

# AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL

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## BLUE LINES

*'Our partners want more from Europe,' the European Union's new International Partnerships Commissioner Jozef Sikela told MEPs in the European Parliament at hearings last year. In the case of Africa, they are unlikely to get it. Facing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, Africa is not high on the agenda for Ursula von der Leyen's new European Commission. The EU's diplomatic service, the European External Action Service, faces budget cuts and some African embassies will cut staff numbers over the next 12 months. That is not a promising start, though countries where the EU is already diplomatically weak, such as in the Sahel region, are likely to be prioritised for cuts. An EU/African Union summit will be held in early 2025, but expectations are low. There will be no new trade offer to Africa as the EU concentrates on the South American Mercosur bloc agreement concluded after two decades of talks. France opposes this deal, claiming it will harm its farmers, leaving the Commission's trade department preoccupied with ratifying it. The EU remains focused on migration control. The Commission says that its 'cash for migration control' deals with Tunisia, Mauritania and Egypt have cut irregular migration via the Central Mediterranean route. More positively, Von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron say they will promote an ambitious debt relief initiative – but only if China and the rest of the G7 are on board.*

## AFRICA/ECONOMY IN 2025

# Growth is still chasing demographics

**Inflation is falling but capital is scarce and a host of climate and trade disruptors hold back progress**

Africa is set for faster growth and lower inflation this year – and the World Bank has upgraded growth projections for 2025 and 2026 – partly due to improved growth prospects in the bigger economies like South Africa and Angola. Most importantly, in many countries on the continent, economic growth lags in per capita GDP and incomes compared to industrial economies and other developing regions. And the continent's annual growth projections are rarely met (AC vol 65 No 22).

With population growth typically close to 2.5% per annum, 2025 GDP growth of 4.1% (sub-Saharan Africa), 4.2% (SSA) and 3.7% (including North Africa) projected by the World Bank, IMF and UN respectively, remains well below 2% in per capita terms. The continent's growth in working age population is set to vastly exceed that in other developing regions through 2050, but current economic growth trajectories do not imply convergence towards higher incomes in other regions.

Numerous Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have 2030 target dates, are well out of reach (AC Vol 65 No 23). According to Brookings Institution analysis, the continent is lagging behind the 'rest of the world' on almost all metrics – vastly so on extreme poverty, sanitation, malaria incidence, and access to water and electricity. World Bank figures suggest that the numbers of Africans facing food insecurity now exceed 160 million in SSA alone, and that the share of SSA's population affected by 'adverse weather events' from 2020-24 is almost triple that in 2015-19.

A host of economic disruptors remain on the horizon, such as conflicts in the Sahel, Sudan and Central Africa; climate shocks; strikes and protests in major African economies; elections in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi and Tanzania; and external developments mostly outside African governments' control.

The latter includes the impact of a China slowdown; the US trade and Africa policy of the second Trump administration; resumption of Middle East hostilities; the outcome of the Russia-Ukraine conflict; and a fresh deterioration of global financing conditions, which had improved sufficiently last year to allow Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Cameroon, Benin and Senegal to raise dollars on the international Eurobond market (Dispatches 24/4/24 & 11/6/24).

## INFLATION EASING

Last year's weather hit to domestic agriculture and food production in several economies is a reminder that food prices and availability remain unpredictable.

Current trends suggest inflation on the continent will continue to fall from the highs of 2022. But average Africa inflation will still exceed world averages, and to a lesser extent exceed inflation in most developing regions. Pressure on Africa's central banks to partially reverse hefty 2022-24 rate hikes – to reduce the cost of borrowing and boost growth – might prevail even in some economies without sustained reduction in inflation.

In Nigeria, major foreign exchange market reforms have turbocharged

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## Tshisekedi eyes a third term

Amid the security crisis in the Kivu provinces, the President prioritises a constitutional change

SOMALIA IN 2025,  
MOZAMBIQUE IN 2025,  
BURKINA FASO/MALI/  
NIGER/MINING, SOUTH  
AFRICA, US/UN/AFRICA/  
FINANCE, SUDAN/UAE,  
DISPATCHES,  
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inflation and created short-term hardship. And in **Egypt**, IMF-backed forex-market reforms have created short-term economic turbulence and coincided with IMF downgrading of 2025 and 2026 growth projections (AC Vol 65 No 16 & Dispatches 22/10/24). These recent experiences offer a cautionary tale to central banks and governments considering similar policy change close to elections, before the mooted longer-term benefits to economic stability, investor confidence and revenue generation kick in.

**Zimbabwe**, where the April 2024 introduction of yet another currency has not prevented major devaluation, illustrates the outlandishly high policy interest rates required to bring previously runaway inflation under control (Dispatches 1/10/24). The country is nevertheless, together with debt-restructuring **Zambia**, predicted to be among the fastest-growing Southern African economies this year, thanks to mineral exports in both cases.

### DEBT MATTERS

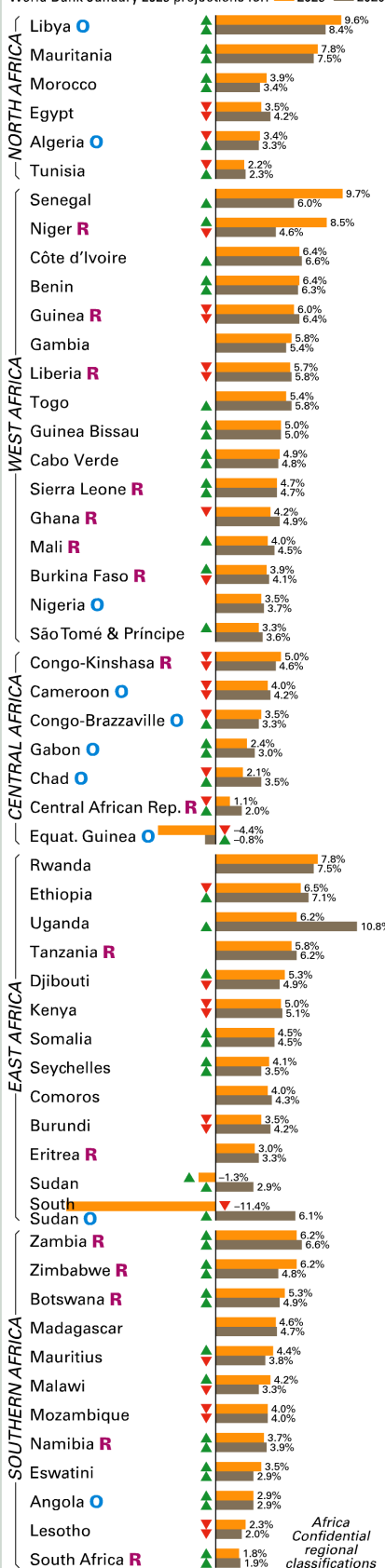
Concerns over Africa debt sustainability persist among the international financial institutions. South Africa's President **Cyril Ramaphosa** highlighted the need for coordinated action on debt and the costs of capital when he set out his country's agenda for its presidency of the G20 this year. There has been some improvement in global financing conditions, mostly driven by central bank policy in the US and other major economies (Dispatches 21/1/25). But this could prove temporary given some of the countervailing pressures in the global economy.

There has also been progress in debt restructuring negotiations in **Ghana** and **Zambia**, signs that the IMF and World Bank are working to accelerate lending to sovereign borrowers in need, and modest fiscal consolidation/deficit reductions in several economies. Yet more than half of the continent's low-income countries (LICs) remain in, or at high risk of, debt distress. And, although debt ratios are returning to stability, the share of domestic revenues depleted by

## AFRICA: GROWTH TO IMPROVE, INFLATION TO FALL – FOR NOW

### REAL GDP GROWTH % change on previous year

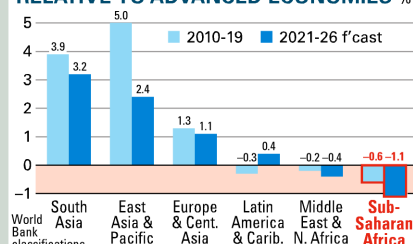
World Bank January 2025 projections for: 2025 2026



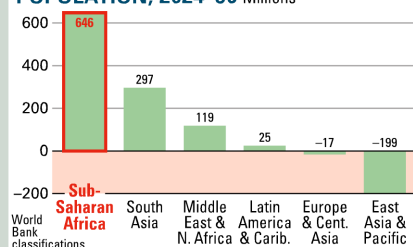
○ Africa Oil Exporters (official IMF definition, Oct 2024)  
■ Other Sub-Saharan Africa Resource Intensive Countries (official IMF definition, Oct 2024)  
Triangles represent upward (▲) / downward (▼) revisions from World Bank projections made in June 2024

Sources: World Bank Group; United Nations; Economist Intelligence Unit; Brookings Institution

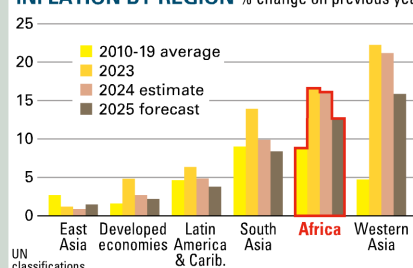
### PER CAPITA INCOMES GROWTH RELATIVE TO ADVANCED ECONOMIES %



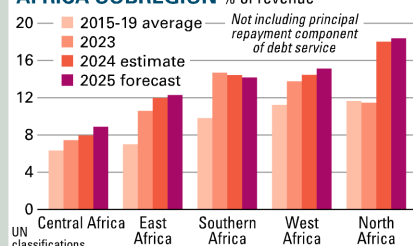
### PROJECTED CHANGE IN WORKING AGE POPULATION, 2024-50 Millions



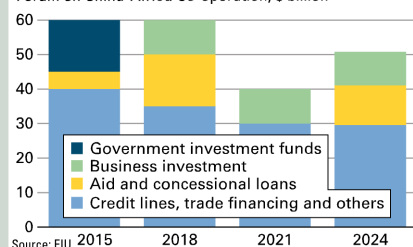
### INFLATION BY REGION % change on previous year



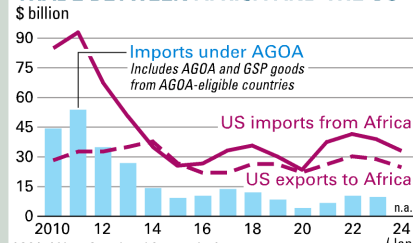
### GOVERNMENT INTEREST PAYMENTS BY AFRICA SUBREGION % of revenue



### CHINESE COMMITMENTS AT FOCAC Forum on China-Africa Co-operation, \$ billion



### TRADE BETWEEN AFRICA AND THE US \$ billion



AGOA: African Growth and Opportunity Act  
GSP: Generalized Scheme of Preferences

interest payments is set to increase in West, East, Central and North Africa this year, according to UN analysis of IMF numbers.

But this is not the case in Southern Africa, which remains dominated by South Africa (AC Vol 66 No 1). So far, the country's Government of National Unity (GNU) has avoided the return of economy-disrupting electricity power cuts, optimism on growth is returning, and its national Treasury suggests 2025 could see discussions on whether to introduce another cap on national debt to complement the existing one on primary budget deficits. But there are concerns that such a 'debt anchor' could unnecessarily restrain government policy in response to future circumstances.

African economies such as Nigeria, Kenya and post-elections Ghana face a pressing need to boost revenues in 2025. Joining them is Egypt, where IMF staff completing the latest review of its now US\$8 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) last month observed that Cairo's request for 'recalibration' of medium-term fiscal targets will require additional policy reforms to boost tax revenues by 2% of GDP within two years. At least Egypt, which is set to receive another \$1.2bn EFF disbursement once it gets Executive Board approval, has and could continue to benefit from a massive influx of investment. Egypt has also received multi-billion-dollar

## THE RESOURCE PARADOX PERSISTS

Africa's growth story remains heterogeneous, with differences between faster-growing non-resource intensive economies such as **Rwanda** and **Côte d'Ivoire** and typically slower-growing resource-intensive economies, such as oil exporters **Angola** and **Equatorial Guinea**. During 2025, three of Africa's four largest economies (**Egypt**, **Nigeria**, **South Africa**) should, according to World Bank economists, achieve faster growth than last year, even if still lagging behind continental averages. But the Bank predicts that, over the longer term, per capita incomes in Angola will decline.

Almost half the 21 African economies projected by the World Bank to reach or exceed 5% GDP growth this year are in West Africa, led by Senegal (almost 10%) where oil and gas production is set to increase from a low base. But **Ghana**, where growth rocketed following the 2010 start of Jubilee oil field production, provides another illustration that becoming an oil producer can provide a false growth and fiscal dawn. Côte d'Ivoire, the best-performing major West African economy, could expand (6.4%) as fast as rapidly growing non-resource intensive East African economies **Ethiopia** and **Uganda**, but notably without the debt, currency and significant domestic security woes of the former. Finance Minister **Adama Coulibaly** this month described his nation to IMF officials as 'West Africa's engine of growth and stability' with growth and inflation significantly and consistently better than continental averages.

Other growth hotspots include Libya (9.6%), where statistical growth from a low base – partly reflecting recovering oil production backed by strong oil prices – contrasts with the disruption caused by inter-government tensions, absence of economic diversification, and persisting vulnerability of oil production to domestic political developments.

