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Standard Gauge Railway: Tanzania's path to regional hegemony? By Tarun Ruschmeier

Introduction

Traveling from station to station along the Tazara line, which connects the Tanzanian port city of Dar es Salaam with Zambian Kapiri Mposhi, one witnesses the bustling vibrant economies it has helped create. With its various stops in smaller, previously isolated towns, local markets have become connected, opening up new opportunities for trade, specialization, and growth. The impact of the Tazara cannot be understated, symbolizing independence and serving as a catalyst for economic transformation.

Primarily a geopolitical project, the Tazara line emerged from Zambia's leader Kenneth Kaunda's predicament in the late 1960s. Sitting on vast amounts of natural resource wealth, Zambia's traditional trade routes were limited to settler-ruled Rhodesia. As a newly liberated and independent country, Zambia needed an alternative solution to export its copper. The Tazara trade route, while not necessarily cheaper or faster, was free and liberated—geopolitically advantageous—hence the birth of the Tazara or Uhuru Rail.

After Western institutions and the Soviet Union rejected the railway proposal due to a lack of return on investment, China stepped in. Offering a generous loan of $400 million over 30 years interest-free, China made it clear that their participation was not for monetary gain. China, having recently freed itself from various imperial pressures, saw this as an opportunity to gain geopolitical leverage. Clearly, this was a geopolitical project for China as well.[1]

Over time, the Tazara has significantly shaped Zambian-Tanzanian relations. With Zambia's economy still heavily reliant on mineral exports and critical imports from Dar es Salaam, Zambia has grown economically reliant on Tanzania, granting Tanzania crucial geopolitical advantages in the region.[2]

In this historical context, on April 12, 2017, a new railway project was planned. Starting from the port of Dar es Salaam, this new railway aims to enhance trade along the central corridor, connecting Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and the DR Congo. The 2000km electrified Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) is intended to replace an old meter gauge, enabling quicker and cheaper transportation and logistics within Tanzania and between landlocked countries and the port of Dar es Salaam.[3]

The project is planned and will be owned and operated by the Tanzania Railway Corporation, as part of two broader initiatives: the East African Railway Master Plan by the East African Community, which seeks to increase regional connectivity[4], and the Africa Integrated Railway Network Project by the African Union, aiming to foster physical and economic integration across the continent. These larger initiatives view the Tanzanian SGR as a key project, providing significant institutional and financial support[5].

The SGR will be constructed in six phases. Phase 1, connecting Dar es Salaam with Morogoro, has been operational since June 2024, reducing transit time between these cities from 4-5 hours to 1 hour 40 minutes. Phase 2, connecting Morogoro with Makutupora near the capital Dodoma, is expected to commence operations by the end of July 2024. Phases 3 and 4, connecting

[1] Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*.

[2] Monson, *Africa's Freedom Railway*.

[3] "SGR Archives."

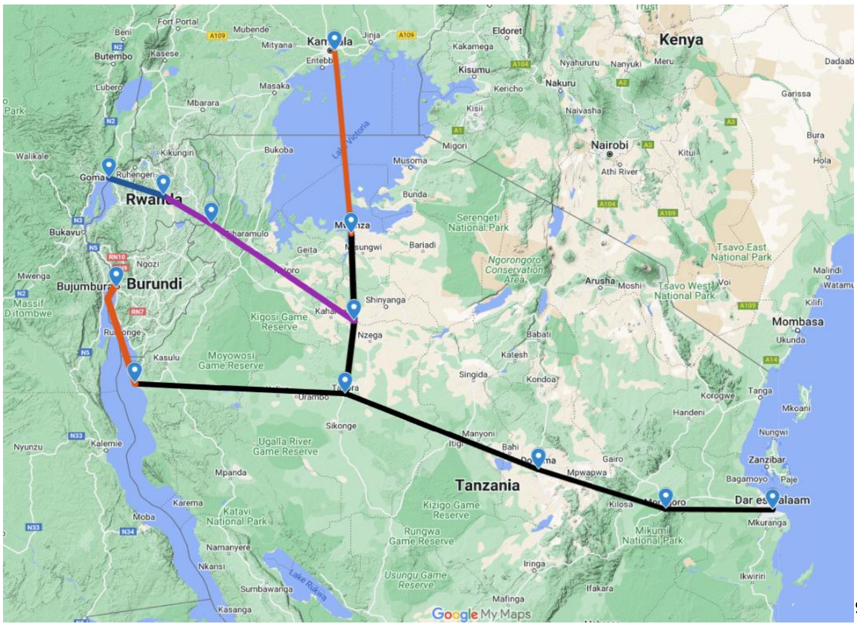
[4] East African Community, "East African Railways Master Plan."

