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BLUE LINES

The failure of the BRICS group of countries to agree a communiqué during a meeting in Rio de Janeiro this week supports the criticism that the bloc has little in common and lacks internal coherence.

The BRICS' recent enlargement, with Ethiopia and Egypt the new African members, will likely make it harder to reach common policy positions, further diluting the grouping's influence. This challenge was in evidence as the two new members opposed parts of a previously approved plan to reform the UN Security Council by giving South Africa a permanent seat.

The Brazilian government has sought to downplay the dispute, stating that ministers had agreed a position and voiced serious concerns on the Trump tariffs.

Last October's BRICS summit, hosted by Russia's Vladimir Putin in Kazan, proved far more successful as a political forum – taking aim at the west's sanctions against Russia, the Bretton Woods institutions, and Israel's military attacks in Gaza – than in achieving consensus on trade or economic policy. Attempts to set up a Cross-Border Payments Initiative, an attempt to establish an alternative to the SWIFT system from which Russia has been excluded, also faltered. This was one of a suite of economic policies proposed by Putin that failed to gain traction.

If the BRICS can't agree on policy, it stands little chance of becoming a geopolitical rival to the G20 or the European Union.

NIGERIA

Tinubu exudes confidence as opposition starts to fold

After failing to capitalise on deepening hardships and insecurity, opposition governors and lawmakers are defecting to the ruling party

As a political boss, President **Bola Ahmed Tinubu** has run rings around his rivals. They lack his skills and tactical acuity but most of all they are just not as ruthless and determined. That is why – with the opposition parties in disarray – that Tinubu and his All Progressives Congress are odds-on to win the 2027 elections.

It's also remarkable given that his signature policies – cutting the fuel subsidy and letting the naira float – were ill-timed and fuelled chronic inflation for a year after he introduced the policies in May 2023. People grumble about the policies' consequences but there has been little coordinated push-back.

When the country's biggest trade union threatened a national strike, Tinubu's persuaders moved in, armed with cash and credible threats. The strike was called off. A planned season of 'days of rage' against Tinubu's policies fizzled after a few outings.

Youth organisers trying to recapture the vigour of the protests against the SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) in October 2020, using online techniques to lobby for the cause, have turned their attention to the flawed arena of party politics. They helped run **Peter Obi's** campaign on the Labour Party ticket and won him a national following in 2023 as a first-time presidential contender.

Many are likely to work for Obi again as the candidate they think most likely to reform or restrain the most venal political transactions. After several protestors were shot dead in 2020 – and similar tactics were used against protestors in Kenya last year – activists are more cautious about taking to the streets.

Yet Nigerians are highly dissatisfied with governance performance, as revealed in successive surveys by the Afrobarometer group. Tinubu faces mounting pressure to reshuffle his cabinet as a mid-term evaluation he commissioned identifies several ministers who are underperforming.

Sworn in on 29 May 2023, Tinubu appointed a cabinet of 48 ministers three months later. This excludes statutory members such as the National Security Advisor, Secretary to the Government, Chief of Staff, Head of the Civil Service and seven advisors – all hired and fired by him directly.

MINISTERIAL SCORECARDS

He required his appointees to sign performance bonds, subject to quarterly reviews. He asked his policy advisor, **Hadiza Bala-Usman**, to oversee the evaluation of ministers and agency heads, in collaboration with **Britain's** Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (AC Vol 65 Nos 3 & 11).

A scorecard seen by *Africa Confidential* revealed that most ministers failed to achieve a score above 50% in any single quarter. Minister of Agriculture and Food Security **Abubakar Kyari** scored as low as 13%, Communications Minister **Bosun Tijani** managed to scrape 22%, Minister of Solid Minerals Development **Dele Alake** received 37%, and Humanitarian Affairs Minister **Nentawe Yilwatda** scored

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just 9%. Interior Minister **Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo**, widely regarded as the top performer, achieved 62% in the first quarter of 2025.

'Many of the ministers still seem to lack a clear understanding of their jobs,' said a source close to the president, adding that many had been playing politics with their portfolios, even misleading the president into signing frivolous MoUs with briefcase investors who lacked serious intent.

Last year, Tinubu reshuffled his cabinet, dismissing five underperforming ministers and appointing seven new ones. He also created two new ministries: the Ministry of Livestock Development and the Ministry for Regional Development, which oversees the recently established regional commissions and the Niger Delta Development Commission (AC Vol 65 No 22).

He was lambasted for appointing so-called 'heavyweight politicians', many of whom have performed poorly. But these individuals are mostly ex-governors and crucial to the president's re-election strategy. They are unlikely to be removed, even in the event of another cabinet reshuffle.

One such minister is **Bello Matawalle**, a former governor of Zamfara, a state plagued by insecurity and overrun by illegal gold miners working for an illicit consortium. Matawalle, who has no military experience, currently serves as junior defence minister.

Former Governor **Mohammed Badaru Abubakar** of Jigawa State serves as the senior defence minister. His performance has been underwhelming, with a score of zero in a performance report early last year. **Ibrahim Geidam**, a former governor of Yobe State, holds the position of police affairs minister – a largely redundant role with unclear responsibilities. Geidam was asked to nominate someone for a cabinet position, so instead put himself forward.

As godfather in Yobe State, he is unlikely to be sacked. Insecurity has worsened, particularly in northern Christian agrarian communities such as Benue and Plateau, where over 105 people were killed in the first two weeks of April while Tinubu was on a working holiday in Paris.

Tinubu established a Ministry of Livestock Development and appointed **Idi Mukhtar Maiha** as minister to address clashes between farmers and cattle herders. Maiha has also failed to justify his appointment.

Borno State, which had seen some reprieve after 16 years of a jihadist insurgency, has been hit by a new wave of violence. Governor **Babagana Zulum** recently lamented that terrorists now attack and kidnap people in many communities almost daily. Some attribute this to the fractured relationship between Nigeria and Niger, which has disrupted regional security arrangements. The president, who declared 'enough is enough' on insecurity, has received the scorecard of his ministers and must now decide whether to reshuffle his cabinet.

Tunji Alausa, the Minister of Education, has come under scrutiny for his handling of the president's flagship initiative, the Nigerian Education Loan Fund, aimed at supporting students in tertiary institutions. Despite funds being released for the programme, students have struggled to access the loans.

Like other ministers, Alausa – backed by the Oba of Lagos, **Rilwan Akiolu** – has reportedly nominated

NORTHERN DISSATISFACTION

One blind spot in President **Bola Ahmed Tinubu's** re-election strategy remains northern Nigeria. Tinubu has faced severe criticism for excluding the Muslim north from his key appointments. His actions have drawn scrutiny from the northern elite, particularly his plans to grant states greater control over their revenue – a move that could impoverish the less productive regions.

Tinubu is also insisting that the northern governors who are members of the APC should show loyalty by delivering their states to him. The APC controls 15 of the 19 northern states but there are doubts over their loyalty. The President is working hard to bring in the PDP's **Umar Fintiri** of Adamawa State an estranged ally of **Atiku Abubakar**, who is also from Adamawa. It would be a huge boost for Tinubu if Fintiri dumps Atiku publicly

All the top revenue agencies, including the central bank, the federal tax agency, customs, and the national oil firm, are headed by Tinubu's Yoruba kinsmen. Similarly, the major security agencies, such as the army, police, and secret police, are led by Yoruba officials. There are growing fears that if Tinubu could marginalise the Muslim north in such critical positions during his first term, he may do even worse in his second term.

Influential northerners, including former Kaduna Governor **Nasir El-Rufai**, have vowed to block Tinubu's re-election. El-Rufai, a key figure in Tinubu's last campaign, has defected to the Social Democratic Party and is leading opposition merger talks.

The opposition is capitalising on northern dissatisfaction, driven by poverty and insecurity. Tinubu is negotiating with Kano political heavyweight **Rabiu Kwankwaso**, as Kano, with the largest voter turnout, remains critical. Close aides suggest Tinubu may replace Vice-President **Kashim Shettima** with an influential northerner like Kwankwaso if the region proves difficult to secure.

Tinubu's 2023 victory relied on dominating the south-west, winning the north-central, and splitting the north-west and north-east with the opposition. ●

TAX REFORMS: ZACCH ADEDEJI AT THE HELM

As Nigeria's parliament prepares to pass President **Bola Ahmed Tinubu's** radical tax reforms, **Zacch Adedeji**, chair of the Federal Inland Revenue Service, stands to gain the most. The reforms will abolish the FIRS and establish the National Revenue Service, a new agency with expanded powers to collect taxes nationwide. Once operational, the NRS will centralise revenue collection, barring other government agencies from performing this function, further elevating Adedeji's influence.

Already one of the president's most powerful appointees due to the vast funds he oversees, Adedeji's role becomes even more critical as dwindling oil prices, exacerbated by **Donald Trump's** trade war, force Nigeria to rely on stricter tax enforcement. Despite being junior to the finance minister in rank, insiders note that Adedeji's control of resources and strategic importance make him more influential within the administration. ●

individuals deemed unqualified for key agency positions. 'Some of the ministers recommend unqualified people as heads of agencies. They take advantage of the fact that the president is too busy to inspect their CVs. Sometimes, they are exposed, and the appointments are reversed,' said a government official.

So far, the president has reversed at least 10 appointments previously announced by his spokespersons. Efforts to implement a report aimed at reforming the deteriorating civil service have also been hindered by the Secretary to the Federal Government, **George Akume**.

POLITICAL AMBITIONS

Several ministers are accused of using their positions to further political ambitions, including Health Minister **Muhammed Ali Pate**, who was recommended by Bill Gates and is eyeing the Bauchi governorship. Pate, tasked with overseeing Tinubu's free dialysis programme, is criticised for inequitable distribution, with two centres allocated to Bauchi and four to Lagos, according to a presidential aide.

Power Minister **Bayo Adelabu**, who ran for the Oyo governorship in 2019 and 2023, plans to contest again, despite criticism over Nigeria's energy issues. **Gboyega Oyetola**, former Osun governor and current Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, is expected to run next year. Both have faced scrutiny for underperformance.

Interior Minister **Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo** has spent significant sums on grassroots politics in Ondo State, distributing bags of rice to the poor. Those close to him suggest he is preparing to contest for governor in 2028.

National Security Advisor **Nuhu Ribadu**, a top rank politician since 2011, has seen his influence soar since his 2023 appointment. A former presidential candidate and gubernatorial hopeful, Ribadu is now viewed as a strong contender for the 2030 presidency. While he denies engaging in partisan politics, his growing power has unsettled Vice-President **Kashim Shettima**, who harbours his own ambition.

Jumoke Oduwole, who was appointed minister of trade and investment 10 months ago with a mandate to improve the ease of doing business was also scored low for the last quarter of 2024. Foreign Affairs Minister and former journalist **Yusuf Tuggar** also wants to be governor of Bauchi and is engaged in a high-profile feud with current Governor **Bala Mohammed**.

Tunji Alausa is positioning himself for governor of Lagos State. He was Tinubu's personal physician for 20 years. They lived together in Chicago decades ago. Tinubu is also working with Governor **Charles Soludo** of Anambra State. A leader of the small All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) Soludo is seeking re-election in November. His job will be to whittle down Obi's influence in his native Anambra. ●

TINUBU'S AIDES CELEBRATE A 2027 VICTORY EARLY

The next national elections are just under two years away but posters extolling the virtues of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu line the roads of Abuja and Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital. This isn't because the ruling All Progressives Congress fears defeat. Quite the contrary. Its loyalists expect a far bigger victory than they achieved in February 2023. And they want to convince their opponents and the media of that.