In **Rwanda**, services growth and a rebounding agricultural sector are accompanied by glowing IMF reviews on Kigali's implementation of structural reforms under a three-year programme that expires in December. It remains an illustration of how devastating conflicts such as the 1994 genocide can be followed by extended periods of strong, income-boosting growth. But the political record of President **Paul Kagame's** government – the growing critiques of its human rights abuses and backing for the M23 militia in **Congo-Kinshasa** – could still undermine that growth record, which has been heavily fuelled by western aid flows. ●

## THE TRUMP CLIMATE - TARIFFS AND FOSSIL FUELS

**Donald Trump's** signing of an executive order to authorise the **United States's** withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accords, just hours after his inauguration on 20 January, will undermine international funding to protect countries from extreme weather. It would breach the agreement reached at the COP29 UN Climate summit in Baku to commit US\$300 billion a year by 2035 to help the hardest hit countries combat the effects of climate change.

Last year the Biden administration contributed \$11bn, the highest from any industrial economy, in loans to climate finance. That is likely to be rapidly ratcheted down, including funds for African climate projects. Washington is also likely to cut or slow down contributions to climate finance projects run by the World Bank or the African Development Bank.

Trump's pro-hydrocarbons agenda and general distrust of climate change mitigation measures could prove costly for African countries which face increasingly frequent extreme weather that hits agriculture and hydropower. But the US is just one player in the global energy transition, alongside the European Union, **China**, the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), **Russia** and the global south. Last year, economies across the world invested \$2 trillion in the energy transition. The new US administration can neither stop nor reverse that. But it can divert critical funding sources. Several big banks are cutting support for green energy initiatives.

The tech industry supporters of Trump will urge caution about ignoring the green energy revolution, and China's dominance of it. They are urging the US to prioritise securing critical minerals from Africa, such as lithium, copper and cobalt, to close the gap with China for energy security and other purposes including military use. Key countries, such as **Angola**, **Congo-Kinshasa**, **Zambia** and **Zimbabwe**, are preparing for fresh negotiations over critical minerals (AC Vol 65 No 23). Some Republican-backing companies say the new administration may start to offer government guarantees for US – or even western – mining and resource companies willing to compete with China in the race to secure critical mineral supply chains. That enthusiasm is likely to be restricted to the extractive sector with few plans for local refining, let alone manufacturing, investments in Africa.

In the near term, concerns about Trump's impact on Africa's economies arise from his threats to impose significant tariffs on imports and increases in US interest rates that could affect global financing conditions for emerging economies. Many African countries could struggle with higher borrowing costs if they need to refinance existing debts.

Trump's distrust of multilateral organisations could hinder efforts to boost concessional financing for Africa. Implementing tariffs could disrupt global trade, sparking retaliatory measures and increasing US inflation, which would indirectly affect African economies. The continent's economies could be relatively unscathed compared with the European Union, China, **Canada** and **Mexico**, against whom Trump threatens 25% tariffs from 1 February. ●



investments from the **United Arab Emirates** for development along its Mediterranean coast: yet the two countries are backing opposing sides in the Sudan's devastating civil war.

Almost all governments are under pressure to secure foreign direct investment or financing to meet major investment needs, rather than freeing up funds through unpopular cuts in expenditures such as public sector wages.

African economies currently under IMF programmes and receiving World Bank financing are facing pressure from these institutions to boost

social spending. Since its October Annual Meetings in Washington DC, the Fund has approved programme disbursements to over 20 African borrowers and has this month approved two loan programmes worth a combined \$2.8bn for **Congo-Kinshasa**.

Beijing's commitment at September's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation of \$50.8bn in Africa financing over the next three years surpassed some expectations and talk of 'small is beautiful' (AC Vol 65 No 19). But signs that China's economy could slow this year, and the threat of a US-provoked tariff and trade war, could hit

African economies heavily dependent on the China export market.

Many economists predict that overall Africa investment should increase this year, and that diaspora remittances could continue their upward trend. But the financing gap relating to Africa climate 'adaptation' costs remains huge, even before considering 'mitigation' costs to reduce Africa's own emissions. And, in the aftermath of November's COP29 climate summit, the \$700m of pledges so far by rich economies to the much-touted Loss and Damage Fund all far short in relation to Africa's needs (AC Vol 65 No 24). ●

## UNITED STATES/AFRICA IN 2025

# America first but Africa where?

## Deal-making diplomacy and geopolitical rivalry with China will dominate Washington's policy in Africa

**M**any African leaders believe they can do business with new US President **Donald Trump** despite his previous lack of interest in the continent (AC Vol 65 No 23). A chorus of congratulatory messages greeted Trump's defeat of Democratic candidate **Kamala Harris** in November. Some of this faith in Trump's transactional diplomacy may be wishful thinking. In the State Department's priorities, Africa (with its critical minerals and booming populations) will continue to rank below Latin America (migration and security) and South Asia (mega markets and geopolitical alliances).

Trump's initial diplomatic choices, including Secretary of State nominee **Marco Rubio** and the firebrand New York Congresswoman **Elise Stefanik** as United Nations ambassador, have taken a tough line against **South Africa** for its referral of **Israel** to the International Court of Justice and its ties with **China** and **Russia**. Most of Trump's new ambassadors are expected to be political appointees, surpassing the 46% in his first presidency.

A key guide to policy priorities will be Project 2025, the detailed policy paper prepared by the conservative Heritage Foundation think-tank. The short Africa section was drafted by former special envoy to the Great Lakes **J Peter Pham**, who will serve as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, the top Africa-focused post.

Project 2025 argues that the State Department should refocus on 'core diplomatic activities' and steer away from promoting cultural policies, such as

support for LGBTQI+ and reproductive health rights. **Uganda** lost its tariff and quota-free trade rights to the US market due to a recent anti-homosexuality bill, and its government hopes that the Trump administration will reverse that (Dispatches, 9/4/24).

Trump's executive order for a three-month freeze on all US foreign aid pending a review of 'programmatic efficiencies' nods in the direction of dropping what the new administration considers to be 'leftist cultural ideas.'

Also a tougher stance on China and preferential access to US businesses will be among the requirements for aid recipients in Africa and elsewhere. This initial freeze on aid programmes is highly likely to be followed by hefty cuts to the US\$8 billion a year aid budget.

Trump's announcement of US withdrawal from the World Health Organization, of which he was highly critical during the Covid-19 pandemic, could be the start of a broader US departure from United Nations agencies. In the WHO's case, that will leave a budget hole of over \$660 million a year.

During Trump's first presidency, picking winners like **Morocco** and **Kenya** was a key theme. Both countries are likely to retain favoured status, though a Trump presidency is unlikely to revive stalled US-Kenya trade deal negotiations.

Trump's promises to counter China's influence could mean more strong-arm tactics in Africa, particularly in trade, defence and security policy. Some in the Trump camp have been calling

for loyalty tests – for those countries receiving US aid funds or benefiting from financial guarantees.

Early decisions will include the fate of US Exim Bank and its mandate expiring in 2026. Fearing its closure, TotalEnergies hired Primus Responsum, dangling a US\$250,000 bonus to secure Exim's release of a \$4.7bn loan for its liquefied natural gas project in **Mozambique's** Cabo Delgado before Trump's inauguration on 21 January (AC Vol 66 No 1).

Trump, who signed Exim's last seven-year mandate, sees the institution as a tool to promote US economic interests in Africa, alongside the Development Finance Corporation and the Prosper Africa initiative.

## TRADE WARS

Trump's trade policy to protect American industry from cheap imports could undercut some African products. Heavy trade tariffs will hurt China and Europe the most, with threatened 100% tariffs on BRICS countries (**Brazil**, **Russia**, **India**, **China**, and **South Africa**), a group which now includes **Egypt**, **Ethiopia** and **Nigeria**, if they avoid trading in the US dollar. Most African states should be shielded from the trade wars, particularly if the African Growth and Opportunity Act is extended. The decision to extend, reform or scrap AGOA, which offers duty and quota-free trade to 32 African states and expires in September, will be crucial.

An attempt by some US Congress lawmakers to attach a 12-year AGOA extension to the emergency funding bill avoiding a 20 December government shutdown failed. A bipartisan bill also seeking an extension was derailed by the 2024 election cycle, raising fears that AGOA, originally passed by President **George W. Bush** in 2000 and extended by Barack Obama, will be scrapped.

AGOA costs the US little economically and is likely to be quietly extended with bipartisan support, as

Republicans see it as a counter to China. Despite being under-used by most African states, AGOA exports to the US were worth \$28.6bn in 2023, down from a peak of \$82bn in 2008.

In December, Beijing countered AGOA with zero tariffs on exports from Africa's 33 least developed countries. Geopolitical rivalry with Beijing will also shape Trump's approach to critical minerals.

Many Republicans are sceptical about green technology and carbon emission reductions, aiming to delay the US's green transition and climate targets. Trump's executive order to withdraw the US from the Paris climate change agreement is confirmation of this.

Energy policy will be ambiguous. Trump's order of a national energy emergency will mean a major increase in domestic production with few restrictions on oil and gas companies, fracking and pipelines. But there will also be increased geopolitical competition with China over the minerals and technology for the energy transition. That could lower oil and gas prices. Some African producers could benefit from new US investment in fossil fuel extraction. Certainly, those countries rich in metals needed for the

energy transition should see more state-backed investment. In his first term in 2020, Trump signed an executive order seeking to end US reliance on China for critical minerals imports.

Like European states, the Biden administration lagged behind China's in accessing critical raw minerals and building refining processes. It began talks with **Zambia** and **Congo-Kinshasa** on mineral access deals and invested around \$4bn in expanding the Lobito Corridor, connecting Zambia and Congo-K to **Angola's** Lobito port (Dispatches 10/12/24). The Trump administration could benefit from ramping up investment in Lobito-related projects.

After being forced to leave its military bases in **Niger** and **Chad** in 2024 as part of a broader rejection of the west by the two Sahelian states, Washington wants to restructure its military operations in Africa. **Gabon** and **Côte d'Ivoire** are likely candidates.

**Elon Musk**, the South African-born Tesla Chief Executive and advisor to Trump, is playing a significant role in foreign policy. In September, he was on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, meeting with South African President **Cyril Ramaphosa**, **Namibian** President **Nangolo Mbumba**, and

**Lesotho** Prime Minister **Sam Matekane**.

Without visiting Africa during his first presidential term, Trump made a few substantive interventions in Africa. He broke decades of US neutrality on Western Sahara by recognising Moroccan sovereignty in exchange for Rabat restoring diplomatic ties with Israel (AC Vol 61 No 25). The Biden administration let that stand. Many Republicans now want Somaliland to be the next beneficiary of Trumpian diplomatic disruption (AC Vol 65 No 24). Others separatist movements seeking backing from Trump include supporters of Ambazonia in Anglophone **Cameroon** and Biafra in south-east **Nigeria**.

Republicans backing recognition for Somaliland argue that moving away from the Biden administration's 'One Somalia' policy would allow Washington to strengthen relations with Ethiopia and to reward Somaliland's democracy. Closer ties with Hargeisa would be strategically useful to the US, particularly in relation to China, they add.

Recognising Somaliland would mark a seismic shift in US policy on the Horn of Africa and carries significant diplomatic risks, especially with Egypt and Kenya. Yet that may not be enough to dissuade Trump. ●

## NORTH AFRICA IN 2025

# Realpolitik and angry neighbours

**The Maghreb's sparring giants vie for influence as the Western Sahara stand-off dominates regional ties**

With no sign of a thaw in the cold war between **Algeria** and **Morocco**, the Maghreb region will remain gripped by their stand-off and the Western Sahara dispute. The Maghreb nations' external relations will be shaped by realpolitik in their dealings with Europe over migration and energy rather than by any softening of borders in the world's least integrated trading zone, the *Union du Maghreb Arabe* (UMA). It is one of the world's most expensive diplomatic fights in terms of opportunity costs.

In Morocco, there is no sign that – after first loosening his grip over the last decade then tightening it again – King **Mohammed VI** (M6) plans to offer much space for the opposition when parliamentary elections are held. The 61-year-old monarch's health remains a focus of speculation.

Such authoritarian tendencies in the region risk becoming further entrenched

after elections in autumn 2024 delivered hefty yet disputed victories for Algerian President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** and Tunisian President **Kaïs Saïed**.

### TEBBOUNE CONSOLIDATES

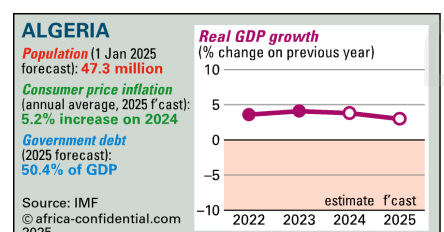
In Algeria, Tebboune incongruously positioned himself as a disrupter, was described in the media as 'the independent candidate', and even raised question about election irregularities as he won with 95% of the vote. The most telling number was the turnout of 24%, far lower than in 2019, when 40% participated in the first poll following President **Abdelaziz Bouteflika's** overthrow. Even without efforts to subvert the election, local analysts said that Tebboune would have won comfortably. And he seems to have little to fear from the street. Opponents saw the election turnout as a de facto mass boycott against rule by *le pouvoir* (the ruling establishment). However, *El*

*Hirak* (The Movement), which forced Bouteflika out in 2019, seems unlikely to return.

