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Related Categories: Arms Control and Proliferation; Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Caucasus; East Africa; North Africa; South Africa; West Africa

BAKU'S AFRICAN ARMS TRADE

Azerbaijani weapons, it seems, are playing a role in Africa. According to the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, the government of Congo-Brazzaville has received more than 500 tons of weapons, ranging from mortars to rockets, from Azerbaijani manufacturers since 2015. Additionally, the Saudi government "was listed as a 'sponsoring party' on several cargo manifests," indicating that Riyadh was possibly aware of the weapons trafficking, or paid for the weapons outright. Specifically, the Saudi government was a signatory to these manifests between 2016 and 2017 - around the time the Kingdom was vetting Congo-Brazzaville as a potential OPEC member. The weapons, moreover, have had the effect of preserving the *status quo* in Brazzaville. Denis Sassou Nguesso, who has served as the country's president since 1997, has been able to retain power largely by virtue of his well-armed Republican Guard. (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, February 22, 2021)

EGYPT MOVES FORWARD WITH RAIL LINK TO SUDAN...

Egypt and Sudan are forging a railway connection. Last month, government officials representing both countries participated in a series of discussions covering infrastructure projects and bilateral commercial diplomacy. Among the topics showcased during the discussion was a notional plan to build a 900km railway linking the two countries. The project, which gets underway this July, is expected to take roughly three years to complete and cost between \$250 million and \$1.19 billion to build.

The effort is part of the larger planned Cairo-Cape Town Road - an ambitious rail project that will, in theory, link Egypt to South Africa through a nearly 6,400 route that stretches across nine countries. The Egypt-Sudan leg is anticipated to boost bilateral trade by nearly \$900 million in annual trade upon completion. The plan also advances short term goals for both countries; Egypt hopes to build on regional relationships by forging infrastructure pacts with neighboring countries, while Sudan is in desperate need of economic activity and investment. (*al-Monitor*, March 24, 2021; *Arab News*, April 12, 2021)

...WHILE SIGNING AN INTELLIGENCE SHARING DEAL WITH UGANDA

The Ugandan and Egyptian militaries are set to formally start sharing intelligence. Out of mutual concern over the development of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the Uganda People's Defence Force's (UPDF) Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence and the Egyptian Intelligence Department publicly signed an agreement to share information "on a regular basis." The memorandum reflects a shift in public posture for Uganda, which "has historically opposed Egypt's attempts to exercise control over hydropower projects in upstream countries." It also may signal a more confrontational posture by Cairo vis-a-vis nearby Ethiopia, which is building the dam; last summer, the Egyptian government carried out the first known intra-African cyber attack against Ethiopia during negotiations over the GERD. (Reuters, April 8, 2021)

SOME CLARITY ON TIGRAY

After months of denials regarding any Eritrean military presence in the restive region of Tigray, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has publicly acknowledged the presence - but indicated that the forces were now leaving. Since the outbreak of violence in November, both Ahmed and his Eritrean counterpart, President Isais Afwerki, have downplayed any claims that Eritrean soldiers were participating in the budding Ethiopian civil war. Their denials persisted despite mounting evidence from the United Nations, independent journalists, international human rights groups, the European Union, and the U.S. intelligence community. The belated news of Eritrea's involvement, however, is hardly surprising; the Eritrean government has long sought to bring about an end to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the *de facto* governing body of semi-autonomous region, which it views as a mortal foe. (*New York Times*, March 26, 2021)

A FUROR OVER FRENCH COUNTERTERRORISM

France may have committed war crimes in Mali. A United Nations inquiry has found the French military guilty of killing a fifth of all attendees at a wedding in Mali - 19 civilians in total. France has denied the accusations, instead claiming that the January attack was directed at an "armed terrorist group." The United Nations report on the incident, however, states that only "about five armed people" of the roughly hundred or so in attendance are thought to have been affiliated with al-Qaeda. "The group affected by the strike was overwhelmingly composed of civilians who are protected persons under international humanitarian law," the UN has said.

The incident raises new questions about France's counterterrorism approach in Africa. The French government currently has roughly 5,100 soldiers deployed throughout the Sahel as part of "Operation Barkhane," where they are active alongside troops from seven other European countries and the G5 Sahel nations. The effort has met with criticism from locals as well as international human rights organizations, all of whom have accused "Barkhane" participants of human rights abuses. The initiative, however, seeks to solve a pressing problem; over the past two years, the Sahel has seen the greatest increase in activity by terror organizations of any region in the world. (*BBC News*, March 30, 2021)