[5] African Union, "Detailed Scoping Study (DSS) of Vision 2063 Africa Integrated High Speed Railway Network and Master Plan - VPIC."

Makutupora with Tabora and Tabora with Isaka respectively, have started construction in 2022 and 2023, with operations beginning in 2025. Phases 5 and 6, connecting Isaka with Mwanza and Tabora with Kigoma, commenced in 2021 and 2022, with significant progress already made, especially in Phase 5[6].

Two major operators are constructing this project. The first four phases are being built by Yapi Merkezi, a Turkish construction company, while the last two phases are managed by Chinese companies—the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation and the China Railway Construction Company. Additional support comes from various companies, including Deutsche Bahn Engineering and Consulting and Portuguese Moto Engil Africa[7].

The SGR directly links the port of Dar es Salaam to Rwanda through an extension from Isaka. Extensions through Kigoma will connect to Burundi and then to the DR Congo, while the connection from Mwanza allows direct ferry transport to Port Bell, near Uganda's capital, Kampala[8].



[9]

This research paper will investigate the question: How will the construction of the Tanzanian Standard Gauge Railway change Tanzania's geopolitical position in the region? It will be shown that the SGR will make Tanzania significantly more attractive for hinterland countries to trade through compared to Kenya, thus challenging Kenya's current geopolitical hegemony. Additionally, through diverse international financing, Tanzania reduces the risk of foreign dependence and debt trap diplomacy, further strengthening its geopolitical position relative to Kenya.

[6] Tanzania Railways Corporation, "The Standard Gauge Railway."

[7] Karashani and Onyango, "Turkey Contractor Confirms $1.8bn Gap in Funding Tanzania SGR."

[8] Barigaba, "Uganda, Tanzania SGR Line Clear as Kenya Derailed."

[9] Map that indicates the route of the Tanzanian SGR. The black lines are the tracks which are part of the Tanzanian SGR and which will be operated by the Tanzanian Railway Authority. Every blue connection between blue markers represents one phase in the SGR project. The red lines are transport links per Water that will connect the SGR with Uganda and Burundi. The purple line represents the Rwandan extension that will connect the SGR with Rwanda and then with Goma (DRC). This map was created by the Author based on Google Maps application,

Part 1: Regional Hegemony

"Nothing is more usual, among states which have made some advances in commerce, than to look on the progress of their neighbours with a suspicious eye, to consider all trading states as their rivals, and to suppose that it is impossible for any of them to flourish, but at their expense"[10] by David Hume.

For countries in which the economic situation is the most salient, it is certain that the relation to each other is primarily defined by exactly that - trade. East Africa narrowly defined to Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania can be categorized in two groups. The groups which have access to the ocean and countries that do not. In the modern economy the prevalence of shipping as main form of trading is almost universal and by far the cheapest medium. This means that Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, which are all landlocked, are dependent on trading through either Tanzania or Kenya to be able to import and export goods on the global market[11]. The balance of power between Kenya and Tanzania in accessing this hinterland trade is exactly the fact that is being altered by the establishment of the Tanzanian Standard Gauge Railway.

Historic Regional Relationships

Kenya and Tanzania have long had a tense and competitive relationship. As the two largest economies and populations in East Africa, they have always been set apart from one another and have naturally been in a competitive relationship. The collapse of the East African Community, founded in 1967, is indicative of this. Ten years after the first EAC was established, it broke up because two of the founding members (Kenya and Tanzania) were too ideologically different. Tanzania's Nyerere championed an idea of Ujamaa and African socialism, while Kenya under Kenyatta was strongly focused on capitalist development. These structural differences proved too great in a Cold War era and the EAC became dysfunctional in 1977. These rivalries diminished over time, allowing the second East African Community to emerge, but have resurfaced in the last 10 years[12].

In 2014, Kenya banned Tanzanian safari tour operators from entering Kenyan protected areas; in response, Tanzania restricted Kenyan Airways' ability to operate in Tanzania - the dispute was settled in 2015. In 2020, there was a reciprocal ban on each other's flights in each other's airspace - the dispute was again settled shortly afterwards, but not before large amounts of trade were blocked by trucks stranded at the recently closed borders. Earlier this year, Kenya decided not to allow Tanzania Airways to fly cargo to Kenya, leading to an immediate escalation with Tanzania banning all Kenya Airways flights. Again, a solution to the conflict was found, but all these conflicts are indicative of a relationship based on competition[13]. The most important aspect of the Kenyan-Tanzanian rivalry is trade.

