

TRADING WHITE HATS FOR BLUE ONES? CHINA SENDS AN INFANTRY BATTALION TO SOUTH SUDAN

By Dr. Eliza Johannes

On January 9, 2015, China deployed an [advance party](#) of 18 peacekeepers to South Sudan. By March, the number will have climbed to 520, eventually topping off at a full battalion of 700. This military contingent will be stationed at the United Nations country office in Juba, complementing assistance provided by approximately [350](#) Chinese engineers and medical staff located nearly [400 miles](#) away in Wau. In a [press release](#), the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) said that Chinese troops will focus primarily on “[protecting] civilians living in or near the Mission’s UN House property, carry[ing] out patrols in and around Juba, the escorting of humanitarian relief supplies and the guarding of UN assets.”

According to a Congressional Research Service (CRS) [report](#), Juba is one of three locations designated as a “major clash” area (see Figure 1). It houses nearly 30,000 displaced people in UN camps and contains over 20,000 more in the area not directly serviced by the UN. In addition, another 20,000 have fled into the northern regions of Uganda and Kenya.

[Some](#) argue that China has deployed the infantry battalion to protect its economic and political interests and that the opportunity to assist Sudanese civilians is an added benefit—not the focus. Wang Yi, China’s foreign minister, [dismisses](#) the charges out of hand: “China’s mediation of South Sudan issues is completely the responsibility and duty of a responsible power, and not because of China’s own interests.” At the same time, while Chinese contributions will help support the UN surge from 10,000 to 12,500 troops (originally approved by UN Security Council [resolution](#) in December 2013), critics argue that China’s real aim is to [protect](#) South Sudanese oil workers. Oil workers labor in an industry in which the Chinese have [invested](#) well over \$20 billion. China is the largest foreign investor in oil in both Sudan and South Sudan. Adding to the perception of China being a significant stakeholder in South Sudanese politics is its position as the country’s [largest](#) trading partner. Oil exports drive most, if not all, of the favorable South Sudan surplus in the balance of trade.

While only the Chinese know their real intentions, it is important to note other circumstances surrounding the troop deployment to Juba. A [report](#) published by the U.S. Energy Information Administration indicates that Juba lies at the outskirts of South Sudan’s largest oil and gas field (Block 8; see Figure 2). Juba also happens to

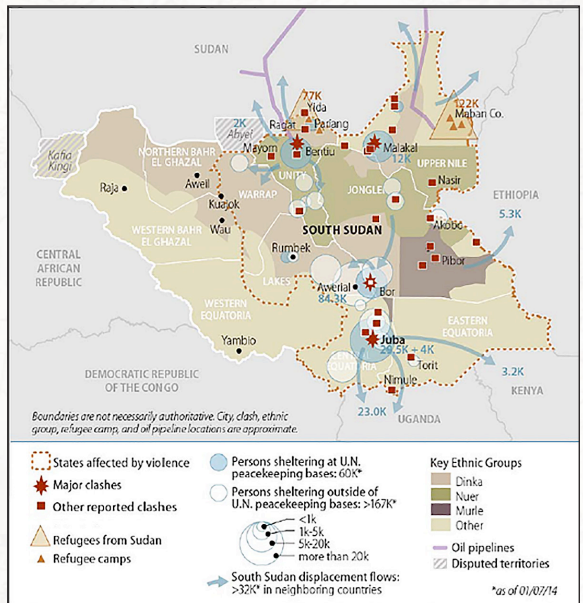


Figure 1. South Sudan Crisis Map

Source: L. P. Blanchard, “The Crisis in South Sudan,” Congressional Research Service, January 9, 2014, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43344.pdf>. Graphic created by CRS. Boundaries generated using data from ESRI, National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, and State Department (all 2013), and U.N. Development Program (2012). Other areas and locations based on maps from USAID (01/07/14) and Drilling Info International. Humanitarian data from UNOCHA.

be at the center of three proposed pipelines: one running from the planned Upper Nile refinery to the north; one running east to the coast off Djibouti; and another running southeast to the Kenyan coastal city of Lamu. Even though Toyota Tsusho, the trading arm of the Japanese carmaker, has [reportedly](#) received approval to build the pipeline to Lamu from South Sudan's President, Salva Kiir, China's position as an industry leader in the country will undoubtedly help it maintain a favorable position. Controlling—or at least significantly influencing—the flow of oil through Juba would be a boon to such efforts. Bolstering Kiir's [strength](#) relative to that of rebel leader and former Vice President Riek Machar through the [alleged](#) distribution of light and medium [weapons](#) could also help to solidify China's position regarding what may become the nexus of South Sudan's major corridor for oil exports.

