

# The GLOCEPS

## Commentary Today

Security and Defence Pillar

### Increased Al-Shabaab attacks on LAPSSSET project jeopardizing regional integration

Dr John Mwangi & Denis Muniu



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The multi-billion dollar Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor project has the capacity to enhance economic development and promote regional integration in Eastern Africa. However, challenges such as inadequate financing, insecurity threats, and lack of political goodwill from member states such as Ethiopia and South Sudan, have slowed down completion of the project. This commentary therefore focuses on constant security threats from targeted attacks by Al-Shabaab (a terrorist organization operating in Somalia) as one of the key areas that needs to be addressed to ensure timely completion of the project.

The security threats, which involve kidnappings and assaults on workers and security officials, scare away investors, thereby derailing its completion. This emboldens the Al-Shabaab (AS) to increase pressure on Kenya to withdraw her military from the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). Consequently, the resultant loss of opportunities for economic

expansion is bound to jeopardize the envisaged regional integration benefits since LAPSSET is expected to open up new trade routes, reduce transport costs, promote investment, and create jobs.

The transport corridor, launched in 2012, connects Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia with the aim of intensifying seamless movement of goods, people, and services through a network of infrastructure. These include a port, crude oil pipeline, international airports, railway and road networks. It is intended to reduce the time and transport costs within the region, thus increasing trade and investment opportunities. For instance, the KES 310 billion Lamu port is positioned to become the regional trans-shipment hub rivaling other seaport hubs in Africa such as Djibouti and South Africa.

However, incidences of insecurity have delayed its completion, with member states such as South Sudan criticizing the interruptions. More than seven attacks to the LAPSSET were carried out between December 2022 and March 2023, resulting in loss of lives and destruction of

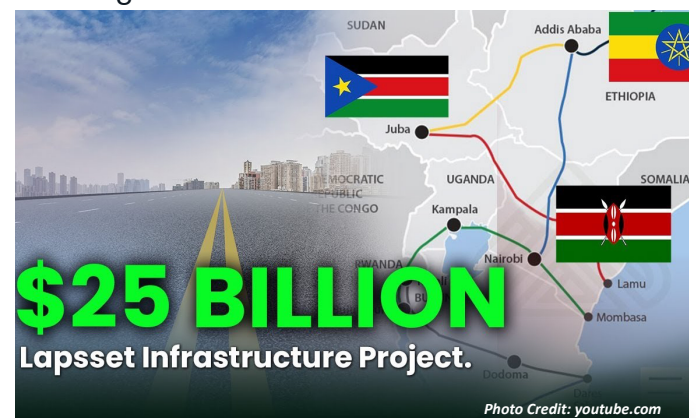


Photo Credit: youtube.com



expensive work equipment. Their modus operandi involves using Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and rocket-propelled grenades to stage guerilla attacks. The ambushes have, at times, occasioned suspension of construction works. For instance, in January 2023, construction works were suspended for six weeks after a convoy carrying workers escorted by military personnel was attacked. The delays, have adversely affected the infrastructure's ability to attract a wide range of users, though some of the facilities such as the 505km Isiolo–Moyale road are complete and operational.

These occurrences also scare away potential investors interested in financing various components of the LAPSSET. The infrastructure requires a lot of resources, which member states may not be able to provide. This necessitates the need for alternative means of financing, such as Public Private Partnerships (PPP). However, due to the prevailing security situation, a lot of high-level buy-in is required, as investors want a positive return on their investment. The loss of investor confidence, negatively impacts on project funding as they perceive the investments risks to be high.

Increased cost of doing business due to additional security measures that traders have to put in place influences them to seek cheaper alternative routes reducing the overall economic benefits of the project. These measures include hiring of private security personnel, purchasing of high insurance premiums, and installation of security cameras. The added security



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expenses result in increased transport costs for the movement of people, goods and services. Consequently, they are hesitant to use the corridor.

**In conclusion, AS assaults on LAPSSET have had negative impacts on its timely completion, hence adversely affecting projected outcomes of enhancing regional integration. As Al-Shabaab tries to consolidate its bases and seek haven in neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia, it is critical for member states to execute effective security measures to protect the infrastructure and its users. Regular appraisal and adaptation of emerging security challenges should be factored in as its implementation continues. Other measures should include increased placement of security personnel in strategic locations and escalating their training on countering IEDs. The Kenyan government should also improve its intelligence gathering and analysis capabilities through effective community policing to detect and respond better to potential infrastructural threats.**



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THE GLOBAL CENTRE FOR POLICY AND STRATEGY  
(GLOCEPS)  
Research | Knowledge | Influence  
Off Kiambu Road, Nairobi Kenya  
P.O. Box 27023-00100, Nairobi.  
Telephone: 0112401331  
Email: info@gloceps.org  
Web: www.gloceps.org

