



Africa Political Monitor No. 10

January 4, 2021 **Jacob McCarty**

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Warfare; Resource Security; Central Africa; China; East Africa; North Africa; Russia; Turkey

UGANDA'S ELECTRICITY, SOUTH SUDAN'S BENEFIT

Uganda is using its energy surplus to light up the region. Uganda has joined with Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in a consortium known as the Eastern Africa Power Pool, "in which partner states within the region interconnect their electricity grids to take advantage of excess capacity." Ugandan energy companies currently generate double of local demand, and even more capacity is expected once the country's mega-project known as the Karuma Hydro Power Dam is built. The principal beneficiary of this trend is South Sudan; the two countries have inked a new deal for Ugandan state energy firms to export electricity to South Sudan as part of larger regional energy plans already underway (including oil shipments to both South Sudan and Rwanda, as well as a crude oil pipeline from Eastern Uganda to Tanzania). (*Daily Monitor*, December 9, 2020)

BEIJING EYES CONGO'S MINERAL WEALTH

The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has given the green light for the sale of another mine to the Chinese government. Controlling interest in the Kisafu project, an undeveloped copper and cobalt mine previously overseen by Arizona-based Freeport McMoRan, was sold in November to China's state-owned China Molybdenum Co. for \$550 million. The acquisition is a boon for Beijing, which has for years sought to expand its control and access to rare earth mineral reserves in Central Africa. Roughly two thirds of the world's supply of cobalt – a strategic mineral used in the production of virtually all electronic devices – comes from the DRC alone, where the Chinese government currently controls 8 of the country's 14 cobalt extraction sites. (*Bloomberg*, December 12, 2020; *Mining Technology*, December 15, 2020)

ERITREA REPORTEDLY JOINS ETHIOPIAN CONFLICT...

The U.S. intelligence community believes Eritrea is now involved in the Ethiopian civil war. Citing "satellite images, intercepted communications and anecdotal reports," unnamed diplomats have discussed a "growing consensus" in Washington that the Eritrean military is now actively fighting the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region. While both the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments have denied the claims, several sources have confirmed that elements of the Ethiopian military were already using sites in Eritrea to deploy soldiers to the conflict. If confirmed, Eritrean involvement would represent a further escalation of violence a civil conflict which has already displaced thousands. The Ethiopian government and the TPLF have been bitter enemies since the time of the 1998 war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, when the TPLF was in charge in Addis Ababa. Confirmation of Eritrea's participation in the violence has been difficult, however, as the Ethiopian government has still not lifted its regional media blackout and has stonewalled international aid organizations attempting to access Tigray. (Reuters, December 8, 2020; *Guardian*, December 21, 2020)

...AS BORDER FRICTION WITH SUDAN FLARES ANEW

The Sudanese military, meanwhile, is capitalizing on the Ethiopian government's divided focus. The Sudanese army's Deputy Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Khaled Abdin al-Shami, recently claimed that his military's forces were quickly gaining control over the contested al-Fashqa border region between the two countries. While international mediation previously deemed al-Fashqa, which borders Ethiopia, to officially be part of Sudan, Ethiopian farmers and militia members have long been the area's primary occupants. While the Sudanese military is fighting for control over al-Fashqa, its transitional government is simultaneously involved in talks with its Ethiopian counterparts to relocate farmers in the region. (*Arab News*, December 29, 2020; *Africa News*, December 31, 2020)

RUSSIA AND RWANDA SEND TROOPS TO THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Unrest surrounding the presidential election in the Central African Republic (CAR) is drawing international attention. In recent weeks, Russian and Rwandan troops were sent to the CAR under the guise of stabilizing the country and assisting the incumbent government during its most recent election, which took place in late December. While the Rwandan government more readily admitted this role, citing concerns over local organized rebel groups undermining the vote, Russia initially denied any involvement. However, multiple sources have confirmed that roughly 300 Russian soldiers are currently in the central African country acting as instructors of government military forces while also fighting rebel groups. Relations between the current governments in the CAR and Rwanda have recently warmed after a coup ousted former President Francois Bozizé in 2013. Bozizé is now the alleged figurehead of the assorted rebel groups fighting against government forces. (Reuters, December 21, 2020; *ABC News*, December 22, 2020)

TURKEY MOVES AHEAD WITH DRONE SALES TO TUNISIA

Tunis may finally get its long-awaited drones from Ankara. After years of delayed sales and official hesitation, Tunisia has signed a new contract with Turkey's state-aligned Turkish Aerospace Industries for the purchase of three *Anka-S* drones for a price tag of \$80 million. Also bundled in this package are control stations for the drones and training for dedicated pilots and personnel in the Tunisian Air Force. Funding for the sale will come from a loan provided to the Tunisian government by Türk Eximbank, a development lending institution based in Ankara. The sale reflects a larger trend in Tunisian policy; over the past year, roughly \$150 million has been spent by the Tunisian government in procuring military technology, while key political figures (like Assembly Speaker Rachid Ghannouchi) are reported to have ties to the Turkish government. (*Defense Post*, December 17, 2020)