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# Strategic Digest

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**The US plans January rollout of first projects to counter China's Belt and Road**

**The migrant crisis at Belarus-Poland border- a new method in hybrid war?**

**Egypt and the US conclude first strategic dialogue since 2015**

## The US plans January rollout of first projects to counter China's Belt and Road

The United States plans to invest in five to 10 large infrastructure projects around the world in January as part of a broader G-7 program to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative. As per a statement by the US State Department on 08 November, A U.S. delegation led by President Joe Biden's deputy national security adviser, Daleep Singh, identified at least 10 promising projects in Senegal and Ghana during a series of "listening tours" last week. Early in October, Singh also led an interagency delegation to Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama to hear directly from a range of Latin American stakeholders. As per the US State Department, these interagency delegations visit indicate Biden Administration's whole-of-government effort to implement the Build Back Better World Initiative (B3W) in a manner that is transparent, sustainable, adheres to high standards, and catalyzes the private sector where possible.



The US Officials have been meeting government and private-sector leaders as they hunt for projects to be funded under the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative launched by the G7 rich democracies in June 2021. As per the US State Department, plans could be finalized during a G7 meeting in December for a likely roll out in January 2022.

The US state department briefing highlighted that senior officials in Senegal and Ghana welcomed U.S. assurances that unlike China, the world's largest creditor, the United States would not require non-disclosure agreements or collateral agreements that could result in later seizure of ports or airports. The United States will offer developing countries "the full range" of U.S. financial tools, including equity stakes, loan guarantees, political insurance, grants and technical expertise to focus on climate, health, digital technology and gender equality, the US official told reporters. The effort is seeking to "identify flagship projects that could launch by the start of next year." Projects discussed included setting up a possible vaccine manufacturing hub for West Africa in Senegal, bolstering renewable energy supplies, boosting lending to women-owned businesses, and narrowing the digital divide.

In response, in a routine press briefing on 09 November 2021, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said there was "enormous space" for infrastructure cooperation. "Different initiatives don't offset or replace each other," Wang told reporters. "The world needs efforts to build bridges...we need to advance connectivity, not decoupling."

Chinese state media has argued that the US B3W infrastructure projects are financially unfeasible, bound to fail. As per global times, a Senegal government source has indicated that the infrastructure projects suggested by the US

delegation have almost nothing to do with real "infrastructure." As per Chinese experts, "the US and its Western allies are just talking big" and "without cooperation from China, the US plan is unlikely to be successful."

### **The migrant crisis at Belarus-Poland border- a new method in hybrid war?**

A serious humanitarian crisis has been unfolding on the Belarus-Poland border since early November. Thousands of people, many of them Kurds arriving from the Middle East, are camping at the border with Poland, enduring freezing conditions in the hope of crossing into the EU. Crowds have tried to cut through a barbed-wire fence to enter Poland this week - only to be pushed back by Polish border guards and the army.



Poland is refusing to allow migrants to cross and has accused Minsk of luring them into Belarus and further pushing them in Poland. In a statement released for Poland's Independence Day on 11 November, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said his country was facing a "new kind of war" whose "ammunition is civilians". European Union officials on Wednesday

accused Belarus of state-sponsored "trafficking" of human lives by luring desperate migrants to the edge of the EU. Countries bordering Belarus on Thursday warned the migrant crisis on the European Union's eastern borders could escalate into a military confrontation while Ukraine said it would deploy thousands of more troops to reinforce its frontier. Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia said Belarus posed serious threats to European security by deliberately escalating its "hybrid attack" using migrants to retaliate for EU sanctions.

Last year, the EU and the US has imposed sanctions on Belarus in response to a fierce crackdown by Belarusian authorities on political opponents of President Alexander Lukashenko. Belarus was rocked by months of massive protests following the August 2020 election that gave authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko a sixth term in office. The opposition and the West rejected the result as a sham.

Those restrictions were toughened after an incident in May 2021 when a passenger jet flying from Greece to Lithuania was diverted by Belarus to Minsk, where authorities arrested dissident journalist Raman Pratasevich. The EU called it air piracy and barred Belarusian carriers from its skies and cut imports of the country's top commodities, including petroleum products and potash, an ingredient in fertilizer.

