



## RESOURCE SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of  
Changes to the Global Strategic Environment

# Resource Security Watch No. 19

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**Related Categories:** Africa; Southeast Asia

## A KENYAN-SOMALI OIL CONFLICT

Tensions between East African neighbors Kenya and Somalia are on the rise. Earlier this year, Kenya recalled its ambassador to Somalia and expelled Somalia's ambassador to the country after accusing Mogadishu of auctioning oil and gas exploration blocks in disputed maritime territory in the Indian Ocean. Somalia, however, maintains that this is all a misunderstanding; according to officials in Mogadishu, maps presented to investors at a recent conference contained Kenyan claims as a marketing exercise rather than as part of an official sale. Kenya, however, doesn't believe the rationale – and for good reason. The two neighbors have both submitted claims to about 100,000 km of sea floor, which contain large amounts of natural gas and oil. Somalia's offshore oil reserves along the Indian Ocean coast could be as much as 100 billion barrels, a treasure trove that Kenya is eager to access.

The spat has potentially significant geopolitical consequences. Kenya is a major contributor to the fight against the al-Shabaab terrorist group, providing more than 3,600 troops to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). If Somalia goes through with selling parts of the disputed territories, however, there is a good chance Kenya will pull its troops out of AMISOM, thereby crippling the fight against one of Africa's most potent jihadist actors. (*Voice of America*, February 13, 2019; Reuters, February 17, 2019; Institute for Security Studies, March 1, 2019)

## SOUTH SUDAN'S LOOMING FAMINE

According to a new report from three UN agencies, more than half of South Sudan's population is suffering from extreme hunger, and over seven million people could face severe food shortages between May and July of this year, during which time rainfall and harvests typically decline. South Sudan has been in a five-year civil war following its successful fight for independence from Sudan. This conflict has depleted resources for many, and due to years of water shortage, food supplies continue to be catastrophically low. Because the conflict continues, many young children are being used as soldiers, and more young people are drifting toward affiliation the military – a dynamic that has depleted funds and food and made the conflict worse. Greater humanitarian aid is now needed to curb the number of citizens dying from malnourishment, the studies state. (*Voice of America*, February 22, 2019; *Globe Post*, February 22, 2019)

## SEEKING CLARITY IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

On March 5th, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad both issued public calls for territorial disputes in the South China Sea to be resolved through international law rather than the use of force. The South China Sea remains a highly contested area, with multiple ASEAN member countries claiming swathes of territory there. China, however, has generalized claims to nearly the entire South China Sea – a situation that has impeded regional nations in their efforts to more fully exploit regional resources. Beijing has likewise been aggressively pushing its dominance in the area, asserting claims to man-made islands in the middle of the sea, as well as small islets close to the territorial waters of Philippines and Malaysia. This has caused a spike in resource disputes amid competing claims of sovereignty and associated exclusive economic zones. Both Malaysian and Filipino fishermen have been repeatedly harassed by their Chinese counterparts, with Chinese ships going so far as to block passage for Filipino vessels to sandbanks off an island where traditional fishing grounds are located. Manila and Kuala Lumpur are now seeking greater clarity from international law; both countries have requested formal Codes of Conducts from China, so at least a temporary truce can be maintained. (*New York Times*, March 5, 2019; *CNN*, March 7, 2019; Associated Press, March 7, 2019)

## THE GRISLY BUSINESS OF BLOOD DIAMONDS

At its upcoming 74th General Assembly meeting this Fall, the United Nations plans to classify Zimbabwean diamonds as conflict gems – a designation with potentially far-reaching political and trade implications for the southern African state. The international organization is responding to mounting evidence that diamonds have been used to finance President Emmerson Mnangagwa's suppression of domestic dissent, which killed at least 17 individuals during recent protests over the rising cost of living in the country. Conflict diamonds have become a valuable commodity for extremists as well; due to their size and ease of transport, terrorists have historically relied on smuggling diamonds and other precious gems to generate currency through informal means.

Whether the designation goes forward, meanwhile, depends greatly on Russia and China. Companies from both countries are currently looking to partner with the Zimbabwean government in hopes of exploiting the diamonds, and Moscow and Beijing could lobby against the determination as a result. (Bulawayo *24 News*, March 15, 2019; *ZoomZimbabwe*, March 15, 2019)