The ports of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam are two incredibly important parts of each countries economy and both raise significant amounts of governments revenue but also give large amounts of leverage over hinterland countries. For this reason controlling the Northern and Central Trade Corridor stand in constant competition. The Northern Corridor stretches from the port of Mombasa all the way to Uganda and then south to Rwanda and Burundi, whilst the Central Corridor starts at the port of Dar es Salaam and stretches straight through the country connecting to Burundi and Rwanda over land and to Uganda over the Lake Victoria. Tanzania's Standard Gauge Railway tries to significantly improve the attractiveness of the central corridor whilst Kenya's own Standard Gauge Railway tries to do the same and again stands representative of the ongoing competition[14].

Kenya's relationship with its neighbours is mixed. Kenya's relationship with Uganda has always felt somewhat out of balance, and Uganda has been trying to free itself from this. Since the vast majority of Uganda's trade currently passes through Kenya, the level of dependency is quite high, and Uganda fears this. They see themselves as being in Kenya's backyard, restricted in their own actions[15]. The 2014 oil incident is a case in point. In January 2014, Kenya decided to ban direct oil imports from Uganda, meaning

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[10] Hume, "Of the Jealousy of Trade - Essay VI."

[11] African Development Bank, "East Africa Regional Overview."

[12] "Tanzania and Kenya and Their Tiresomely Recurring Disputes."

[13] "Tanzania Withdraws Approval for Kenya Airways Flights."

[14] Lamarque and Nugent, "The Jealousy of Roads: Construction, Circulation, and Competition in East Africa's Transport Corridors."

[15] Otele, "China's Belt and Road Initiative and Intra-Regional Dynamics in Africa."

that oil had to be imported into Kenya and then reimported to Uganda, massively increasing costs. This angered Uganda so much that it took the matter to the East African Court of Justice. It was not until June 2024 that these issues were resolved, after it appeared that Uganda would start importing much more oil through the port of Dar es Salaam[16]. The strained relationship has a long history, with Kenya accused of meddling in the 1980s by funding opposition groups, a fear that still haunts the Ugandan leadership[17].

The relationship between Kenya and Rwanda is very strong, with the Rwanda Development Board proudly proclaiming Kenya as its top investor and trading partner. Despite some recent controversy over critical comments made by Kenyan minister Kipchumba Murkomen, which caused some outrage in Rwanda[18], the relationship is very strong and prosperous[19]. Importantly, however, Rwanda has no land border with Kenya and would still be forced to trade through Uganda and then Kenya if it wanted to access the northern corridor, making its relationship with Uganda closer in terms of deciding which trade routes to use.

Although relations between Rwanda and Tanzania were strained during the Kikwete regime[20], this seems to be a thing of the past and the current regime is much more committed to bilateral growth. The focus on economic cooperation has seen Rwanda and Tanzania grow closer over time, with 80% of all trade now passing through the port of Dar es Salaam. Other initiatives to facilitate cross-border trade are further evidence of the increasingly close relationship[21]. The story is similar with Uganda. Despite their shared history of war, Tanzania and Uganda have recently been cooperating much more closely. Uganda's decision to route its oil pipeline through Tanzania rather than through Kenya further cements their growing economic ties. The ferry link between Mwanza (Tanzania) and Port Bell (Uganda) also allows for direct bilateral trade, making their economic relationship independent of that between Uganda and Rwanda[22].

Relations between Uganda and Rwanda have always been tense. Most recently, they were on opposite sides of the Second Congo War (1998-2003)[23]. Although several memoranda of understanding have been signed since then, the backdrop of the previous difficult period remains[24]. An important development is the escalation in 2019, with both countries accusing each other of espionage, political crises and other things that may have been triggered by the Rwandan killing of a Ugandan policeman or Uganda's support for rebel groups in Rwanda, but regardless, tensions escalated massively and from one day to the next the borders, including trade lines, between the two countries were closed[25].

Problems with Northern Corridor

Kenya operates the port of Mombasa, which is one of the largest and most important ports in Africa; to complement this port, Kenya had also planned to build the port of Lamu, but given its proximity to Somalia and al-Shabab territory, it is questionable whether this port will be used to any significant extent in the future[26]. For this reason, the northern corridor is mainly conceived as starting from the port of Mombasa, although there have been some questionable reports about this port recently.

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16 "Uganda Oil Imports Land, End Kenyan Firms' Fuel Transit Business."

17 Makinda, "From Quiet Diplomacy to Cold War Politics."

18 "Kenyan Minister Kipchumba Murkomen Sparks Concern with 'Rwanda-Is-Autocracy' Remark."

19 "East Africa Living Encyclopedia."

20 "Membe: Kikwete Won't Apologise to Rwanda."

21 "Tanzania and Rwanda to Open New Border Point."

22 "Uganda, Tanzania Resume Talks over Trade Barriers."