To win popular support and reinvigorate the economy, Tebboune says his government, led by Prime Minister **Mohamed Nadir Larbaoui** (or **Ennadir Larbaoui**), will focus on accelerated economic reform and job creation, in part by encouraging entrepreneurship.

Oil prices at around US\$75 a barrel and heavy European demand for natural gas will be key to the government maintaining subsidies. This avoids entanglement with the IMF and its neoliberal outlook. China instead will be favoured. The government still wants to launch big scale infrastructure projects, even if some Chinese suppliers and financiers have been put off by corruption and a glacial bureaucracy.

Chinese dominance was underlined when China International Water &



## TUNISIA WEAPONISES MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION

Having emerged as an unlikely president from the 2019 election, **Kaïs Saïed** ran again virtually unopposed in October, having arrested rivals, hobbled opposition parties and undermined the independence of the judiciary and *Banque Centrale de Tunisie* (BCT). Acting with apparent impunity, the campaign of the former law professor has brutalised migrants and benefitted from a partisan electoral regulator, the *Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections* (ISIE) (AC Vol 65 Nos 16 & 21).

Typical was the arrest of lawyer **Sonia Dahmani** by masked police last May at the headquarters of the *Ordre National des Avocats de Tunisie* (bar association) after she questioned Saïed's anti-migrant policy on live television. Dahmani was subsequently convicted for spreading false news. Amnesty International said in December she was still facing five separate legal proceedings as it described the 'cruel and inhuman conditions' she endured at Manouba prison. Other luminaries arrested last year included **Sihem Bensedrine**, who chaired the Truth and Dignity Commission established after late dictator **Zine el Abidine Ben Ali** was ousted in 2011. She denies corruption charges.

A blog entitled 'Why Tunisia Lost Faith in Democracy', published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, commented that measures such as Dahmani's imprisonment had 'left many people, particularly those outside Tunisia, wondering how the country's much-lauded transition to democracy has degenerated into authoritarian dictatorship.' Author **Jasmine Khelil** answered her own question: 'The democratic transition in Tunisia never succeeded. In fact, it barely got off the ground' after the 'Jasmine Revolution', a now widely detested term.

Dependent on the support of a more assertive security establishment – including director of presidential security **Khaled Yahyaouim** but also other players in an increasingly factionalised landscape – Saïed will seek to juggle support among potential rival power-brokers. Two military ministers were sacked in his August reshuffle, which also appointed army General **Mustapha Ferjani** as health minister.

Saïed has also cultivated securocrat alliances with powers more to his authoritarian liking, notably **Iran** and **Russia**, as well as **Algeria**, which has used its relative economic muscle to secure a foothold in Tunisia that previous administrations worked hard to prevent.

Europe has looked on as its previously close, and often subservient, ally has exploited its position as a migration hub to avoid governmental criticism. **Italy's** conservative Prime Minister **Giorgia Meloni** has cultivated Saïed. With ramifications for regional relations, Meloni has been consolidating power at home. This was apparent in the sudden resignation on 9 January of **Elisabetta Belloni** as Italy's head of intelligence. Career diplomat Belloni had previously been one of a small group of officials trusted by Meloni. The same may be said for Saïed, whose rule is marked by his isolation.

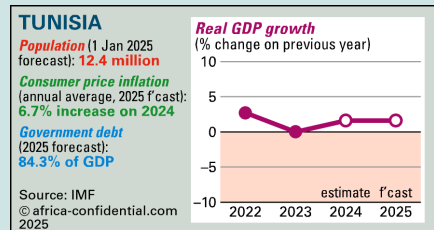
Locked in his presidency, there is much that should be concerning Saïed. With the economy tanking, his rejection of IMF support – leaving only a few institutions like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) working on reform projects – has left his government bereft of funds. A speedy new IMF deal seems even more unlikely as Saïed has moved to remove BCT's autonomy over interest rates and foreign exchange policy, which is being dismantled along with other levers of economic independence.

The European Union has committed some €8 billion to cash-for-migrant control deals with its partner countries: **Egypt**, **Mauritania** and **Tunisia**. While those Europeans with autocratic tendencies like Meloni and **Hungary's Viktor Orbán** have been cheerleaders for Saïed (AC Vol 65 No 10), others including Macron and **Britain's** new Labour government under **Keir Starmer** have sought to get closer to Saïed to help tackle their migration concerns. Migrants wanting to transit through Tunisia report alarming abuse, stoked up by Saïed (Dispatches 21/5/24).

Saïed's government, led by Prime Minister **Kamel Madouri**, after **Ahmed Hachani** (from August 2023-August 2024) and **Najla Bouden** (appointed in October 2021) before him failed to deliver, needs much more to keep afloat. Algeria has consolidated its influence – to the concern of many Tunisians – with the offer of sweetheart gas supply deals.

Structural weaknesses persist. Tunisia's crude oil and condensate output fell to a new low of 26,400 b/d in July-September 2024; in Q3 2014 it was double that, at 53,000 b/d, having been 99,000 b/d in 2007 and 118,000 b/d at the 1980 peak. A chronic lack of investment and bureaucratic hold-ups caused the slump.

That can be said for much of Tunisia's shrinking economy. Saïed and his securocrat backers will need all their muscle to suppress popular anger at a once promising economy's decline. ●



Electric Corporation (CWE) and PowerChina International won a majority of the contracts in state utility Sonelgaz's long-delayed 2-gigawatt solar programme, which is financed by the government and was seen as a safe investment.

### CHENGRIHA'S RISE

A striking appointment in Tebboune's 18 November post-election reshuffle was that of Lieutenant General Saïd **Chengriha** as minister delegate for defence, a powerful position in Algeria. The head of the military since 2020 has

in the past four years answered doubts about whether he carries the political heft of his predecessor, the late Major General **Ahmed Gaïd Salah**.

Chengriha's growing power was illustrated in September when external intelligence chief General **Djebbar M'henna** was finally sacked as head of the *Direction des Documents et de la Sécurité Extérieure* (DDSE), reportedly for failing to maintain control over supposed Sahelian client states and also for being a perceived threat to the chief. Now 79, Chengriha is focusing on military modernisation and key foreign

dossiers, leaving Tebboune with some domestic room to manoeuvre.

Closest to Chengriha's heart are conflict with Morocco, over the disputed Western Sahara, and promoting ties with **Russia**, where he trained. (AC Vol 63 No 24). The military's long-standing ties with Russia have yet to deliver on Moscow's requests to open a naval base on Algeria's Mediterranean coast (AC Vol 62 No 6 & Vol 63 No 9).

Following the collapse of **Bashar al Assad's** regime in Syria, President **Vladimir Putin** is likely to pressure Algeria to be even more supportive.



Events in Syria have unnerved leaders across North Africa, rekindling memories of the 2011 Arab Spring when veteran rulers were thrown out in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Protests spread across the Middle East, even to the Gulf monarchies. In Morocco, M6 oversaw a political opening that brought the *Islamist Parti de la justice et du développement* (PJD) into government.

Another longstanding Algerian ally, Iran, has also suffered reversals over the past year amid Israel's campaign against its allies Hamas, Hezbollah and, most recently, Yemen's Houthis. Tunisia's Saïed has been courting Russia and Iran as a counterweight to the west, but it is Algeria that would suffer most from a further weakening of Iran and its 'Axis of Resistance'.

### WESTERN SAHARA HEATS UP

Algiers won't shift on its core values while a regime underpinned by *le pouvoir* persists. Central to those values is continued strong support for the Polisario Front independence movement in Western Sahara, despite a steady flow of governments effectively recognising Morocco's claim to the former Spanish colony. Ghana's now ex-president Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo was the latest to abandon its long-standing recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. The new government in Accra under John Dramani Mahama faces local pressure to reverse this.

The Western Sahara conflict risks moving from the frozen conflict that has kept the Algerian-Moroccan land border closed since 1994 to a hot war. The issue will continue to dominate domestic and foreign policy in Algeria and Morocco. Expect further regional reorganisation in the kingdom and more Moroccan investment into the 'Southern Provinces' as Algerian military exercises focus on the *Armée nationale populaire's* (ANP) western border. Devolution in Morocco has focused on giving a veneer of autonomy to the Sahara. Morocco will continue to spend heavily in the Sahara and pull in more investment, including tourism around Dakhla. The ANP's programme of military exercises undoubtedly points westwards, underlining the threat of conflict.

An increase in Rabat's defence spending is no match for Algiers'. It rose by 76% in 2023 to reach a record US\$18.3 billion, with even more planned for 2025. Russia is by far the biggest supplier.

Foreign policy in both countries is defined by the conflict. Morocco's diplomatic coup of 2024 came in July when French President Emmanuel Macron recognised Morocco's

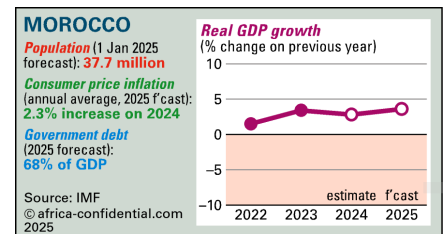
sovereignty in Western Sahara and its 'autonomy plan', which would end Polisario's claims to full independence (AC Vol 65 No 16).

Macron was risking a new freeze in relations with Algeria, which did not take the news well. A similar move in 2022 damaged Spanish business interests. Gas was affected but Algerian actions did much more to hurt the hundreds of Spanish companies operating in other sectors of its economy leading Premier Pedro Sánchez to roll back on his commitment to Morocco (Dispatches 24/3/22). Still, that looks less likely this time around—oil and gas is the one area where Algiers has been keen to maintain business-as-usual with European states.

Algiers and Rabat are competing for political favours from regional UMA partners and military regimes in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Mauritania's President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani spent the first months of his second term balancing its relations with Algeria: it boosts ties with better road transport and trade in minerals, especially phosphates, as well as building up political influence (AC Vol 65 No 14). Morocco has significantly improved its links to Nouakchott.

### M6 SEEKS AFRICAN BOOST

Africa, south of the Sahara, remains a priority for M6, while the Moroccan economy will continue to deliver on big-ticket infrastructure and hi-tech investments. Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch has survived another year in government but winning little



public affection for his neoliberal policies. This is despite efforts to whip up support around upcoming prestige events, which will include the 2025 African Cup of Nations and a share of 2030 FIFA World Cup matches with Spain and Portugal. Signalling that the regime will brook no opposition, *Direction Générale de Surveillance du Territoire* police chief Abdellatif Hammouchi is focusing on snuffing out any domestic or international threat to these marquee occasions.

The attention of Hammouchi, *Direction Générale des Études et de la Documentation* head Mohammed Yassine Mansouri and other securocrats is focused on keeping a lid on any dissent, while staying as close as possible to 21-year-old Crown Prince Moulay el Hassan bin Mohammed al Alaoui. The heir apparent is ever more in the public gaze given his father's health (AC Vol 65 No 2). M6 enters 2025 nursing a broken shoulder as well as medical conditions that have affected him for years (AC Vol 65 No 1).

The king's domestic policy priorities will again shape the government's agenda, while his determination to

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become a key player in Africa will influence Foreign Minister **Nasser Bourita's** focus and the security services' regional plays. Competition over Western Sahara will poison inter-Maghreb relations, no matter how many

G7 governments effectively recognise Morocco's claim.

Local headlines will likely focus on regional rivalries and Moroccan gains, and political party activity ahead of legislative elections, scheduled for

2026. Pending a strong return for the PJD, a key battleground is likely to be on the centre-right of politics, where Akhannouch's *Rassemblement national des indépendants* is pitted against **Nizar Baraka's Istiqlal**. ●

## CHAD IN 2025

# Kaka beset on all sides

**Having struck out on his own, the President looks ill-equipped to meet the domestic political and foreign security challenges and faces major risks**

Two momentous decisions at the end of 2024 govern prospects for the regime in the year to come: the expulsion of **France's** military and President **Mahamat Déby Itno 'Kaka's'** appointment as Field Marshal, the highest rank in the armed forces. Those moves followed the foregone conclusion of a rigged election in December which was intended – but failed – to consolidate the President's position (AC Vol 66 No 1).

The trappings of absolute power do not equate to control of the country or its problems, a point that eludes the President and his unsophisticated ruling circle which was illustrated by the coup attempt in January.

The presidential entourage appear to believe that unlimited **Emirati** money and brutal repression of the opposition are all they need to maintain power.

Pundits in Ndjamenā see few 'political minds' in the President's circle, citing his acceptance of the supreme military title from a Transitional National Council he appointed himself as evidence of self-delusion. Waiting until parliament could make the same appointment would have carried greater credibility, however small.

Closing the French military chapter is widely supported, but no intelligence operations or air support – even if they were slow to arrive – replace it. Nor will Paris any longer cover his back by making excuses for the regime to other western powers. The increasing repression by the intolerant and poorly trained *Agence Nationale de la Sécurité de l'Etat* (ANSE) head, **Ismaël Souleymane Lony**, will

receive greater attention internationally.

Mahamat Kaka's main challenges are usually portrayed in terms of the security tensions on the borders with **Sudan** and **Central African Republic**, but many see his management of domestic security and political elites as more pressing. Greed, arrogance, and lack of vision appear to be the regime's chief features.

