

Will Nigeria Join Africa in the New Paradigm?

by Mark Bender

Aug. 10—As Africa breaks free from imperial post-colonial domination, central to this effort is the biannual meeting of the BRICS group of nations, which takes place this month in Johannesburg, South Africa, Aug. 22–24.

While most of the news of this event in the western press—driven by the “narrative” of the London/Washington axis—has been dominated by false emphasis on the “will Putin come, will Putin be arrested” scenarios, the more important news concerns what development proposals will come from the meeting. Closely connected is the question of expanding the membership in the group of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

BRICS (originally BRIC) was formed by Brazil, Russia, India, and China in 2009, with the addition of South Africa in 2010. As of today, [22 developing countries](#) of the “Global South” are said to have requested membership in the BRICS, with six of them—Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, and Zimbabwe—in Africa. While the difficult decision of who (if any) will be invited to join will be a subject for discussion at the upcoming meeting, arguably the most important nation on the continent of Africa is Nigeria.

Not only is Nigeria the most-populous nation on the continent—its 230 million citizens dwarfing even its closest competitor, Ethiopia, by a 2:1 margin—Nigeria is also strategically positioned at the crossroads of both east-west and north-south transportation corridors, making its development key to that of the entire continent. Nigeria has just elected a new president, Bola Tinubu, who is struggling to define his, and the nation’s course for the years and decades to come.

London Wields the Imperial Hammer

The significance of Nigeria’s strategic importance is not lost on its former colonial oppressors in London (with its “muscle man,” the United States, in tow). Not desiring their intended target to realize its own strength, the western policy push has been to turn the nation inward—for example, emphasizing the fight against smaller “domestic terror” and “oil theft” issues—thus preventing or minimizing any outward focus.

Though Nigeria has had a rough 60 years of “independence,” including five military coups and living under military rule for about half of that time, the country has settled down in that regard in recent years. The Fourth Republic (begun in 1999) is now nearly a quarter-century old, Bola Tinubu being its fourth elected President.

From London’s standpoint, the country should remain an awkward mix of three major, contending ethnic groups; it does everything it can to encourage polarization among the Yoruba in the southwest, Igbo in the oil-rich southeast, and Hausa/Fulani in the north. Mainstream media implicitly continue that division, blaming

the northern Muslim region (and by association, President Muhammadu Buhari) for—if not inspiring—being soft on jihadist subversion, while at the same time feeding active secessionist operations within the largely Christian Yoruba and Igbo sectors of the country.

It is just these divisions which modern infrastructure projects would help to overcome, as Nigeria (and the continent) struggles to overcome the usurious policies of wealth and mineral extraction with no development.



WEF/Benedikt von Loebell

Mohammadu Buhari, President of Nigeria, 2015–2023.

The Buhari Legacy

“Electing Buhari would be a disaster for Africa,” [said](#) Richard Grenell, former spokesperson for four U.S. ambassadors to the UN in 2015. Even a studious observer of Nigerian politics would be hard-pressed to identify a particular development program or reform for which Buhari, specifically, could be publicly credited, despite his eight years (2015–2023) in office. Popular achievements—such as the extended standard gauge rail (SGR) lines now linking more and wider regions of the country together; the Second Niger (highway) Bridge; the Blue Line commuter rail line in highly-congested Lagos; or the Lekki Deep Water Port (just east of Lagos)—were admittedly all programs which pre-dated Buhari’s presidency, only reaching completion during it.

The significance of Buhari’s accomplishments is that these projects—which had routinely become the victims of financial starvation or other political or procedural delays—*were actually completed* during his presidency. He demonstrated the finesse often needed to force these “forever projects” across the finish line. For example, to ensure the opening of the Second Niger Bridge—whose completion had been both announced and postponed several times during 2022, and rumored for years before that—the President resorted to the trick of forcing the “not quite completed” project open for the 2022 Christmas holiday travel season, counting on its popularity to make advocacy for its re-closing a politically unpopular move. It worked.