23 Bareebe and Khisa, "Rwanda-Uganda Relations."

24 Gasana, "Rwanda-Uganda Relations."

25 "Presidents of Rwanda and Uganda Sign Pact to Ease Tensions."

26 ADF, "Al-Shabaab Attacks Increase in Kenya's Lamu County."

For example, the Port of Mombasa appears to charge fees that no other port (including the Port of Dar es Salaam) charges, including container cleaning fees, container management fees and equipment management fees. In addition, the port of Mombasa has a very short period of time in which containers must be returned to the port before charges are incurred, and this very short period of time results in high demurrage charges in most cases. In addition, government ownership of the port is seen as slow and inefficient, making change difficult[27]. These facts have affected the port's standing. The World Bank, which ranks ports globally, recently downgraded the port of Mombasa from 293 to 326 in the world, noting a 326% increase in arrival times, which further hurts the port's attractiveness; in comparison, the port of Dar es Salaam has improved its arrival times and now ranks 312, higher than Mombasa. As all trade through the corridor ends in the port to access the open sea, the attractiveness of the port is key to the attractiveness of the corridor[28].

The Kenyan SGR, which would link Mombasa, Nairobi, Kampala and Kigali (and later the DRC), looked like a more than promising project that would significantly increase the attractiveness of the Northern Corridors. The problem was twofold: first, the Rwanda-Uganda tensions of 2019 massively reduced Kigali's interest, as all trade would necessarily have to pass through Uganda before ending up in Mombasa. Closed borders and hardened diplomatic relations made this unlikely - thus shortening the SGR to Kampala[29]. After observing the excessive debt Kenya had taken on from China to fund its project, Uganda also became reluctant to join the SGR and decided not to build the SGR from Kampala to the Ugandan/Kenyan border[30]. Further suspensions of funding from the Chinese side meant that the SGR simply never reached other countries and so will not bring any of the increased trade that Kenya had hoped for.

Kenya as a trade route is also perceived as less stable and therefore more volatile. Uganda decided to route its oil pipeline through Tanga rather than Lamu because Tanga was perceived as more stable and less threatened by al-Shabab terrorism[31][32]. But other factors of instability remain. Memories of the 1970s, when Kenya threatened to block trade[33], or the mass political unrest in 2007 that massively disrupted trade, act as barriers that traders operating from Rwanda and Uganda consider before deciding which trade corridor to use[34]. Given Kenya's history of using its dependence to extract regional concessions[35], Rwanda and Uganda are likely to be more inclined to move away from Kenya.

This shift away from Kenya can be seen in the extreme acts of desperation that Kenya has undergone. Recently, following reports of massive trade growth in Dar es Salaam, the Kenyan port authorities decided to massively reduce the fees charged at the port of Mombasa[36]. While this will certainly make the port more attractive, it is uncertain whether it will actually benefit Kenya, since the biggest benefit of having trade pass through your country is the fees you can collect on it at the port. Further despair at having invested billions in Kenya's SGR without seeing any additional trade has led Kenya to offer Uganda large land concessions for dry ports at Navaisha, in the hope that this will sweeten the deal enough for Uganda to reconsider taking on the project[37]. It is

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27 “The Race to Become East Africa’s Biggest Port.”

28 World Bank, “The Container Port Performance Index 2022.”

29 “Rwanda Dumps Kenya SGR Route for Tanzania.”

30 Burroughs, “Uganda Cancels $US 2.3bn SGR Deal with China and Turns to Turkish Firm.”

31 Mwesigwa, “Uganda Chooses Tanzania over Kenya for Oil Pipeline Route.”

32 Cannon and Mogaka, “Rivalry in East Africa.”

33 “When Idi Amin Put Jomo Kenyatta in the Mood for Battle.”

34 Harneit-Sievers and Peters, “Kenya’s 2007 General Election and Its Aftershocks.”

35 “Kenya in Talks to Set up Dry Port in Uganda.”

36 Sanga, “New System to Bring down Cost of Trade through Mombasa Port.”

37 “Kenya Offers Uganda Land in Naivasha for Dry Port.”

uncertain whether this will be enough, and perhaps the extension of the line to Kampala will materialise in the near future, but it is clear that these issues have severely shaken Kenya's regional positioning.

Attractiveness of Central Corridor through SGR

After the Magufuli regime abandoned plans to rebuild a larger port at Bagamoyo, the port of Dar es Salaam is Tanzania's main trading centre. While the Port of Dar es Salaam faces a number of problems, including instability due to changing ownership and major congestion, it is also clear that the port has made significant improvements[38]. The World Bank notes that the port has made significant improvements to reduce waiting times and increase capacity, reducing arrival and turnaround times by more than 50%, making it comparatively more attractive. The 2022 Tanzanian government has also pushed for various measures to make the port more attractive, including reducing port usage fees and removing non-tariff barriers. While long queues and problems still persist, recent investments in optimisation suggest a positive long-term trajectory[39].

