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THE 2018 FOCAC SUMMIT:

Prospects for an African Multilateral Policy towards China in a changing global economy

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Cover: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa co-chairs the 2018 Beijing Summit, 2 September 2018. Picture: GCIS.

Introduction

This Policy Brief seeks to highlight the missed opportunities at the 2018 FOCAC Summit held in Beijing, China, on 3 and 4 September 2018. I start with a brief overview of its setting, notably the burgeoning trade war between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States (US), with the two giants imposing punitive tariffs on each other. While this largely concerns these two countries most directly, it also has ramifications for Africa, given that both countries have strategic and economic interests in the region. Next, I examine China's flagship initiative known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and how this could be used for the betterment of Africa. Following this, I take a look at the progress made in terms of China's US$60 billion pledge at the Johannesburg FOCAC Summit in 2015. Next, I talk about the pledges made by China at the 2018 Summit, which resembles China's pledge under the Johannesburg Action Plan for the period 2015 to 2018, but spells out different priority areas for development assistance to African countries. I conclude by arguing that while the Summit might have addressed certain issues vital to a productive Africa-China partnership, some opportunities were missed.

Analysts anticipated that the Summit would seek to integrate China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with the AU's Agenda 2063 and the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development

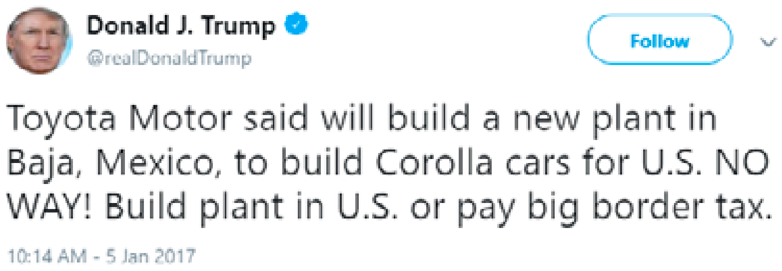
Background

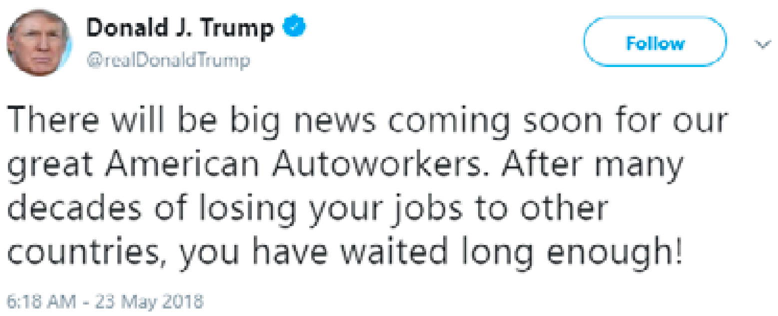
China hosted the 16th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing on 3 and 4 September 2018. The Summit marked 18 years of enhanced effort on the part of China to establish friendly socioeconomic and development with all African UN member states except for Swaziland/eSwatini, which disregards Beijing's 'One China Policy' by maintaining ties with the Republic of China (Taiwan). FOCAC welcomed three new entrants from Africa, namely Burkina Faso, Sao Tome and Principe and the Gambia.

Analysts anticipated that the Summit would seek to integrate China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – including the Maritime Silk Road – with the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 and the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The unfolding trade war between the USA and China intervened. The US imposition of higher tariffs on Chinese products, mostly automobiles, could be interpreted as an expression of President Donald Trump's 'America First' policy. One of its pillars is the imposition of 'Border Taxes' on relevant countries and products. The tariffs were imposed after a Trump tweet that Toyota should either build a plant in the USA, thereby creating US jobs, or pay border taxes on automobiles built in Mexico (Phillip 2017).

This trade war could have far-reaching global implications, especially for Africa. It escalated when the USA instituted an additional tariff of 25% on US$16 billion worth of Chinese manufactures. The initial tariff was imposed on 6 July 2018 when the USA enforced tariffs on US$34 billion worth of Chinese products. China then retaliated by imposing tariffs on US agricultural products (Bryan 2018).