Mahamat Kaka has weakened his opponents by buying off some and killing others, coercion and money being his only tools. On 20 October 2022 he signalled his policy with the shooting of over 200 demonstrators, hundreds more being detained and sent to a desert prison where many disappeared, and in February last year, when his security forces killed his cousin, **Yaya Dillo Djérou** (AC Vol 65 No 6).

Emirati funds were critical to buying off many high-ranking officers with generous pensions, and appointing his trusted associates in key positions in the state apparatus. All this helped blunt the impact of the call for reform from opponents such as **Saleh Kebzabo** and **Succès Masra** in the wake of the repression.

### GREED INC.

The greed of members of the elite has reached a level that Mahamat Kaka's father, **Idriss Déby Itno**, would never have tolerated, regime-watchers say.

Reports are increasing of ever greater predatory behaviour by security men in eastern Chad, where corrupt opportunities abound from refugee operations, medical care for casualties of the Sudan war, and Emirati logistics in support of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'**, who is fighting the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) of General **Abdel Fattah al Burhan** in Sudan. In early December, the International Fund for Agricultural Development suspended all projects in Chad over such concerns.

As for the co-optation and repression

side of the picture, the killing of **Yaya Dillo** in February 2024 appears to have been an over-reaction that may yet cost the President. The assassination, we hear, was planned by members of the inner presidential circle well ahead of the events that ended in Yaya's death.

Measures to soften the reaction of Yaya's relatives were taken but blood money (*diyya*) was unexpectedly not paid. Zaghawa youth are bent, we hear, on taking revenge for Yaya's death. Their mouthpiece is Yaya's brother, **Ousman**, who is active on social media while claiming to be fighting in El Fasher against the RSF, which is backed to the hilt by Mahamat Kaka and the UAE.

### CORRUPTION AND COMMUNITY

There are therefore two currents which are likely to prove vital in the coming months. Plunder of the public purse and foreign funds by members of the elite was so serious last year that it could only be compensated by Abu Dhabi's largesse. If those funds were to stop, the regime would face far stiffer opposition.

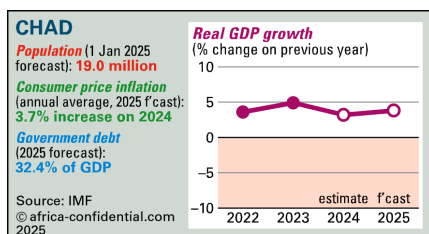
The other strand is the resentment of personnel, especially Zaghawa, Gorane, and Arab in the security sector, who find Mahamat Kaka wanting of the qualities of strength they saw in his father and believe they have been shunted to the sidelines. They are unlikely to stay quiet.

### SUDAN POLICY

The civil war in Sudan is a major risk to the stability of Chad, however much Emirati money flows into Ndjamenā. Mahamat Kaka's strategy here is to disconnect the Chadian Zaghawa (**Bideyat**) from the Sudanese Zaghawa and enlarge his ethnic support base by favouring the Gorane (mostly the **Anakaza**) and Arabs.

But he is not making coalitions for nation-building, or seeking compromise with important constituencies. He is only consolidating his own power. Moreover, he is not interested in appeasing groups, such as southern or central Chadian communities, important for national unity.

The instability in the east is dangerous. Clashes between Sudanese refugees and local people cause vendettas and acts of revenge, a nightmare for the humanitarian organisations there. Another problem is the westward flow of RSF fighters escaping the battle of El Fasher.





These fighters have no resources to support themselves, cannot be integrated into the Chadian army, and can't settle in refugee camps. There is a danger they will become politicised and start to fight on behalf of the Arab communities under pressure from the influx of refugees or the Chadian army.

Some Chadian Tama and Guimir groups are trying to get support from and may revive armed groups that did not sign the Doha agreement in July 2022, such as the *Front pour l'Alternance*

et la Concorde au Tchad (FACT) of Mahamat Mahadi.

Leaders like this are emboldened by France's departure and seeking support in places like Benghazi or Port Sudan.

The battle of El Fasher itself also creates different scenarios.

If the Zaghawa forces led by Minni Minnawi and Jibril Ibrahim can prevail against the RSF, they may well refrain from taking revenge against Ndjamen for supporting the RSF. Zaghawa control the Chadian state and so Minnawi

and Ibrahim might be able to find an accommodation in Ndjamen, even if Mahamat Kaka is replaced.

On the other hand, if Hemeti wins the battle of El Fasher, armed Zaghawa groups could try to take power in Ndjamen. However, this does not necessarily mean Mahamat Kaka would be overthrown.

Either way, Chad may well find itself once more, after decades away, heading the foreign pages of the western press once more as the violence increases. ●

## CONGO-KINSHASA IN 2025

# Tshisekedi eyes a third term

**Amid the security crisis in the Kivu provinces and geopolitical jockeying for Congo's critical minerals, the President prioritises a constitutional change**

Two key issues confront President Félix Tshisekedi in 2025 – to harness the spiralling global demand for the country's cornucopia of critical minerals and to end the deepening conflict in the east with the M23 militia, and by extension its sponsor, Rwanda. Yet neither of these lead his political agenda. Instead, he is spending most of his political energy on a bid to reform the national constitution; a project that most people believe is aimed at securing him a third presidential term.

Last October, Tshisekedi claimed the constitution is outdated and must be adapted to 'current realities'. He formed a commission to draft a new one which many think will dispense with restrictions on the number of presidential terms. Leaders of his *Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social* (UPDS) have launched a campaign supporting constitutional revision. Beyond the party loyalists, there's little public support for the change.

Much more central to citizens' concerns is the Tshisekedi government's clash with Rwanda over its support for the M23 militia in the Kivu provinces in the east. This is rumbling on, and may be about to enter a more intense phase. The prospects are not good following the cancellation of a summit designed by Angolan President João Lourenço to bring Tshisekedi and President Paul Kagame face to face to negotiate a ceasefire plan (Dispatches 17/12/24).

The latest UN reports say that over 178,000 people have been displaced around Minova in Kivu Nord since the beginning of the year. Minova has been targeted by the M23 as a stepping stone to Goma, the provincial capital (AC Vol

65 No 20). The M23 now controls many of the key trading routes in the area along which minerals are exported.

President Kagame flatly denies any connection to the M23 (AC Vol 65 No 15). Behind the scenes, official briefings talk of Kigali's desire to suppress the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* (FDLR), the Hutu-led militia with links to the 1994 genocide, with help from the mainly Tutsi M23.

But analysts do not believe FDLR is any threat to Rwanda. Many conclude that the M23's real role is to act as cover for the continued plunder of minerals. Rwanda's exports of coltan are said to have increased by 50% in the last year. Few believe comes from higher domestic production.

Kagame's insouciance in the face of accusations that he is responsible for the M23 attacks may be based on a bet that the strategic utility of his forces to western interests in Mozambique and the wider region.

Tshisekedi's cack-handed response to Kagame's tactics has included expelling the admittedly ineffective East Africa Community force led by Kenya and then dismissing a Southern African Development Community (SADC) mission.

Then there were the feeble efforts of Romanian mercenaries paid by Kinshasa, and the attacks of numerous Congolese militia. And there are reports of overtures to Kinshasa by Russia's Wagner Group (AC Vol 66 No 1).

### M23 EXPANSION

The M23, buoyed by revenues from coltan, tin and gold mines under its control, seems set to expand its territory still further – even if it doesn't choose to

take control of Goma, for tactical reasons,

The EAC-sponsored 'Nairobi Process' is having as little success as Angola's peace efforts. Kinshasa rejected the Nairobi process, which focuses on direct dialogue between the Congolese government and armed groups. It refuses to negotiate with the M23. Instead, it insists on talking directly with Rwanda.

M23 itself has repeatedly said it is not interested in the flurry of meetings, contending it is but a constituent part, albeit a key one, of the *Alliance Fleuve Congo* (AFC), a coalition of armed groups.

The departure of the UN's MONUSCO peacekeeping mission from South Kivu, meanwhile, has given M23 and Rwanda greater freedom of movement, but the mission's departure from North Kivu has been delayed, out of fear that the provincial capital Goma may fall to the rebels once more.

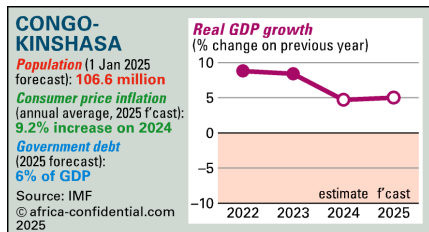
During the year, President Kagame will maintain support for M23 and is likely also to keep the Rwanda Defence Force deployed in eastern Congo-K as back-up to M23. Keeping that region unstable is also plays a part in Kagame's rivalry with Uganda.

Burundi National Defence Force operations against *Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi* (RED Tabara) look set to continue during 2025, with *Mai-Mai Yakutumba* providing support to the former. That's one aspect of shifting alliances between the militias, each with their own foreign sponsors. In RED Tabara's case, Rwanda is again believed to be the power behind the scenes.

Work by a consortium led by Swiss commodity trader Trafigura will intensify during 2025 on the railway line between Kolwezi in Lualaba Province, and Lobito on Angola's Atlantic Coast, known as the Lobito Corridor.

The United States International Development Finance Corporation has approved a US\$553 million loan for work on the line, while the Italian government and the African Development Bank have pledged \$820m for a line connecting Zambia to the network.

The line provides an alternative



export route for Congo's copper and cobalt to the main road route between Lubumbashi and Durban. It was backed by the Biden administration

as part of an overall strategy to lessen Chinese dominance in Congo's copper and cobalt sector. President Donald Trump's antipathy to China means US support for the Lobito project is likely to continue. But its commercial value may be threatened by a Chinese-backed refurbishment of the railway export route for copper through Tanzania.

### NEEDING A PLAN

Kinshasa needs its own infrastructural plan. Traffic in the capital is routinely gridlocked for hours on end. Like

its predecessors, Tshisekedi's administration has opted for flyovers constructed at great expense on the Boulevard 30 Juin instead of resuscitating the city's much-decayed urban railway network.

Long-term planning doesn't much interest Tshisekedi – whether in infrastructure or politics. That may explain why he isn't exploiting the geopolitical jockeying for position between the US and China over Congo's stock of the key minerals required for the green energy transition. ●

## SOMALIA IN 2025

# Unity preserved but security lost

**The damage caused by Ethiopia's MoU has receded but political prospects are poor and morale in the national security forces is at rock bottom**

If there are prospects for an upturn in 2025, it's only because security, morale and international coherence could hardly have been worse in 2024. Ethiopia fractured the international consensus on the indivisibility of Somalia with its Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland, while opportunities to consolidate progress against *Al Shabaab* were squandered and the Somali polity descended into new levels of recrimination (Dispatches 17/12/24).

The year begins with the federal government campaign against *Al Shabaab* in tatters, and the flawed post-2012 consensus, based on federalism and the 4.5 formula, under heavy siege as personal ambitions eat away at it and the consensus behind it fades. The damaging defeat of the Somali National Army (SNA) in its confrontation with Sheikh Ahmed Madobe in Ras Kamboni in December will be hard to recover from.

Elections in Somaliland gave hope to many who were dismayed at the dangerous direction in which President Muse Bihi Abdi was heading. However, the new President, Abdirahman Mahamed Abdullahi Irro, still has debts to pay to supporters that will make realisation of his efforts at conciliation and compromise difficult.

One highly positive development is the accord signed in Ankara between Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud brokered personally by Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in December, which has calmed the crisis (AC Vol 65 No 14).

Abiy Ahmed had no real choice

but to comply, having been isolated by the international community on the question of the indivisibility of Somalia. Talk in Washington and London about recognition of Somaliland as a sovereign nation was no more than that. The Trumpist voices in favour have fallen silent. They were loud enough during President Donald Trump's first term and had no success then, so there is no reason to expect anything more this time around. Any attempts to challenge the status quo would also have to address the fact that Somalia is a member of the UN Security Council.

Opposition within Ethiopia to the MoU and its effects also extended to the military, which could see its presence in its neighbour being overtaken by Egypt, a strategic foe, and others, leading to the possibility of *Al Shabaab* renewing its attacks on Ethiopia.

Nor would senior officials and officers any longer have access to the international funds allocated to the Ethiopian contingent within the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) or its successor, the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM).

The latest iteration of this counter-insurgency force starts with only a six-month transitional budget since donors are imposing conditionality on how long the mission should last and how it is run. But Ethiopian generals and AU Peace and Security Council members are convinced that the donors, however reluctantly, will extend the funding.

Hassan Sheikh appears to be the winner as the issue of an Ethiopian commercial port remains unresolved, and while Berbera is an option it is not a

likely one under present circumstances.

The United Arab Emirates paid lip service to the Ankara agreement but Mogadishu's experience is that all concessions by Abu Dhabi come with a price attached. This may emerge in changes to Puntland's stance towards Mogadishu, since Said Abdullahi Dani, Puntland's president, is under strong UAE influence.

Turkey's influence is expected to grow further as news emerges of discoveries by the Turkish Petroleum Corporation along the shores of Galmudug and Hirshabelle. The risk is that massive earnings at the top of the Somali political tree will not trickle down, especially since there is no good legal framework to exploit oil and gas that would protect Somalia's rights.