The crisis has been brewing since early this year when long-time Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko reacted furiously to EU sanctions. Angered by the toughened measures announced in May 2021, President Lukashenko hit back by announcing Belarus would stop trying to prevent undocumented migrants and refugees from reaching the EU, arguing the bloc's sanctions deprived his government of the funds needed to do so. Planes carrying migrants from Iraq, Syria and other countries began arriving in Belarus, and they soon headed for the borders with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

Poland has accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of masterminding the unfolding crisis. But Moscow, which Lukashenko's government depends on heavily as an ally and creditor, has denied involvement. Russia has instead accused Poland and its fellow EU member states of attempting to "strangle" Belarus, which the Kremlin sees as a security buffer against the bloc and the US-headed transatlantic NATO military alliance on its western flank. Amid growing tensions, Russia has deployed its paratroops as part of "snap" drills testing its combat readiness "on an unfamiliar landing site" in an area close to the Poland Belarus border.

Under pressure from the EU, airlines have begun to curb the flow into Belarus of migrants hoping to reach the European Union. Since midnight of 12 October, Turkish authorities have stopped all citizens of Iraq, Syria and Yemen from flying from Turkey to Belarus, until further notice. Turkey's Civil Aviation Authority said it was because of illegal migrant crossings from Belarus into the European Union.

With tens of thousands of soldiers from Belarus, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia dispatched to the border, there is no indication of political negotiations towards resolving this growing humanitarian crisis. The Baltic nations bordering Belarus fear the crisis could escalate into a military confrontation.

### **Egypt and the US conclude first strategic dialogue since 2015**

Egypt and the United States wrapped up their two-day "strategic dialogue" in Washington on Tuesday, pledging to continue talks over human rights, Egypt's water security and resolving regional conflicts. The talks, led by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry, are the first under the Biden administration after a hiatus of six years. At a news conference alongside Shoukry on Monday, Blinken said diplomats from Egypt and the United States would "cover a wide range of issues" during two days of talks on Monday and Tuesday, including the military takeover in Sudan and efforts to revive the nuclear deal with Iran.

The US-Egypt strategic dialogue was established in 1998 during the administration of former US President Bill Clinton. There was a pause from 2009 to 2015 with the beginning of the administration of former US President Barack Obama and the beginning of the Arab uprisings in 2011.



economic and commercial affairs, education, cultural issues, consular affairs, human rights, justice and law enforcement, and defence and security.

“The United States expressed its appreciation for Egypt’s leadership in mediating solutions to regional conflicts, notably in promoting peace and ending violence in Gaza,” the statement said. Egypt, which shares a border with Gaza, facilitated the truce in May that ended the 11-day conflict between Israel and the militant group Hamas and is working to secure a longer-term cease-fire between the two sides. The United States also “reiterated President Biden’s support for Egypt’s water security,” and the two sides called for the resumption of African Union-mediated negotiations over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia are embroiled in a dispute over the GERD, which Addis Ababa is building on the Blue Nile, the main tributary of the Nile River. Cairo worries that the multibillion-dollar mega-dam could dangerously restrict its freshwater supplies.

The joint statement also noted “the US role in economic development in Egypt and its supply of defence equipment.” Egypt has received \$1.3 billion in foreign military financing annually from the United States since 1987, making it the second-largest recipient of US military aid after Israel.

The joint press conference of the US secretary of State and Egyptian Foreign Minister saw some divergences on Human rights issues between the two countries. While Blinken welcomed Egypt’s National Strategy for Human Rights and the lifting of its state of emergency in place since 2017, he also highlighted that Egypt had more work to do on human rights amid calls for Washington to take a tougher stance on Cairo's crackdown on political opponents during meetings in with Egyptian officials. Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry suggested some resistance to Washington's push, saying human rights must be balanced with other considerations and emphasizing the importance of stability. The US State Department in September had announced the United States would withhold \$130 million worth of military aid from Egypt until President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government takes action on human rights. Egypt has also not been invited to Biden's flagship Summit for Democracy scheduled in December 2021.