While this could lead to Africa being flooded with cheap Chinese products, thus undermining local manufacturing, the continent could also benefit, as China largely imports agricultural products from the USA, and could look to Africa for these instead. China could invest in Africa's agricultural sector, thereby creating jobs and alleviating food scarcity. In Burundi, for example, agriculture contributes nearly 50% of GDP, and employs more than 90% of the population. China could look to countries such as Burundi for trade in agricultural produce, mainly tea and coffee, which account for 90% of the country's foreign exchange earnings (Anejo 2017).

While this could lead to Africa being flooded with cheap Chinese products, thus undermining local manufacturing, the continent could also benefit

Despite the unfolding trade animosity between the largest and second largest economies in the world, African expectations were high, as representatives of African countries sought to find ways of deepening and consolidating their relations with China after 18 years of developmental partnerships, resulting – inter alia - in many major Chinese-sponsored infrastructural projects. At the same time, these projects were beset with various economic and social ills, including corruption, the displacement of communities, a failure to employ local people, and fears of African governments finding themselves in debt traps due to repayable Chinese loans that far exceed their repayment capacity. Since the inception of FOCAC in 2000, Chinese loans to African countries, largely for infrastructure development, have spiralled up to more than US$130 billion (Marsh 2018).

The Johannesburg Action Plan

Taking stock of the projects implemented after the 2015 FOCAC summit held in Johannesburg was one of the talking points at the Beijing FOCAC summit. At the 2015

FOCAC, China pledged US$60 billion for ten priority projects to be undertaken over the next two years, including:

- US$5 billion in grants and zero-interest loans;
- US$5 billion in concessional loans and export credit;
- an additional US$5 billion for the China-Africa Development Fund (CADFund); and
- US$10 billion for the CADFund earmarked for Production Capacity Cooperation.

In 2016, Chinese investment in Africa reached the US$100 billion mark, representing a more than hundred-fold increase from 2005 to 2016, thus making China the largest foreign direct investor in Africa, translating into 130 750 jobs (Ernst & Young 2017).

Despite this milestone, there is a need to determine a clear way forward, made more difficult by the growing tensions between China and the USA, as well as the tense relations between China and India, which are likely to spill over on to Africa as well.

The 2018 FOCAC Summit was preceded by a meeting of the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum on 4 July 2018, in support of the approaching summit. The Forum was held against the backdrop of China's 40th anniversary of its reform and opening up, under the theme 'China-Africa Relations over the Course of Reform and Opening-up'. It was attended by more than 380 delegates from 44 African countries, including diplomats, who set out to assess progress made with Chinese-sponsored development projected as well as their impacts. Special attention was paid to the achievements of the Africa-China economic partnership in the wake of the Johannesburg summit. In 2017, trade between Africa and China reached US$170 billion, and Chinese direct investment in Africa increased to more than US$40 billion, with more than 10 000 Chinese companies operating in Africa.

Despite this milestone, there is a need to determine a clear way forward, made more difficult by the growing tensions between China and the USA

The 2018 Beijing Summit also came just over a month after the BRICS Summit in South Africa. Prior to the BRICS event, Chinese and Indian delegates made a few stops in East Africa to deepen their ties with some African countries, signalling what appeared to be growing competition between Beijing and New Delhi.

While the commitments at FOCAC Summits are made between China and Africa, the projects involved are implemented on a bilateral basis by the Chinese government and individual African countries. Prominent projects include the 480-kilometre-long Mombasa-Nairobi railway, the largest infrastructure project in Kenya since independence, built at a cost of US$3.8 billion. Owing to this and other Chinese investments, Kenya's GDP increased by 1.5%, and 38 000 jobs were created in construction.

