as diamonds, coal, limestone, phosphate, and oil—all the makings of an industrial economy. But at present, if mined at all, it is exported unprocessed. Railway branch lines east and west of the corridor will provide the infrastructure to exploit those resources and create new, modern industrial cities.

Mega-Project: Transaqua

The major task of the north-south rail corridor is to facilitate the construction of the most ambitious mega-project ever conceived for Central Africa, Transaqua, the project to replenish and thereby revive the dying Lake Chad.

The project, fully developed in the two Schiller Institute reports mentioned, would transfer 6 to 8 percent of the water of the Congo River Basin into a 2,400 kilometer "river highway" through the heart of Africa to Lake Chad. The river highway—a navigable canal crossing the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and Chad—will have dams and power plants to generate an estimated 4,000 MW of hydro-electric power—the current average power generation of Nigeria. That is the vision of Bonifica, the Italian engineering company that has proposed the project. Transaqua would enable a huge expansion of the agricultural potential of the entire region, helping to reverse the advancing desertification now underway. Once the Transaqua project is complete, the rail link would then connect Lake Chad and the 2,400 km canal to the Mediterranean, directly north.

At Chad's capital, N'Djamena, just south of Lake Chad, the railway would intersect the east-west transcontinental Djibouti-Dakar railway, which China has made a priority as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. The railway, moving south from this intersection, enters one of the world's least developed countries, the landlocked Central African Republic. The coming of the railway will unleash its huge agricultural potential. It will then enter the Republic of Congo and cross into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

With its nearly 90 million people, and its vast reserves of natural resources and huge industrial potential, the DRC is the sleeping giant of Africa. What little



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The Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway at Holhol Bridge, Djibouti.

infrastructure it has, is almost exclusively used for the mining industry in what has been little more than a decades-long process of looting the country. The rail corridor will not only bring modern transportation to the country, but will integrate its economy with the regions to the north and south, while enhancing the value of the Congo River as a transport artery.

Mega-Project: Congo River Bridge

Two mega-projects have been proposed for this area.

One is a road-rail bridge across the Congo River at the 15th meridian, connecting the capital cities of Brazzaville, Republic of Congo and Kinshasa, DRC. At 4 kilometers in length, it would be the second longest such bridge in the world. The second project on the Congo River is another game changer, the Grand Inga and Inga III hydroelectric projects which, when finished, will produce 51 GW of electricity, enough to light the entire region. The installed power capacity of all Sub-Saharan Africa is only 96 GW, a significant fraction of which is offline at any given time.

In his 2011 proposal for the

development of a railway network in Africa, the late Hal Cooper, a leading U.S. railway engineer, called for a bridge between Kinshasa and Brazzaville, a combined metropolitan region of over 20 million people. Cooper’s plan called for four railway lines, two for cargo and passenger traffic, and two for local metropolitan commuter rail, as well as four lanes of motorway and pedestrian and bicycle lanes. Given its location at the confluence of three of the African Union-planned rail routes coming down from the north, and its intersection with one of the planned east-west cross-

continental routes; and, that the twin-city metropolitan region is home to nearly 20 million, the proposal was most reasonable.

A comparable example of such a bridge is the Yibin Jinsha River Railway Bridge, in China, the world’s longest road-rail box steel arch bridge, carrying the Chengdu-Guiyang railway, connecting Sichuan’s capital Chengdu (population 16 million) with Guiyang (population 4.3 million), the capital of Guizhou Province. It has two high-speed rail lines and four lanes of road traffic.

Here, with the Kinshasa-Brazzaville Bridge, we encounter the criminal denial of real development for

