



Africa Political Monitor No. 8

November 6, 2020 **Jacob McCarty**

Related Categories: China; East Africa; Europe; North Africa; West Africa

THE RESTIVE UGANDAN-SOUTH SUDANESE BORDER

Tensions between Uganda and its northern neighbor are escalating. In late October, two South Sudanese soldiers and two members of the Ugandan armed forces were killed in a clash along the common border between the two countries. The skirmish, which follows a similar incident earlier this year in which four South Sudanese soldiers were killed, stems from a long-running border squabble between Kampala and Juba dating back to at least 2005. At issue is the question of border demarcation, as the exact territory controlled by each country has never been completely delineated. The border region itself, meanwhile, remains insecure, with a number of rebel groups - including those participating in South Sudan's ongoing civil war - active in the area. To date, however, the skirmishes have not led to a wider conflict between the two countries. (*Voice of America*, October 29, 2020)

UK, CHINA JOCKEY FOR POSITION IN BENIN

As part of a growing post-"Brexit" focus on Africa, the British government is deepening its ties to Benin. As part of this effort, the government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently announced a massive £100 million (\$129.5 million) road project in the country. But the British initiative faces stiff competition from another global power, China, which has invested more than five times that sum (a total of \$683 million) in the West African nation between 2000 and 2018.

The competing investments represent a microcosm of unfolding British-Chinese competition in the third world. In this contest, British officials are banking on local nations souring on Chinese investment after years of unequal deals that have resulted in Chinese gains at African expense. Local nations have learned the "real price" of China's involvement, Conservative MP Tom Tugendhat, chair of the House of Commons foreign affairs committee, has said. "You thought [the investment] was free but it turns out it's not free." Tugendhat and other British policymakers hope that this situation will afford the UK a favorable foothold on the continent. (*Politico*, October 25, 2020)

HOSTILE WATERS FOR CHINESE FISHING

The Liberian National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA) has rejected applications by six Chinese super trawlers to fish off the West African country's coast. The decision was driven by both conservation and regional concerns; fishing accounts for roughly 37,000 jobs in the country, while the Chinese vessels could overfish local waters, thereby potentially disrupting the diets of the 80% of Liberians who include fish as a regular staple. The NaFAA decision follows a similar move by the government of nearby Senegal, which has likewise attempted to throw up hurdles to Chinese fishing in its coastal waters. (*Front Page Africa*, October 28, 2020)

SUDAN'S PEACE PUSH

The Sudanese transitional government is kicking its efforts to rehabilitate its international image into overdrive. In late October, President Trump announced that the U.S. would initiate steps to remove Sudan from the State Sponsors of Terror (SST) list - where it has been for nearly three decades - after Khartoum agreed to pay \$335 million in compensation to the families of victims of the 2000 USS Cole bombing. That development was followed, in quick succession, by news that Sudan had agreed to normalize ties with Israel, making it the third majority-Muslim state to do so in recent weeks. (*CNN*, October 23, 2020; *Al-Jazeera*, October 31, 2020)

ETHIOPIA'S LOOMING CIVIL WAR THREATENS TO UNDO EAST AFRICA

A late night assault by the federal government in Ethiopia was the opening salvo of a burgeoning civil war that now threatens to engulf Africa's second-most populous country. On November 3rd, the government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed began a military assault on Tigray, the country's semi-autonomous northernmost region and the hub of Ethiopia's most powerful armed opposition group (and former national controlling party), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The precipitating event for the hostilities is currently unclear, with recriminations flying back and forth. But tension between the TPLF and the current government has been building for some time. When Ahmed formed the "Prosperity Party," a coalition of the country's three remaining political parties, late last year, the TPLF was the only group not to join. And after Ahmed canceled elections due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the TPLF defiantly announced regional elections in their place.

A civil war in Ethiopia could be nothing short of a seismic event in an already-fragile region. Neighboring Sudan's transitional government is already struggling to maintain a grip on local political stability, South Sudan is in the throes of its own civil war, the Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Ugandan heads of state are exhibiting increasingly autocratic tendencies, and Mozambique and Somalia are each attempting to stave off continued attacks by extremist *jihadi* organizations. (*National Public Radio*, November 4, 2020; *Foreign Policy*, November 5, 2020)