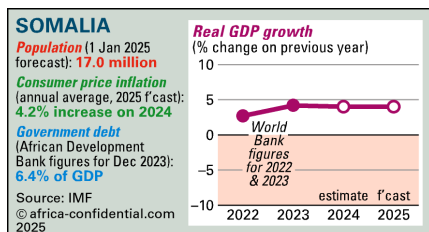
The discoveries could also exacerbate tension with Kenya as the maritime boundary dispute is not over despite the International Court of Justice ruling in Somalia's favour in December 2021 (Dispatches 8/8/23).

### ELECTORAL POLITICS

The current 4.5 system of clan representation, a substitute for a national electoral register, which is judged impossible because of *Al Shabaab* threats to its security, suits the leaders of the Federal Member States (FMSs), who are long accustomed to manipulating clan politics, bribing elders, and deciding who shall go from their areas to the national parliament.

But all except Dani accepted the principle of holding direct elections, based on an electoral register, in February 2023, although the leaders of South West State, Hirshabelle and Galmudug then changed their minds and returned to the usual indirect process for elections to be organised this year.

They did this because under the new system Mogadishu's financial power is comparatively so strong it can make powerful contenders of candidates in any of the FMSs, and Hassan Sheikh has shown signs of exercising this influence



to the full.

The other reason FMS leaders went back to the old system was more prosaic. When the agreement on general elections was reached, Ahmed Madobe in Kismayo, for example, imagined that if, as many believed, *Al Shabaab* was on

the verge of historic defeat, he could win elections hands down.

If Lower Juba and some areas in Gedo and Middle Juba were freed of *Al Shabaab* influence he could win any election, even though most of the inhabitants of Gedo (i.e. Marehan clan members) would cast their votes against him. But *Al Shabaab* was not run out of town, and the electoral arithmetic meant he would not be able to win any elections with Gedo against him.

#### POLITICS VS JIHAD

For now, it seems the political systems offer no alternative to *Al Shabaab* and no prospect of it facing security challenges

during the year, especially in view of the blow the SNA took in December.

The disastrous defeat of the SNA by Madobe's forces in a major battle at Ras Kamboni on 11 December has demoralised SNA leaders, including the Turkish-trained *Gorgor* Special Forces, 600 of whom had to cross the border into Kenya to avoid annihilation.

The United States-trained *Danab* Brigade refused to participate in this highly questionable and costly military operation. The experience has confirmed Hassan Sheikh's poor record as a general, and it seems he has nothing left in the bag with which to deal serious blows to the long-running insurgency. ●

## MOZAMBIQUE IN 2025

# Facing the costs of Nyusi's inheritance

**Ruling party candidate Daniel Chapo has been sworn in as president but inherits an economy ravaged by corruption and post-election protests**

**D**aniel Chapo of the ruling *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (Frelimo) took the presidential oath on 15 January, but post-election protests have cast serious doubt over how effectively he, and Frelimo, will be able to govern. Since the 9 October election, Mozambique has been riven by a breakdown in law and order. The opposition *Partido Otimista pelo Desenvolvimento de Moçambique* (Podemos) and its presidential candidate **Venâncio Mondlane** maintain that they won the elections (AC Vol 65 No 22). The scale of participation and public anger during the demonstrations suggests that Mondlane and Podemos enjoy a high level of support, while anti-Frelimo feeling is strong and widespread.

This sentiment is likely to persist, according to both civil society and Frelimo sources. Party insiders indicate that Frelimo is unwilling to address the population's grievances, nor is it willing to concede power. Sources close to Chapo say he has shown little sign of being a reformer, despite initial hopes. He faced criticism for remaining silent during the protests. Chapo maintains that he won 70% of the vote, though this claim is widely regarded as implausible.

Many are relieved to see the back of his predecessor, **Filipe Nyusi**, who is widely regarded within Frelimo as the worst leader in the party's history. However, there are concerns that Chapo is not equipped to address Mozambique's myriad complex and deeply entrenched problems. Nyusi left the country teetering on the edge of bankruptcy

and grappling with an insurgency in Cabo Delgado that has necessitated the presence of foreign troops. The presence of the **Rwandan** army in and around Cabo Delgado remains unpopular, and if opposition forces gain more influence, they may put stronger pressure on Frelimo to justify it (AC Vol 65 No 22).

Nyusi's own party accuses him of corruption and incompetence. He managed to lose core support groups, such as doctors, teachers and other civil servants, by introducing a disastrous new salary structure that effectively cut their wages while simultaneously driving up the wage bill, violating commitments to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Frelimo has also lost support in regional strongholds such as Gaza. Frelimo moderates argue that they need to focus on winning back this support, but Chapo does not appear up to the job – especially when facing the charismatic Mondlane.

Analysts note that Frelimo may have only limited real support and that any attempt to govern alone in such a precarious situation will likely result in heightened political instability. Internally, the party has been weakened by deep divisions and shows no sign of uniting. Moderates are angry with the hardliners for allowing the post-election protests to spiral so far out of control.

The opposition will continue to fight for political space, backed by its increasingly vocal supporters. Meanwhile, investors will adopt a cautious stance towards the country while its government remains so

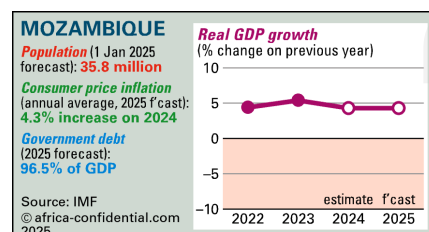
uncertain. This is likely to result in delays and suspensions of projects, particularly in the mining sector, with gas megaprojects also facing setbacks. Security threats from protests and their knock-on effects on supply chains will hinder business operations and growth.

The post-election violence has resulted in significant economic costs. The new government will find its coffers largely empty and face substantial damage to repair, with domestic infrastructure and businesses in need of rebuilding. Mondlane has called for a US\$500 million fund to compensate firms for losses incurred as a result of the protests, although Frelimo is attempting to pin the blame for the unrest on Mondlane (Dispatches 14/1/25).

Poverty increased significantly under Nyusi, who was partly responsible for the country's \$2 billion hidden loans scandal. This debacle culminated in a **United States** court sentencing former Finance Minister **Manuel Chang** to eight-and-a-half years for fraud and money laundering on 17 January (AC Vol 64 No 25). Pundits say that the huge sums wasted on vanity projects that enriched government officials, exposed the level of corruption among the Frelimo elite, and that the poor bore the brunt of the debt crisis.

#### DEFAULT RISK

Frelimo sources acknowledge that analysts are right to fear another sovereign debt default in 2025. Ratings agency Standard & Poor's downgraded Mozambique's local currency debt risk





to a junk status of CCC a week after the 9 October election, with Fitch following suit in November. On 18 October, S&P blamed political unrest for exacerbating existing problems in the country's fragile economy.

Other analysts say the risk of default on external debt is significant. Mozambique's next payment of around \$40m to bondholders is due on 31 March. Other external debt obligations may fall due before then, say financial sources. According to figures from the Ministry of Finance, Mozambique's annual debt service burden is \$800m. Insiders say that this sum is unaffordable, and that the only viable option may be borrowing from the central bank.

Following the hidden loans debacle, the central bank has taken stringent measures to control monetary flows and maintain the value of the metical to stabilise the economy. S&P regards the currency as overvalued by 40% and investors fear devaluation.

Mozambique has relied heavily on domestic borrowing since the 2016 debt

crisis shut it out of the international credit markets. Meanwhile, businesses report that the scarcity of dollars in the market has created significant challenges, making it difficult to import goods. Finance sources indicate that a substantial portion of Mozambique's \$3.7bn in gross reserves might simply be borrowed and securitised against domestic debt in the form of Treasury bills.

Sources close to the IMF report that Mozambique has failed to meet its obligations under its \$456m, three-year programme. Consequently, the IMF has suspended disbursements, diplomatically stating that it will wait to conduct its fifth and sixth reviews in March. The IMF hasn't offered detailed reasons for the delay. But its staffers suggest that the uncertainty around the election means they would like to assess the new administration before proceeding with the next stage of the programme. The sources say it is likely Mozambique has not met the criteria, but that the IMF prefers not to openly

acknowledge this.

Key to the economy are the gas projects. France has been reluctant to acknowledge the scale of the post-electoral crisis, we hear, and suspicions are that it has tried to play it down to avoid jeopardising its investment interests. French oil giant TotalEnergies is still awaiting a delayed loan from the US Exim Bank, which we understand is the main obstacle to the project, rather than the insurgency in the north (AC Vol 66 No 1). US Exim Bank is waiting for a new board, due to be appointed in January by President Donald Trump. Meanwhile, America's Exxon is also waiting for Total to proceed before it can declare its Final Investment Decision. Following the election protests, Total announced in mid-December that it would not restart the project until mid-2025. It had previously been expected to lift *force majeure* earlier this year. Exxon announced on 6 November that its FID is expected in 2026, rather than 2025, as initially forecast. ●

## BURKINA FASO/MALI/NIGER/MINING

# Sahel's juntas challenge western miners

Published online 17 January

**The fight over one of the world's biggest gold mines points to the changing balance of power in the region**

**T**he stand-off between General Assimi Goïta's military regime and Canada's Barrick Gold has reached a critical point with the mining conglomerate suspending work at the Loulou-Gounkoto complex after the government used military helicopters to seize more than three tonnes of gold, worth around US\$245 million on 11 January. Loulou-Gounkoto, 300 kilometres west of Bamako, is one of the world's biggest gold mines in which Mali has 20% of the equity and Barrick has 80% (Dispatches 14/1/25). After increasing last year by 27%, gold prices are over US\$2,700 an ounce. The Bank of America forecasts they could hit an unprecedented \$3,000 this year.

The escalation of Mali's dispute with Barrick follows months of fraught negotiations over revenue-sharing and new mining regulations. It mirrors similar disputes between western mining companies and the juntas in Burkina Faso and Niger. But the stakes in dollar and geopolitical terms are highest in Mali.

In mining parlance, Loulou-Gounkoto is defined as a tier one asset; with low operating costs, it produces

over 500,000 ounces of gold a year or 14% of Barrick's global output. And Russia's Africa Corps (the rebranded Wagner Group now under direct command of the GRU in Moscow) is closely watching mining developments in all three countries (AC Vol 64 No 14). Mali mined 105 tonnes of gold last year, making it Africa's second biggest producer after Ghana.

Russia wants to expand its mining operations in the Sahel as part of its sanctions-proofing tactics (Dispatches 14/8/24). Industry sources report that Russian operations exported over 2.5 tonnes of gold from Africa last year, much of it from Sudan. But that is still a fraction of the gold being smuggled to the United Arab Emirates. Currently Goïta's junta pays the Africa Corps at least \$10m a month for security services since the UN and European peacekeeping forces were pushed out in 2023 (AC Vol 64 No 18).

### ARRESTS AND SEIZURES

This latest round of high-tension bargaining started on 5 December, when the junta issued an arrest warrant for Mark Bristow, Barrick Gold's chief

executive. A straight-talking mine boss, Bristow had won over previous governments by training local workers instead of hiring expatriates and paying dividends and royalties promptly. He led the development of Loulou-Gounkoto for 20 years when he was chief executive of South Africa's Randgold, which was taken over by Barrick six years ago.

Since the military seized power in Mali in August 2020, Bristow has been locked in ill-tempered negotiations with the junta about how to allocate the revenues generated by the mines which have been merged into one asset. Gold revenues are key financial prop for the Bamako junta (AC Vol 65 No 14).

Bristow is safely outside Mali's borders but his local employees aren't so fortunate. Four senior managers were detained in late November and are awaiting trial on charges the authorities are yet to specify. The warrants for Bristow and Loulou-Gounkoto's general manager state they are wanted for money laundering. After issuing the warrants, the junta blocked Barrick's exports pending agreement on the outstanding payments. Then on 11 January, that escalated when the military seized gold from the company's stockpile at the mine.

Barrick, a New York-listed company which produces gold in Argentina, Canada, Congo-Kinshasa, the Dominican Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Papua New Guinea and Tanzania as well as copper in Zambia, says it has contributed 5-10% to Mali's national income in recent years. And last year, it

says it earned revenues of over \$1 billion for the country.

Bristow isn't the first head of a multinational that Gen Goïta, Mali's interim president since 2021, has targeted. **Terry Holohan**, Bristow's counterpart at **Australia's** Resolute Mining, was held in November for over a week at a financial crimes court in Bamako, after the government invited him to fly in for talks. A **Briton**, Holohan was released only after his company agreed to transfer more than \$160m to Mali's treasury.

At the heart of the mining companies' troubles in Africa's second-biggest gold producer is the junta's quest to extract large one-off payments to settle tax claims dating back a decade and secure a greater share of revenue from future operations. After investing billions of dollars in operating mines and expansion projects, those companies in Mali are trying to negotiate the least painful deals.

### SPIRALLING SUMS

Before the junta issued an arrest warrant for him, Bristow was discussing an offer of 225bn CFA (\$370m) – of which Barrick already paid a 50bn CFA instalment – to resolve a dispute over back taxes. Barrick described the claims as 'legally and factually flawed'. Since then, the figures claimed have spiralled from \$550m to over \$5bn.