Another major project is the Addis Ababa-Djibouti light railway, which was built by China and the Ethiopia Railway Corporation at a cost of about $4.5 billion -- half a billion dollars more than initial estimates. It was financed by the Ethiopian government and a $2,4 million loan from China's Exim Bank. Due to financial constraints, the Ethiopian government could not finish the project on time, as the Ethiopian Railway Corporation was faced with a $3.7 billion debt and had to start repaying the loans before the project was completed. The railway is operated by the two Chinese companies

Lindiwe Sisulu, South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, addresses the Seventh Ministerial FOCAC Conference on 2 September. Picture: DIRCO

that did the construction work, namely the China Railway Group (CREC) and the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CRCC), They will operate and maintain the railway and train its employees until 2023 (Tarrosy and Vörös 2018).

The 2018 FOCAC Beijing Summit

Attended by representatives of China, 53 African countries, and the African Union, the 2018 FOCAC Beijing Summit was held on 3 and 4 September under the theme 'China and Africa: Towards an Even Stronger Community with a Shared Future through Win-Win Cooperation'.

The Summit was preceded by the Seventh Ministerial FOCAC Conference, held on 2 September. It was co-chaired by the Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, the Chinese Minister of Commerce, Zhong Shang, and their South African counterparts, the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Lindiwe Sisulu, and the Minister of Trade and Industry, Rob Davies. It was attended by foreign ministers and ministers or representatives responsible for foreign, economic and trade affairs of 53 African FOCAC members, as well as senior representatives of the African Union Commission (AUC).

Wang Yi and Zhong Shan reported back on what they described as the successful implementation of the Johannesburg Action Plan. According to Zhong Shan, all 10 major aspects of the plan had been effectively implemented.

Providing an insight into China's expectations, Wang Yi said China hoped to combine the 'joint construction' of the BRI between China and Africa with the UN's Agenda 2063, the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the development strategies of various African countries.

Lauding China as Africa's 'most trustworthy and reliable friend', Lindiwe Sisulu thanked China on behalf of African countries for its long-term support and assistance, and expressed the willingness of African countries to collaborate with efforts to harmonise the BRI with the AU and UN instruments. Other ministers spoke positively about the implementation of the Johannesburg Action Plan, and expressed their appreciation of China's long-term contribution to facilitating China-Africa cooperation.

The Conference reviewed and approved the drafts of two outcome documents, namely the 'Beijing Declaration on Building an Even Stronger Community with a Shared Future between China and Africa', and the FOCAC-Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021), which were then submitted to Chinese and African leaders at the Beijing Summit for adoption.

The Summit itself was co-chaired by the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, and the South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa. Following two days of deliberations, it adopted the Declaration as well as the Action Plan.

The Declaration expresses a commitment to further strengthen collaboration between Africa and China. One of its most important features is its treatment of the BRI.

The Beijing Declaration

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The Declaration describes the BRI as embodying the principle of extensive consultation, joint contributions and shared benefits; observing market principles and international norms; advocating and practising openness, transparency, and win-win results; and efforts to develop inclusive, accessible and reasonably priced infrastructure that contributes to sustainable development. It anticipates that cooperation between China and Africa under the BRI will generate more resources, expand African markets, and broaden its development.

The parties to the Declaration then commit themselves to developing a 'strong synergy' between the BRI, the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the AU's Agenda 2063, as well as the development strategies of African countries.

The Beijing Action Plan

In this framework, the Summit adopted an Action Plan embodying eight major initiatives, in the areas outlined below.

- **Peace and Security**: This initiative will include the establishment of a China-Africa peace and security fund, aimed at funding African Union (AU) peacekeeping missions and efforts to combat terrorism.
- **Trade Facilitation**: This initiative seeks to increase Chinese imports of non-

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Chinese President Xi Jinping co-chair the Beijing FOCAC Summit, 3 September 2018. Picture: GCIS

resource products from Africa.

- **Health Care**: This initiative seeks to boost 50 African medical and health programmes, including the training of medical personnel.
- **Infrastructure connectivity**: This initiative will support Chinese firms involved in African infrastructure development. It will also work closely with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank with the aim of promoting the BRI.
- **People-to-People Exchange**: This initiative will encompass the establishment of more Confucius Institutes at African educational institutions, and the establishment of an African Studies Institute. Tourism between China and Africa will also be promoted.
- **Industrial Promotion**: This initiative will seek to establish and improve economic zones in various African countries, and develop Africa's agricultural sector.
- **Capacity Building**: This initiative will seek to share China's developmental experiences with African countries. This will include the hosting of 10 Luban workshops, aimed at providing African youths with vocational training.
- **Green development**: This will entail 50 exchange and cooperation projects related to climate change, wildlife protection, desertification prevention, and control.