Tanzania's SGR is likely to be quite important once it is finally built in 2025. According to a World Bank report, transport currently accounts for 50% of the cost of goods exported or imported by Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi[40]. In particular, long road journeys with heavy congestion and the recent rise in fuel prices make the traditional transport system less attractive. The promise of the SGR is significant: the cost of a container from Dar es Salaam to Kampala will fall from $4,500 to $1,600, and the cost of a trip from Dar es Salaam to Kigali will fall by 73%. And all this with a massive reduction in transport time. The time aspect is particularly important for perishable goods, but also because it allows producers to better match current world market prices[41]. It should also be noted that the actual distance between Kigali and Dar es Salaam is also significantly shorter than the distance between Kigali and Mombasa.

For Rwanda in particular, the geopolitical aspects should be noted: trading through Tanzania allows it to 1) reduce the number of border crossings and thus save money again, but 2) also allows it to avoid trading through Uganda. Especially in times of high tensions, the second aspect makes Rwanda much more independent and thus also provides it with a strong incentive to use the Tanzanian SGR. For Uganda, the closer relationship with Tanzania in the 2010s is another manifestation of the increased focus on trade with Tanzania.

One important comparative analysis is the temporality of the projects. While for Rwanda the Tanzanian SGR will always be significantly cheaper, for Burundi the Tanzanian SGR is the only option, but for Uganda the relative price and speed difference between a connected Kenyan or Tanzanian SGR is limited[42]. Apart from all the negatives mentioned in the previous section, the most important difference is when these projects will be implemented. The Tanzanian SGR has already opened and commissioned significant parts of its construction on time, giving hope that the target date of 2025 for full operation will be met. Freight traffic between Uganda's Port Bell and Tanzania's Mwanza has already resumed, so the whole logistics supply chain appears to be ready to go in just a few years' time.

While Kenya may be able to revise its original SGR plans, the planning, permitting, financing and construction of the remaining parts will certainly take years longer and remain more volatile than the Tanzanian Central Corridor route. For traders who want the cheaper benefits now, the Tanzanian SGR is the easy option. The importance of path dependency then probably means that these traders will stay in Tanzania, they know the regulatory environment, they have logistics expertise and perhaps fulfilment ports or other dependencies that have now been refocused on Tanzania[43]. As Kenya is at best marginally faster or marginally cheaper, it is uncertain that a large group of people would choose to change their current existing infrastructure and routes.

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[38] Kiyonga, “Tanzania-Uganda Ties.”

[39] World Bank, “The Container Port Performance Index 2022.”

[40] World Bank, “Project Appraisal in Support of Intermodal and Rail Development Project.”

[41] Central Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency, “Annual Report of the Performance of Central Corridor Transit Transport.”

[42] Kiyonga, “Tanzania-Uganda Ties.”

[43] Goodin and Tilly, *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*.

Conclusion

What we have seen is that, notwithstanding the Tanzanian SGR, various geopolitical and economic realities favour trade through Tanzania rather than Kenya for both Uganda and Rwanda, so why is the railway needed at all? The problem is the issue discussed in the previous paragraph - path dependency. Individuals and organisations are often stuck in a way of thinking that reinforces systems rather than changing them. Whilst change is not impossible, it requires a significant push to change. While many factors favour the viability of the Central Corridor over the Northern Corridor, the soon to be completed Tanzanian SGR is likely to be the tipping point at which a large number of actors will change course and reorient themselves towards Tanzania. With shipping savings of over 50% and massive speed gains, the opportunity to capitalise on the additional profit will be too great not to take. And even if Kenya is able to complete its SGR as well, it will at best level the playing field, but not provide enough of an impetus to change the actors from their new path dependency[44].

As transport costs represent the total cost of goods, the change brought about by the SGR is more than significant. Importantly, similar to the Tazara line, this change has significant geopolitical implications as it gives Tanzania leverage. It now controls a significant amount of trade because it controls the port with which it can deny access to Rwandan goods at any time, and it controls the railway line that actually delivers those goods. Importantly, this power does not need to be exercised in order to exist. Just because everyone knows that Tanzania theoretically has this ability, it can demand concessions and be given the upper hand in negotiations[45]. Rwanda and Uganda now have stronger incentives to side with Tanzania in EAC negotiations because Tanzania is responsible for their access to food and other critical goods. It is clear that the resulting changes in trade patterns will benefit Tanzania in the long run.