Then, they faced a formidable opposition: veteran politician and former Vice President **Atiku Abubakar** leading the former ruling People's Democratic Party; and former governor of Anambra state **Peter Obi** running a youth-led campaign on the Labour Party ticket. Combined the opposition parties polled more than Tinubu's 36.61% of the vote, but they could not unite on a common platform.

And ahead of the next election, the opposition parties are even less coherent than two years ago despite sporadic calls to agree on a joint presidential candidate in 2027. The biggest change this year is state governors from the opposition PDP succumbing to Tinubu's co-option strategy which could give his APC a clean sweep of the states in the south-west and south-south, the two wealthiest regions in the country. That's a serious advantage in a system where campaigns are mainly funded by public money.

Tinubu wants to strengthen his southern base. He can use the APC governors in the north to help him. The APC rules in 15 of the 19 northern states. Tinubu doesn't need to win any more northern states in 2027 but just needs a sizable number of voters to back him in the north.

Tinubu wants to defend his base against a northern wave which **Nasir El-Rufai**and Atiku are trying to build into an anti-government coalition. One of Tinubu's advisors, **Hakeem Baba-Ahmed**, resigned in April in order to join the northern push.

Tinubu has reasserted his grip on Lagos State. The Labour Party challenger Obi won more votes in Lagos than Tinubu in the 2023 elections. But more critically for the fortunes of the APC, Tinubu's election machine ensured – by hook or crook – that its candidate, **Babajide Sanwo-Olu**, won the Lagos State governorship in 2023, along with control of the largest state budget, of approximately 1.69 trillion naira (US$1.05 billion) a year.

In Delta, the state with the highest oil revenue and a long-time stronghold of the PDP, Governor **Sheriff Oborevwori** has defected to Tinubu's APC along with all elected officials. The APC held a mass post-defection rally there on 28 April. He was accompanied by former Governor **Ifeanyi Okowa**, the PDP's Vice-Presidential candidate in the last election. Okowa, who is under investigation by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission over the mismanagement of some $1bn, is expected to be exonerated as part of the deal.

In oil-rich Akwa Ibom, currently under PDP rule, Governor **Umo Eno** has announced he will support Tinubu in the next election. In Rivers State, where all elected officials have been suspended under a state of emergency decree, Governor **Siminilayi Fubara** is negotiating with Tinubu (AC Vol 66 No 7). We hear he has been promised his job back and the chance to serve out his term if he agrees to defect to the APC and support Tinubu in the next elections

To those who complain this is a gross abuse of executive and that it smacks of gangsterism, that is exactly the point. The two main parties are run by cabals of 'investors' presiding over piles of capital, much of it accumulate via state contracts. They will bet on the leader party that looks most willing to serve their interests over the next four years. And to many of them, that looks like Tinubu and the APC. The result of the competition will be recorded in February 2027 in an 'election-like' event as a former **United States** ambassador **John Campbell** used to characterise them.

Any resemblance between that any a system of representative, let alone participatory, democracy looks accidental. Far-reaching bills are waved through the National Assembly. Approval for a US$750 million downpayment from the Treasury to Tinubu's business partner **Gilbert Chagoury** on a no-bid $13bn highway contract across the country is backed by the Assembly while a specialist sub-committee goes the motions of scrutiny. ●

Global trade chaos undermines Africa's prospects

US tariffs are disrupting trade routes, cutting into financial reserves and posing a threat to growth across the continent

Along with much of the rest of the world, the economic prospects for Africa have taken a serious hit due to the trade war launched by the **United States** and its sharp cuts to the multilateral system, including the green energy transition. Such assessments were common cause at the Spring Meetings of the IMF and World Bank in Washington DC from 21-26 April but with delegates differing sharply on the policy responses.

The standing of the IMF and the World Bank has also been weakened by the new US administration. US Treasury Secretary **Scott Bessent** insisted on 23 April that his administration wasn't planning to withdraw from the Washington-based international financial institutions, as proposed by the conservative Heritage Foundation, but he want to several radical changes to their operations.

In a gesture towards the White House's rejection of policies tackling climate change, the Bank and the Fund minimised their references to climate

FINANCING COSTS ROCKET ALONG WITH THE TARIFFS

Last year saw the return of several sovereigns, including **Kenya**, **Côte d'Ivoire** and **Benin**, to the international Eurobond market, alongside significant external financing through syndicated loans. Improvements in trade balances and foreign exchange reserves, driven partly by higher commodity prices and exchange rate reforms in some economies, also contributed positively.

Even before this year's tariff-induced rise in borrowing spreads on Africa's Eurobonds, the approximately 10% borrowing costs on 2024-issued Eurobonds compared unfavourably with pre-pandemic yields.

The World Bank warns that Africa's rising debt levels over the past decade and increased need for domestic borrowing has pushed the average debt service-to-revenue ratio in low-income countries under the World Bank/IMF low-income debt sustainability framework to a staggering 50%. Ahead of this month's DC meetings, an IMF blog warned that emerging and developing economies are 'bracing for what could become a new sovereign debt crisis'.

Amid the turbulent conditions, the Fund and Bank have kept their policy advice largely consistent with their previous recommendations. They downplay speculation about the Trump administration's effect on the participation and contributions of their largest shareholder.

The Fund urges Africa's finance ministries to boost revenues, optimise spending, reform troubled state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and establish fiscal buffers to prepare for future crises. It also emphasises the need to engage the public carefully, avoiding abrupt measures that might spark unrest. On monetary policy, the Fund highlights the importance the need for adequate foreign exchange reserves and tailoring interest rate adjustments to domestic inflation trends and economic circumstances.

The World Bank notes that most Africa central banks have implemented rate cuts or ceased rate hikes as inflation declines and stresses the need to improve primary fiscal balances. It argues that citizens' willingness to pay taxes increases when revenues are seen to be spent effectively. Greater fiscal transparency is crucial to boost investor confidence and lower borrowing costs, as is transparency on the national debt.

Structural reforms are crucial to boost growth and employment; increasing investment while safeguarding capital expenditures from during budget adjustments is key.

Everyone agrees that expanding trade under the African Continental Free Trade Agreement is key to the region's response to escalating international tariffs but there is little sign of the political will needed to forge such new relationships.

Africa's conflict zones – the Sahel, the Horn and **Congo-Kinshasa** – are bearing both the economic and societal costs internally. Cross-border population flows from those zones add pressure to the neighbouring countries.

The continent's biggest economies – **Angola** (2.4% growth in 2025), **Nigeria** (3%) and **South Africa** (1%) – continue to weigh down regional growth. Yet **Egypt** (3.8%) is starting to reap the benefits of reforms under its US$8 billion IMF programme (Dispatches 27/10/24). Nigeria has seen some delayed gains from fuel subsidy and foreign exchange market reforms initiated under President **Bola Tinubu**. But the next few months will test the government's ability to further boost revenues and diversify the economy, as global conditions cut oil revenues (Dispatches 1/6/23 & AC Vol 64 No 12).

IMF Africa Director **Abebe Selassie** praised Nigeria's efforts to improve 'data quality', for better policymaking amid scepticism among other economists about the reliability of some African statistical agencies. This aligns with observations from the IMF Fiscal Affairs Department that its South Africa deficit projection for 2025 (6.6%) is more pessimistic than that of the government's, reflecting 'more conservative assumptions' on tax revenues and spending cuts. These differences carry significant implications for debt forecasts amid rising interest rates.

Among smaller, more agile African economies, 11 countries – including Côte d'Ivoire, **Ethiopia**, **Guinea**, **Senegal** and **Uganda** – are projected by the IMF to grow by 6% or more this year, equating to nearly 4% in per capita terms. The World Bank's latest projections highlight sharp disparities, with real per capita GDP in resource-rich SSA economies expected to decline this year. Average per capita GDP in these economies remains below 90% of its 2015 level and barely above 80% in the resource-intensive but 'non-fragile' states.

This is particularly troubling given the stark inequality across SSA, which accounts for almost 580 million of the world's poor – nearly half of whom reside in Nigeria, Congo Kinshasa, Ethiopia and **Sudan**. It is no accident that all four are wracked by insecurity, with Sudan as the most extreme case. And the outlook for these high population and resource-rich (apart from Ethiopia) has taken a further knock from the latest round of global shocks. ●

finance and removing subsidies on fossil fuels during the meetings. But the omertà can only last so long now the US has again withdrawn from the UN Paris Climate accord.

More immediately for Africa will be the secondary effects of a global slowdown caused by the tariffs, rising interest rates and falling commodity prices. The continent may avoid the near 1% growth downgrades (2025 IMF) suffered by the United States and the oil-rich Middle East and North Africa region, but the IMF has reduced its forecast for sub-Saharan Africa's real GDP growth by 0.4% to 3.8%. The World Bank predicts SSA's growth will reach just 3.5% this year, down 0.6% from January. In North Africa, **Egypt** and **Tunisia** face deteriorating growth prospects, although the Fund has raised its 2025 projections for both **Algeria** and **Morocco**.

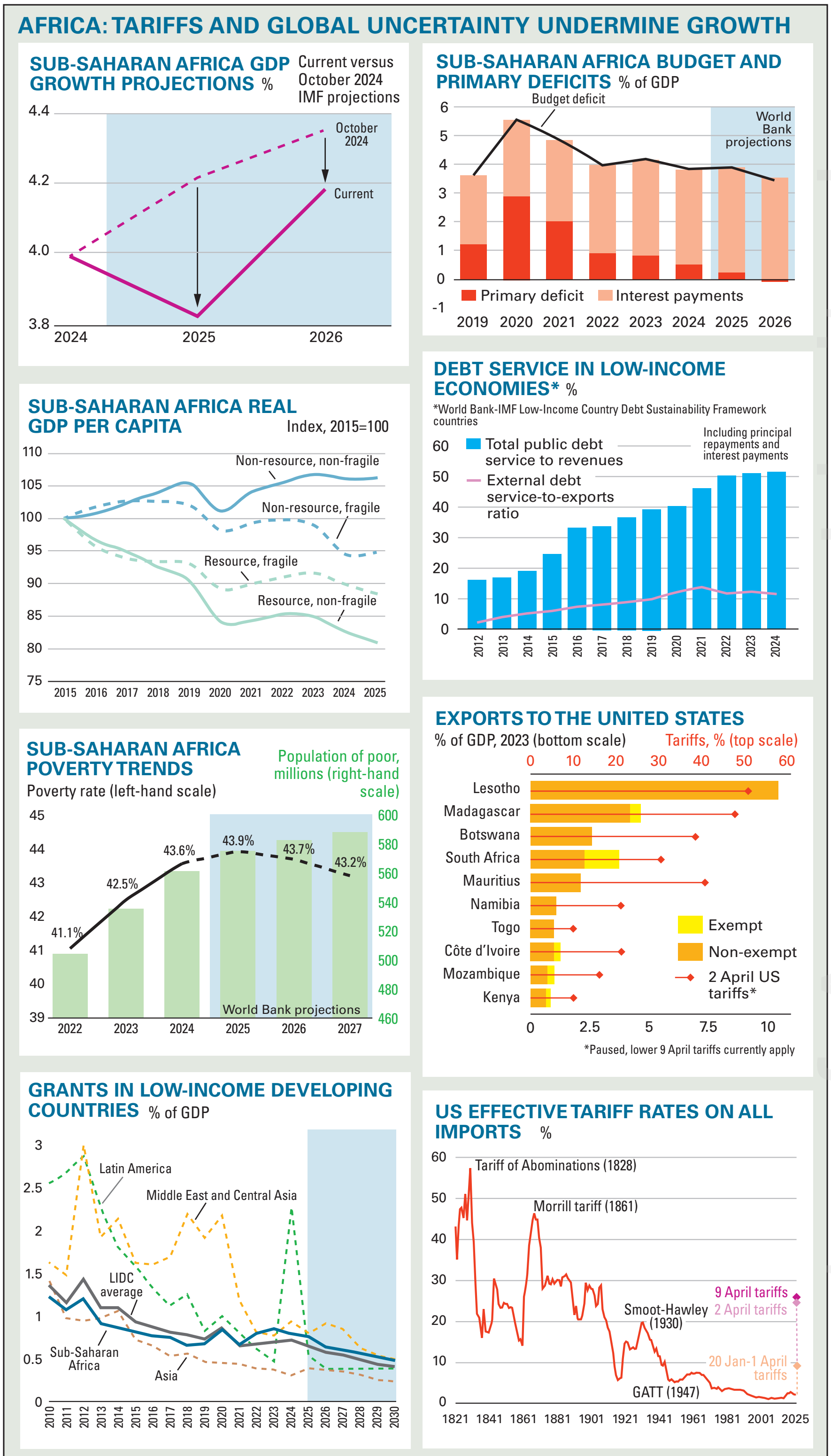
This shift is part of the fallout from the US tariff hikes, which have been more severe than expected before President **Donald Trump's** inauguration on 20 January (Dispatches 28/1/25 & 22/4/25). The US is softening its position – introducing 90-day 'pauses' and exemptions for key imports – but the long-term global impact could be irreversible. The IMF's chief economist called it the start of a 'new era', marking the end of 80 years of the prevailing 'global economic system'.