The pledges in the Beijing Action Plan are more diverse than those under their predecessor, the Johannesburg Action Plan. However, they all have a common feature, namely a focus on building and strengthening local African capacity (Phadke 2018).

The most significant pledge is probably trade facilitation, as it provides African countries with enhanced opportunities to export manufactured goods (Phadke 2018). This would promote formal employment, and deflect claims that China is exploiting Africa by stripping it of raw materials and then exporting the finished products back to Africa.

President Xi Jinping pledged US$60 billion towards implementing the Beijing Action Plan. While the total is similar to that pledged towards the Johannesburg Action Plan, it is made up in a different way – while the Chinese government will contribute US$50 billion, the outstanding US$10 billion will be contributed by Chinese companies doing business in Africa. The US$50 billion will be made up as follows:

- US$20 billion for new credit lines;
- US$15 billion for grants and interest-free loans;
- US$10 billion for a special development financing fund; and
- US$5 billion for a special funds for imports from Africa (Benabdallah and Robertson 2018).

Table 1 (overleaf) compares the composition of China's pledges in 2015 and 2018. Among other things, it shows that the pledge towards grants and interest-free loans increased by US$10 billion, reaching the highest level ever (Phadke 2018).

There is little doubt that this increase is aimed at influencing the debate about the merits and demerits of Chinese loans, notably the pervasive narrative that China lures African countries into debt traps. This narrative, which is prominent in the international media, was recently refuelled when Sri Lanka was forced to hand its Hambantota Port to China for a period of 99 years due to its failure to repay its loans to China (Benabdallah & Robertson 2018).

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Conclusions: missed opportunities, and the way forward

Despite the apparent progress made, discussions at the Summit about areas of cooperation were not thorough enough, and many of the areas discussed were affected by events and developments just prior to the Summit. A possible solution would be to change the triannual FOCAC summit into an annual one. Similarly, it is not possible to discuss all the areas of cooperation in this study. Some priority areas are discussed below.

Corruption

Given allegations that Chinese involvement in Africa has given rise to corruption, discussions of corruption should have been more extensive. This issue is linked to China's policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of recipients of Chinese investments. Among others, critics claim that Chinese development assistance works

Table 1: Financial pledges by China at FOCAC 2015 and FOCAC 2018

FOCAC 2015 Financial Pledges		FOCAC 2018 Financial Pledges	
$60 billion in financing to Africa:		$60 billion in financing to Africa:	
$35 billion	Preferential and concessional loans	$15 billion	Grants, interest-free loans, and concessional financing
$5 billion	Grants and interest-free loans	$20 billion	Credit lines
$5 billion	China-Africa Development Fund	$10 billion	Special fund for development financing
$5 billion	Special loan for the development of African small and medium enterprises	$5 billion	Special fund for financing imports from Africa
$10 billion	China-Africa production capacity cooperation fund	$10 billion	Investment over the next 3 years

to keep African despots in power. One example cited is Zimbabwe, where former president Robert Mugabe's 'Look East Policy' helped him to stay in power for longer with the aid of Chinese loans (Brautigam 2009). Critics argue that this undermines the UN's attempts to promote good governance in Africa.

It is hard to quantify corruption in Africa, but the huge sums of money injected into African economies and the sheer scale of the infrastructure projects are clearly breeding grounds for corruption (Brautigam 2009).

China did pledge to support African governments in the fight against corruption by setting up a Africa-China Law Enforcement and Security Forum that would, among other things, facilitate the exchange of police personnel. It also pledged to provide African countries with policing equipment, and to offer Chinese language courses for law enforcement officers. This will help them to police Chinese nationals working in Africa, thus countering perceptions that they are above the local law.

While these steps have been welcomed, analysts generally recognise that the primary responsibility for combating corruption remains vested in African governments themselves (Monyae and Ndzendze 2018).