Buhari is well known as an advocate for resource development. He gave a cage-rattling speech at COP26 (the UN Conference of the Parties Summit on Climate Change) held in Glasgow, Scotland, in November 2021, where he refused to genuflect to the gods of green, the Davos financiers, and instead announced his determination that Nigeria utilize its natural resources (particularly its natural gas) for its own development. In 2020, Buhari launched the “Year of Gas” in Nigeria, saying in a tweet:



CGTN

The significance of President Buhari’s accomplishments is in the completion of various big projects, begun before him, but completed during his administration. The jewel is the upgrading of Nigeria’s antiquated colonial gauge rail network to modern standard gauge.

The rising global demand for cleaner energy sources has offered Nigeria an opportunity to exploit gas resources for the good of the country. We intend to seize this opportunity.

A year later, to the increasing consternation of the Davos/COP26 crowd, Buhari had turned the “year,” into a “decade,” saying,

When we declared 2020 as “The Year of Gas” in Nigeria, it was a bold statement to demonstrate our Administration’s resolve that gas development & utilization should be a national priority. Now we’re going a step further to dedicate this decade to industrializing Nigeria using gas.

Buhari’s vice president, Yemi Osinbajo, had been just as outspoken, taking the same message to the imperial Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), in an [article](#) titled, “Why Banning Fossil Fuels Would Crush Africa,” in the CFR’s journal, *Foreign Affairs*, in 2021.

Under Buhari’s tenure, Nigeria achieved the humanitarian milestone of becoming self-sufficient in the production of rice, a staple food of a large section of the nation’s 230 million people. Again, the monumental goal had not been *set* by Buhari, but was *reached* by him. In August 2019, the President had even forced the closure of the border (for over a year) with neighboring Benin, in a protective move to prevent the smuggling of

cheap imported rice into the country. The *Premium Times* of January 18, 2022 [reported](#) on an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), in which Ado Hassan, Secretary of the Kano State Chapter of RIFAN (Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria), said,

Nigeria has not imported even a grain of rice in the last four years.... There was a time when the CBN [Central Bank of Nigeria] was spending N1 billion [\$1.28 million] to support rice import bills. Today the apex bank is no longer spending a kobo [penny] to support importation of rice.

Although it has yet to be accomplished, Buhari was a staunch supporter of the development of the Lake Chad Basin. Nigeria—along with Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Libya, and the Central African Republic—is a member of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. In February 2018 in Abuja, Nigeria hosted a meeting of those states in the International Conference on Lake Chad, [promoting](#) the Transaqua project—a project that includes refilling the Basin with water diverted from tributaries of the Congo River. This push was renewed by Nigeria Water Resources Minister Suleiman Adamu in 2022. While it’s true that incoming President Tinubu endorsed this transformative project as President-elect in March 2023, it remains to be seen whether he will actually fight for it, as will be necessary to see it built.

SGR, the Crown Jewel

Topping all of Buhari’s accomplishments has to be the upgrading of the nation’s antiquated rail network to modern, standard gauge rail standards, allowing for higher transport speeds and thus reducing the economic costs (time) of transport, both for freight and passengers. Like most African nations, Nigeria’s rail lines were old, with the meter-gauge as part of the colonial legacy, designed primarily for imperial resource extraction instead of domestic economic development. The widening of these lines to the now universal standard



Buhari was a staunch supporter of the international Transaqua project, not yet begun, which includes the development of the Lake Chad Basin.

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gauge (1.435 meters) system sets the stage for a trans-continental network, necessary to open the interior of the continent to development.

In 2002, President Olusegun Obasanjo oversaw the passing of the Nigerian Railway Modernization Project, which gave the nation a 25-year perspective for rebuilding the nation’s nearly moribund transport infrastructure. However, the project went nowhere, and Obasanjo, while laying out a “vision,” saw no new track laid during the remaining five years of his administration.

In the words of one domestic observer of the last eight years:

There is no doubt whatsoever that President Buhari has done far more than any administra-

tion in post-Independence Nigeria to develop a modern rail system for the country.