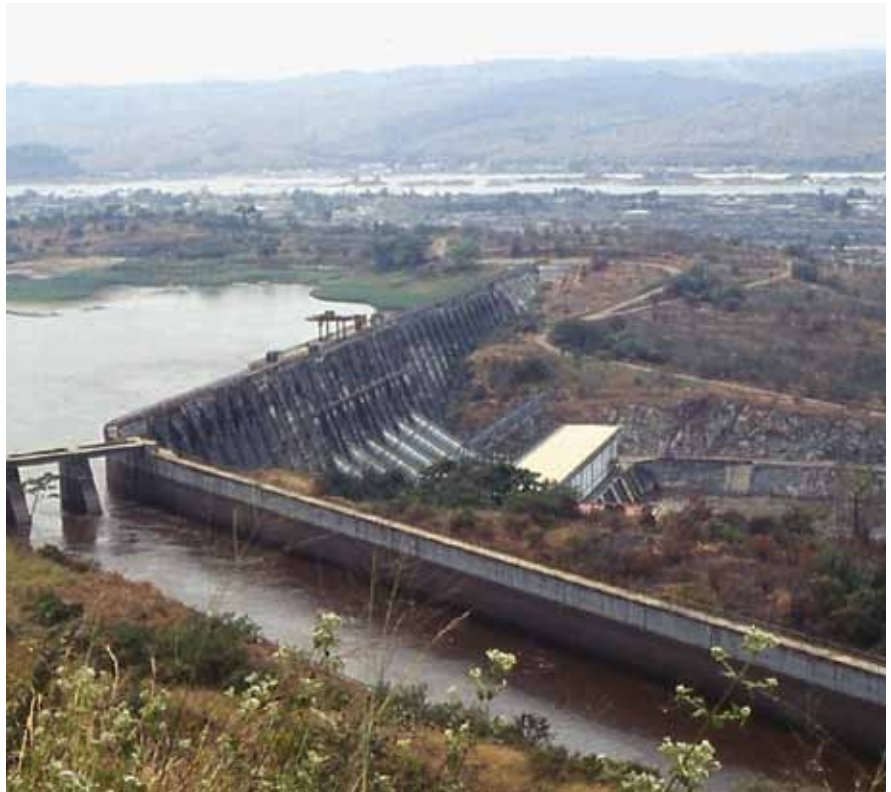


CGTN

China’s Yibin Jinsha River Railway Bridge. At 1,875 meters, it is the world’s longest road-rail box steel arch bridge, carrying the Chengdu-Guiyang high-speed rail line connecting Sichuan’s capital Chengdu with Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou Province.

Africa. A feasibility study by a French company for such a bridge, calls for building only a single rail line and two lanes of road traffic, one lane in each direction. It would be a toll bridge to be built and operated by private companies on a build-operate-transfer basis. It would be built at the narrowest part of the river, but more than 60 km from the two capitals. The feasibility study is based on a growth forecast of no more than 2.4 percent annually for the two countries.

Such thinking is merely the continuation of a policy of looting the country of its resources. Given the region's real potential, such a bridge would be obsolete before it was finished. But this is not an example of economic incompetence. It must be attributed to a clear Malthusian intention to ensure that the Congo does not become the superpower that its potential offers.



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The Inga I Hydroelectric Dam, on the Inga Falls of the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, showing the feeding canal for Inga II in the foreground.

Mega-Project: Inga Hydroelectric

The second mega-project for this area is the Grand Inga and Inga III hydroelectric projects along the waterfalls of the lower Congo River. The former would have a capacity of 40 GW of electricity production and the latter 11 GW, for a total of 51 GW. This compares with the current 158 GW now available for all of Africa! Compare this with the 2,000 GW of electrical capacity in China, which has a population comparable in size to Africa.

The biggest argument by western pundits for not building these projects is the absurd assertion that there is no market for that amount of power! Thanks to a commitment by the Chinese, the Inga III project will eventually be built. The north-south rail corridor will facilitate the creation of a railway network in the DRC as well as an electricity distribution network throughout the region.

Out with the Old, In with the New

The rail corridor will continue south along the 15th meridian to Cape Town, South Africa. Upon reaching Angola, this Standard Gauge Railway (1,435 mm) will

encounter the narrower Meter Gauge (1,000 mm) and Imperial Gauge (1,067 mm) tracks that dominate in all southern African countries, including Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and others. This is the legacy of British colonial policy that built a less costly, but therefore less effective rail network, one that does not have the carrying capacity or speed of the Standard Gauge.

Either gauge-changing stations will have to be built, or else dual (“mixed”) tracking can be provided, capable of carrying rolling stock of both gauges, as suggested by Hal Cooper. The best option, however, would be to tear out all the old narrow tracking and replace it with Standard Gauge, since many of the existing lines are in poor condition, making the option of replacing them with the Standard Gauge more practical.

The Tripoli to Cape Town Corridor is not a dream. It is a necessity—not just for Africa but for Europe, which has been suffering from virtually zero growth because of the European Union’s bankrupt financial system and Malthusian policies. Cooperation with China, Russia and the U.S. in transforming Africa into the next China is the obvious answer.