The row between Barrick and the military has become overtly rancorous. But Resolute and other companies have resolved matters quietly, helped by hefty cash payments. Resolute, Allied Gold and B2Gold all concluded deals with the junta last year. They will see the firms – which, together with Barrick, accounted for around 90% of the 2.4m ounces of gold extracted from industrial mining in 2024 – pay the government almost \$550m.

This bargaining season started with an audit of the mining sector ordered by Goïta in 2022. He assigned it to the **Senegalese** affiliate of Forvis Mazars (formerly Mazars) and Iventus, a consultancy owned by **Mamou Touré**, a local businessman. Touré spent a decade working for Randgold Resources, the company that Bristow founded in the 1990s. Randgold and subsequently Barrick have invested more than \$10bn in Mali on Loulo Gounkoto and another mine, formerly known as 'Morila the Gorilla', over nearly three decades.

If Bristow can reach an agreement allowing him to return to Mali without being sent to jail, it's possible that the junta will have earned around \$1bn from these renegotiations with mining companies. For context: the government's national budget for 2025

## BARGAINING THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

Fuelled also by a combination of high commodity prices and geopolitical upheavals, neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger have been emulating the Malian junta's tactics in changing the rules for mining companies.

Captain **Ibrahim Traoré's** junta in Ouagadougou has revised Burkina Faso's mining code, nationalising gold projects and beefing up ties with **Russia** (AC Vol 64 No 3). It started in August with the Wahgnion and Boungou mines, the subject of a legal fight between London-listed Endeavour Mining and Lilium Mining, a firm belonging to **United States**-Burkinabe banker **Simon Tiemtore**. In September, Mali also reclaimed the dormant Yatela gold mine from AngloGold Ashanti and Toronto-headquartered Iamgold.

The junta in Niamey has also complicated conditions for western companies, banning uranium exports, revoking a license from **Canada's** GoviEx Uranium and taking full control of the Somair mine, owned by **France's** Orano.

It's not only military leaders in West Africa who think existing terms are too favourable for foreign investors. Elected in March, **Senegal's** President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** has initiated an audit of all natural resources contracts, while **Côte d'Ivoire's** Mines Minister **Mamadou Sangafowa Coulibaly** plans to rewrite legislation to boost state profits from the mining sector.

Mali is soon set to join **Zimbabwe** as a key African supplier of lithium to **China** through the Goulamina and Bougouni mines. The majority shareholder of the former is Ganfeng Lithium, an industry giant based in Jiangxi which manufactures chemicals used in electric-vehicle batteries. The latter is co-owned and fully funded by Hainan Mining, an iron ore producer which is diversifying its operations. If these new projects get a smoother ride than Barrick and Resolute, that suggest that anti-western sentiment is driving the tactics against the gold mining houses.

Yet the companies behind the two lithium mines must pay US\$75 million in negotiated settlements to Gen **Assimi Goïta's** government before exporting spodumene concentrate. Some effects of the junta's tactics are becoming clearer. A small deal for exploration assets between two industry juniors, Marvel Gold and Precious Metal Consulting and Engineering, was dropped by the buyer in November 'due to recent developments in Mali'.

Toubani Resources, a single-project firm attempting to raise financing for a 160,000 ounce a year gold mine near the border with **Guinea**, has seen its share price fall by 50% since October. Robex Gold, which is listed in Toronto and has been trying to sell its Nampala mine, has said the 'geopolitical context' in Bamako means 'the market of potential buyers is currently very limited.' ●

is just over \$5 bn in 2025.

The arrangements that Allied, B2Gold and Resolute – headquartered in Toronto, Vancouver and Perth respectively – have announced since September also commit the firms to move their assets on to the new mining code or accept most of the fiscal terms in the revised legislation. The law, which was adopted 16 months ago and implemented via decree last July, increases the state's stake in joint ventures to 35% from 20%, raises taxes and hikes royalties by tying rates to the gold price, which surged to record levels in 2024.

The final holdout, Barrick, argues the 'government insists on forcing Loulo-Gounkoto under the framework' of the code even though it should have 'no application' to mines that already operating when the law was passed. Allied, B2Gold and Resolute all acquiesced under pressure.

After those deals, the three companies can continue operating at their Sadiola, Fekola and Syama

gold mines with some certainty and confidence. That cannot be said for Barrick, although Bristow insists he wants to reach a compromise with Goïta's junta. For now, Mali has threatened to take back one of Barrick's concessions, covering the Loulo part of the mining complex, when the permit expires in early 2026.

Mali has been represented in its negotiations by civilian technocrats rather than bereted soldiers in fatigues and dark glasses. Its team is headed by Economy and Finance Minister **Alousséni Sanou**, a bespectacled economist and banker, and Mines Minister **Amadou Keïta**, a professor of law and political science.

Some of the mining executives have grown used to dealing with an assertive government intent on rebalancing Mali's partnerships with investors. They remain sanguine about their prospects in the Sahel, given the magnitude of the resources there.

Others are outraged yet helpless and see the unfolding events as simply

extortion which will recur whenever the government wants to top up the treasury as local political pressures mount (AC

Vol 65 No 10). The bigger questions for the future are to what extent these tactics will deter other western investors

and will their counterparts in **China**, the Gulf States and Russia fill the capital vacuum. ●

## SOUTH AFRICA

# The country looks north as the party goes south

Published online 22 January

### A fresh bout of optimism about the prospects for economic recovery isn't helping the venerable ANC

**F**rom keynote addresses to international investor conferences, nation-boosting speeches to the UN General Assembly to grassroots rallies in the township, President **Cyril Ramaphosa** knows how to tailor his rhetoric to the audience. On 21 January at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Ramaphosa set out his agenda for South Africa's presidency of the Group of 20: emphasising international cooperation, tackling the excessive debt burden in developing economies, fighting climate change and boosting sustainable energy.

It is hard to imagine a more starkly different world view from the 'America First' agenda set out by **United States** President **Donald Trump** in his inauguration speech on the previous day in Washington DC. Yet in November, Ramaphosa is due to host Trump and other G20 leaders for a summit in South Africa. Insiders suggest it could be a triumph for golf diplomacy if Ramaphosa can persuade national champion **Ernie Els** to play a round of golf with the US President. Els is said to be one of the few foreigners that Trump follows on social media; the two men played golf together in 2022.

Two weeks earlier, Ramaphosa was in comrade mode, trying to fire up his party's base for a revival. As the party celebrated its 113th birthday in Cape Town, the rank and file of the African National Congress braved the sun in Khayelitsha to listen to Ramaphosa's 30-page speech on achieving the vision of the Freedom Charter of 1955.

Ramaphosa posed the party's choice as 'renew or perish'. The May election was a 'strategic setback'. And the Government of National Unity (GNU) was a 'tactical initiative'. But Ramaphosa stressed the importance of winning back trust by tackling corruption and boosting public service delivery.

The new political parties, such as **Jacob Zuma's uMkhonto weSizwe** (MK) party, also came under fire. 'Counter-revolutionary forces and state capture groups are still trying to break the ANC,' said Ramaphosa. These splinter groups were merely seeking access to state

power, he added.

Last year, the ANC suffered at the polls nationally and in the Western Cape. The province delivered the party's worst electoral results since the advent of democracy in 1994, with the ANC securing only 19.5% of the vote, a significant drop from the 28.6% it received in 2019 (AC Vol 65 No 12).

The six-member national executive committee members, including ANC National Chair **Gwede Mantashe**, ANC Secretary-General **Fikile Mbalula** and ANC Treasurer-General **Gwen Ramokgopa**, spent a week in Cape Town visiting poorer areas such as Khayelitsha and Delft but avoided the Cape Flats areas of Mitchells Plain and Manenberg, which are plagued by escalating gang violence and unemployment.

Mbalula has barred any leadership discussions but horse-trading continues. Deputy President **Paul Mashatile** and Mbalula are front-runners for the top spot in 2027, when the ANC holds its elective conference. Ramaphosa must step down after two terms as ANC president but may remain head of state until 2029 (AC Vol 65 No 13 & Vol 66 No 1).

Some ANC leaders fear 2029 could be the party's death knell. This may be Mbalula and Mashatile's last chance for the top post. 'Mbalula was going to wait until 2034 but he wants to throw his hat in the ring now,' said an ANC insider.

### CONTENDERS

ANC sources told *Africa Confidential* it is too early to define the leading factions but that the current battle is between Mashatile and Mbalula. Other contenders include ANC Gauteng Chair and Gauteng Premier **Panyaza Lesufi**, Eastern Cape Premier **Oscar Mabuyane**, Police Minister **Senzo Mchunu**, and Ramokgopa.

During the anniversary events, Mbalula and Mashatile had contrasting outreach programmes in Cape Town. As Secretary-General, Mbalula held several press conferences discussing party matters, including Zuma's legal notice challenging his removal from the ANC.

Mashatile faced a public relations

disaster when a resident in Khayelitsha asked him to leave his home during a house-to-house visit. A video on social media showed the resident shouting before Mashatile's VIP protection team forced him outside. Mashatile later apologised. In 2023, several members of his VIP protection unit were charged with assaulting four motorists on the N1 highway in Johannesburg.

Mbalula tried some door-to-door campaigns but his arrival at Robben Island in a luxury yacht drew public ire. Ramaphosa arrived by helicopter for security reasons, while other NEC members took the ferry. An ANC member commented, 'So much for reconnecting with the people and being on the ground... how can Mbalula get it so wrong? Our leaders just don't learn... it signals crass materialism.'

Mashatile is currently the front-runner for deputy president of both the country and the ANC, enjoying majority support within the National Executive Committee (NEC). Yet his backing in Gauteng is fractured and he is courting ANC First Deputy Secretary-General **Nomvula Mokonyane** and Lesufi.

After serial reports about his lavish lifestyle, Mashatile has struggled to gain support in other provinces. The ANC's Integrity Commission is investigating him and has yet to rule on it (AC Vol 65 No 11 & Vol 65 No 6).

Mbalula, who runs ANC headquarters at Luthuli House, has reorganised branches and provinces. 'This is a powerful position as you have the most powerful leaders in provinces – the provincial secretaries – to lobby on your behalf,' an activist told *Africa Confidential*.

'Remember, Mashatile did the same when he was acting secretary-general following **Ace Magashule** being booted out of the party and this gives you a line to people on the ground.'

A major challenge for Mashatile and Mbalula is the potential disbanding of the Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provincial executives (PECs). The ANC performed poorly in both provinces, with Gauteng's support dropping from 50% in 2019 to 36%, and KZN's from 54%



to 17%. Last year, the ANC's National Working Committee recommended dissolving the PECs and holding new elections.

While Mbalula supports disbanding the PECs, Mashatile and the NEC disagree, believing the issues can be resolved without such drastic measures.

'Mbalula wants those PECs dissolved so that he can get his own people to run and it becomes a powerful lobby ahead of 2027. Mashatile will not allow this, knowing what it would mean for him. Now it's a stalemate,' an ANC insider said. The other debate involves Lesufi, who has publicly criticised the GNU.

KZN ANC members argue that dissolving the PECs could empower Zuma and his MK party, at a time when the ANC is desperate to regain ground ahead of the 2026 local government elections (AC Vol 65 No 24).

## POLICY REVIEW

Powerful provinces, such as the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Northern Cape, and Mpumalanga, are considering their options. Negotiations are expected soon but their branches are also focusing on the National General Council, the ANC's mid-term policy review set for

## MLAMBO-NGCUKA – A THIRD-WAY LEADER?

On the ANC's birthday on 8 January, President **Cyril Ramaphosa** invited former Deputy President **Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka** to the cake-cutting ritual. She also joined the wreath-laying ceremony for the late Justice Minister **Dullah Omar**. Having been out of the country for the past decade, some believe she may be Ramaphosa's third-way choice to avoid a succession favouring Deputy President **Paul Mashatile** or ANC Secretary-General **Fikile Mbalula**.

While serving as the Executive Director of UN Women during the Zuma years, Mlambo-Ngcuka, formerly **Thabo Mbeki's** deputy, has remained engaged with local issues. She is also Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, a senior fellow at the Global Dialogue Inclusion Partnership and active in African missions, including the Sudan Women's Peace Dialogue. In December she joined the African Union mission to observe the Ghana election.

Although she has not made headlines recently, after the May elections, she voiced concerns about the reduction in the number of women MPs, bringing her back into political campaigning. ●

June. It will be the first NGC in a decade; the 2020 NGC was cancelled due to the Covid pandemic.

NGCs are a platform for provinces to advocate for policy positions, and act as a national sounding board. In 2015, under President Zuma and Deputy President Ramaphosa, the NGC discussed a wealth tax and cutting municipalities. This was when **Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma's** lobbyists started mobilising for

her failed presidential bid.

The NGC allows branches and members to raise policy disagreements, including the GNU and issues around the NEC and Ramaphosa's leadership. 'The ANC always finds a compromise and middle ground,' said a member who worked at the 2015 NGC. Neither Mashatile nor Mbalula are likely to get Ramaphosa's blessing for the succession. ●

## US/AFRICA/UN/FINANCE

# New front opens in global tax war

Published online 13 January

## As Donald Trump takes over, Washington may penalise states applying OECD tax rules on multinationals

**F**ights over new rules to cut corporate tax avoidance and illicit financial flows are intensifying weeks ahead of the first meeting of a new UN convention to set global rules. The UN convention follows years of campaigning by developing countries, especially the Africa group in the UN (AC Vol 64 No 24).

