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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Terrorism; Warfare; Africa; East Africa; Russia; South Africa; Ukraine; West Africa

SOUTH AFRICA TAKES SIDES

South Africa might have broken its neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict by supplying arms to the Kremlin, says the Honorable Reuben Brigety, Washington's ambassador to Pretoria. Ambassador Brigety claims a Russian ship recently docked in Cape Town's naval base and left with loads of ammunition, a charge which South African President Cyril Ramaphosa denies. The incident, Brigety argues, "is extremely serious, and we do not consider this issue to be resolved." The South African government has since established an independent inquiry to look into the accusations further, but it is still unclear whether the investigation will be transparent – or whether the U.S. plans to impose sanctions and other penalties on the South African government if the claims are proven to be true.

Notably, this is not the first indication that Pretoria is drawing closer to Moscow. In recent weeks, South Africa has participated in military exercises with both Russia and China, and the country recently abstained from a UN vote condemning Russia's invasion in Ukraine, as well as opposing both U.S. and European sanctions against Russia. That strategic pivot, Brigety notes, could have consequences. If South Africa continues to be a "soft ally" to Russia, it could significantly weaken its relationship with the U.S., "one of its largest trade allies." (*BBC*, May 11, 2023)

GUINEA'S CIVILIAN OPPOSITION GAINS TRACTION

Following popular demonstrations demanding the release of three civil society figures, the Guinean government has released those individuals, signaling an important stride forward for the country's embattled political system. The individuals in question were all leaders of the National Front for the Defense of the Constitution (FNDC), a group that opposed the country's ruling junta. Following their arrests in July 2022, the junta formally dissolved the FNDC. However, a new opposition party, known as the Forces Vives de Guinée, has continued the FNDC's work to return Guinea to civilian rule.

The incident marks an important symbolic victory for the country's opposition. The jailed FNDC leaders had previously rejected the junta's offer of freedom in exchange for a pledge to cease their "civic struggle," including peaceful demonstrations. It also sets the stage for a more competitive political contest next year, when the ruling authorities have agreed to hold elections and presumably return the state to civilian rule. (*Africa News*, May 11, 2023)

ETHIOPIA INCHES TOWARD A WIDER PEACE

Ethiopia's government and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), a rebel group, began negotiations in Tanzania to resolve their five-year conflict. This is the first time the two parties have agreed to sit down for negotiations, with each side stipulating to certain terms as a starting point for the peace talks. The conflict originally started because of the OLA's grievances against the Ethiopian government's "marginalization of the Oromo people," and for several attacks in the Oromiya region. Since 2018, a number of civilians have been killed in clashes between the two sides. The peace negotiations come at a crucial time, as Addis Abbaba recently achieved a separate peace deal with the forces of the more prominent Tigrayan People's Liberation Front. (*Reuters*, April 24, 2023)

SUDAN'S CIVIL STRIFE CREATES A WIDER CRISIS

Since Sudan's descent into civil strife last month, some 150,000 people have left the country, and 860,000 people are expected to flee to neighboring states by October. Chad and Ethiopia are experiencing the largest influx of refugees, and according to the UNHCR, "the majority of new arrivals are children." The conflict between the Sudanese army and its previously-loyal Rapid Support Forces has so far killed more than 600, and caused hardship in both Sudan and neighboring nations, such as Chad. The refugees are entering conditions of food and water scarcity, while the continent as a whole is heading into its rainy season, which can result in widespread flooding and hamper relief efforts. (*Telegraph*, May 10, 2023)