

AFRICA DIGEST

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FOCAC 2024: New Direction or Same Rhetoric?

The ninth edition of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) took place from 4 to 6 September 2024 in Beijing. The gathering came at a time when African nations are confronting several challenges like high inflation, currency depreciation, heavy debt burden, unconstitutional military takeovers and geopolitical challenges like the Israel-Hamas and Russia-Ukraine war, and attacks by Houthi rebels on commercial shipping in the Mediterranean Sea.

The summit led to the adoption of the [FOCAC Beijing Action Plan \(2025-2027\)](#) which outlined some concrete targets for China-Africa relations. China's financial developmental package to Africa at FOCAC 2024 amounted to 360 billion yuan (\$50.7 bn) over three years in credit lines and investments. Grand announcements of 60,000 training opportunities for African women and youth, training for 6000 military and 1000 police personnel, and invitation to 1000 members of African political parties to China indeed sound impressive. However, this template is not new. The decision to grant zero-tariff treatment on 100 per cent of tariff lines on products to 33 African LDCs was noteworthy.

Three trends were discernible at the summit. In terms of financing, FOCAC shifted away from the days of large-scale infrastructure deals towards "[small yet beautiful](#)" projects, thereby reflecting China's own economic slowdown post the pandemic. This aims to ensure that newer Chinese investments under BRI are more targeted, greener, and less financially risky than previous commitments. Allegations of "debt trap diplomacy", international backlash over non-compliance of ESG

norms, labour standards, and China's own domestic economic pressures led Beijing to be apprehensive about where it invests in. All three of China's flagship plans – Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Civilizational Initiative (GCI) – have been embedded into the Beijing Declaration to create a joint path to achieve security and development.

Secondly, green transition featured prominently at the summit with President Xi announcing 30 new clean energy projects across Africa. African governments have been pressurizing Chinese mining and renewable companies to refine more minerals on the continent. Amid mounting export restrictions, China is banking upon exporting solar panels, EVs, batteries and green technology to Africa.

Thirdly, the entire question of China's role in Africa's debt relief was missing from the conversation. The Chinese side astutely shifted responsibility by calling in international financial institutions and commercial creditors to actively participate in debt treatment of African nations. Although China is not the main creditor in Africa's debt, Chinese lenders account for [12 percent](#) of Africa's public and private debt. At FOCAC 2024, China did waive off interest-free loans, but those loans are only a small fraction of Africa's overall debt burden.

Second Indonesia-Africa Forum: Key Outcomes and Takeaways

From 1 to 3 September 2024, Indonesia hosted the second Indonesia-Africa Forum (IAF) to pursue pragmatic economic engagement. The narrative of Asian-African solidarity, rooted in the 1955 Bandung Conference, remains a cornerstone of Indonesia's Africa policy

and outreach. Their shared historical legacy is Indonesia's unique value proposition in its engagement with the continent. However, the task of driving meaningful economic partnerships is difficult and several questions arise about the efficacy and motivations behind Jakarta's African engagement strategy. Unlike other similar summits China, India and Japan hold with Africa, the IAF is not recognized by or coordinated with the African Union. This lack of continental endorsement underscores [Indonesia's limited capacity to offer substantial economic incentives](#).

Indonesia's overall trade volume with Africa in 2023 stood at a mere \$13.7 billion which stands in stark contrast to \$282 billion of China-Africa trade, over \$100 billion of India-Africa trade, and \$20 billion of Japan-Africa trade. Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Strategic Plan for 2020-2024 recognizes Africa as a region for Jakarta to engage with and pursue economic diplomacy through platforms like the IAF, Indonesia-Africa Maritime Dialogue (IAMD), and Indonesia-Africa Infrastructure Dialogue (IAID). Jakarta aims to access non-traditional markets like Africa by focusing on sectors such as infrastructure, transportation, and oil and gas.