Even if the new tariffs are largely reversed – by both the US and retaliating targets such as **China** and the EU – the resulting global uncertainty will take longer to resolve. Governments, policymakers and markets are adjusting to a less predictable world. Neither the IMF nor the World Bank are forecasting a global recession, but its likelihood has nearly doubled to 30%, according to IMF economists. That would disproportionately hit Africa.

Africa's economies were initially thought to be less directly affected by US tariffs targeting China, Europe, and North America's neighbours. But the secondary effects will hit hard: on demand for African exports and the price of imports, alongside the threat of an escalating risk premium.

Some Africa economies – including smaller nations such as **Lesotho**, **Botswana**, **Madagascar**, and **Mauritius**, as well as regional powerhouse **South Africa** – have substantial trade exposure to the US. These countries were disproportionally targeted by Trump's perplexing 2 April tariff calculations, which may yet take precedence over the broadly applied 10% US tariffs announced on 9 April.

According to World Bank and IMF economists, slower global growth driven by new tariffs will dampen



Sources: World Bank Group; International Monetary Fund © africa-confidential.com 2025

demand for Africa's exports, including key commodities. Oil exporters such as **Nigeria** and **Angola** face lower-than-projected oil prices, jeopardising national budgets. Angola's Finance Minister **Vera Daves de Sousa** has hinted that Luanda may need to request an IMF financing programme. Yet Africa's oil importers could benefit from cheaper oil, while global uncertainty supports record-high gold prices – at around US$3,500 an ounce – aiding gold exporters. But exporters of most metals and agricultural commodities may see prices fall.

Inflationary pressures in major economies, caused by higher import costs from tariffs, could tighten monetary policy more than anticipated. This means delays in interest rate cuts previously expected by markets, worsening global financing conditions. African treasuries

FINANCE CHIEFS SEEK A PATH THROUGH THE DEBT LABYRINTH

Africa's debt troubles are far from over, according to delegates at the International Monetary Fund and World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington. Officials warn that more countries may have to restructure their debts if the trade war and global slowdown continue to take their toll. To help nations struggling with debt repayments, the Fund and World Bank suggest a 'three-pillar approach': reforms to boost economic growth, increase revenues and manage spending, more support from international lenders, and new ways to lower the cost of repayments. Still, the IMF says countries at high risk of financial difficulties might not only need to tighten their budgets or find ways to increase revenue to avoid deeper crises, but also consider debt restructuring.

Talks on restructuring debts have picked up pace recently but the IMF concedes the process is still unwieldy and can inflict high social costs. There was progress last year in Zambia, Ghana, and Ethiopia's debt negotiations under the G20's Common Framework for Debt Treatments but none of these countries have fully completed their restructurings. In Ghana's case, debt restructuring has progressed, with domestic and external Eurobond debts now fully restructured and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed for official bilateral debts. The main unresolved matter is negotiations with non-Eurobond commercial lenders.

Zambia, by contrast, avoided the domestic financial fallout Ghana faced with local debt restructuring. Yet it is still working towards an agreement with its external non-Eurobond commercial creditors. Ethiopia remains behind, yet to sign an MoU with official creditors or finalise a bondholder deal, despite entering the Common Framework four years ago. The cases of Zambia, Ghana and Ethiopia under the Common Framework have done little to encourage other Africa sovereign borrowers to adopt it. Yet contentious restructurings outside the Framework, such as Sri Lanka's, raise their own challenges and uncertainties.

A meeting of the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable (GSDR) in Washington DC, co-chaired by South Africa's Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva and World Bank President Ajay Banga, brought finance ministers together to tackle weaknesses in the Common Framework. Ethiopia's State Minister of Finance was among those urging improvements to mechanisms for finalising bilateral restructuring agreements with official lenders. GSDR participants support making a country's initial restructuring agreement with its Official Creditors' Committee (OCC) – which typically includes Paris Club and non-Paris Club lenders – more transparent, including by publishing key restructuring terms. This greater clarity could ease negotiations with other creditors, such as bondholders, who must adhere to the Comparability of Treatment (CoT) principle. CoT has been a sticking point, delaying debt restructurings for Zambia and Ghana.

The GSDR's report advocates for better information sharing between official bilateral and private creditors, including bondholders. It suggests early-stage meetings between these groups to enable parallel progress on restructurings by the OCC and bondholders – shortening the restructuring timeline. Another key issue is improving negotiations with external, non-Eurobond creditors, such as commercial banks, which lack organised committees like the OCC or bondholder groups to negotiate collectively. Discussions also continue with credit rating agencies to expedite ratings upgrades for borrowers undergoing restructuring. African officials argue these agencies assign unfairly low ratings, driving up borrowing costs. ●

– already managing significant Eurobond maturities – could face higher borrowing costs, capital outflows, and reduced vital investment inflows.

A direct hit, more severe for some African economies than others, stems from Trump's slashing of programmes funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and his administration's targeting of South Africa on political grounds (AC Vol 66 Nos 4, 6 & Dispatches 5/2/25). This accompanies cuts in Africa-bound official development assistance from other sources, such as **Britain**, which has reduced its aid budget to increase military spending in response to the new NATO and **Russia-Ukraine** dynamics (Dispatches 1/11/22).

According to IMF African Department Director **Abebe Selassie**, the shift in the global economic outlook has undermined what was better-than-expected recovery in SSA growth to 4% last year, driven by policy reforms that had 'began to bear fruit'. This shift is now adversely 'reshaping the region's growth trajectory'. Selassie highlights the importance of sound policies, whether monetary, fiscal, trade, or structural reforms.

The IMF's African Department warns that, in a downside scenario involving further trade uncertainty and worsening financial conditions, SSA's 2025-26 economic activity could fall by 2% relative to already pessimistic projections, with oil exporters facing even steeper declines.

Before the reshaping of SSA's growth trajectory, median consumer price inflation in the region had fallen to 4.5%. Yet several economies – including Angola, **Congo Kinshasa**, **Ethiopia**, **Malawi**, Nigeria and **Zimbabwe** – continued to experience double-digit inflation, with high food prices hitting the poorest.

According to the Fund, primary deficits, excluding interest payments, are starting to shrink. There's still significant room to improve public finances by boosting revenue and cutting spending or making it more efficient. Some countries, including Nigeria, have sharply increased revenue as a percentage of GDP since 2022, but most African economies rely primarily on spending cuts for fiscal adjustments.

If SSA finances achieve an average primary surplus by 2026, as World Bank economists forecast, substantial interest payments will still limit progress in cutting overall budget deficits and alleviating the debt burden in many economies. ●

SUDAN/BRITAIN/CHAD

Gulf States power play scuppers peace bid

A peace conference on Sudan declined to hold the Middle Eastern sponsors of the war to account. Now the conflict is spreading to Chad

If anyone questioned that the Gulf States **United Arab Emirates** and **Saudi Arabia**, with their less pecunious partner **Egypt**, hold a veto on Sudan policy, the conference in London on 15 April seeking an end to the country's devastating war would have stripped any illusions (Dispatches 22/4/25). It was widely seen as a tragic failure given the depths of suffering intensifying in the country. One serious change was that the UAE emerged from the conference looking more isolated for its backing of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia. That message was picked up by African delegates to the meeting.

Organised by the African Union, the European Union and Britain, the conference delegates in London had proposed establishing a contact group to bring the warring factions into an indirect dialogue through their regional sponsors. This would have meant the financiers and suppliers of materiel fuelling the world's worst war and humanitarian catastrophe would be under serious pressure to desist.

As the only political initiative on the table was sidelined, western delegates limited their offers to pledges of humanitarian aid. Faced with a power struggle among the countries that were supposed to draft the final statement (the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia), the conference organisers published their own statement and deferred any serious attempt to bridge the gap between the regional sponsors of the war.

The organisers also omitted to invite any Sudanese representatives from the warring factions or even civilian politicians. It was a conference about the Sudanese war – but without the Sudanese. The delegations and the agenda clearly showed the depths of the dysfunction among multilateral organisations.

Pledges of humanitarian aid of €925 million (US$1.1 billion) from the EU, Britain, as well as the war's sponsors were billed as a breakthrough. Yet the UN and other multilateral aid operations in Sudan are raising little more than 20% of their funding requests: wholly inadequate to provide even short-term relief to millions of Sudanese facing the deadliest famine for 40 years.

It has been left to journalists to expose the double standards. Reuters news agency reported on 29 April that the UN Expert Panel on Sudan

MAHAMAT'S FOES CAPITALISE ON HIS SUBMISSION TO THE UAE

Chad's government is feeling the heat from the submission of President **Mahamat Idris Déby Itno 'Kaka'** to the war aims of the **United Arab Emirates** in Sudan. Mahamat's kowtowing to UAE President **Mohammed bin Zayed bin al Nahayan**, though not new, is losing him credibility and support at home (AC Vol 66 No 7).

Mahamat Kaka faces a similar challenge to his father between 2003 and 2005: how to rein in a military deeply divided over Sudan policy. Rejecting Mahamat's alliance with the UAE and Hemeti, over 1,500 Chadian soldiers are now fighting alongside the Sudan Armed Forces and Zaghawa groups in Darfur against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Some were rebels, others demobilised, but many were still active. They left their barracks, taking young relatives, often with cars, weapons and ammunition. These experienced Chadian fighters are a great asset to the SAF under General **Abdel Fattah al Burhan**.

Under pressure from the UAE, Mahamat sacked the deserters who crossed the border into Sudan and tried to make out it was his decision – not a diktat from the UAE.

In February, a technical, a pick-up armed with a machine gun or rocket propelled grenade launcher, fired on Amdjarass airport at night. The perpetrators escaped unharmed. But it's likely the targeting of three senior Chadian officers, who had defected to join the SAF defending El Fasher in March was revenge for the Amdjarass incident.