They argue that the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s unofficial role as the world's tax rule-maker should come under the aegis of the UN General Assembly, a more representative body. Officials at the OECD, which is dominated by rich western countries, have tried to resist any role for the UN on taxes.

Another front in the war over global taxes looks set to be opened by United States President **Donald Trump's** administration which takes office on 20 January. Senior Republicans around Trump and in the US Congress have said they oppose both the OECD's

and the UN's planned rules to tax multinationals.

With backing from US President **Joe Biden's** administration, the OECD had introduced a global minimum corporate tax of 15% after prolonged debate. Now US Republicans, elected in November on a tax-cutting agenda, argue they will not be party to what they see as 'discriminatory taxes' on US multinationals. They have singled out the OECD's Under-Taxed Profits Rule (UTPR) which allows countries to levy top-up taxes on a multinational should any of its affiliates pay corporate tax of less than the 15% baseline in other jurisdictions.

That would mean if a multinational operating in **Nigeria** shifts its profits to the British Virgin Islands with minimal corporate tax obligations, then the Nigerian government would be able to charge tax on that multinational at the baseline 15% rate.

This fight between the US and European states in the OECD could delay

any new international agreements under the aegis of the UN tax convention. The convention's first task is to create a global tax platform to cut base erosion and profit-shifting including tax avoidance and illicit financial flows (IFF).

African states criticised the OECD's 15% baseline tax rate as too low. It would not stop profit-shifting out of Africa, given the average corporate tax on the continent was 25% to 35%. The next step for the UN tax convention will be the creation of an 'intergovernmental negotiating committee', with a bureau consisting of a Chair, 18 Vice-Chairs and a Rapporteur at a meeting in New York, between 3-6 February.

The first of the two protocols to be discussed by the convention will be on taxing income from cross-border digital services. The second protocol – drawn from a short list of measures to counter IFFs – will be agreed in New York.

It was due to pressure from African states that IFFs featured so prominently in the terms of reference of the convention. The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) estimate Africa's losses from IFFs are running at over US\$100 billion a year (AC Vol 65 No 18).

Though **France** led a campaign to prioritise tax measures on environmental and climate challenges, this is only included in a list of four

possible subjects for future protocols.

**Ramy Youssef**, Egypt's assistant minister of finance for tax policy and reform, is likely to be appointed as bureau chairman. The resolution on the UN tax convention, drafted by the Africa group and adopted by the UN General Assembly, asked the UN Secretary-General for technical support and a secretariat from the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs. **Kenya** is to host at least one of the convention's three sessions in 2025.

The biggest problem facing the UN tax convention will be how to work with those nine states that voted against it in the General Assembly and the 46 that abstained (27 of those are in the EU and voted en bloc) (AC Vol 65 No 3). The US is likely to oppose many of the

convention's decisions, and the Trump administration may impose punitive tariffs on states seen as singling out US multinationals.

**Britain** has taken a more ambiguous position. The Labour government, elected in July, had promised to reverse the previous Conservative administration's opposition to the UN convention and support more African representation in international forums (AC Vol 65 No 21). But this wasn't reflected in Britain's position in the UN General Assembly debate on 27 November when the African-sponsored resolution on the tax convention secured a 125-9 majority.

The EU, whose member states were split, has hedged its bets. Several EU states such as **Germany**, **Spain** and

the Nordic countries, are high-tax countries who want more transparency and tougher rules on IFFs. But some European states, such as the **Netherlands**, **Luxembourg** and **Malta**, are either tax havens or use overseas territories to achieve the same goal. France, which benefits from hosting the OECD's headquarters in Paris, does not want its role to be diluted.

In the pre-vote discussion, officials from the EU and Britain argued, unsuccessfully, that the UN process should work by consensus. EU officials hinted that they could walk out on the convention if it attempted to force new rules via a majority vote. But relying on consensus would reduce the convention to a talking shop given the difficulties of uniting over 190 states. ●

## SUDAN/UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

# Washington's sanctions block Hemeti's war message

Published online 15 January

**Torn between ties to the US and the UAE, Kenyan officials banned a press conference by the RSF militia in Nairobi**

**T**he last-minute cancellation of a press conference in Nairobi on 13 January by senior officials in the Rapid Support Forces suggests that its commander General **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'** is losing ground diplomatically as well as militarily in the civil war that has wracked Sudan since April 2023.

The RSF had invited over 100 journalists and diplomats to hear Hemeti's response to the **United States** sanctions against him and his business empire in the United Arab Emirates. Sources close to the RSF say it may announce the formation of a parallel government in Darfur to counter what it sees as the propaganda advantage enjoyed by its foes, the Sudan Armed Forces, from their headquarters in Port Sudan.

We hear the press conference was cancelled at the behest of President **William Ruto's** office following the US's determination on 7 January that the RSF has committed genocide in Sudan. The US also sanctioned Hemeti directly. No statement was made by **Kenya's** government which has received Hemeti several times including a widely publicised meeting with Ruto, a year ago.

Kenyan officials feared that allowing the RSF to present its case to East Africa's press corps, just days after US sanctions, could damage Ruto's relations with Washington, we understand. Kenya was designated a major non-NATO ally of the US by President **Joe Biden** last

year (AC Vol 65 No 12). And Ruto hopes that Kenya, which boasts one of the region's most advanced and innovative tech sectors, could strike a bilateral trade deal with the US under President **Donald Trump**.

### AWKWARD FOR RUTO

Before the event, social media posts criticised the Kenyan government for remaining virtually silent about the wave of kidnappings and extraordinary renditions in Kenya, while being willing to provide a platform for a militia accused of multiple war crimes to address the press (Dispatches 31/12/24).

Hemeti and his brother, **Abdul Rahim Hamdan Dagalo**, the deputy commander of the RSF, were said by diplomatic sources to be staying in Kenya, close to the venue for the press conference in the Upper Hill diplomatic area. Their travel to Kenya and business transactions could have involved a breach of the US sanctions.

A RSF spokesman was unable to explain why the press conference was cancelled at such short notice but insisted that Hemeti was in Khartoum. That seems unlikely given the intensity of the latest fighting for control of the Sudanese capital. Over 120 people were reported to have been killed by artillery shelling on 13 January in Omdurman, across the Nile from Khartoum.

It is inconceivable that Ruto's office was unaware that RSF officials were in town and planning a press conference,

just a short walk from State House. This last-minute shutdown illustrates the awkward path that Ruto is walking on Sudan. Last year, Commander of the Sudan Armed Forces Gen **Abdel Fattah al Burhan** blocked Ruto from mediating ceasefire talks by the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development, accusing him of being an ally of Hemeti (Dispatches 27/3/24).

As the RSF press conference was being cancelled, Ruto was in Abu Dhabi meeting the UAE President Sheikh **Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahayan** (MBZ), whose government provides weapons and funds to the RSF, as reported in serial UN investigations, and well-documented news reports by Reuters and the *New York Times*. MBZ's National Security Advisor, Sheikh **Tahnoon bin Zayed**, has also been linked to Hemeti's businesses in the UAE.

Ruto, who signed a bilateral trade deal with MBZ, is also trying to negotiate a US\$1.5 billion balance of payments loan with the UAE. Kenya's foreign borrowing is heavily restricted under the terms of its IMF programme. Attending the World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi on 14-16 January, Ruto also met the UAE's investment minister **Mohamed Hassan Alsuwaidi** to finance an extension of Kenya's standard gauge railway, now linking Mombasa to Nairobi, on to **Uganda** and South Sudan.

Balancing their commercial interests, the UAE rulers may be ready to cut their

support for Hemeti, which was becoming a diplomatic and financial liability even before the US sanctions. Large caches of arms, clearly identified as coming from the UAE, were uncovered in the RSF bases at Wad Madani, when the SAF seized control of the city, some 200 kilometres south-east of Khartoum, on 12 January.

## RECKONING ON SANCTIONS

Until now, US officials had been wary of imposing sanctions on the RSF or publicly criticising the UAE's support for it. Having reopened diplomatic ties with Israel and vehemently opposing Islamist groups, the UAE has proved a useful ally for successive governments in Washington.

The calculus has changed after President Biden's outgoing government and the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control imposed sanctions on Hemeti, and seven companies in the UAE linked to him. They include Capital Tap and the gold purchasing companies Al Zumoroud and Al Yaqoot Gold & Jewellers, all owned by **Abu Dharr Abdul Nabi Habiballa Ahmmed**, and are accused by the US of supplying the RSF with money and weapons.

The European Union may move next on sanctions but its decisions require agreement by all 27 member

states and can't be dictated by the Commission in Brussels. An EU official in East Africa told *Africa Confidential* that 'after the massacres committed by the Rapid Support Forces in West Darfur against the Masalit tribe, we already declared these atrocities ethnic cleansing and warned that a genocide could be happening.'

These measures would have legal implications for any Emiratis, including senior figures in the government who continue to do business with Hemeti. His business empire, headquartered in Dubai, is largely based on gold smuggled from Sudan.

US Secretary of State **Antony Blinken** has accused both the RSF and the SAF of mass atrocities. Some expect another round of US sanctions against senior figures in the SAF and its allied Islamist militia leaders, but not Gen Burhan. Aware of these risks, the SAF has, unusually, disassociated itself from those fighters who were rounding up, torturing and killing civilians accused of links to the RSF around Wad Madani and some areas of El Gezira.

Videos on social media showed a young man being pushed off a bridge by a group of men, one of whose jacket bore the insignia of the *al-Baraa ibn Mali* battalion, one of the Islamist militias fighting alongside the SAF. Reuters

confirmed the footage was taken at Hantoob bridge in Was Madani but couldn't verify the date.

The latest US sanctions are likely to stay under the Trump presidency. But few expect the probable new Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, **J Peter Pham**, to prioritise negotiations to end the war in Sudan. After serial failures of negotiations led by the US and **Saudi Arabia**, and the side-lining of the African Union, this leaves a door open for **Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**, whose foreign minister **Burhanettin Duran** was in Port Sudan on 4 January promising to ship thousands of tons of food and medicines to the country.

To some irritation in Abu Dhabi, Turkey has proposed that the UAE stops its backing of Hemeti and the RSF – in exchange for the Burhan and the Port Sudan-based government withdrawing its complaints against the UAE at the UN Security Council. But to do that, the government would have to admit to doing what it had steadfastly denied doing for the last 21 months.

Turkey is far from neutral in this fight. Apart from supporting sundry Islamist factions in Africa and the Middle East, it has backed Burhan and the SAF, along with **Egypt** and **Malaysia**. ●

## DISPATCHES

### KENYA

## Ruto bids for Emirati gold

21 January

**The President seeks to bolster the economy through new loans and trade deals with the UAE, while navigating diplomatic pressures and shifting alliances**

President **William Ruto** has pinned his government's economic hopes on new loans and trade with the **United Arab Emirates**, as he seeks alternatives to **Chinese** financing.

Last week, Ruto cancelled a press conference in Nairobi organised by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the **Sudanese** militia led by General **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'**, following diplomatic pressure from the **United States** (AC Vol 66 No 2). Hemeti's main supporter is Abu Dhabi.

The US sanctioned Hemeti and seven UAE-based companies for supplying cash and weapons to the RSF. Despite aligning with Washington on the RSF,

Ruto's standing with the UAE remains unaffected.

On the same day, Ruto was in Abu Dhabi signing a trade deal expected to substantially boost agricultural exports to the Emirati state. The deal also aims to open up services markets in finance and technology. It was one of three free trade pacts signed by the UAE.

More than trade, Ruto is hoping to finalise a US\$1.5 billion loan with the UAE, as well as financing to extend the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) which currently connects Nairobi to Mombasa.

Kenya had wanted the SGR project, which was financed by loans totalling 476bn shillings (\$3.6bn) from China's Exim Bank, to extend to **Uganda** and **South Sudan**. However, the completed track only reaches Naivasha, an agricultural hub in the Rift Valley, close to 500 kilometres from the Ugandan border.

The Kenya Railway Authority is one of the most financially precarious among the country's parastatals. Despite regularly running services at or near full capacity since its launch in June 2017, the Mombasa-Nairobi line remains loss-making (AC Vol 64 No 7). The terms and

secrecy of the SGR contract with China have faced significant criticism in Kenya.

### AFRICA/FINANCE

## Lower US interest rates will lead sub-Saharan Africa back to market

21 January

**Despite current tighter financing conditions, Moody's upgrades the region's credit outlook to 'stable' amid reduced borrowing costs**

Lower **United States** interest rates will mean cheaper borrowing for African states, ratings agency **Moody's** believes. The ratings agency has revised its outlook on sub-Saharan Africa's sovereign credit to 'stable' from 'negative' last year.

The US Federal Reserve cut its rate by a percentage point between September and December, with further cuts expected in 2025. This is despite new trade tariffs promised by President **Donald Trump**, which may have a drag



on global economies.

Analysts at Moody's Ratings expect the outlook for credit fundamentals for sub-Saharan African sovereigns to remain stable, up from negative last year, though financing conditions will still be tighter than pre-Covid.