Part 2: Foreign Dependence

Introduction to Foreign Dependence

In Part 1, we looked at the overall external dependency created by the functioning of the Tanzanian SGR; the focus of this part is less on the direct consequences of the infrastructure project, but rather on the process by which it was acquired. The African Development Bank often speaks of a staggering infrastructure gap in Africa - i.e. a huge discrepancy between the amount of money that needs to be invested in infrastructure and the amount that is actually invested. With a financing gap potentially in excess of $100 billion, it is clear that the continent alone may not be able to close this gap. Governments are often already resource-constrained, reducing their ability to invest effectively in local infrastructure projects. Large informal sectors often make taxation difficult, large education and humanitarian deficits require large investments, and the persistence of terrorism and secessionist movements on the continent constrain government budgets[46].

The obvious solution is to look abroad for funding. Look, for example, at the petrodollar boom between 1974-1981, when banks around the world were flush with cash and decided to invest it aggressively around the world, which meant that a huge number of governments suddenly had access to large amounts of cash at relatively low cost. Government debt increased around the world, for example in Brazil it rose from $5.1 billion in 1970 to $90.4 billion in 1990. As a result of the massive over-indebtedness of states, a staggering number of governments were pushed into positions of difficulty - an era of easy, fast, cheap money had trapped them in excessive debt that they could not repay[47].

Foreign control was and is exercised in two ways, direct and indirect. If a country is actually in default, direct pressure can be exerted in the restructuring process, the last resort in which a country tries to restructure its loans so that it can pay them back. Lending countries are also free to attach various other conditions to the restructuring process, such as structural reforms, land concessions or foreign policy commitments. This process also works indirectly, and arguably more often, by anticipating the

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[44] Goodin and Tilly, *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*.

[45] Blanchard and Flint, “The Geopolitics of China’s Maritime Silk Road Initiative.”

[46] The African Development Bank Group, “African Economic Outlook 2024.”

[47] Abel and Lewis, *Latin America, Economic Imperialism and the State*.

restructuring process. Since countries have strong incentives not to go so far as to risk restructuring, they often make concessions earlier in order to obtain additional years of grace or perhaps temporary suspension of debt payments[48][49].

Funders of the Tanzanian Standard Gauge Railway

The total cost of the Tanzanian Standard Gauge Railway will be $10.4 billion, which will be funded by various groups. The cost is divided into two parts, the first 4 phases and the last 2 phases. The first 4 phases cost $6 billion and the last 2 phases cost $4 billion. The first 4 phases were financed with the help of the Tanzanian Ministry of Finance, which increased the national debt through a mix of domestic and foreign lenders. On the other hand, a consortium led by Standard Chartered Bank and consisting of 17 development partners, including Denmark, Sweden and South Africa, raised about $1.5 billion[50]. The last two phases were financed by the China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation (Sinosure) and $3.9 billion through the African Development Bank[51]. The African Development Bank is the direct lender for $0.7 billion and merely facilitated and structured the remaining $3.2 billion[52]. There have also been reports that Yapi Merkezi, the Turkish construction company responsible for the first 4 phases, has led a consortium in Europe to seek further funding to complete the railway[53].

The variety of players involved is interesting. The financing itself is so diverse that it is even unclear which country is the biggest player. Through a high mix of commercial lenders (often higher interest rates but lower risk of dependency) and national institutions (lower interest rates but higher risk of dependency), Tanzania's SGR funding represents a mixed basket that tries to be exposed to a little of everything but not too much to any single actor. The use of multilateral institutions such as the African Development Bank also facilitates access to concessional loans and other agreements on favourable terms. Without a clear actor owning a controlling share of Tanzania's debt, it becomes more difficult for any country to exert the kind of pressure on Tanzania outlined above[54].

Another important factor is the distinction between financier and lender. Construction will be carried out mainly by the Turkish company Yapi Merkezi for the first four phases and by Chinese construction companies for the last two phases[55]. German consultants will be used for planning and design[56]. Wagons from South Korea will then be used to operate the lines. By varying the different parts of the project, Tanzania is creating competitive incentives and can thus reduce cost inflation through complacency[57]. In addition, companies that only contribute to small parts of the overall projects are less able to put pressure on the government and are more easily held to account. The result is the lowest cost per kilometre for any SGR project since 2006[58].

Two other observations are worth making. The first is that the main use of the Tanzanian SGR will be to move cargo from Tanzania's hinterland and mining region to the port. While the current size constraints of the port of Dar es Salaam remain, the likely financial projections still appear very profitable. Current cost projections show logistical costs between Kigali and Dar es

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48 Marichal, "The Finances of Hegemony in Latin America."