Among those targeted in Darfur was Chadian Gen **Abdel Rahim Bahar Mahamat Itno**. That was a signal from President Mahamat that no one, especially in the Itno family, should challenge his policy on Sudan.

This highlights his weakness. He had to spend a fortune to silence his uncles, cousins and half-brothers. Whenever one of them pushed back, Mahamat publicly showed his resolve. **Salaye Déby Itno**, a comrade of Mahamat's half-brother **Yaya Dillo**, was imprisoned for months after the attack on the headquarters of Yaya Dillo's political party. Eventually he was released due to poor health but died a few weeks later.

The choice of Abdel Rahim Bahar Itno was calculated. Mahamat wanted to show control over his family. He knows that Abdel Rahim Bahar had a complicated relationship with his father and is not very popular in the military rank and file.

His brother **Ousmane**, on the other hand, is much more respected and has stood by Mahamat until now. Ousmane heads the Chad-Sudan joint forces. Several decrees against deserting Chad's army have been issued in recent weeks but they underestimate the real number of defectors who have joined their (mainly Zaghawa) relatives in Darfur.

Unnerved by this, Mahamat's advisors are realising that money and coercion may not be enough to control the Ndjamena government's critics. Mahamat seems shocked by the close ties between the Zaghawa in Chad, and their Sudanese counterparts, and the Kobé. These ties, now forged on the battlefield, threaten the cohesion of Mahamat's security forces.

What started out for Mahamat as a sound financial arrangement with the UAE is turning into a family nightmare. Relatives with close ties to the presidency are being sacked and sanctioned. Lashing out at critics of his close ties with the Emirates, Mahamat may be causing more collateral damage – to his own government and Chad's internal security. ●

was investigating how mortar rounds exported from **Bulgaria** to the UAE ended up in a supply convoy for RSF militia fighters in Darfur.

INVESTIGATION

Over the past year, UN experts have been investigating sanctions-busting involving arms flows to both the RSF commanded by General **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'** and the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) under Gen **Abdel Fattah al Burhan.** They requested manifests for 15 different flights last year originating from UAE airports and landing in Amdjarass and Ndjamena in Chad. But the UAE authorities declined to comply and denied sending arms to the RSF and its allies in correspondence that was later published.

Now UAE spokesperson **Afra Al Hameli** even denies that the UN is investigating his country for breaching sanctions. This is no longer a diplomatic debating point. On 5 May, the International Court of Justice is due to rule on a complaint by Sudan against the UAE for arming Hemeti's RSF fighters and complicity in genocide in Sudan.

Member states of the AU in London as well as Britain, **France** and **Germany** had been expected to be more vocal on the regional sponsors of the Sudan war. But their national self-interests in maintaining close ties to the Gulf economies seem to have prevailed.

The **United States** merely reiterated its condemnation of the RSF's attacks on civilians fleeing their homes but failed to repeat its early statements that it had satellite surveillance showing UAE arms supplies to Hemeti's forces. The US was represented by **Peter Lord,** Deputy Assistant Secretary while the European countries were represented at ministerial level.

By the end of the conference, the rift between the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt dominated proceedings. At stake was the question of whether the SAF regime headed by Burhan in Khartoum was the legitimate representative of the Sudanese state.

Backing Hemeti's RSF, which in March declared a parallel government, the UAE opposed recognising the SAF (AC Vol 66 No 5). But Egypt favoured it, as did Saudi Arabia whose Africa policy frequently clashes with that of the Emirates. It also established Riyadh as the top player in the reconstruction contracts that Burhan is planning to award. Yet the war is far from over.

Qatar and **Turkey** relished the moment; Abu Dhabi was left isolated with its continuing support for Hemeti. Qatar announced that it would soon reopen its embassy in Khartoum; it is reopening its links to officials in the former regime.

Piqued by this loss of face in London, the following day UAE President **Mohammed bin Zayed bin Al Nahayan** (MBZ) summoned Chad's President **Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno 'Kaka'** to Abu Dhabi for talks on 'cooperation'. Unlike earlier discreet visits, Mahamat was received with great ceremony by MBZ, surrounded by top diplomats and Africa advisors. MBZ wanted to send the message that he would not waver in support for Hemeti, and that Mahamat would be an instrument of that policy, whatever the cost to Chad.

Yet beyond the belligerent choreography around Mahamat's visit, Abu Dhabi officials sent out more diplomatic briefings: celebrating economic cooperation with Ndjamena and the despatch of humanitarian aid to Chad and building another hospital there.

ZAMZAM ATROCITY

A day before the London conference, the RSF claimed to have seized control of the ZamZam camp in Darfur, home to more than 700,000 people chased from their homes by the war (AC Vol 66 No 8). UN sources say at least 400, including children and aid workers, were killed in the RSF onslaught over three days. Yet this atrocity, an evident crime against humanity, triggered no specific questions to the UAE in London about its support for Hemeti's fighters.

Hemeti's attack on ZamZam shows the prevalence of extreme military tactics as well as an unrealistic assessment of military capabilities in Darfur. The RSF is determined to seize El Fasher, the only provincial capital in Darfur outside its control – whatever the cost in lives and materiel (AC Vol 65 No 21).

In January, Abu Dhabi sent a **Chinese**-made FK-2000 anti-aircraft system to Ndjamena, and the RSF received this and other military equipment in February and March. This may explain RSF claims to have shot down an Ilyushin 76 near Nyala in February and an Antonov in North Darfur in early April. The SAF has denied any losses.

Such equipment means the SAF will use its air superiority more cautiously when it moves troops and equipment or attacks RSF bases. Today, this makes long-range offensives against the RSF in Darfur much riskier. Troops and equipment are being amassed near Kosti but the objectives are unclear.

The RSF's military plan is to consolidate its control over areas it was holding – in South Darfur where an attack by the SAF was likely – and to clear the outskirts of El Fasher to finally take the town after a year of siege. Regardless of the civilian casualties in the ZamZam and Abu Shouk camps, the RSF wants to control these sites to surround El Fasher, destroy the SAF's 6th Infantry Division headquarters and strategically weaken the Zaghawa armed groups allied with General Burhan.

The main alternative for civilians is to move to Tawila in Jebel Marra and wait for the fighting to stop. Many thousands have done so, and more are expected to escape the indiscriminate killing by the RSF or the shelling by the SAF. ●

SUDAN/SOUTH SUDAN/UAE

Emiratis accused of arming RSF from south

Published online 29 April

Diplomats suspect Abu Dhabi is building a new military logistics centre, hidden alongside a hospital, for Hemeti's forces across the border

In a blaze of publicity the United Arab Emirates announced on 10 March the opening of the Madhol Field Hospital in South Sudan's Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, adjacent to the Sudan border. The 100-bed hospital offering emergency care and specialist clinics will cater for '2 million South Sudanese, 300,000 returnees, 15,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 20,000 refugees from Sudan', according to UAE official media.

But intelligence sources, analysts and diplomats strongly suspect it will be co-located with a new hub for the Gulf state to provision the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of General **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'** in Sudan's civil war, citing two field hospitals in Chad as precedents.

The two UAE-funded field hospitals in eastern Chad at Amdjarass and further south in Abéché were also ostensibly established to treat Sudanese refugees but sources say they serve as cover for the UAE's materiel supply chain for the RSF while treating patients (AC Vol 64 No 20).

The hospitals in Chad treat wounded RSF fighters and evacuate the most serious cases to the Gulf on Ilyushin Il-76 cargo planes which return loaded with weapons, according to multiple sources. Abu Dhabi denies this although all regional capitals and western countries believe it to be true.

The fear now is that the new hospital in South Sudan will serve a similar function – providing cover for RSF operations on Sudan's southern flank and dragging South Sudan deeper into its northern neighbour's war. Analysts say the UAE has been searching for some time for alternative supply lines to the route through Amdjarass.

The UAE's influence in South Sudan is believed to be represented by the new First Vice-President **Benjamin Bol Mel**, who also serves as the First Deputy Chair of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and is believed to be the custodian of President **Salva Kiir Mayardit's** business interests (AC Vol 66 No 8).

In February, Kiir made a rare official visit to Abu Dhabi, underscoring the strength of this new relationship. The UAE has been expanding its influence throughout the Horn and East Africa in recent years.

In Renk, in Upper Nile State in early March, opposition SPLM-In Opposition forces battled RSF units in an effort, we hear, to prevent the SPLM-IO meeting up with the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) of General **Abdel Fattah al Burhan** to receive military supplies.

This 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' calculus offers risk and reward for Kiir. While it can increase the violence and further destabilise an enfeebled South Sudan, it could give Kiir the opportunity to defeat or seriously weaken his internal enemies. But he is unlikely to want to clash directly with the SAF.

The UAE's arms supply role is coming under growing scrutiny but faces no sanctions so far. Burhan's submission to the International Criminal Court, accusing the UAE of fuelling the civil war, is intended to publicise the links but there is no sign of the UAE changing course.

OIL LEVERAGE

South Sudan's dependence on the UAE has been growing. In 2024, the UAE-based Hamad Bin Khalifa Department of Projects company extended a US$13 billion loan to Juba, secured against future oil revenues, which could last beyond the time when the oil is expected to run out. The status of the deal is unknown following a storm of controversy when it was revealed. But the export pipeline to Port Sudan has been out of action for many months and lies in RSF-controlled territory.

The RSF has used this to exert maximum leverage on Juba, we hear, demanding a share in oil revenue in exchange for allowing pipeline maintenance. This would subvert the current revenue-sharing arrangement between Juba and Khartoum.

The UAE's operations in South Sudan are seen as part of a plan to increase dependence on Abu Dhabi for security and investment. 'The economic interests are tied to the security project,' said one regional expert. 'And that security project increasingly looks like it's about generating disorder from which the UAE can benefit.'

Regional officials have also accused **Uganda** of acting as a transit point for UAE military supplies to the RSF. Others say the new hospital in South Sudan may not only act as cover for UAE military supplies, but be used by the RSF to deepen its presence in South Sudan.

'The UAE has shown more interest in conflict than in solutions,' said one South Sudanese analyst. 'Most of our leaders have their bank accounts in Dubai. How do you hold a country like that accountable?' ●

KENYA/CHINA

Ruto pivots from Washington to Beijing

Kenya's embattled president calculates that being nice to Donald Trump can only get you so far – his meeting with Xi Jinping may have netted billions

For a cash-strapped government and a deeply unpopular president, **William Ruto's** five-day trip to China could hardly have gone better. He returned with the promise of new investment but not loans. Heading the catch for Nairobi was a deal on the 675 billion shillings (US$4.5bn) which Ruto says is needed to complete the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) from the Rift Valley town of Naivasha to Malaba on the border with **Uganda**, vital for regional trade, and a major highway project connecting the Rift Valley to western Kenya (Dispatches 24/1/23). It may eventually run into the Congo-Kinshasa copperbelt where Kenyan investors are eyeing opportunities for financial and other services.

The Naivasha-Malaba line was not specifically referred to in the final communiqué, but a joint statement indicated that the two countries would pursue an 'integrated development of infrastructure and industries' and work to 'build a China-Africa network featuring land-sea links'.

Ruto's trip, hailed as a diplomatic coup for China in its efforts to expand influence in Africa amid trade tariffs imposed by US President **Donald Trump**, also delivered significant gains for Beijing. Counted among the US's closest African allies during **Joe Biden's** presidency, Ruto now appears to be pivoting eastwards.