New President-elect Prabowo Subianto is set to take office in October 2024. While he has previously mentioned Africa during campaign debates, he continues to emphasise a "Good Neighbour" policy. This may lead Jakarta to refocus its foreign policy engagement towards addressing challenges within ASEAN and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

At the summit, it is estimated that thirty-two business deals worth over [\\$3.5 billion](#) were signed in sectors like renewable energy, health, and food

security. An MoU on geothermal energy cooperation with Tanzania and state-owned oil and natural gas holding Pertamina acquired a 60 percent stake in Wentworth Resources, operator of the Mnazi Bay gas block in Tanzania. Other deals included a master agreement on health technology transfer cooperation between Biofarma and Atlantic Lifesciences Ghana and a letter of intent (LOI) between PT Dirgantara Indonesia (PTDI) and the Setdco Group to sell five N219 aircraft to Democratic Republic of Congo and maritime patrol aircraft to Senegal were signed.

Algeria Joins BRICS New Development Bank

Algeria has been approved for [membership](#) in the New Development Bank (NDB), marking a significant step in its integration into the global financial system. The announcement was made by the bank's chief, Dilma Rousseff, during a meeting held in Cape Town, South Africa. This development places Algeria among a growing list of emerging economies joining the institution aimed at offering an alternative to the traditional global financial system dominated by institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The NDB was established in 2015 by its founding members—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—with the purpose of mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in emerging markets. Over the years, the NDB has expanded its membership to include Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates in 2021, Egypt in 2023, and now, Algeria. With this addition, Algeria becomes the ninth member of this multilateral development bank.

According to a [statement](#) by the Algerian Finance Ministry, the country's

membership in the NDB is a testament to its strong macroeconomic indicators and recent classification as an "upper-tier emerging economy." This strength, backed by significant economic growth and multi-sector reforms, has established Algeria as a reliable and dynamic partner within the international financial community.

Algeria's economy, primarily driven by its status as Africa's leading exporter of natural gas, is expected to benefit from new financial avenues through the NDB. Membership in the bank opens prospects for Algeria to support and strengthen its economic growth in the medium and long term, diversify its financial resources and enhancing its global economic standing.

NDB President Dilma Rousseff emphasized that the inclusion of new members is part of the bank's broader strategy to expand its reach and influence. "We have a process to authorize new members to the bank, and Algeria was authorized to become a member," Rousseff stated during a press briefing at the ninth annual meeting of the NDB in Cape Town. The decision aligns with the bank's goal of providing financial support to emerging economies and promoting sustainable development.

Algeria's entry into the NDB is particularly noteworthy given its role as a major energy exporter and its recent economic reforms aimed at reducing reliance on hydrocarbons. As the global energy landscape shifts, Algeria's alignment with the BRICS group could provide additional leverage in international energy markets and contribute to the country's strategic economic diversification.

The NDB was initially conceived to offer an alternative financial platform for emerging economies, addressing concerns about the conditionalities and dominance of

Western-led financial institutions. The bank's expansion over the years reflects its growing importance as a global development finance player and its capacity to attract diverse emerging economies looking for more inclusive and flexible financing options.

Algeria's inclusion in the BRICS New Development Bank is a significant milestone for both the country and the institution. For Algeria, it represents an opportunity to deepen its integration into global financial markets, support its economic diversification, and strengthen its international partnerships. For the NDB, Algeria's membership enhances its profile as a key player in development finance, reinforcing its mission to provide alternatives and support for sustainable growth in emerging economies.

US Troops Return to Chad Amid Regional Instability

The United States is set to reintroduce a "limited number" of Special Forces personnel to Chad, following an agreement between the two nations. This development, confirmed by U.S. Major General Kenneth Ekman in a recent [interview](#), marks a reversal of Chad's earlier stance when it requested a full withdrawal of U.S. forces earlier this year. At the time, President Mahamat Deby's demand led to the removal of around 70 U.S. troops from N'Djamena. Now, the Chadian government has invited them back, signalling a potential recalibration of its security strategy.

The decision to reinstate American troops in Chad contrasts sharply with the broader trend across the Sahel, where several countries have demanded the withdrawal of Western military forces. Recent years have seen a series of coups and escalating tensions, leading to the ousting of French

and American forces from countries like Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali. The creation of the Alliance of Sahel States by Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso further underscores a growing alignment against Western influence in the region. This shifting geopolitical landscape poses significant challenges for U.S. counterterrorism strategies.

