



# Africa Political Monitor No. 1

March 19, 2020 **Jacob McCarty**

**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; International Economics and Trade; Europe; Israel; Balkans; North Africa; East Africa; West Africa

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Africa Political Monitor, the American Foreign Policy Council's newest e-bulletin. Edited by AFPC Research Fellow Jacob McCarty, the Africa Political Monitor is designed to track economic, political, and security trends on the African continent. You will continue to receive the next several issues of the Africa Political Monitor via this list. Should you wish to subscribe to the Monitor directly, please click [here](#), and it will email us your request.

## **ON ISRAEL, TRUMP MAKES AN AFRICAN PLAY**

The Trump administration is looking to enhance relationships in Africa as a way of supporting one of its signature foreign policy initiatives. In accepting a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Sudanese Sovereignty Council is likely signaling to Washington that the new government is willing to expand its diplomatic ties with Jerusalem. Likewise, the U.S. government is reportedly considering formally acknowledging the dominion of the Moroccan government over the territory of the Western Sahara in exchange for more formal ties between Rabat and Jerusalem. Both moves would support the foreign policy goals of the two African countries: the Sudanese Sovereignty Council hopes to end the country's designation as a state sponsor of terror, while international Moroccan governance of the Western Sahara would aid the kingdom's domestic security and economic goals. (*The Hill*, February 12, 2020)

## **CORONAVIRUS IMPACTS EAST AFRICAN SHIPPING IMPORTS**

For two months straight, cargo ships from China have failed to dock in Mombasa, Kenya amid concerns over the impact and potential spread of coronavirus. While the embargo has arguably bolstered the continent's so-far successful mitigation of the virus, the implications are broader because Mombasa Port is the major avenue through which goods from China reach East Africa. As a result, the prices for these goods - including cosmetics, electronics, clothing, machinery, and regional staple diet consumables - may surge in the region. Those soaring prices, in turn, will impact domestic traders on the continent. (*The East African*, March 2, 2020)

## **THE GERN CONTINUES TO ROIL EGYPTIAN-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS**

The Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERN) has long served as a fault-line in relations between Ethiopia and Egypt, and it continues to serve as a major point of friction between the two countries. Most recently, Addis Ababa has announced that it plans to skip the upcoming round of talks with Cairo, brokered by the United States, over the \$4 billion, decades-in-the-making dam construction project. The GERN is of vital interest to both nations. Egypt wants less water to flow through the dam so long as it faces severe future water shortages. Ethiopia, meanwhile, is in the midst of an economic boom, and hopes to use greater water flows via the dam to fuel development projects using hydroelectric power. (*Voice of America*, February 26, 2020)

## **SIERRA LEONE ENDS RECOGNITION OF KOSOVO**

Calling it potentially "premature," the government of Sierra Leone has withdrawn formal recognition of Kosovo's statehood. The move was taken in response to an international, years-long lobbying effort by the Serbian government to isolate the self-declared independent country from the international community. Sierra Leone's decision is significant, because now the plurality of UN member states no longer consider Kosovo to be independent from Serbia - and suggest gaining such recognition will be an uphill battle for Pristina. What is as yet unclear, however, is what benefits - diplomatic or otherwise - Sierra Leone will receive from Serbia for this reversal of stance. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 3, 2020)

## **UNPRECEDENTED LOCUST SWARMS THREATEN AFRICAN RESOURCE STABILITY**

Locust swarms, reportedly the size of major cities, continue to plague rural farmland in East Africa and Ethiopia. What's worse, increased breeding by the insects and swarming during the region's wet season could exponentially expand the size of these swarms. Other countries in the Red Sea and Gulf of Oman have either been directly (as is the case of Yemen and Pakistan) or indirectly (as in the case of Saudi Arabia) impacted as well. Moreover, because the severity of the locust horde is tied to weather conditions and the frequency of cyclones in the region, the worsening effects of climate change could signal that this is not a one-off occurrence. (*Bloomberg*, February 17, 2020)

## **THE KREMLIN'S MILITARY PLAY IN LIBYA**

Hoping to capitalize on the ongoing security crisis in Libya, mercenary companies with ties to the Russian government are backing the Libyan National Army (LNA). Headed by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, the LNA has been waging a civil war since 2014 against the internationally-recognized government in Tripoli. Interested in extending its foothold into Africa via Libya, the Russian government has so far provided 235 mercenaries to the LNA in the hopes that Haftar, should he fully conquer the country, will help provide the Kremlin with a preferential economic foothold in the North African nation. (*Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2020)