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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; International Economics and Trade; Islamic Extremism; Africa; East Africa; West Africa

A CONTESTED VOTE IN KENYA

Kenya's former Prime Minister, Ralia Odinga, who lost in the country's recent presidential election, is refusing to accept the result of the August vote, claiming there is "neither a legally and validly declared winner nor president-elect." Despite the fact that the country's Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission declared Odinga's opponent, William Ruto, to be the president-elect, Odinga has refused to concede, claiming electoral fraud and vowing "pursue all Constitutional and legal options available" to overturn the results. The maneuver has plunged Kenya into political turmoil, with supporters of both Ruto and Odinga rallying behind their respective candidates. (CNN, August 16, 2022)

AFTER FRANCE, MORE EXTREMISM IN MALI... AND ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA

Concerns over the potential consequences of France's withdrawal of security forces from West Africa are turning out to be well-founded. Following the withdrawal of French forces from Mali earlier this summer, after nearly a decade of counterterrorism engagement, militant groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) have entrenched themselves further in the Sahel. These extremists have ramped up their attacks, and observers say the regional situation is now more volatile than it was in 2013, when Paris first established a security presence in Mali. The attacks indicate that Islamist violence "has shifted away from the Middle East and South Asia" toward Africa, according to experts. Mali itself has seen a 40 percent increase in extremist attacks in the past year.

South African analyst Martin Ewi, meanwhile, recently briefed the United Nations on the growing presence of the Islamic State on the continent. According to him, the terror group has spread in more than 20 African countries and is moving toward a permanent presence on the continent. Meanwhile, the lack of French forces to serve as reinforcements in its counterterrorism fight is moving Mali's government, at least unofficially, toward enlisting militias and contractors such as Russia's notorious Wagner Group in an effort to help contain the spread of *jihadiism*. (Washington Post, August 16, 2022)

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION SEEKS TO MAKE UP GROUND IN AFRICA

Long outpaced by Russian and Chinese engagement in Africa, the Biden administration is seeking to step up U.S. contacts with the region. In August, Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited sub-Saharan Africa in a bid to foster closer bilateral relations between the United States and African nations. During his trip, Secretary Blinken unveiled President Biden's sub-Saharan Africa strategy, emphasizing that "African countries are geostrategic players and critical partners on the most pressing issues of our day." Blinken's visit included stops in South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Rwanda, where he discussed economic engagement, as well as security issues, with local officials.

Those countries were chosen for good reason. South Africa is America's largest trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa, and continued partnership with Pretoria provides Washington with access to other African markets. The DRC, meanwhile, continues to weather a humanitarian crisis as well as a stagnant national economy. As for Rwanda, the U.S. is looking to Kigali to continue its peacekeeping missions in the DRC and elsewhere as a way of stabilizing the region. Blinken's visit also comes at a time when the U.S. is looking to dissuade the expanding relations between African countries and Beijing and Moscow. (Brookings Institution, August 5, 2022)

THE GERD AS FLASHPOINT... AGAIN

Ethiopia has completed its third filling of the reservoir for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), deepening tensions over the massive hydrological project with neighboring Egypt. According to GERD officials, "for the next 2 1/2 years" work will continue "to complete the entire dam, implement all phases of the filling process and install the remaining turbines." The statement is a clear signal that Addis Ababa has no intention of halting its plans to fully complete the project, despite protestations from neighbors Egypt and Sudan, both of whom see the GERD as a potential threat to their hydrological security. The government of Egyptian President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi has written to the UN Security Council, requesting the body to intercede and halt Ethiopia's manipulation of the Nile River. Sudan's Irrigation and Water Resources Minister, Abdul Rahman, has demanded that "Addis Ababa stop its unilateral measures and reach a legal and binding agreement on the GERD."

Negotiations over the GERD had been ongoing for a decade when they were suspended in April 2021. International actors, such as the United Arab Emirates, have tried to mediate between the parties, but Ethiopia has forged ahead with its plans without a regional consensus. (*Al-Monitor*, August 17, 2022)