Demonstrating how these projects can languish without the determination to see them through, a contract was signed with the Chinese Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC) in 2006, to build the central spine of the new network, the 1,402 kilometer Lagos–Kano line. In 2008, without a single kilometer of track having been laid, the \$8.5 billion contract was suspended for lack of financing and returned to the negotiating table. In 2009, the project was divided into three phases: the \$874 million, 187 km segment from Abuja, the capital in central Nigeria, northward to Kaduna; the \$1.5 billion, 156 km segment from the port of Lagos to Ibadan, and the longest, over 600 km segment from Ibadan to Abuja, connecting the other two. Construction of a further extension northward from Kaduna to Kano in the far north—which would complete a modern, fast and seamless “port to border” railroad—was kicked off on July 15, 2021. While the Abuja–Kaduna line opened in 2016 (Buhari took office in 2015) and proved immensely popular, it was completely isolated, having only meter-gauge lines to connect to at either end. Meanwhile, the southern Lagos–Ibadan segment seemed to be cursed with delays, at one point almost collapsing. Officially kicked off in 2016, it wasn’t until 2017 that groundbreaking was celebrated. Then came a year of severe flooding in 2018, followed by the COVID-19 lockdown of 2020. In between, in the election year of 2019, the Chinese workforce became the subject of targeted hooliganism, so seriously that the CCECC was forced to temporarily evacuate its workers as a precaution. The dual track line was finally opened to the public in 2021.

In 2018, the critical central Ibadan–Abuja line was further broken into five sub-sections—primarily under constraints of financing—which are now in various stages of development. Lastly, Buhari can take credit



Nora Asemota

The administration of newly elected President Bola Tinubu has so far shown no inclination to build on his predecessor’s accomplishments, and every inclination to open Nigeria to imperial financial looters.

for the 326 km north-south line, built from the port of Warri northward to the steel mill in Ajaokuta, a project begun in 1987, abandoned, only re-started in 2015, and finally inaugurated in 2020. Unfortunately, the almost-completed steel plant lies rusting, still starved for funds.

Sometime in 2020, Buhari met with then Niger President Mahamadou Issoufou with a proposal to extend the line into Niger. As a “courtesy” to the very poor, landlocked (and terror-ridden) country, Buhari reportedly even offered to pay the full \$1.8 billion for the project, construction of which was begun in Feb. 2021. The Niger segment was projected to be completed sometime this year.

Buhari was eager to see the Nigeria-Niger link built—the first international link for the expanding SGR network in West Africa and a step toward linking Nigeria with the Mediterranean coast by a 2,000 km extension across the Sahara Desert.

Tinubu ‘Cheered’ by London

In contrast to this determination to build the infrastructure which will free the nation of its colonial chains, the recently inaugurated Tinubu Administration has shown absolutely no inclination to build on these gains, and every inclination to open the country to imperial financial looters, even actively reversing the accomplishments of his predecessor.

In 2022, a year before the election, all three leading candidates had been “invited” to address (on separate occasions) the elite of British imperialism at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, also known as Chatham House. While most speakers treat this as a chance to impress the audience of geopoliticians and financiers—and are on their best behavior as a result—Tinubu turned the event over to his advisors, each of whom presented a segment of his proposed social, economic and developmental platform. This type of disorganized “leadership” display, with advisors appearing

to be making policy, gives the maximum opportunity to influence policy from the outside. It no doubt pleased London just fine.

Since his emergence as the victor of the three-way election (held on Feb. 25, decided only in early March), these former colonial overlords have been closely watching Tinubu, as if he were some speculative investment on which they were anxiously awaiting a payoff. On May 29, the day Tinubu took office, London's *Financial Times* ran a rather presumptuous headline, "Economy and Insecurity Top Agenda for Nigeria's New President." Despite the commanding tone of its headline, the article was somewhat pensive—How far would Bola Tinubu actually go to reverse the legacy of Buhari, especially since the two leaders were from the same party?