Barring a handful of countries, most of Africa stayed away from the bond market in 2024 (Dispatches 11/6/24).

One of them, Kenya, issued a US\$1.5 billion Eurobond in February 2024 to repay a maturing Eurobond and is expected to return to the market soon to repay a \$900 million Eurobond tranche due in May. Securing a better interest rate than the 9.75% of last February will be a key early test (AC Vol 65 No 8).

Being shut out of the financial markets has pushed a number of African countries deeper into debt distress contributing to debt restructuring and bailout deals for Ethiopia, Ghana and Zambia.

The latest, for Ethiopia, which agreed a \$3.4bn programme with the IMF last July, remains on track. On 17 January, the IMF's executive board approved the second review of Ethiopia's programme, paving the way for a disbursement of about \$250m.

## GHANA

### An early challenge for President Mahama

21 January

**A gun battle between the military and galamsey miners has resulted in seven deaths, intensifying Ghana's illegal mining crisis**

The deaths of seven *galamsey* miners in a shoot-out with army officers have deepened the crisis over Ghana's illegal mining.

On 18 January, the army reported that the gunfight occurred after around 60 illegal gold miners broke through the security fence at the AngloGold Ashanti mines.

The shooting started when the miners, armed with guns, knives and other weapons, attempted to enter the deep decline area of the mines.

Tackling illegal mining threatens to be an early, and potentially intractable problem for President John Mahama who was reelected in December, eight years after being ousted by the New Patriotic Party's (NPP) Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (AC Vol 65 No 25). Both Mahama and Akufo-Addo promised to address *galamsey* mining.

On 20 January, the Ghana Coalition Against *Galamsey* urged Mahama to declare a state of emergency over the damage to the country's rivers and water bodies caused by illegal mining.

Meanwhile, the Ghana Water Company Limited has reported an alarming increase in turbidity levels at the Sekyere Hemang Water Treatment Plant, reaching 14,000 Nephelometric Turbidity Units. This starkly contrasts with the World Health Organization's safe threshold of 5 NTUs for water processing.

However, artisanal mining employs over a million people and contributes to 40% of gold production. Senior officials from both the NPP and Mahama's National Democratic Congress have been implicated in these activities (AC Vol 65 No 21). Notably, Mahama did not set out specific policy plans to tackle *galamsey* ahead of the election.

## MOZAMBIQUE

### More protests but Mondlane softens his stance

14 January

**Despite calling for demonstrations, the opposition leader has eased his demands, making his planned unofficial inauguration unlikely**

Six people were reported killed and a further 15 injured by gunfire in clashes on 13 January, in the first of three days of planned protests called by *Partido Otimista pelo Desenvolvimento de Moçambique* (Podemos) presidential candidate Venâncio Mondlane.

Mondlane, who returned to the country last week after several months in exile following the assassination of two of his senior advisors, had his diplomatic passport confiscated by authorities upon arrival (Dispatches 7/1/25).

Though Mondlane has called for three days of protest to mark the swearing in of President-elect Daniel Chapo and members of the Mozambican parliament, he appears to have softened his demands in recent days. Plans to hold his own unofficial presidential inauguration on 15 January look increasingly unlikely.

On 10 January, he demanded that the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (Frelimo) government set up a programme to build three million houses for young people in five years, alongside a US\$600 million fund to

compensate small businesses for their losses from several months of protests since the disputed October elections. He has also called for free medical care for those injured and compensation for the families of people killed.

It remains uncertain whether South African President Cyril Ramaphosa will attend Chapo's inauguration on 15 January. Meanwhile, Portugal, the former colonial ruler, has indicated that only its foreign minister will attend.

Last week, the Portuguese parliament passed a resolution urging its government not to recognise the election results pointing to 'the serious irregularities and fraud that have been denounced and documented' (AC Vol 65 No 22).

## MALI

### Bullion for Bamako

14 January

**Barrick Gold says it will suspend mining operations in the country after the government seized gold stocks from the company's Loulo-Gounkoto operation**

Canadian mining company Barrick Gold has pulled the plug on operations at its Loulo-Gounkoto complex in Mali after the Malian government seized an estimated 3 metric tonnes of gold, valued at around US\$245 million from the facility at the weekend.

The seizure follows demands by Colonel Assimi Goïta's military regime for hefty tax payments from Barrick, based on a court order claiming the company owed \$5.5 billion in taxes, after previously demanding \$500m in back taxes.

Barrick paid \$85m in taxes to the government last October, according to its latest quarterly earnings report. The Bamako government owns a 20% stake in Loulo-Gounkoto.

The junta had also issued an arrest warrant for Barrick's chief executive Mark Bristow.

The neighbouring military regimes in Burkina Faso and Niger have also signalled that they want to significantly increase revenues from mining. In November, Niger expelled French miner Orano from its uranium concession (AC Vol 65 Nos 21 & 23).

While industry analysts estimate that closing Loulo-Gounkoto will cost Barrick around 11% of its annual revenue, the decision leaves grave doubts over the future for foreign miners in the country.

In December, United Kingdom miner Hummingbird Resources

announced its sale to Nioko Resources, a subsidiary of its main creditor, for a reduced price of \$17.5m. Hummingbird attributed the decision to operational losses at its Yanfolila mine in Mali and the revenue demands from the junta, with which it had been in negotiations (Dispatches 12/1/22).

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KENYA/TANZANIA

## Activists' kidnapping highlights police campaign of repression

14 January

**The abduction of a Tanzanian campaigner, assaulted by unknown assailants in Nairobi, reinforces concerns about a spate of extraordinary renditions**

The kidnapping and subsequent release hours later of the Tanzanian political activist **Maria Sarungi Tsehai** in Nairobi is the latest in a chilling series of abductions involving the connivance

of Kenya's security services.

The abduction of dozens of youth activists, many of whom were later murdered, as well as the extraordinary rendition of foreign activists, including Ugandan opposition leader **Kizza Besigye**, has shocked Kenyans (AC Vol 65 No 23).

Tsehai's kidnapping was reported immediately and, on 13 January, Tsehai told a press briefing that she had been choked and assaulted by four unknown assailants who forced her into a vehicle in Nairobi's middle-class Kilimani district, on the afternoon of 12 January.

Tsehai blamed President **Samia Suluhu Hassan** and the ruling *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* for her abduction. Last year, Tanzanian opposition politicians, including **Freeman Mbowe** and **Tundu Lissu**, were detained and beaten by police (Dispatches, 22/10/24).

Despite the evidence, the police force continues to deny any involvement. On 13 January, a High Court gave Inspector-General of Police, **Douglas Kanja**, and Director of Criminal Investigations **Mohammed Amin**, four days to release three men: **Justus Mutumwa**, **Martin Mwau** and **Karani Muema** (Dispatches 31/12/24).

The three were allegedly abducted in Machakos County in December. Justice **Chacha Mwita** also ordered Kanja and Amin to appear in court on 17 January, before citing them for contempt of court.

Despite leading politicians also being affected – the son of Public Service Cabinet Secretary **Justin Muturi** was abducted and later released last year – and President **William Ruto** promising to address the issue, the police continue to act with impunity.

In a sign of the top-level political support that they enjoy, the police leadership have repeatedly defied court orders to release abductees and to appear in court. In September, Kanja's predecessor **Gilbert Masengeli** was given a six-month jail sentence for contempt of court after defying seven orders to testify on the whereabouts of three activists said to have been abducted by the police.

With little prospect of this order being respected, similar sanctions appear likely. A handful of abductees were quietly released at police stations across the country in early January, with images suggesting that they had been tortured. ●

## POINTERS

## Migration/EU/Africa

## ACCENTUATE THE INNOVATIVE

■ A severe bout of pneumonia put a hold on European Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen's** plans to visit **Morocco** last week, but nothing it appears can halt the momentum for more migrant control deals with Morocco and its neighbours.

The number of migrants arriving from **Tunisia** and **Libya** fell by 59% to 66,766 in 2024. **Italian** Prime Minister **Giorgia Meloni** has seized upon these figures as proof that the 'cash for migrant' control deal with Tunis is working (AC Vol 65 No 14).

Brussels is now focused on the 18% increase, amounting to 46,877 irregular crossings, on the West African route to the Spanish Canary Islands via Morocco, Western Sahara and **Senegal**.

While financial incentives will be offered to Morocco and potentially Senegal, arguably more significant is a June review of the EU's 'safe third country' concept that allows EU states to dismiss asylum requests and send asylum seekers abroad, provided the hosting country can offer 'effective protection'. The 'safe third country' designation was central to the previous UK government's legal difficulties with its deal to outsource asylum processing to **Rwanda**.

Commission officials say that 2025 will be about 'innovative solutions', potentially including offshore detention centres. The **Polish** government, which holds the EU Council's six-month presidency, says that this will be one of its priorities between now and June.

Key to such 'innovative solutions' is whether the EU can get legal approval to replace the concept of 'instrumentalisation' of migrants with 'weaponisation'. Instrumentalisation refers to situations where states push or encourage migrants towards the EU border, allowing EU countries certain exemptions from asylum law in emergencies. Weaponisation of migration, by contrast, could enable EU countries to suspend asylum rights altogether.

## Cameroon/US

## AMBAGONIA BETS ON TRUMP

■ The Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC) has emerged as the latest African separatist movement to stake its hopes on a second **Donald Trump** presidency recognising its independence from Cameroon by hiring K-Street lobbyists in Washington.

## IN THE NEWS: TRUMP'S NEW MEN IN AFRICA

Two **United States** foreign policy veterans are taking the lead on Africa policy in **Donald Trump's** second presidency. **Joseph Foltz**, the staff director on the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa for the past two years, will be director of the Africa desk at the National Security Council.

One of few Trump appointees who also served in the Democrat administrations of **Joe Biden** and **Barack Obama**, and one of even fewer who acknowledge the existence and threat of climate change, Foltz is a career Washington insider. The bulk of his career has been spent with the US Agency for International Development, serving in **Rwanda** and then as a senior official in USAID's Office of Environment, Energy, and Infrastructure during Obama's presidency. He then served a year as a director on the National Security Council under both Trump and Biden between 2020 and 2021.

In recent weeks, Foltz has downplayed his bipartisan past, enthusiastically extolling Trump's 'America First' agenda on social media. A more muscular diplomacy is likely from **J. Peter Pham**, the veteran Republican Africanist, whose nomination as Assistant Secretary of State for Africa had been widely expected.

A fellow at the Atlantic Council since 2021, Pham spent three years as US Special Envoy for the Great Lakes and then the Sahel Region. His political career started in earnest with a stint as advisor to Senator **John McCain's** presidential campaign in 2008 (AC Vol 58 No 3).

Pham is a strong supporter of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which offers tariff and quota-free exports to the US for over 30 African countries. AGOA is due to expire in September. Trump considered axing AGOA during his first term but its importance as an alternative to **China**, which now offers quota and tariff-free trade to all African countries with whom it has diplomatic relations, is widely recognised by Republicans in Congress. A bipartisan bill to extend AGOA has been stuck in Congress for most of the past year.

Other hints of policy direction under Pham can be found in Project 2025, the policy blueprint drawn up by the Heritage Foundation think-tank, which Pham helped draft. It calls for a return to 'core diplomatic activities' and away from promoting policies focused on cultural values, such as support for LGBTQI+ and reproductive health rights. That could be good news for **Uganda**, whose access to AGOA was suspended under Biden because of its anti-homosexuality bill.

His nomination will also give hope to Somaliland and the prospects of recognising its independence. Pham is a strong supporter of **Morocco's** sovereignty over Western Sahara – arguably the biggest single change in US Africa policy during Trump's first term. He remarked ahead of Hargeisa's presidential elections that 'a smooth election in Somaliland will, in addition to its other achievements, undoubtedly strengthen its case in an overall policy review' (AC Vol 65 No 24). ●

The AGovC has picked Moran Global Strategies, led by former Democrat Congressman **Jim Moran**, whose other clients include fellow African exile groups: the National Representative Council of Eritrea and the Biafra Republic Government in Exile (AC Vol 65 No 15). The AGovC has a formal alliance with the latter group led by **Nnamdi Kanu**.

For a monthly retainer of US\$8,000, Moran will work to 'encourage the United States government to support Ambazonia's independence and to recognize the AGovC as the entity which represents Ambazonia,' according to filings under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. The contract is with **Obadiah Mua**, Secretary-General of the Ambazonia Governing Council, who is based at an address in Virginia Beach.

This arrangement could put Moran's work on a collision course with the AGovC's rival in Cameroon's Anglophone region, the Federal

Republic of Ambazonia, which has its own arrangement with Scribe Strategies & Advisors, led by veteran Washington insider **Joseph Szlavik** (Dispatches 4/10/23).

Part of the dispute between the two organisations stems from the guerilla tactics employed by the AGovC's armed wing, the Ambazonia Defence Forces. Last September, former AGovC leader **Ayaba Cho Lucas** was arrested in **Norway** and charged with inciting crimes against humanity, prompting his replacement by AGovC Vice-President **Julius Nyih**.

It will also 'educate' US officials about the 'gross human rights abuses and crimes against humanity against the people of Ambazonia, as well as more broadly all the crime and abuses perpetrated during the decades-long dictatorship of Paul Biya'. AGovC representatives claim their movement received invitations for senior officials to attend Trump's inauguration.