AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY COUNCIL

Africa Political Monitor No. 18

April 26, 2022 **Jordan Savage**

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Science and Technology; Resource Security; Central Africa ; China; East Africa; Europe; North Africa; Russia; Ukraine

FRANCE RETHINKS ITS AFRICAN FOOTPRINT
Amid ongoing instability in West Africa, the French government is reconfiguring its military presence on the continent. French President Emmanuel Macron announced this Spring that his administration was withdrawing its contingent of 2,400 troops from Mali, "the epicenter of violence in the Sahel," after a decade of sustained deployment there. The forces will migrate to neighboring Niger, where they will continue the country's long-running counterterrorism mission. The shift, announced in February, is expected to take four to six months.

The change, experts say, is political in nature – and reflects a souring of ties between Paris and Bamako following the latter's May 2021 coup, which saw democratically-elected president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita deposed by a military junta. "[A]t the core of France's withdrawal is the belief that Mali's transitional government is an untenable counterterrorism partner and that it is unwilling or unable to address the growing web of security and governance issues in the country," note Marielle Harris, Catrina Doxsee and Jared Thompson of the Center for Strategic & International Studies. Islamism continues to plague the region, with deadly raids and the forced implementation of sharia law, and many fear this departure could lead to more terrorist attacks and greater instability in the region. (Reuters, February 18, 2022; CSIS, March 2, 2022)

MEDIATION IN SUDAN IS KEY TO EGYPT'S SECURITY...
Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi is stepping up his efforts to alleviate the political crisis gripping his country's southern neighbor. In February, Khartoum played host to an Egyptian diplomatic delegation which held a series of meetings with assorted Sudanese political parties. The trip was an effort by Sisi's government to break a deadlock which has persisted since an October 2021 coup by the country's military. The reasons for Egypt's interest are clear. Cairo "wants to help settle the crisis created by the military coup, as Sudan entered a dangerous turning point that directly affects Egypt," notes Al-Monitor. Among Egypt's priorities are the re-opening of a major trade route connecting the two countries, as well as closer cooperation between the two in their joint opposition to Ethiopia's controversial GERD hydrological project on the Nile. (Al-Monitor, February 22, 2022)

...AS KHARTOUM LEANS TOWARD MOSCOW
All eyes may currently be on Russia's war in Ukraine, but the Kremlin is making major gains in Africa. Last month, against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis, a delegation of Sudanese leaders traveled to Moscow for meetings with Russian government officials to discuss national security and politics. The meetings, which Sudanese officials billed as "productive," were designed to secure the Kremlin's support for a range of Sudanese priorities, including education and combating terrorism. Also discussed were long-standing plans to open up a Russian naval base on the Red Sea. Back in 2020, Russia's government came to terms with Sudanese leaders on the establishment of a naval base capable of accommodating nuclear-powered vessels – a critical objective that would help expand Russian influence in the region. Those plans appear to still be in effect, despite the African country's current political turbulence. (Africa News, March 3, 2022)

CONGO MOVES TO REGAIN CONTROL OVER CHINESE-RUN MINE
In the latest blow to Chinese strategic interests on the continent, a court in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has appointed a temporary administrator to manage the Chinese-run Tenke Fungurume mine. The decision follows a nearly year-long dispute between shareholders in the project over the disposition of copper and cobalt reserves. Congo is a major repository of rare earth elements, and China currently controls 70 percent of its mining sector – a situation that the government in Kinshasa is attempting to rectify. The creation of a commission, and the subsequent appointment of an administrator, are part of a larger governmental plan to limit Chinese investments in the region and roll back Beijing's current stake in the country. (Reuters, March 1, 2022)

CHINA'S DIGITAL SILK ROAD COMES TO KENYA
In recent years, China has dramatically expanded its outreach to Africa in the technological sphere, with the country's "national champion" firms making headway in markets across the continent. Beijing's latest bid in this domain is an undersea cable to Kenya. The "Pakistan and East Africa Connecting Europe (PEACE) Cable" is designed to stretch from Asia to Africa and then on to France. It represents the first part of the larger "2Africa" cable that the Chinese are looking to complete by 2024. Once completed, it will be "one of the biggest undersea projects in the world." The PEACE Cable formally reached the Kenyan capital, Mombasa, in late March, ushering a new phase of connectivity for the African nation – and inaugurating a new tool of Beijing's digital soft power on the continent.

These gains are increasingly raising concerns in Western capitals. The U.S., for instance, has expressed worries over Beijing's growing control of the internet in Africa (Huawei now owns an estimated 70 percent of Africa's 4G networks) because of the potential for China to monopolize the networks as well as use them for espionage. (Voice of America, March 30, 2022)

© 2024 - American Foreign Policy Council