Chad's renewed openness to U.S. military support comes at a time of growing insurgent threats. Militant groups linked to Boko Haram and the Islamic State are expanding their reach around Lake Chad and further into the region. The U.S. presence in Chad, while now more limited in scale, is part of an outside-in approach to addressing these violent extremist organizations, especially after the loss of operational bases in Niger. Ekman emphasized that Chad's cooperation remains crucial for countering these threats and restoring regional stability.

The return of U.S. troops could be a double-edged sword for Chad. On one hand, their presence may bolster the country's counterterrorism efforts against the growing militant presence in its border areas. On the other hand, it risks entangling the U.S. deeper into a conflict that has proven difficult to contain. Years of counterinsurgency operations led by the U.S. and France have done little to curb the expansion of these groups, which continue to adapt and increase their influence in the Sahel.

Washington's repositioning of its forces in the region has been strategic. With its military footprint reduced in Niger, the U.S. has moved some troops to Ivory Coast and is working to upgrade its presence in other West African nations, including refurbishing an airfield in Benin. However, the reception to U.S. forces has been mixed.

Nigeria and Ghana have made it clear that they are not interested in hosting American troops, highlighting the delicate balance the U.S. must strike to maintain influence without overstepping.

The reintroduction of U.S. forces in Chad reflects a nuanced shift in U.S. military strategy in the Sahel. While the decision aligns with efforts to secure the region from extremist threats, it also underscores the limited options available to Washington as it navigates a complex and volatile security environment. With regional partners forming alliances outside of traditional Western influence, the U.S. faces an uphill battle in recalibrating its approach to counterterrorism across West Africa.

Rising Jihadi Threats and the Evolution of Drone Warfare in Mali

Tuareg separatist rebels in Mali have introduced drones as part of their combat strategy, marking a significant shift in regional conflict dynamics. The Tuareg rebel coalition, the Strategic Framework for the Defense of the People of Azawad (CSP-DPA), has launched [drone attacks](#) on security forces at least three times since August 2023, targeting Malian and Russian soldiers. Their first recorded use was a deadly ambush on a convoy at Tinzaouten, killing 84 Russian and 47 Malian soldiers. This was followed by attacks on army bases in the Timbuktu region on September 11 and during Mali's Independence Day on September 22.

This new tactic compensates for CSP's lack of conventional mortar supplies, allowing for indirect fire operations. The drones have already proven effective in halting and disorienting security forces, though the group is still perfecting its use of the technology. The September 11 attack, for example, saw the drone payload miss its target. CSP's adoption of drones might be

linked to its longstanding ties with Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), Al-Qaeda's affiliate in the Sahel. JNIM first employed similar drone tactics in central Mali in September 2023, suggesting possible support or technology transfer.

However, distinctions within JNIM's organizational structure could limit further dissemination of these capabilities. The Macina Liberation Front (MLF), a JNIM subgroup in central Mali, has successfully used drones in attacks in both Mali and Burkina Faso. In contrast, JNIM's northern subgroup, Ansar al-Din, has not yet replicated this tactic, despite deep historical and operational connections. This disparity suggests potential challenges in internal technology transfer across JNIM factions.

External actors have also been implicated in the development of these capabilities. A Ukrainian military intelligence spokesperson hinted at Ukraine's support for non-jihadist rebels like the CSP, though the Ukrainian government denied any involvement. Given Ukraine's use of similar drone tactics against Russian forces, these claims, if substantiated, would underscore an evolving external dimension to the Sahel conflict.

Meanwhile, on September 17, Mali's capital, Bamako, [witnessed](#) its most brazen terrorist attack in years. Armed militants stormed a gendarmerie barracks and the Modibo Keita military airport, killing dozens and destroying key military assets. JNIM's media outlet, [az-Zallaqa](#), claimed responsibility, and videos surfaced showing severe damage, including destroyed vehicles and aircraft. The attackers—identified as being from diverse ethnic backgrounds—symbolized JNIM's expanding recruitment base.

These attacks indicate a rapidly deteriorating security environment in the Sahel. With state capacity crumbling in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, analysts warn of a looming collapse that could have serious regional and international consequences. As violence and displacement increase, there is growing concern that instability in the Sahel will eventually translate into security risks for Europe, especially as migration flows intensify. The recent developments underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive response to curb the spread of extremism and prevent further destabilization.