Up to this point, observers have noted China's [self-described](#) use of "soft" power to pursue its national interest on the African continent, favoring business-oriented, economic penetration over military intervention and methods often seen as ideologically patriarchal. By donning the iconic "blue helmet" worn by all UN peacekeepers, are the Chinese taking a new approach to protecting their national interests and assets in South Sudan? Will we see a contest between China and the United States in South Sudan, as some [argue](#)? Or is the Chinese move simply an effort borne of practical concerns for preserving long-held political and economic equities through an international mechanism?



Figure 2. Key Oil Infrastructure in South Sudan

Source: Graphic created by the U.S. Energy information Administration (<http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=su>). Represented boundaries are not authoritative.

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AFRICAN HYDROPOLITICS—ETHIOPIA'S OTHER DAM

By George F. Ward

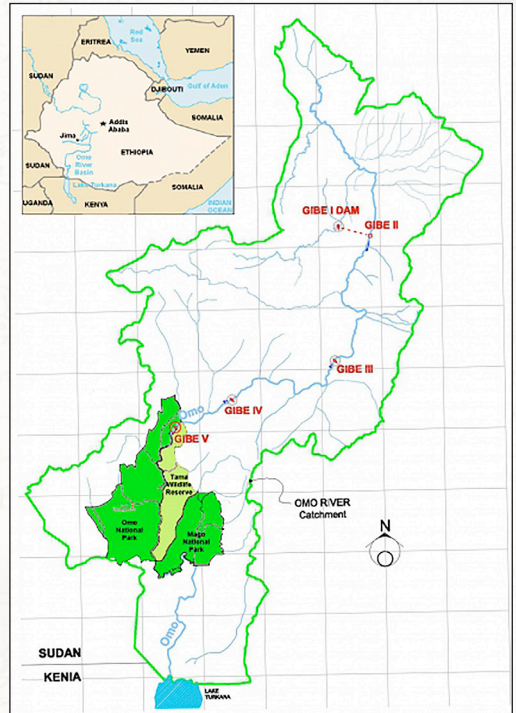
While much attention has been focused on the controversy over [the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam \(GERD\)](#), Ethiopia's 6,000 megawatt hydropower project on the Blue Nile, another major dam project, also hotly debated, has been moving toward completion. The Gibe III hydropower dam on the Omo River in southwestern Ethiopia will eventually generate 1,870 megawatts of electricity. On September 22, 2014, Ethiopian Electric Power announced that Gibe III was [87 percent complete](#) and that two of its 10 generating units would begin operation in spring 2015. Although Gibe III will eventually be dwarfed by the GERD, it will still represent an 82 percent increase in Ethiopia's currently installed electrical generating capacity when it becomes fully operational as early as 2016. Gibe III's critics complain that the dam and associated projects will disrupt a delicate ecosystem and destroy the livelihoods of many thousands of people in Ethiopia and Kenya. The Ethiopian and Kenyan governments [counter](#) that far more people will benefit from the electrical power that the dam will produce. With international support, the supporters of the dam seem to be prevailing.

The Omo River and Its Dams

The Omo River, which runs for hundreds of kilometers through western Ethiopia southward to the border with Kenya, has been seen for decades as a source of significant hydropower. The Gibe III hydropower project would be the [third and largest](#) in a cascade of four or five dams on the Omo. Gibe I is operational; Gibe II is virtually complete; and Gibe IV and V are in the planning stage. Along the length of the Omo River, farmers are dependent on seasonal floods to grow crops. At its terminus in the border region with Kenya, the Omo flows into a delta and empties into Lake Turkana, the world's largest desert lake. The lake supports an active fishery. Farmers and pastoralists from a variety of ethnic groups also inhabit the region.