49 Birdsall, Caicedo, and De La Torre, *The Washington Consensus*.

50 "We've Arranged US$ 1.46 Billion of Financing for Tanzanian Rail Project."

51 "Treasury, Sinosure Tie up on SGR Lots Five, Six Financing | The Guardian."

52 The African Development Bank, "African Development Bank Approves Financing to Develop the Central Corridor Network."

53 Preston, "Contractor Works to Fill $US 1.8bn Funding Gap in Tanzania SGR."

54 Mchome and Nzoya, "Challenges of the Performance Standards of the International Finance Corporation in Financing the African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network and the Way Forward."

55 Dharma, "Tanzania Awards $2.2bn Contract for Standard Gauge Railway Project."

56 DB Engineering and Consulting, "Design Studies for Tanzania Standard Gauge Rail Project."

57 "Tanzania Signs $2.2billion Final SGR Section Deal with China."

58 Mchome and Nzoya, "Challenges of the Performance Standards of the International Finance Corporation in Financing the African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network and the Way Forward."

Salaam dropping from $15,000 to $4,000 per tonne and from 30 days to 36 hours. The incredible increase in profitability is giving investors a lot of confidence and probably means that the loan will be repaid quickly. On the other hand, reports emerged in August 2023 that workers at Yapi Merkezi were on strike over unpaid wages. Although the strike was quickly resolved and the company reportedly addressed the issue, ethical questions remain[59].

Funders of the Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway

The Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway project linking Mombasa to Uganda is still a work in progress. While a connection between Mombasa and Nairobi and Naivasha has been completed, the actual connection to the Ugandan border, i.e. from Naivasha to Malaba, is currently suspended. The cost of the Mombasa-Nairobi link alone was already $3.8 billion, but the extension to Naivasha and other construction inefficiencies have pushed the existing cost to $6.3 billion[60].

Designed as a key project in the Kenya Vision 2030 Agenda, the project was 90% funded by the China Export-Import Bank and 10% by the Kenyan government. Construction was carried out by the China Road and Bridge Company. The financing included two interest rates, 3.6% and 3% higher than a London-based interest rate indicator, and all loans were denominated in dollars. Under these conditions, the debt burden has increased significantly and there are already fears of potential payment difficulties. Between July 2022 and March 2023 alone, Kenya will have to pay $800 million to service the SGR debt. China already accounts for more than 65% of Kenya's bilateral debt, clearly demonstrating a one-way dependency[61].

With China in charge of feasibility studies, financing and construction, there have also been reports that the cost of the project has been inflated to add to the debt burden, with multiple parliamentary inquiries researching the issue. Even with a diesel train, the cost of the railway was around USD 0.0085 per kilometre compared to Tanzania's USD 0.0058 per kilometre, a 46% higher cost per kilometre[62]. As China is not a member of the Paris Club of international debtors, various disclosure requirements are not met, reducing accountability and transparency[63].

While these figures are theoretically value-neutral, they take on significance in the context of the dependency theory outlined above. Given the huge power differential between Kenya and China, there is still uncertainty about the equivalence of the relationship. There have been rumours that China would seize the port of Mombasa in the event of a default, which has recently become more likely. Although the Kenyan government has denied this, there are still fears of various risks. Supposedly, in the event of non-payment, an arbitration tribunal in Beijing would find a suitable solution; it is not only speculative but clear that this is likely to be an outcome highly favourable to China and not to Kenya[64].

Relying on one source for both financing and construction is also risky because it raises questions about how much concern this project would have for the local population. Apparently, 'during construction, the needs of the local people were at least to some extent taken into account in the design of the SGR, and the CRBC (Chinese Road and Bridge Company) allocated some budget for CSR (corporate social responsibility)', suggesting that the extent of exploitation was limited[65].

A very interesting part of the development of the Kenyan SGR is the reduction in the scope of the project. In the East African Railway Master Plan, the Kenyan Vision 2030, or in any of the proposals or speeches made by Chinese or Kenyan officials, increasing interconnectivity was a key aspect of the project. The project was seen as viable because of the increased hinterland

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[59] The Chanzo, "Workers Constructing SGR Are Striking Over Delayed Pay."

[60] Vines, Butler, and Jie, "The Response to Debt Distress in Africa and the Role of China."

[61] Rumpel, "Lessons from Kenya's New, Chinese-Funded Railway."

[62] Mchome and Nzoya, "Challenges of the Performance Standards of the International Finance Corporation in Financing the African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network and the Way Forward."

[63] Wang and Wissenbach, "Clientelism at Work?"

[64] Rumpel, "Lessons from Kenya's New, Chinese-Funded Railway."

