



RESOURCE SECURITY WATCH

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

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October 13, 2020 **Annie Swingen, Thomas Falci**

THE AIR FORCE EYES THE ARCTIC

The first-ever U.S. polar strategy - unveiled by the White House this summer - has further solidified the role of the U.S. Air Force (USAF) in the Arctic. The directive, encapsulated in a "Memorandum on Safeguarding U.S. National Interests in the Arctic and Antarctic Regions," outlines four main pillars for military operations in the region: power projection, cooperation with allies and partners, vigilance in all domains, and preparedness. In keeping with these priorities, the USAF is now stepping up nuclear-capable bomber flights over the Arctic. A June sortie, for instance, saw two American bombers fly north of the Arctic Circle and rendezvous with both UK and Norwegian fighter aircraft.

The expanded military focus is very much a product of strategic necessity. Russia has prioritized the region for years, and is continuing its military buildup there. China, for its part, has signaled its interest in the faster shipping routes that access to the Arctic provides. The new U.S. strategy is intended to respond to these geopolitical developments, including by enhancing the ability of the USAF to frequently reposition assets in the Arctic. The primary challenge for U.S. military planners, however, is the lack of adequate existing infrastructure in the region, since highway systems, weather forecasting, communications, and threat detection and tracking are all central to the new strategy. (*Air Force Magazine*, September 1, 2020)

CORONAVIRUS AND GLOBAL FOOD INSECURITY

COVID-19 continues to impact the most vulnerable segments of the world population. Medical estimates suggest that the pervasiveness of "wasting" among children under five years old could increase by 14.3% as a result of COVID-19's repercussions on worldwide food security. Among the stressors driving this trend is a spike in food prices globally, which has put added pressure on many families already struggling to afford foodstuffs. Those rising food costs are a product of, among other things, the new challenges that the global food transportation sector now faces, such as difficulties moving between countries due to COVID-19 restrictions and higher instances of government corruption.

Additionally, food insecurity among children has been compounded by the shuttering of schools worldwide - which previously offered minors their most reliable daily meal - as well as by soaring unemployment that has left affected parents unable to feed their dependents. Lastly, COVID-19 has made it more difficult for international aid organizations to operate in developing nations. What's more, many of the countries facing severe malnutrition are also plagued with corruption, non-COVID-19 related diseases, and domestic instability - conditions that make it even more difficult for families there to obtain the support they require. (*New York Times*, September 11, 2020)

GOLD MINING IN SOUTH AFRICA EXPERIENCES A TEMPORARY REVIVAL

Recent months have seen a dramatic rise in global gold prices as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, and the trend has provided a lifeline for South Africa's ailing gold mining industry. In 2020 alone, gold is predicted to increase in value by 25%, driving a surge in gold mine activity in the country. However, this jump, observers say, is not expected to last long, and is unlikely to result in the long-term, large-scale projects required to revive the declining industry, which has been plagued by a variety of ills (including high mortality rates for gold mine workers) that has resulted in one of the highest costs for mining an ounce of gold in the world. (*Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2020)

AFRICAN ENERGY PROJECTS GAIN MOMENTUM

Amid burgeoning population growth, several African nations have recently signed agreements or secured funding for energy-related projects. In Nigeria, the government has reportedly "secured \$6.15 billion to fund major power sector infrastructure projects in a bid to expand its production output to 25,000 MW by 2025." The projects are part of Nigeria's new "Economic Recovery and Growth Plan," which includes new initiatives on power, electrification and transmission. Nor is Nigeria alone. Uganda and Tanzania recently inked an agreement green-lighting the construction of the 1,445-kilometer East Africa Oil Pipeline. The estimated \$3.5 billion project will, when completed, become the longest electrically-heated crude oil pipeline in the world. (*Africa Oil & Power*, September 15, 2020; *Pumps Africa*, September 14, 2020)