



# Africa Political Monitor No. 29

January 3, 2024 **Jordan Savage**

**Related Categories:** Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Terrorism; Warfare; Africa; Sudan; Europe; France; Israel; Russia

## **SUDAN'S CIVIL WAR CAUSES A DEEPENING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS**

Back in November, Sudan's warring factions ended negotiations without a firm commitment to allow humanitarian aid to reach the East African state despite Saudi Arabia's efforts to broker some sort of truce. Previously, the two sides had agreed to a ceasefire, but the halt in fighting was quickly broken. The renewed violence has its roots in strategic gains by the rebel Rapid Support Forces (RSF) faction, which has seized control over the western region of Darfur in recent weeks, marking "the most significant military breakthrough" since the outbreak of the conflict in April 2023. As a result, the paramilitary group has stepped up its killing of non-Arabs.

In an attempt to flee the violence, over four million Sudanese have been displaced, and still more refugees from the Darfur region are now sheltering in Chad. UN agencies have warned that they are overwhelmed with the outflow and are struggling to "deliver essential services to those in need." Another wrinkle has developed as well; the current conflict between Israel and the Hamas terrorist organization has dominated the headlines since its outbreak in October, and Sudan – like Ukraine – has paid the price. UN officials are worried that Sudan's war is forgotten as a result of the current, overwhelming focus on the Middle East, and that as a result their agencies will not receive the resources they need to continue a humanitarian response plan to ameliorate the effects of the fighting in Sudan. (*Washington Post*, November 9, 2023)

## **KYIV TRIES AN END RUN IN AFRICA...**

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba visited Pretoria this past Fall, looking to strengthen his government's ties with South Africa. Kuleba's visit follows last year's "peace mission" to Ukraine of African heads of state, which was led South African president Cyril Ramaphosa and which floated a 10-point peace plan to end the current Ukraine-Russia war. The Ukrainian foreign minister said he is looking to revive relations with the continent as a whole, and to bring relations between Ukraine and South Africa in particular to a "new level." It is unclear, however, how successful Kuleba's outreach has been; South African Minister Naledi Pandor reiterated her country's non-aligned stance – a position that allows Pretoria to "talk to both Ukraine and Russia." (*Africa News*, November 7, 2023)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Kuleba's outreach, coming amid slowing momentum in his government's military counteroffensive, is noteworthy. It suggests that Kyiv is attempting to lessen African support for Russia, which has remained strong throughout the conflict, and thereby improve its international diplomatic position.]

## **...AS MOSCOW SEEKS TO CAPITALIZE ON DECLINING U.S. POPULARITY**

The Kremlin, meanwhile, is working to expand its own presence on the continent further. Last month, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Tunisia in a much-promoted state visit. The choice of destinations was strategic; amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Russia is deftly attempting to take advantage of shifting regional attitudes toward the United States – which has generated anger because of its support of Israel's campaign against Hamas in the Gaza Strip – to improve its regional position. According to a December tally by Arab Barometer, a leading regional research firm, U.S. popularity fell 30 percent among Africans in the wake of Hamas' October 7th assault and the ensuing Israeli incursion into Gaza. (Associated Press, December 21, 2023)

## **FRANCE HAS LEFT THE BUILDING**

In the wake of Niger's demand, earlier in 2023, that it withdraw its military forces, the government of French President Emmanuel Macron completed its redeployment in December, officially ending its mission in Niamey. The country's ruling *junta* described the withdrawal as a "new era" for Nigerians, but counterterrorism experts believe that the result will be a worsening of security conditions for Niger and the entire Sahel region. France's departure also marks the end of an era; Niger was the last remaining Western partner in the ongoing fight against *jihadiism* in the region, and the decision of the country's current *junta* to force troops out has created a vacuum that terrorists will be looking to exploit. (Associated Press, December 22, 2023)