



Figure 1 Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and African leaders at a joint conference in Yokohama during the Tokyo International Conference on African Development. | AFP-JJII

ENTHRONEMENT OF EMPEROR NARUHITO AIDS JAPAN'S PIVOT TO AFRICA

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The grand enthronement ceremony on October 22, 2019 in Tokyo Japan, showcased a change of guard highlighting history and cultural heritage as the handmaidens of civilization, prosperity and stability. This transition, from the Heisei era corresponding to the reign of Emperor Akihito (1989-2019) to the Reiwa era that began on May 1, 2019, is poised to deepen Japan's diplomacy in Africa.

The coronation of Japanese Emperor Naruhito on October 22, 2019 has shored up Japan's global diplomacy. It has also aided Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's pivot to Africa. Kenya's President Uhuru

Kenyatta was one of the few African leaders invited to witness the best of Japanese cultural heritage at the grand enthronement ceremony in Tokyo.

Coming in the wake of Emperor Akihito's decision to abdicate on April 30, 2019 after nearly 30 years on the Chrysanthemum Throne, the change of guard highlights history and cultural heritage as the handmaidens of civilization, prosperity and stability. "We, the people of Japan, revere Your Majesty as the symbol of the State and the unity of the people", said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe defining the role of the monarchy in Japanese polity.

The coronation ceremony came hard on the heels of the Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) hosted by Japan in Yokohama on August 28-30, 2019. The two events have raised Japan's global profile and prestige and are poised to expand its footprint in Africa.

Japan's new diplomatic push in Africa is discernible. Abe has made three trips to the continent since taking office in the late 2012, more than other Japanese Premier before him. In August 2016, he travelled to Kenya to attend the Sixth TICAD meeting in Nairobi, the first on the African soil.

During the conference, Abe pledged more than \$30 billion in Japanese investment to infrastructure projects across the continent over the next three years—the largest such commitment in TICAD's history. In TICAD 2019, Abe promised to continuously expand Japan's \$20 billion private-sector investment in Africa.

In the past, Japan's African policy has revolved around soft power diplomacy, mainly in the form of development assistance. However, under Abe, Tokyo's assistance is more and more directly linked to its core foreign-policy interests.

A key interest in East Africa is Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision, in which Africa plays an important role. FOIP is to Japan what the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is to China. Like Beijing's BRI, it seeks to promote a sustainable system of infrastructure, protect and uphold free sea lines of

communication, and improve connectivity across the Indian ocean.

TICAD meetings have always been the cornerstone of Japan's development assistance. As Japan pivots to Africa, it has been reconfigured to become a more powerful diplomatic tool than in the past. In 2016, the first TICAD was held in Kenya, on the African soil.

The 6th and 7th TICAD meetings have witnessed a diplomacy shifted from aid to trade, and from government to the private sector. Japan wants Africa to see it as a development partner rather than simply a donor. This shift reflects Japan's desire to forge closer ties with Africa's 54 countries.

However, domestic economic woes and a shrinking size of Japan's economy have limiting its ambitions. It is becoming harder and harder for Tokyo to compete with emerging powers especially China in terms of quantity of funding to Africa. As of 2017, its foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock in Africa stood at \$9 billion—about 20 percent that of China's FDI estimated at \$43 billion, and still growing. In 2018, Japanese exports to Africa sat at approximately \$7 billion compared to China's \$100 billion!

Tokyo's strategy out of this conundrum is to forge a common front with the United States' (estimated to be about \$50 billion in 2017) and like-minded countries such as France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and India to counter Beijing. Combined, Japan and its four partners have invested more than \$250 billion in Africa, a fivefold advantage over China.

Operationally, the focus of Japan's new economic diplomacy in Africa is twofold. First, Tokyo is appealing to Pan-Africanism, aligning its assistance to Africa's Agenda 2063—the long-term development vision adopted by the African Union in 2013.

With the adoption of the Continental Free Area in March 2018, Japan has moved to leverage its existing supply chains, high-tech innovation and manufacturing to promote regional integration among African businesses. Second, Japan is strengthening existing bilateral ties with Africa countries. Kenya is one of Japan's leading development partners in Africa. Here, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has primarily focused on supporting economic infrastructure, private sector development, renewable energy, agriculture, environment, Water, human resource development, and health. Tokyo's security footprint in Africa is also expanding. Its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) have maintained a base in Djibouti, their only foreign base. During his visit to Kenya, Abe committed Japan to enhance security ties with Africa, especially in countering terrorism and antipiracy efforts. He has also sought Africa's support for his 2015 security reforms aimed at loosening the restrictions on Tokyo's involvement in international peacekeeping and security missions. Since 2011, Japan has increased its contribution to peacekeeping missions, although its role is limited to the provision of technical expertise. Of

the around 400 of its troops, most are engineers, are in South Sudan.

Tokyo has for long lobbied for a permanent seat on the Security Council. In 2016, Abe managed to secure a joint statement from Japanese and 54 African leaders expressing a shared determination to "urgently reform" the UN, including the Security Council. In the 7th TICAD Summit, Japan sought an even stronger support for the UN reforms. Japan also won the support of Africa in its push for "rules-based" maritime order, a powerful diplomatic salvo in view of its maritime row with China in the East and South China Seas. But beyond this expression of symbolic solidarity, many African states have strong economic ties with China, which is vehemently opposes Japan joining the Security Council as a permanent member.

The 2019 Japan imperial transition from the *Heisei* era corresponding to the reign of Emperor Akihito (1989-2019) to the *Reiwa* era that began on May 1, 2019, is poised to deepen Japan's diplomacy in Africa.

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