China Exim Bank advanced around $5bn for the 590km Mombasa-Nairobi-Naivasha first phase of the railway. But construction stopped in Naivasha in 2019 when the bank cut funding due to concerns over debt and repayment risks, and project viability. The project faced heavy cost overruns and corruption, making the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway one of the world's most expensive railway projects.

The new railway pact contradicts Beijing's stance at last year's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation when it said it was it ending the funding of big infrastructure projects. But China is cautious about its new commitment. Under the agreement, Ruto's government will contribute 30% of the estimated $4.5bn cost, with another 30% coming from the Chinese state. The remaining funds will be sourced from Chinese infrastructure lenders and local banks, including Kenya's KCB, Stanbic, and the Asian Infrastructure Bank.

Chinese contractors will have exclusive rights to build and operate the line, allowing them to recoup costs for at least 25 years after its completion. Investors will get incentives, such as tax holidays, the right to import labour, and repatriate profits without restriction.

Despite high passenger demand, the SGR relies on freight for close to 80% of its revenue and has been a major lossmaker for the Kenyan Treasury. This is due to the corrupt land compensation schemes associated with the deal (AC Vol 64 No 7). The original $3.7bn loan, secured to finance the Chinese-built SGR between Nairobi and Mombasa during **Uhuru Kenyatta's** presidency, was controversial. Its strict loan terms exacerbated Kenya's debt burden, which has worsened during Ruto's three years in office.

BEIJING LOOSENS THE PURSE STRINGS FOR A GEOPOLITICAL WIN

The trip was a triumph for a Kenyan president beleaguered at home. But it also allowed China to score some geopolitical points. Beijing secured Ruto's endorsement as Africa's most reliable ally, as well as several thinly veiled digs at Washington. Referring to solar energy and Chinese smart phones, President **William Ruto** remarked that 'without China, many of these technologies would remain unaffordable for much of the developing world'.

'The post-war multilateral system is broken, dysfunctional and no longer fit for purpose,' said Ruto, as he criticised both the **Donald Trump** tariff wars and the global 'financial and security architecture'.

A communiqué issued by Beijing stated that Kenya 'resolutely opposes any form of "Taiwan independence" and supports all efforts by the Chinese government to achieve national reunification'.

In truth, Ruto and his Treasury Cabinet Secretary, **John Mbadi**, are in a tight fiscal squeeze. Debt servicing now consumes well over 60% of government revenue, and the legacy of the Gen Z anti-Finance Bill protests has left the Treasury with little room to increase taxes. The loss of US aid is set to cost the Treasury up to $850m, while Trump's 10% 'liberation day' tariffs are expected to dampen Kenyan-US trade flows (Dispatches 3/3/25).

With ministers divided over whether to seek a new loan programme with the International Monetary Fund, the results of the China trip appear to vindicate Ruto's chief economic advisor, **David Ndii**. A leading sceptic of a new IMF deal, Ndii advocates securing financing from **Japan**, **China** and the **United Arab Emirates** (AC Vol 66 No 8).

In a nod to Ndii's aspirations for alternative financing, China is 'ready to explore cooperation with Kenya on panda bonds' – bonds denominated in Chinese Yuan (RMB) and issued within China's domestic bond market. The communiqué also added that Beijing would 'support Chinese financial institutions in setting up branches in Kenya and explore new and diversified forms of financial cooperation with Kenya'. ●

The legacy of the SGR's hefty costs will fuel scepticism about the extension plans. But Ruto's ministers insist that the Naivasha-Malaba line is essential to making the SGR more financially viable. 'If this railway were to reach Malaba, it would generate enough revenue which would enable it to pay for itself more,' Foreign Affairs Principal Secretary **Korir Sing'oei** told journalists ahead of the China trip.

The agreement will require Kenya to review its Railway Development Levy – a tax on imports designed to fund an extension of the SGR to Kisumu, the largest Kenyan town on Lake Victoria in western Kenya. The tax, which was increased to 2% last December and raised $245 million in 2024, has been used to help plug the budget deficit and maintain debt repayments.

Ministers say that China has also agreed a public-private partnership to finance several roads and bridges, as well as 'major investments across infrastructure, healthcare, education, culture, ICT, the job market and the blue economy,' said **Musalia Mudavadi**, the Prime Cabinet Secretary. Seven Chinese firms have signed letters of intent with the Kenya Investment Authority, aiming to net $500m in private sector investment. ●

BURKINA FASO

Cracks appear in Traoré's YouTube persona

Burkinabés see the reality of military defeats, a cratering economy and growing authoritarianism despite millions spent on propaganda

Captain **Ibrahim Traoré's** regime in Ouagadougou has uncovered yet another 'plot' showing that Burkina Faso's security crisis is deepening in many different ways.

When the military government accused neighbouring **Côte d'Ivoire** of hosting conspirators planning to attack the presidential place on 16 April, it also tacitly acknowledged internal rifts. Côte d'Ivoire government spokesman **Amadou Coulibaly** responded laconically saying that he expected more seriousness from Burkina's military leader. Among those arrested in Ouagadougou were Commandant **Frédéric Ouédraogo**, the head of military justice who was investigating the shooting of a suspect in a previous abortive putsch, as well as Captain **Elysée Tassembedo**, head of a vital northern force.

An isolated Traoré is increasingly reliant on a coterie of hardline advisors and committed to a strategy of *le tout sécuritaire*. This entails repeated army purges, the suppression of political opponents and civil society critics and a relentless campaign against presumed jihadist groups. The latter is carried out by the armed forces and the *Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie* (VDP) militias, in an operation that often lurches into targeting of Peulh (Fulanis) and other groups considered sympathetic to militants.

There are doubts about these campaigns. Some 54 **Beninois** soldiers were killed inside Benin, close to the border with Burkina Faso. But Benin reported that noted the Burkina side of the border was unprotected. Similar complaints have been heard from **Togo** and Côte d'Ivoire. Soldiers from the Niamey junta also criticise the lack of Burkinabe soldiers guarding against jihadists on their common border.

In the latest incident, a video emerged of the VDP and other pro-government militia, led by a commander appointed by Traoré, in the aftermath of a fatal attack on mostly Peulh civilians in Solenzo in the far west on 10 and 11 March. Such brutality has alienated the public to a degree that could erode remaining support for the regime and create a wider opening for militants.

After exposure of the Solenzo attack, **Jaffar Dicko**, leader of *Ansaroul Islam*, the Burkinabè affiliate of the pan-Sahelian *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* (JNIM) group, described the jihadists as patriotic opponents of Traoré's junta and the others in **Mali** and **Niger**. Posing between a map of Burkina and Ouagadougou's *Monuments* *des Martyrs*, he accused the VDP of killing Peulh to seize their livestock.

In the widely circulated video, Dicko accused the three regimes of disregarding both sharia and democracy as he praised Human Rights Watch, independent media and humanitarian groups. Yet the jihadists have been sabotaging bridges and mining roads, attacking trucks, stealing livestock and food, murdering civilians and assassinating local religious and community leaders.

JIHADIST PUSH

Even before the overthrow of elected President **Roch Marc Christian Kaboré** in 2022 in the first of two coups, the army was struggling to resist the spread of *Ansaroul Islam* across the far north, the east, Boucle du Mouhoun and Centre-Nord. Since then, the militants have pushed over the southern border into all neighbouring coastal states. Meanwhile, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) has also become active from its bases in north-east Mali and the Tilabéri region in Niger.

When Lieutenant-Colonel **Paul-Henri Damiba** deposed Kaboré in January 2022 he said a stronger military response to the jihadists was needed, but allowed civil society and political activity to continue. Nine months later, Traoré elbowed him aside and adopted a more uncompromising approach, pouring money into the military and launching a mass recruitment drive for the VDP, which had emerged out of the *koglwéogo* vigilante groups.

But Traoré's regime has fallen out with some of the *koglwéogo* and its old leaders such as **Moussa Thiombiano** (aka 'Django'), who was based in Fada Ngourma. He was kidnapped and is presumed to have been killed by unknown individuals in an unmarked car. Traoré draws much of his support from unemployed youths in the suburbs of Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulassso, who have also joined the ranks of the VDP. They are the so-called *wayiyans* – a reference to their message to the **French** to 'get out and to the youths themselves to protect Traoré.

In less than three years, Traoré oversaw the recruitment of 14,000 soldiers and almost 100,000 militia. In January 2023 he set up the *Fonds de soutien patriotique*, raising CFA175 billion (€270 million) in a year from levies on salaries and public sector workers' allowances, imports, communications, mining and donations. Through a January 2024 presidential decree, Traoré created the *Brigades Spéciales d'Intervention Rapide* – 28 units in the army and 13 in the police, complemented by a 1938-strong unit of forest rangers – to spearhead the fight against terrorism.

These measures have boosted a military that never fully recovered from divisive management under former President **Blaise Compaoré** (1987-2014), who concentrated resources in the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP) while neglecting the rest of the armed forces. Traoré has even amnestied former RSP soldiers who backed a failed pro-Compaoré counter-coup in 2015 and absorbed them into his presidential guard, although he left Compaoré's security chief, General **Gilbert Diendéré**, in jail (AC Vol 56 No 19).

However, the mass mobilisation of the VDP has proved hugely contentious with many, especially the Peulh. Leaders of the Peulh civil society movements – *Tabital Pulaaku Burkina* and Collective Against Impunity and Stigmatization of Communities – have mostly been driven into exile or intimidated into silence. While there are many Peulh in the military, the VDP is derived from the *koglwéogo*, who are mostly from the Mossi, the predominant ethnicity in central Burkina. This ethnic composition, combined with the polarising slide into violence, means the VDP is often accused of sectarian killings and other abuses.

Traoré's approach has not been that militarily effective. The regime tries to control information as it seeks to downplay jihadist successes and

CAPTAIN TRAORÉ CHOOSES STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE

Designer fatigues, with matching leather gloves in the West African sun and a service pistol in a holster on his waistband, Captain **Ibrahim Traoré** is every inch the thoroughly modern putschist – even if the biggest threat to his security comes from his fellow officers. When he attended the inauguration of **Ghanaian** President **John Mahama** in January, his revolutionary chic contrasted gratingly with West Africa's establishment politicians. His demeanour, even his fashion sense, is calculated to draw comparisons with Burkina's revered military leader in the 1980s, Captain **Thomas Sankara**. But for those with long memories, the comparison doesn't hold up.

Traoré espouses a pan-Africanist ideology that centres on opposition to Western neocolonialism – messages which he pays social media influencers handsomely to push into cyberspace. But unlike Sankara, he is detested and feared by many of his own people.

The 34-year-old Traoré originates from the village of Kéra near Boundoukui in the west, 120km from Bobo Dioulasso. His mother is from a Mandingue family while his father, **Zoumana**, a nurse, may have Mossi origins; his paternal grandfather is thought to have come from Yako in the centre of the country, but later settled in the west near Bobo. He had served in the **French** colonial army in the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* in the Second World War, and then adopted the typically Mandingue Traoré family name.

Studying geology at university, Traoré was an activist in both Muslim and Marxist student organisations before going on to join the army. He served in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (Minusma) and then in campaigns against jihadist militants back home.