Debt Trap

As noted previously, a ubiquitous narrative about Africa-China relations is that African countries are at risk of being trapped in an abyss of debt due to the accumulation of fresh loans from China before previous ones have been repaid. African leaders should have addressed this issue, as fears in this respect are rife on the continent, leading to people questioning China's motives for its ostensibly benign relations with Africa.

One cause for concern is the situation surrounding the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka. Due to a failure to repay the Chinese loans used to build the port, it has now been leased to China for 99 years (Schultz 2017). Traditionally, Sri Lanka fell into the Indian sphere of influence. In recent years, however, China has asserted its influence in Sri

Lanka, and 77 % of its national debt is now owed to China. The port is controlled by two Chinese state-run companies, the China Merchants Port Holdings Company and the Sri Lanka Ports Authority, with the former holding 70% state in the Hambantota port. The government of Sri Lanka has signed a deal with the former to cede the port to the latter for a period of 99 years as a way of repaying the loans (Schultz 2017). This case has been presented in the international media as setting a precedent for the seizure of foreign assets by China in the case of loan defaults. Another case that has made the international headlines is China's seizure of the Kenneth Kaunda Airport in Zambia, following a loan default by the Zambian government (Krah 2018).

The militarisation of Africa by China is another topic that was not adequately discussed

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

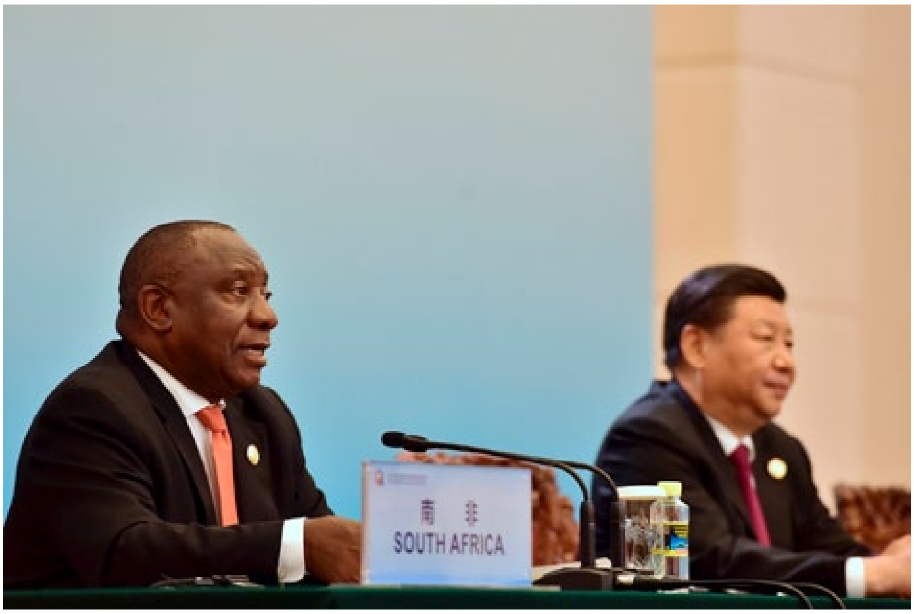
As reflected in the 2018 Summit Declaration, China's assistance to Africa now forms part of its flagship economic initiative known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This initiative seeks to establish or enhance linkages between China and world regions adjacent to it, typically by improving infrastructure as well as economic connectivity (Cai 2017). Until now, trade relations with Africa have been regarded as asymmetric, with China importing African raw materials at low prices, and exporting manufactured goods back to Africa. However, under the BRI, African exports of manufactured goods should be promoted as well, thereby turning the partnership between China and its African allies into a win-win one, characterised by mutual gains for both parties.

The BRI could also be used to promote enhanced people-to-people exchanges between Africa and China through education. This is already occurring via the growing number of Confucius Institutes allied with African institutes of higher learning. However, as in the case of trade symmetry, African cultures and languages should also be promoted in China.