The Ethiopian Vision

The government of Ethiopia views the Gibe III dam as an important element in an economic development strategy that aims at the country reaching [middle-income status](#) by 2025. The power produced by the dam would increase the percentage of Ethiopians with access to electricity. Ethiopia would also earn revenue through export of power. [Kenya would receive 500 megawatts of power](#) from the dam, and Djibouti and Sudan might also eventually benefit. The export of power would be made possible through the merger of the Kenyan and Ethiopian national grids. That would require construction of [1,068 kilometers](#) of high-voltage transmission lines. In addition, the Ethiopian government asserts that the dam would help control the damaging floods that sometimes occur in the river basin.



Gibe Dams in the Omo Turkana Basin. (Source: International Rivers, <http://www.internationalrivers.org/resources/maps-gibe-dams-in-the-omo-turkana-basin-4579>, licensed under Creative Commons.)

Controversial from the Start

Although the concept of the Gibe cascade is decades old, planning for Gibe III began in earnest only in 2006. It has been controversial from the start. Critics have opposed the construction of the dam for [several reasons](#), asserting that:

- The Omo River's downstream flow would be radically reduced, perhaps by 60–70 percent, causing a major reduction of the size of Lake Turkana and destroying the livelihoods of fishermen, pastoralists, and farmers.
- The dam could fail catastrophically, either as the result of an earthquake or design flaws, producing a humanitarian catastrophe.
- The end of seasonal flooding would harm the plant and wildlife species living near the river, with negative economic effects on the human populations in the area.
- The development of planned large-scale sugar and cotton plantations that would depend on irrigation from water drawn from the Omo would compound the economic and environmental damage.

Unsurprisingly, the Ethiopian government has rejected all of these claims, asserting that the reduction of the flow of water into Lake Turkana will be temporary and minimal, defending the dam's design, denying the existence of a substantial earthquake threat, and insisting that controlled release of water from the dam could substitute for seasonal flooding. The Ethiopian case has rested on an [Environmental and Social Impact Assessment](#) conducted by Italian consultancies (the general contractor for the dam is also an Italian firm). That assessment focuses mainly on the impact of the project on Ethiopian territory, addressing the Lake Turkana issue only briefly. More surprisingly, the government of Kenya, while initially [lending credence](#) to some of the criticisms of the dam, has not made the project a major issue in its relations with Ethiopia, and it has actively supported the construction of the power transmission system.

The Battle over Financing

Opponents of the dam sought to block its construction by denying Ethiopia the financial means needed to complete the \$1.8 billion project. An appeal to the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) yielded partial success. At its meeting in Doha in June 2014, the [committee adopted a decision](#) that urged the government of Ethiopia “not to start the filling of the dam and to halt the construction of the large scale irrigation projects” until the completion of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and the identification of appropriate mitigation measures. That decision is not legally binding.

Despite the opponents' objections, Ethiopia succeeded in putting together a financing package. The views of the dam's opponents may have helped [block financing by Western governments and banks](#), but China agreed to finance the turbines and other equipment needed for the project. Ethiopia has itself financed the construction of the dam through domestic and international borrowing. Although the international financial institutions refrained from providing credits for construction of the dam, they later stepped in to help finance the needed transmission lines. On July 12, 2012, the World Bank approved International Development Association [credits totaling \\$684 million](#) for connecting the Ethiopian and Kenyan electrical grids. The following year, the African Development Bank announced a [\\$348 million loan](#) for the same project.

Conclusion

At this point, the government of Ethiopia appears to be in the driver's seat on the Gibe III project. Despite serious, unanswered questions about the effect of the dam on Lake Turkana and the many thousands of people who depend on the lake's waters, Ethiopia is likely to continue its progress toward an initial operating capability later this year. Agreements on mitigating measures are still theoretically possible, but their effects may be limited by the advanced state of the project.

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