Judging by the course of events following his inauguration, London's "investment" is paying off handsomely. A mere two weeks later, on June 12, the *Financial Times'* headline read: "Nigeria's Foray into Economic Orthodoxy Cheers Investors." What those investors (and *Times* editors) were cheering was President Tinubu's lightning-fast announcement—literally in his inauguration address—of the removal of Nigeria's fuel subsidies. The move—which essentially doubled the cost of petrol and cooking gas for 230 million people overnight—had been repeatedly demanded by the IMF, and repeatedly refused by Buhari.

Twelve days later, Tinubu—trained as an accountant in the United States with early stints at Arthur Andersen and Deloitte & Touche—fired the chair of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Godwin Emefiele, who had been a thorn in London's side because of his "unorthodox" economics—interfering with the "free" markets by propping up ("artificially" subsidizing) the Nigerian naira. The Central Bank of Nigeria had intervened to halt the fall of the naira after global inflation broke out—spurred by almost 15 years of Quantitative Easing, the printing of tens of trillions of dollars needed to prop up a dying financial system—just as the country was recovering from the COVID pandemic lockdown. Emefiele had further irritated London by putting himself forth as a presidential candidate.

Threat of Repression

President Tinubu has also been eager to comply with London's second demand: prioritizing the fight

against "rampant insecurity" (domestic terrorism). Tinubu quickly fired the "security chiefs" (a wide assortment of postings including the heads of the military branches along with customs and border control personnel). While this is often done by incoming presidents, Tinubu and Buhari are from the same party; this signals a change in priorities. Over the previous years, Buhari had painstakingly assembled a fighting crew of (at least) military leaders, weeding out the ideological or otherwise corrupt leaders. Tinubu's new cadre have not been tested to know their true loyalties.

The reality is that during Buhari's eight years in office, the threat of terrorism had largely been dealt with. Through a two-pronged assault, including aggressive military pressure combined with careful reintegration schooling, the threat of Boko Haram (whose leadership essentially fractured and disintegrated in 2021), kidnappings for ransom, and other assaults had been reduced almost to zero. According to the 2023 [Global Terrorism Index](#) released in March, published by Vision of Humanity, Nigeria had dropped from the 6th to the 8th most-dangerous place in the world, with the second-largest drop in terror-related deaths, just below that of Afghanistan. The new "terror" looks more like domestic criminal gangs than ideologically driven fanatics. The question is whether President Tinubu's rebranding of "terrorism" is a cover for building a repressive apparatus to deal with legitimate social and labor protest which he anticipates his IMF-compliant policies to call forth.

A telling priority of the incoming administration is the pursuit of "oil bunkering"—illegal oil theft or refining—which the government is blaming on small-scale operators. Exposing the lie behind this "target the weak" policy is a small army of activists and traditional leaders of the oil-rich Delta State, whose comments were featured in a *Vanguard* [article](#) June 24. They all pointed out the obvious, that corruption starts at the top. Said one regional chieftain of the oil-rich Delta State:

There is a cartel that involves security [military] personnel, oil companies' executives, and top government officials.... This oil is being stolen in high-capacity barges and in most cases, ships. These are not businesses of



British Government/Karwai Tang

London imagines it can return Nigeria to its former colonial status—as a mere supplier of resources to offset the loss of Russian-sourced fuels. Here, then UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, speaking as a leader of the colonial policy at the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow.

peasant people, people who do not have international connections, and poor people.

Threat of Famine?

Taken together, Tinubu’s financial, “anti-insecurity” and “anti-oil theft” programs paint a picture of classic imperial repression of the population. To this must be added the not distant, serious threat of famine. While this is something the new President almost certainly does not entertain, it is one which Nigeria’s former imperial rulers would, as in the induced famines of India and later, Ireland.