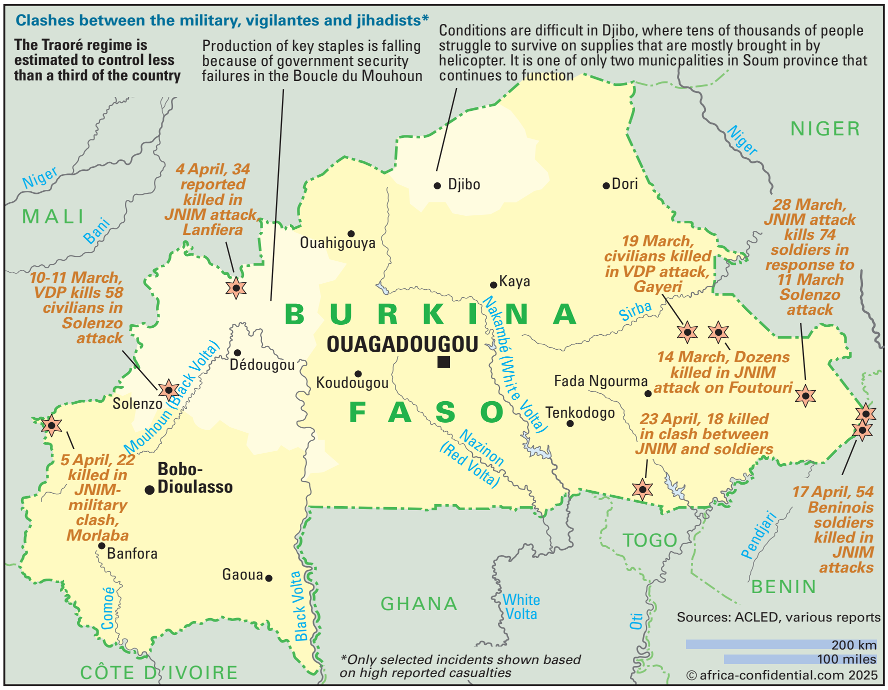
He has sought to present himself as a natural successor to Sankara to tap into the widespread nostalgia for the national folk hero. But these are very different times from the peaceful 1980s when Sankara – who studied agriculture alongside political and military subjects while at the Antsirabe military academy in **Madagascar** – could launch a much admired and still internationally influential programme of grassroots rural and social development.

In today's catastrophic security environment, pursuing such an agenda would be unfeasible across much of Burkina and, even where conditions are less difficult, Traoré seems more interested in experimenting with collectivist models rooted in the Soviet-era rather than focusing on smallholders.

Moreover, economic and social innovation have become almost impossible in a tense political climate where Traoré remains largely isolated, partly protected by **Russian** bodyguards despite the departure of Moscow-tied paramilitary group the Bear Brigade.

In government affairs, the key actors now seem to be **Oumar Yabré**, the intelligence chief, and Lt **Abdul-Aziz Pacmogda**, head of security for Ibrahim Traoré, who enjoy substantial autonomy in day-to-day decision-making. Yabré is at the heart of *Korag*, an advisory team created by Traoré that operates like a politburo. They are behind the repression machine in Burkina Faso, from forced recruitments to disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings. Drawn from the security apparatus, members of the *Korag* oversee specific policy areas and wield more influence than ministers. ●

BURKINA FASO – MARCH TO APRIL 2025



claim its own victories. **Russia**-linked troll armies in Ouagadougou churn out pro-regime messaging and attack critics, such as **Nigeria's** President **Bola Tinubu**. Prime Minister **Rimtalba Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo**, a former editor-in-chief of the national broadcaster who in December replaced **Apollinaire Kyélem de Tambéla**, is in charge of Traoré's public relations operation. There's a group of highly skilful pro-Traoré propagandists in Côte d'Ivoire. One of the leading propagandists, **Alain Christophe Traoré** aka 'Aino Faso' was arrested in Abidjan in January and is accused of links to a Ouagadougou plot to destabilise Côte d'Ivoire. Another big Traoré propaganda operation is run out of the **United States**, headed by **Ibrahim Maïga** (AC Vol 66 No 6). They have deluged YouTube platforms and ensure they get picked up by artificial intelligence companies, one of which was faithfully reporting that mass pro-Traoré demonstrations were happening across Africa on 30 April – hours before they were scheduled to start.

TOWNS CUT OFF

The consensus among analysts is that the Traoré regime controls less than a third of the country. At least 22 and perhaps as many as 40 towns are isolated due to militant group activity and accessible only by helicopter or armed convoy. State authority does still extend to Kaya, 110km north-east of Ouagadougou, but around Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina's second city, it is limited to a perimeter of just a few kilometres. The government also maintains only tenuous control of the road and rail corridor linking the capital to Bobo and the Ivorian border.

Probably the most of the people in the countryside now live in communities under the sway of jihadists, who pressure them to adopt conservative patterns of dress and deprive them of basic education, health and administrative services. Those who abandon their farms and pastoralist livelihoods to seek refuge in Ouagadougou or other towns scrape by on handouts and the informal economy. With transport disrupted, those who remain in their villages struggle to get produce to markets. Conditions are particularly difficult in Djibo, a key town in the far north, where tens of thousands of people, both residents and recently displaced, struggle to survive on supplies that are mostly brought in by helicopter.

Output of cotton, the main cash crop, and key staples such as maize threaten to be reduced by the disintegration of government control over Boucle du Mohoun in the west, the most important agricultural region. A once well-regarded food monitoring and grain storage system is now dysfunctional in many areas. A number of NGOs – *MSF Belgique*, *Action contre la Faim* and some Scandinavian organisations – were trying to maintain a presence in areas outside government control, but have been forced to rein in their activities because of insecurity and government pressure. Officials fear that humanitarian support or public services in jihadist-controlled areas might legitimise the militants in the eyes of locals. In Soum province, out of nine municipalities, only two – Djibo and Kelbo – continue to function at all.

Ansaroul Islam fighters do not appear to be short of food or weapons, many of which were seized in battle. In terms of funding, the militants control many communities involved in artisanal gold mining, raising funds for the struggle ahead. ●

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Contest heats up as court blocks Thiam

The opposition prepares mass protests after the PDCI's presidential candidate is taken off the voters' roll

The main opposition *Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI) is in crisis after an Ivorian court removed its presidential candidate **Tidjane Thiam** from the electoral register. The court ruled against him on 22 April because he formerly held dual **French**-Ivorian nationality, which bars him from the presidential race.

The decision followed a party conference four days earlier when the PDCI, once led by the country's founding President **Félix Houphouët-Boigny**, confirmed Thiam (who is directly related to Houphouët-Boigny through his mother, a second cousin to the founding father) as its candidate. Delegates unanimously backed him in spite of his mismanagement of intra-party controversy and his nationality issue. Rejecting the ruling, Thiam said from Paris on 23 April that he is determined to run, arguing the party is behind him and there is no alternative. Mass demonstrations are planned in support of his candidacy, which many fear could prompt clashes between rival supporters.

In October 2024, **Jean-Louis Billon** announced his intention to run for president on behalf of the PDCI (AC Vol 65 No 22). Billon succeeded in business – between 2001 and 2012 he headed and expanded the country's premier agribusiness conglomerate Sifca – and was a trade minister in one of President **Alassane Ouattara's** cabinets before he switched to the PDCI.

Billon calculated that he was the ideal candidate to challenge Ouattara and the *Rassemblement des houphouëtiste pour la démocratie et la paix* (RHDP) in October 2025, only to be overtaken by Thiam, who had been out of the country for 23 years (AC Vol 65 No 5). Rather than engaging in dialogue, the party's disciplinary council called him a hearing, which was repeatedly postponed until it was cancelled in March. Was this the way to restore party unity behind one candidate?

Certainly not, decided a former member of the PDCI's political bureau, **Valérie Yapo**, reported to be close to Billon. She went to a lower court in Abidjan and demanded the PDCI be placed under guardianship, effectively dislodging the leadership, including Thiam. Yapo denies allegations by Thiam's allies that she is on a mission to destroy the PDCI guided by forces 'from outside', a reference to the RHDP. She insists she just wants the party's own rules and the law to be followed, especially regarding nationality issues. This is when Thiam, a former Credit Suisse Chief Executive, displayed a lack of political nous.

Article 48 of the Ivorian nationality law forbids dual nationality. Therefore, runs the argument put forward by Yapo and her group of Thiam adversaries, when the PDCI elected him president in December 2023, he was a French national. Thiam knew this but downplayed the issue and argued clumsily that if Ouattara could break the law by going for an unconstitutional fourth term, then so could he by being non-Ivorian.

He left it to the last minute to lodge a request with the French authorities to end his nationality, which they duly granted him on 20 March. A lower court judge was not impressed and ruled on 11 April that Thiam was not going to receive the document confirming his Ivorian citizenship. Advantage Yapo – until 16 April, when the party overwhelmingly endorsed Thiam for the 25 October election. The final verdict in the Yapo vs Thiam case has been put back several times and is now expected on 8 May.

RHDP SITTING PRETTY

The RHDP is sitting back and enjoying the spectacle. Few doubt that the party, no stranger to skulduggery, has a hand in fomenting divisions within the PDCI. But few would have anticipated this level of success in turning a pillar of the political establishment – it ruled unopposed from 1960 to 1999 – into such a tangled mess.

A TOWERING FIGURE?

As the ruling RHDP prepares the ground for President **Alassane Ouattara's** fourth term of office, questions about what country he will leave behind are looming. Also towering over the country is *Tour F*, a legacy project that began in 2021 in central Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire. It will survive as a symbol of the current government's hubris. Part of a 50-year-old urban modernisation plan, it stands at well over 300 metres tall, dominates Abidjan's skyline and will add 140,000 square metres of office space for use by an already bloated Ivorian bureaucracy.

Whenever it is completed, it may have cost as much as US$450 million, although the contractors steer clear of citing figures. The office of **Lebanese-**Ivorian architect **Pierre Fakhoury** – who designed it to look like 'an African mask', and who is also responsible for the bombastic copy of St Peter's Basilica in the political capital Yamoussoukro – has put the year of delivery at 2026, optimistic for a project that has barely advanced over the last year, possibly due to a lack of funds.

Curiously, the vanity project has played no role in the campaigning ahead of the 25 October election. Conforming to Ivorian political tradition, substance plays no part in the campaign; personalities, pettiness and threats do the heavy lifting.

But if the RHDP now sees a smooth boulevard towards the fourth and last term of Ouattara, now 83, two questions demand answers. First, what will they do with another five years of uncontested rule? And second, is there life after Ouattara?

The answer to the first question is more of the same: unfettered free market economics with lip service to social issues. This is where an effective opposition could have made progress. The answer to the second question is, almost certainly, no. The party lacks coherence, let alone a binding ideology; Ouattara keeps it all together and if he goes, the party will fragment. So what will he legacy be?

Return to *Tour F*: imposing but unfinished, partially covered by a glittering façade that fails to hide imperfections within. People can see past the glitz and do not like what they see. RHDP's slick campaigns – highlighting achievements such as the number of classrooms built, the extension of electricity access and the amount of new roads – can no longer divert attention from high unemployment, rows over land ownership, festering traumas from the 2010-2011 civil war, and simmering conflicts among clans. All of these have the potential for violence when the country chooses its president.

What grates the most for many is the ruling party's indifference to the plight of ordinary Ivorians, with healthcare too expensive, education out of reach and their economic prospects dismal. The RHDP's callousness, in tandem with displays of extravagant personal wealth, will not cost the RHDP this election, but is likely to ensure it loses the next one. ●

There is broad consensus that Thiam and a rejuvenated PDCI constitute the only political force that worries RHDP. Its failure to challenge the incumbent is blamed on Thiam. A party dissident told us: 'He has failed to stamp his authority on the party early on, demand discipline and foster party unity. This is the result and it will probably cost them the election.'