The BRI presents African countries with significant developmental opportunities. However, African governments should formulate their own approaches to and policies in respect of the BRI, because their participation will be meaningless unless the initiative responds to African needs and goals.

President Xi Jinping announced the initiative unexpectedly and unilaterally in Kazakhstan in September 2013, followed by an announcement to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Africa did not feature prominently in the initial announcements. This was cause for concern for African leaders, as it created the impression that the BRI was a top-down initiative, with Africa at the bottom end.

The BRI took formal shape in 2015 in a document entitled Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. It emphasises that the BRI is primarily an economic initiative rather than a geostrategic one, as claimed in the international media. While it does not rule out geostrategic considerations, its primary focus does appear to be on fostering economic and trade relations. China has indeed become Africa's largest trading partner, largely due to its offtake of African primary resources.



President Cyril Ramaphosa and President Xi Jinping address the media at the closure of the Beijing Summit, 4 September 2018.Picture: CCIS.

African leaders should ensure that the BRI will not remain a one-way avenue for transporting African raw materials to China

The BRI was on the agenda at the 2018 Summit, but once again the discussion was inadequate. Among other things, the BRI is a grand strategy, but Africa is a continent of diverse economies. As such, African leaders should have raised the issue of how to create appropriate structural linkages between their economies and the BRI, which eventually demands political as well as economic reforms (Van Staden, Alden and Wu 2018). Regardless of the congeniality of the BRI, Africa's exclusion from the planning phase has turned it into a passive recipient of externally formulated economic plans and strategies.

Crucially, African leaders should ensure that the BRI will not remain a one-way avenue for transporting African raw materials to China, and buying them back as finished products. It should also encourage the flow of African manufactured products to China, thereby promoting the development of the fledgling African manufacturing sector, which will diversify African economies, and boost economic growth and job creation in the process.

Research and innovation

African leaders should also make greater efforts to prioritise technological exchanges. Among other things, China is at the leading edge of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which will eventually affect Africa as well (Anil 2017). This, in turn, will need to feed into efforts to develop the African manufacturing sector.

There is a dearth of technological know-how in some parts of Africa, with Madagascar an instructive example. It is an attractive destination for foreign investment, and China has made great inroads into its economy. However, it has concentrated on exporting rice to the island, and importing its raw materials. In 2009, China invested US$60.66 million in Madagascar, with just US$10 000 going to sectors other than mining. Its involvement in the manufacturing sector largely consists of joint ventures between Chinese firms and local firms, with little technological transfer. Despite the growing number of Chinese firms operating in Madagascar, real local investment remains limited (Chen & Landry 2016).

The militarisation of Africa

The militarisation of Africa by China is another topic that was not adequately discussed. While, as noted previously, China pledged to fund a peace and security initiative, the discussions should also have included the implications of the militarisation of the Djibouti port, where China has established a military base a few kilometres from an established American one. Should tensions between these two countries escalate, Djibouti will be adversely affected.

The militarisation of African territories, whether for peacekeeping efforts or for combating terrorism, fall under the jurisdiction of the African Union (AU). However, the AU has no control over the situation in Djibouti, as both the US and China have concluded bilateral agreements with the Djibouti government,

Chinese funding are loans, not gifts, and the longer-term financial implications of these substantial debts were not discussed

Moreover, the Chinese company controlling the port is the same one that has gained control of the Hamabatota Port in Sri Lanka (Cheng 2018). The joint venture between Djibouti and China for development the port is worth US$3.5 billion. It has been welcome by the president of Djibouti, Ismail Omar Guelleh, on the grounds that it will stimulate economic growth and create jobs for local people (Cheng 2018). However, Djibouti will need to pay back the loan, together with interest. Should it fail to do so, and the port should also revert to Chinese ownership, Djibouti could become a theatre of conflict between the two main world powers.

At the Summit, China pledged to help develop African sea ports and adjacent industrial parks, including the provision and development of IT, under the rubric of the BRI. This may benefit littoral states in particular in the short term, but Chinese funding are loans, not gifts, and the longer-term financial implications of these substantial debts were not discussed. In the coming years, these and other shortfalls in the FOCAC programme should be rectified.

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