[65] Wang and Wissenbach, "Clientelism at Work?"

trade it was likely to stimulate[66]. Even with an overall successful transport business, only the freight side was ever able to repay the loans. Because the project was stopped before reaching the Ugandan border, the expected boom in freight traffic did not materialise, the Worldbank in 2014 estimated that the Kenyan SGR would be profitable with 20-55million additional freights per year, currently there are only 12million. As a result of this Kenya's revenues did not increase significantly but rather the Kenyan SGR is running yearly losses of around $100million[67]. This makes repayment even more difficult. The asymmetrical relationship with China is particularly evident here, as China had simply decided not to continue funding the project, thus halting its completion at a stroke and leaving Kenya in the mess it is in today[68].

Conclusion

It was clear that the funding model of the Kenyan and Tanzanian SGRs was very different. Tanzania's reliance on a variety of institutional funders, including commercial banks, national development banks and multilateral institutions, has minimised undue influence from any one country. In addition, the variety of construction companies and carriage manufacturers meant that companies were constantly competing with each other to get the best possible price for the Tanzanian people.

Kenya took a very different approach. Instead of having a large portfolio of financiers, Kenya relied heavily on China as its main partner. Its Export-Import Bank financed 90% of the project, and Chinese construction companies also carried it out. While there were certainly efficiencies to be gained from dealing with only one partner, there were also risks. Complacency, which increases costs, but importantly, a relationship of dependency. When China controls billions of dollars of your loans, you cannot say no to demands, because angering China could put you at risk as a state. Especially now, with the government's fiscal crisis brewing and further devaluation of the Kenyan shilling making debt more expensive, there are risks to debt sustainability and the consequences of restructuring the loan process.

This analysis is relevant because it shows that Tanzania's approach to the SGR has allowed it to remain much more independent and thus better able to reap all the benefits of the project. With Kenya at the mercy of China, Kenya is weakened not only in public perception but also in its ability to act. The unwillingness of Chinese institutions to fund the expansion of the SGR sends a strong symbolic message to the region about Kenya's real power and strengthens Tanzania as the other powerhouse on the East African coast.

Conclusion

Who is dominant in the EAC is a binary question, it is either Kenya or Tanzania. Both countries have by far the largest economies and both sit at crucial choke points (the Indian Ocean), which naturally gives them a dominant position over other landlocked EAC countries. Both Kenya and Tanzania have historically, and more recently, challenged each other to maintain control of the dominant hegemonic position in East Africa. Hegemony in this context is not defined in isolation, but rather in relation to the other landlocked EAC countries. What is crucial is that these actors establish themselves as kingmakers who benefit whoever is in control of them - control of their trade routes being the most important element of this.

The Tanzanian Standard Gauge Railway is likely to change the current balance of power in Tanzania's favour. It promises radical cost reductions, significant speed increases and comes without all the other baggage of Kenya. Uganda does not have to worry about blockades like in the 1970s or oil restrictions like in 2014. Rwanda no longer has to trade through Uganda and is freed from the political unrest that followed the 2007 elections, which could flare up again at any time. Importantly, only the massive benefits of the SGR will be enough to break the current path dependency. This new era is likely to continue even if Kenya manages to get its own SGR up and running. The lesson of the Tazara railway is that even if you are able to free yourself from one actor, you may end up in the arms of another.

If you are a puppet of another state, you cannot be a hegemon. Kenya's financing and construction approach to the SGR has put it in a risky position with China. Being so heavily indebted to a single actor with little to show for it raises questions about its independence and ability to govern. If Kenya is simply doing Beijing's bidding, it is questionable whether it has the same relative

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[66] Ali Keya Anami, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Its Role in Developing Africa’s Economies. Case Study.”

[67] “East Africa’s Joint Mega Railway Project at the Crossroads.”

[68]Vines, Butler, and Jie, “The Response to Debt Distress in Africa and the Role of China.”

power in the region. By comparison, Tanzania's multiple financing arrangements with various construction companies have given it more power in the construction sector, and also much less constraint in the long term. The scale of the costs of these two projects should make it clear why the degree of dependence, or rather non-dependence, is so significant.

Both of these aspects should make it clear that the Standard Gauge Railway could usher in a new era in East Africa, with the dice this time being rolled in Tanzania's favour. While this certainly appears to be the case, this research is obviously limited in scope. Power can also take the form of soft power or other forms of hard power such as military might. The information game, i.e. how much control there is over the media narrative, also affects the extent to which relative power can be portrayed. While it is clear that the Tanzanian Standard Gauge Railway is changing the East African landscape in economic and strategic terms, these other factors may lead to different kinds of developments. Significant parts of this research are also speculative to some extent, as the Tanzanian Standard Gauge Railway has not yet been completed, so the perceived benefits are still uncertain, and crises can always occur and change the landscape further.

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