Like a political rite of passage, the opposition launched a barrage of attacks against the government's plans for the vote starting in February, targeting the electoral commission headed by the unflappable **Ibrahime Coulibaly-Kuibert**. The first shot across the bow was directed at his refusal to carry out the annual revision of the electoral register before the poll. Coulibaly-Kuibert says it is not required and not even possible; others refute this last claim. The opposition argues this is an attempt to deprive 'millions' of voters of their rights. Next came the protests over the exclusion of former President **Laurent Gbagbo**, his youth minister **Charles Blé Goudé** and ex-president of the Ivorian parliament **Guillaume Soro** from the list of eligible presidential candidates. Soro's political movement, *Générations et peuples solidaires*, banned in Côte d'Ivoire, said – rather superfluously – on 26 April that it will boycott the election.

OPPOSITION FIGHT MODE

Gbagbo has a conviction hanging over his head for relieving the West African Central Bank (BCEAO) of millions of dollars during his last months in power. His party's response was typically strident. The *Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire* (PPA-CI), now in a renewed alliance with its former adversary **Pascal Affi N'Guessan** and his *Front populaire ivoirien* (FPI) has gone into fighting mode. Its Executive President

Sebastién Dano Djédjé told local media in March that it would do 'anything' to get Gbagbo included and the leader himself indicated at a 12 April rally what that meant. 'Keep yourselves prepared,' he instructed the crowd. 'Orders will come.'

This phrasing implies forthcoming political violence. 'Where Gbagbo appears, there is violence,' one pundit said. 'We had one peaceful national election, in 2015, and that was because he was in The Hague. Now he's back…' The announcement, on the same day, that both the PPA-CI and the former ruling PDCI were leaving the CEI was confirmation of the increase in the political temperature.

Gbagbo retains nuisance power but he has run out of ideas. Or, as one commentator put it to *Africa Confidential*, he has no ideas because ideas do not interest him. Instead, he is surrounded by people whose job it is to feed the party base a constant diet of resentment, which has limited appeal and gets old quickly. ●

ZIMBABWE

Mnangagwa pushes Tagwirei into ZANU-PF policy role

Published online 24 April

Rejecting calls for his exit, the President is lining up his closest business ally for a top political role

The anticipated resignation of the Second Vice-President **Kembo Mohadi** presents President **Emmerson Mnangagwa** with a chance to consolidate his power base as dissent grows. The First Vice-President General (retired) **Constantino Chiwenga**, who is now openly challenging the ruling clique around Mnangagwa's family, is expected to remain in place for now.

Removing Chiwenga and alienating his supporters in the military would be too risky to Mnangagwa, at this stage. Alongside cadres within the ruling party and the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association, Chiwenga staunchly opposes Mnangagwa's plan to extend his tenure (AC Vol 65 No 23, Vol 66 No 4 & Dispatches 5/2/25). But Chiwenga is yet to join calls for Mnangagwa's impeachment or resignation.

Whichever succession or non-succession strategy Mnangagwa adopts, insiders say it will be carefully calibrated to minimise risk. Appointing an ultra-loyalist as Second Vice-President is critical.

Among the two most discussed contenders are Mnangagwa's business ally **Kudakwashe Tagwirei** and the Commander of the Defence Forces, General **Philip Valerio Sibanda**. Both are reliably pro-Mnangagwa but carry political liabilities. Tagwirei lacks roots within the party structures and the support of the armed forces. That plays into conviction of some senior officers that they risked their lives to launch the coup against **Robert Mugabe** in 2017 which brought Mnangagwa to power only for him and his business friends to reap the financial benefits.

And moving Sibanda from his role as head of the security services could provoke fresh unease in the military.

Others favoured by the Mnangagwa faction in the short term include party loyalists such as: **July Moyo**, the Minister of Energy and Power; **Oppah Muchinguri**, the National Chair of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF); and **Obert Mpofu**, the Secretary-General of ZANU-PF (see box).

Whoever gets the Vice-Presidency, Tagwirei's star is in the ascendant, provided Mnangagwa stays in power. On 31 March, ZANU-PF's Harare Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) proposed Tagwirei for a seat on the Central Committee. A similar recommendation had been made by the Masvingo PCC the day before. The Central Committee, comprising 230 members from Zimbabwe's 10 provinces, is the party's most powerful body between Congresses, tasked with implementing policies and decisions.

The recommendations are now with Mpofu for approval. ZANU-PF spokesman, **Chris Mutsvangwa**, has endorsed the proposal, describing Tagwirei's inclusion as 'a noble thing', particularly as Mnangagwa's reforms gain momentum. Echoing the Mnangagwa's courting of the **United States** administration, Mutsvangwa compared Tagwirei's role to **Elon Musk** working for President **Donald Trump**. Given that Mnangagwa and Tagwirei are both subject to the US's Magnitsky sanction for grand corruption, it's unclear how that parallel will be interpreted in Washington DC.

If Tagwirei joins the ZANU-PF Central Committee, his political profile will balloon. As a behind-the-scenes financier and supporter of favoured factions, Tagwirei had no formal position in the party, aside from being a card-carrying member, according to Harare PCC Chair **Godwills Masimirembwa**. A seat on the Central Committee would give him a role in decision-making, and position him for higher office.

After organising the 31 March day of action against Mnangagwa, war veteran leader **Blessed Runesu Geza**, known as 'Bombshell', released a video claiming the president suffers from vascular dementia, causing 'severe cognitive decline', and called for his impeachment. A former ZANU-PF Central Committee member (he was expelled in February), Geza had accused Mnangagwa and his inner circle of grand corruption and betraying the liberation struggle.

Most people stayed home on 31 March, fearing violence, but a small group gathered at Robert Mugabe Square in Harare. Authorities arrested 98 demonstrators, denying them bail (AC Vol 66 No 7).

On 5 April, Geza's camp circulated a draft motion calling for a joint sitting of the senate and national assembly to debate Mnangagwa's removal, citing 11 instances of 'irrational and captured decisions' linked to his alleged cognitive decline.

These include the 'fraudulent issuance of Treasury Bills' to Tagwirei, which caused the collapse of the local currency; the privatisation of the People's Own Savings Bank with **Virginia Mabhiza**; and the 'illegal and fraudulent sale of shares in Kuvimba Mining House' by Tagwirei, in collusion with Finance Minister **Mthuli Ncube**, Finance Permanent Secretary **George Guvamatanga**, and former RBZ Governor and Mutapa Investment Fund CEO **John Mangudya** (AC Vol 65 No 15).

Other allegations involve abusing the presidential title in development projects, profiting from the expensive Zimbabwe e-passport (benefiting Tagwirei and **Emmerson Mnangagwa Junior**), and the US$100 million Zimbabwe Electoral Commission fraud by **Wicknell Chivayo** (Dispatches 29/10/24). Ncube and Guvamatanga are also accused of issuing billions of dollars in Treasury Bills, 'irrationally growing Zimbabwe's debt obligations', and enabling gold cartel activities that defrauded the state of over $750m.

SECURITY RULES WHEN MNANGAGWA REPLACES DEPUTY MOHADI

As succession politics heat up within the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), President **Emmerson Mnangagwa** is showing his usual skills of political micro-management as he plans to extend his grip on power. The expected departure of Second Vice-President **Kembo Mohadi** due to ill health this year offers Mnangagwa another way to wrongfoot his opponents. An experienced security operative and trained by the KGB, Mohadi, 75, was minister of home affairs and state security between 2002 and 2017, after which Mnangagwa appointed him Second Vice-President. From the Beitbridge area, bordering **South Africa**, Mohadi presided over the ruling party's cross-border interests and smuggling operations – a key source of regime patronage.

After several women complained of sexual harassment by Mohadi, he resigned from the Vice-Presidency in 2021. But after dismissing the complaints as 'fake news' he was reappointed to the post by Mnangagwa two years later. He also became close to the flamboyant multi-millionaire **Wicknell Chivayo**. Due to Mohadi's influence, Chivayo was appointed an economic advisor to the president and his now gone into business with his son, **Emmerson Junior**.

The contenders to succeed Mohadi as Second Vice-President include:

- Kudakwashe Tagwirei, 56, Mnangagwa's billionaire business ally and owner of Sakunda Holdings, has run fuel supply operations alongside companies such as Trafigura and now dominates the national market. He also has mining interests in Bindura Nickel, Freda Rebecca Gold Mine and his company, Sotic International. Using his fortune to extend his profile in ZANU-PF and back Mnangagwa, Tagwirei has become embroiled in national infighting. Some insiders say Mnangagwa is positioning him for the presidential succession. But that would be fraught with risks – not least from those who see Tagwirei as a malign influence on the government. Even senior officials within the ruling party argue that Tagwirei's promotion to the Vice-Presidency would dangerously entrench conflicts of interest and state capture due to the wealth he has earned from government contracts under Mnangagwa. Tagwirei's patronage within ZANU-PF also has its limits. He had been closer to the First Vice-President General **Constantino Chiwenga**. But those ties seem to have cooled as Gen Chiwenga's rivalry with Mnangagwa has heightened.
- General **Philip Valerio Sibanda**, 71, Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces, is loyal enough to Mnangagwa and could be a powerful counterpoint to First Vice-President Gen Chiwenga. Mnangagwa is reluctant to sack Chiwenga because of his support base in the military. Appointing Sibanda as the Second Vice-President might boost Mnangagwa's standing in the military. But it would also mean a shake-up in the senior ranks of the military – in a period of febrile politics – as a new Commander would have to be appointed. War veteran leader **Blessed Runesu Geza**, who has been calling for Mnangagwa's impeachment, could weigh in, corralling the President's foes in the army and war vets movement.
- **Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri**, 67, Defence Minister, is a consummate Mnangagwa loyalist appointed to keep an eye on the restive army officers and war vets. She sided emphatically with Mnangagwa during the coup against **Robert Mugabe** in 2017 and benefited substantially from land redistribution. Fond of the headlines, she pronounced that the Covid-19 pandemic was divine retribution on western states for imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe's leaders.
- **Obert Mpofu**, 74, ZANU-PF Secretary-General is a long-standing politician and businessman with extensive personal interests in the mining sector. He plays a leading role in political management and quashing dissidents in the ruling party.
- **Owen Ncube**, ZANU-PF National Chairman, former director of the Central Intelligence Organisation and ex-State Security Minister, is a veteran securocrat and close to Mnangagwa. The two share a political base in the Midlands. Sanctioned by **Britain** and the **United States** for serial human rights abuses, he was removed by ZANU-PF from his National Security portfolio for 'inappropriate conduct'.
- **Lovemore Matuke**, 61, Minister of State for National Security is another key securocrat and ally of Mnangagwa from a younger generation.
- **July Moyo**, 75, Minister of Energy and Power Development and ZANU–PF Deputy Secretary for Administration is a long-serving politician who has held multiple portfolios including Local Government, Public Service and Labour Affairs. ●

Further claims allege the excessive issuance of Dangerous Drug Permits to Chivayo and his associates, enabling narcotics distribution, and the 'irrational pursuit of Vision 2030' – a scheme to postpone the 2028 elections and extend Mnangagwa's presidency by two years unconstitutionally.

When parliament and the senate reconvened on 8 April, their sessions lasted less than 10 minutes. ZANU Chief Whip **Pupurai Togarepi** moved to adjourn parliament until 6 May, while Senator **Conrad Jericho Gotora** proposed the same for the senate. No official explanation was provided but oppositionists say the adjournment aimed to block the impeachment debate – until enough MPs had been bribed to vote against it.

