

Trans-African Railways: Russia's Expertise Could Reshape African Geopolitics

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

Sudan's proposal to have Russian companies help construct the East-West and North-South Trans-African Railways could reshape African geopolitics if Moscow succeeds in leveraging its possibly newfound strategic position in this sphere to "balance" between the two emerging blocs in the modern-day "Scramble for Africa".

Sudan just [proposed](#) during an intergovernmental commission with Russia to have Moscow help construct the East-West and North-South Trans-African Railways that will partially run through its territory, seeing as how the two states are [very close strategic partners](#) and Sudan is also the mainland-maritime nexus connecting both of these ambitious megaprojects. The author previously mapped out the first-mentioned of these trans-continental initiatives in a piece that he wrote back in February 2017 about what he described as the "[Sahelian-Saharan Silk Road](#)", which is envisaged as bringing together a variety of East-West connectivity corridors stretching from the Senegalese capital of Dakar on the Atlantic Ocean all the way to the Red Sea coastal city of Port Sudan and is described more in detail in the aforementioned hyperlinked analysis:



Map Key

Red: [CCS \(Cameroon-Chad-Sudan\) Silk Road](#)

Gold: Trans-African Highway 5

Lavender: Ethiopia-Nigeria Silk Road (the most direct projected route through resource-rich territory)

Pink: West African Rail Loop

Blue: Lagos-Calabar Silk Road

Green: Lagos-Kano Silk Road

Yellow: Port Harcourt-Maiduguri Silk Road

As for the proposed North-South Trans-African Railway, it can be reasonably speculated that it would run from Sudan to [Ethiopia](#) and then down through the East African Community (Kenya & [Tanzania](#) specifically) to [Mozambique](#) and/or Zambia-Zimbabwe and ultimately the South African city of Cape Town, the latter of which is specifically mentioned as the terminal point of this megaproject in the Russia-Sudan intergovernmental commission's minutes.

There currently aren't any North-South connectivity initiatives seriously being pursued at the moment, which is why it's difficult to tell exactly where it would traverse, but the important takeaway is that Khartoum sees Port Sudan as being the northern terminal point and that this vector of the Trans-African Railway will cut through the several countries between them in one way or another.

Russia's possible involvement in constructing the trans-Sudanese parts of these projects would cement its influence in the mainland-maritime nexus connecting these two megaprojects, which could in turn be leveraged to advance Moscow's envisioned 21st-century grand strategy of becoming the [supreme "balancing" force](#) in Afro-Eurasia. For that to happen, however, Russia would need to deftly manage the two emerging "blocs" of countries that are participating in the modern-day "[Scramble for Africa](#)" through a combination of its diplomatic finesse, "[mercenary" security services](#), state-building activities (the [concept](#) of which is currently being tested in the Central African Republic), and its crucial expertise in constructing railway corridors across challenging terrain, which would altogether allow it to play a mutually beneficial role for all continental and extra-regional players in this competition.

From its strategic base in Sudan, Russia would be able to indirectly exert influence along the East-West and North-South Trans-African Railways. The first one would cut through "[Israel's](#)" new [military ally](#) in Chad and France's military "sphere of influence" stretching from that country to Senegal across the so-called [G5 Sahel](#) states, while the second would extend through the [GCC's new "sphere of influence"](#) in the [Horn of Africa](#) via Ethiopia and then southwards across the East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) "battlegrounds" of the [Chinese-Indian New Cold War](#). As such, [Sudan is shaping up to be indispensable not only to China](#), but also to 21st-century African geopolitics as a whole following the fast-moving paradigm shifts of the [emerging Multipolar World Order](#) that's Russia's actively facilitating there.

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