On July 2, Alhaji Attahiru Bafarawa, a former governor of northwestern Sokoto State, in an [interview](#) with the *Punch* newspaper, said this:

Instead of talking about cabinet, subsidy, and the economy, the government should consider food security, because with the rate we are going, in the next three months, we are definitely going to have problems in Nigeria, especially in the North-West. The bandits have refused to allow farmers to cultivate their crops. This is a very dangerous situation, not only because the ban-

aits are killing people, but also the food scarcity is going to be too serious in the next few months, especially in the North-West and the North-East. So, we want the government to wake up and do something about it.

While hunger alerts have been regularly issued for the western Sahel, including Chad, Mali and Burkina Faso, that has *not* been the case for Nigeria. Yet on July 3, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) issued an [alert](#), “Urgent Action Needed To Avert Catastrophic Malnutrition Crisis,” warning about “an escalating food crisis in northwest Nigeria.” In just the first five months of this year, MSF workers had treated 51,000 children for malnutrition in their outpatient facilities, and an additional 10,200 as inpatients, a 26% increase from a year ago, which had seen “numbers which were already unprecedentedly high.”

The Courage To Lead

On July 3, following trips to both Paris and London in June, President Tinubu played host to Ms. Zoe Yujnovic, Global Upstream Director of the Shell Petroleum Development Company, who reportedly prom-

ised to “ramp up billions” for investment in gas and oil extraction in the Delta region. Thus London imagines returning Nigeria to its former colonial status—a supplier of resources to compensate for the NATO purge of Russian-sourced fuels. This is *exactly* what former President Muhammadu Buhari and his Vice President Yemi Osinbajo had railed against, including at the UN Climate Change Conferences, COP 26 (November 2021) and COP 27 (October 2022).

It would seem that London is determined to punish its former colony and send it backwards, and is anticipating that it has found, in Tinubu—either through corruption or conditioning (as an accountant)—the perfect man to oversee that sentence.

Yet this is *not* the final word on the young Tinubu presidency. While in Paris, Tinubu attended the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact, along with dozens of other African leaders, and no doubt heard firsthand South African President Cyril Ramaphosa’s defiant remarks June 23 vilifying the western world for continuing to ignore Africa’s needs, all the while offering a steady stream of encouraging platitudes. “Western leaders, ... the tire must meet the tar,” Ramaphosa said,

insisting that investment in building the transformative 42 gigawatt Grand Inga hydro-power complex must be a priority.

On July 10, Tinubu was unanimously selected as chair of ECOWAS, the 15-member Economic Community of West African States. On July 16, speaking to his presidential counterparts at the Fifth Mid-Year Coordination Meeting of the African Union in Nairobi, Kenya, Tinubu said:

Here and now, let it be said to whoever the new scramblers [as in the imperial “scramble for Africa”] might be, that our continent may be old, but our spirit is new. And it is strong. The bad that took place in the past must stay there. It shall never be repeated.

Nigeria’s short history since independence has been wracked by disasters caused by leaders who have been willing to kowtow to the playbook written in London and supported by Washington. Nigeria’s new President certainly seems to understand that. It remains to be seen if he has the courage of his own words.

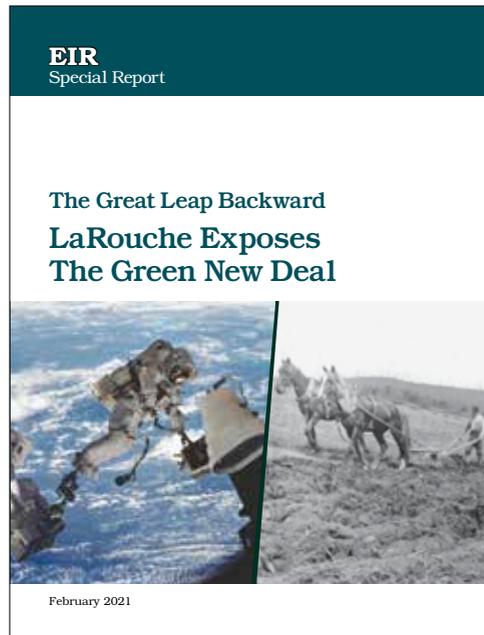
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