On 9 April, 70 MPs gathered at the Mabelreign District Office in Harare to receive plots distributed by Local Government Minister **Daniel Garwe**, reported the activist journalist **Hopewell Chin'ono**.

The plots, ranging from 300 to 1,000 square metres, were mainly taken from protected green belt land in Harare's northern suburbs.

The MPs were promised the land in exchange for votes to block the impeachment motion when parliament reopens, as well as support for extending Mnangagwa's term to 2030, Chin'ono reported. Confirming the meeting, a Ministry of Local Government spokesman said the allocations were part of 'an ongoing urban housing initiative' and simply a non-monetary job benefit.

The list of 70 MPs included at least six opposition members – notably **Sengezo Tshabangu**, the self-proclaimed leader of the former opposition Citizens' Coalition for Change seen as a ZANU-PF collaborator, who is said to be receiving 2,000 square metres. The accusations have deepened divisions within the opposition. One of the accused CCC MPs, **Bridget Nyandoro**, published an exposé on malfeasance among fellow CCC members, sparking days of online finger-pointing within the party.

Chiwenga, although distancing himself from Geza' overtly confrontational tactics is getting more vocal. At an April ceremony in Gweru to light the Independence Flame, he accused party elites of betraying the liberation war's cause. He also confronted Mnangagwa ally, Midlands Provincial Affairs Minister **Owen Ncube**, warning, 'You are hunting me. What will happen when the hunter becomes the hunted?' ●

EUROPEAN UNION/AFRICAN UNION

Can Africa and Europe agree on trade?

Published online 25 April

Former advisor to the AU warns the two continents remain far apart on climate and industrialisation goals

The European Commission plans to 'diversify' relations with its trading partners as it faces the reality of **United States** President **Donald Trump** imposing tariffs of 25% on its cars, steel and aluminium and 10% on all other goods. The Commission has set itself a December deadline for concluding talks on a trade deal with **India** and opened discussions with the **United Arab Emirates** and **Thailand.** So where is Africa in the queue? The Commission and the African Union will hold a ministerial meeting on 21 May ahead of a leaders' summit later this year, though a date for the latter is yet to be set.

Not so fast, says **Carlos Lopes**, the former top AU trade advisor who sought to negotiate an African trade deal with the EU back in 2018 (AC Vol 59 No 21). 'The US withdrawal is both a disruption and an opening,' says Lopes, who also used to lead the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

EU-African trade relations have made little progress in almost two decades since the Economic Partnership Agreements pushed by then EU Trade Commissioner **Peter Mandelson** tried to open market access for EU and African exports.

'Agility has never been a strong suit of the EU-Africa relationship,' cautions Lopes, adding that 'Europe sees Africa through a regulatory lens—compliance, conditionality, governance – but not through a transformative lens that sees value in African agency, scale, or dynamism.'

'The moment is ripe – but only if both sides drop their pretensions: Europe must stop projecting its model as universal, and Africa must stop negotiating from a position of vulnerability. Otherwise, the opportunity will pass, like others before.'

In 2019, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement was launched. It aims to create a single market and customs union but hefty barriers to intra-African trade remain and the continent's trade policy has been shaped by a patchwork of regional economic blocs and their external deals.

A continent-to-continent agreement has been talked of as a long-term project by former Commission President **Jean-Claude Juncker**. Because all member states have to reach consensus, agreeing mandates, let alone brokering a deal at EU and AU level would be politically fraught. Neither is it an immediate EU priority.

An improved EU-**South Africa** trade deal could be an interim step. That would mean Pretoria abandoning the Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU it currently adheres to as part of the South African Development Community. Coal-dependent South Africa would also demand an exemption from Brussels' Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, an import levy based on goods' embedded emissions (AC Vol 64 No 13). CBAM will be one of the main stumbling blocks to an EU trade pact with India, which also opposes the levy.

The EU Commission, however, has indicated that it plans to expand the scope of CBAM later this year to cover more of the value-chain.

Lopes doubts there is much appetite among EU officials to offer improved terms that would allow African countries to promote their own industrialisation. 'There is rhetorical momentum, but very little structural change'. The EPAs were never designed for industrialisation. They reinforced raw commodity export patterns and limited African states' ability to use tariffs and subsidies strategically.

'We are still waiting for the EU to signal readiness for a genuine reset. So far, the bureaucratic reflex to defend legacy agreements has prevailed over any strategic recalibration,' he adds.

Last week the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development announced that official development assistance dropped by 7% in 2024 and, in the wake of the US' suspension of most US aid and already announced cuts by European states, is set to drop by a further 17% in 2025.

Lopes says that the EU 'should depoliticise aid and repoliticise trade,' adding that 'too often, governance conditionality has been weaponised through development assistance, while trade asymmetries are normalised.' ●

SÃO TOMÉ & PRÍNCIPE/RUSSIA

Military alliance and port deal with Russia goes live

Published online 28 April

The pact has been ratified, expanding Moscow's reach in the Gulf of Guinea and upsetting the US although it is retreating from the region

On 3 April Prime Minister **Américo Ramos** of the *Acção Democrática Independente* (ADI), approved a military cooperation agreement with Russia, first signed in St Petersburg a year ago by former Defence Minister **Jorge Amado** under the Trovoada administration (AC Vol 65 No 11). At the same cabinet meeting, ministers endorsed agreements on security force training with **Turkey** and defence cooperation with **Serbia**, seemingly to frame the Russian pact as part of a range of defence engagements.

While the government framed the Russian defence pact as part of broader security agreements, the reality appears different. Last year, the deal embarrassed Portugal, the European Union, and other western donors. In response, then ADI Prime Minister **Patrice Trovoada** quickly played down concerns, insisting that military cooperation with Moscow was routine and would not alter the country's stance on the war in **Ukraine**. He emphasised São Tomé's sovereignty, asserting its right to partner with any willing nation.

São Tomé condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine in UN General Assembly votes in March 2022 and February 2023. In June 2024, then foreign minister **Gareth Guadalupe** attended the Ukraine peace summit in **Switzerland** and signed the final communiqué. Last year, a Russian government commission approved the agreement with São Tomé.

In September, Alexey Chepa, deputy

chair of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee, praised the deal, highlighting its benefit to Russian naval operations as international ports closed to Russian vessels. The agreement allows them to be stationed in the Gulf of Guinea. A similar pact was signed in March 2024 between Russian Deputy Defence Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and Equatorial Guinea, further expanding Moscow's military presence in West Africa (AC Vol 66 No 1).

Russia's news agency Sputnik revealed São Tomé's military cooperation agreement in May last year, covering training, arms supply, logistics, joint exercises, and naval and air force visits but gave no specifics.

Russia's Luanda-based ambassador to São Tomé, **Vladimir Tararov**, proposed establishing a joint private company to monitor the archipelago's 160,000-square-kilometre territorial waters using radars and drones. Russian investors expanded into other sectors. In May 2024, then agriculture minister **Abel Bom Jesus** revoked a local company's concession for the Uba Buda estate, transferring it to the Russian Guta Group.

During São Tomé and Príncipe's period as a Soviet-aligned state, from 1975 to 1990, it received Russian military hardware under a 1979 agreement. Following the democratic transition in 1991, the country prioritised relations with western nations and **China**, though ties with Beijing were interrupted between 1997 and 2016 in favour of **Taiwan** (AC Vol 58 No 6).

São Tomé has had military cooperation agreements with **Portugal**, **France**, **Brazil**, the **United States** and **Angola**. Under a 2018 defence pact, Portugal stationed a patrol boat with a crew of 13 in São Tomé, while Brazil and the US have contributed to coastguard training and equipment.

Three years ago, São Tomé sent its first ambassador to Russia. Two years ago, National Assembly President **Celmira Sacramento** attended the Russia–Africa parliamentary conference in Moscow. In July last year, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister **Mikhail Bogdanov** led a delegation at São Tomé's 49th Independence Day, meeting Trovoada and Guadalupe.

A Russian defence ministry delegation is currently in São Tomé to discuss implementing the military agreement, including training and drafting the country's first military doctrine. Key objectives include supplying military equipment, particularly to the coastguard to enhance territorial water surveillance.

As Russia expands its presence, the US has scaled back, shutting down Voice of America's Pinheira transmitter in 2024 neatly symbolising the region's geopolitical shifts. ●

CAMEROON

Security falls apart as Biya totters

Published online 25 April

Focusing on fixing national elections in October, top officials are failing to respond to the insurgents targeting the regime

The collapsing security system in Cameroon is seriously threatening 92-year-old President **Paul Biya's** regime in what many in Yaoundé say is its twilight period. Determined to run for a sixth term in elections in October, the Sphinx-like Biya has avoided cultivating successors. Distracted by their efforts to stop civilian opponents gaining ground in the election campaign, top regime loyalists have ignored worsening security conditions and rising social discontent.

In a dry-run last year – when Biya 'disappeared' for six weeks – ambitious politicians plotted in the capital. Some had expected senior officers to mount a coup if the absence had continued much longer. Since then, military gripes against the Biya regime have ballooned with soldiers bearing heavy losses across multiple conflict zones.

As the crises mount, the government keeps schtum and seems incapable of pushing back the insurgents. Senior officials are electioneering, while soldiers and civilians grieve (AC Vol 66 Nos 1 & 5).

On the night of 24-25 March, elite politicians and their business allies celebrated the 40th anniversary of the ruling *Rassemblement démocratique du peuple Camerounais* (RDPC), fighters loyal to the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) attacked a Multinational Joint Task Force base at Wulgo, near the **Nigerian** border.

They killed 20 soldiers, wounded 12, and destroyed the base, marking a grim climax to nine months of jihadi insurgency around Lake Chad, an area plagued by hunger, communal strife, and extreme poverty. Yaoundé authorities ignored the military losses, unwilling to interrupt the RDPC celebrations with national mourning.

Alongside the toll of jihadi attacks, the slow-burn Anglophone conflict is stretching state defences. In March, pro-Ambazonia (the self-declared Anglophone republic) fighters killed 14 government soldiers in ambushes and by planting roadside bombs near military checkpoints in the English-speaking North-west and South-west regions. On 19 March, gunmen crossed into Magba in the neighbouring Francophone West region, killing two soldiers, marking the first such cross-zone assault in a year, highlighting the cyclical violence in the nine-year conflict.

Such targeting of the security forces risk spilling into electoral politics. Biya's regime downplays the violence as it steps up surveillance on the usually loyal armed forces. Periodically, Biya's apparatchiks reshuffle key personnel to disrupt any coup planning.

Biya quickly replaced military commanders after General **Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema's** coup in **Gabon** in August 2023. When Biya was in **France** for medical treatment last September, succession contenders started plotting amid reports of his incapacitation or demise. Returning after an unexplained six-week absence, Biya again reshuffled the senior officers corps (Dispatches 30/8/23, AC Vol 64 No 18 & Vol 65 No 20).

Biya is yet to declare his candidacy but no one doubts he will run again. On 10 February, the eve of National Youth Day, the president asked youths to stop opposition candidates destabilising the country during the election. His aides paid people to declare him their presidential candidate on his 92nd birthday.

More than ever Biya's backers want to tilt the playing field.

The government is using the bureaucracy to block the opposition, with the electoral body refusing to release the voter's roll despite legal challenges from opposition contender **Maurice Kamto** and *le Mouvement pour la renaissance du Cameroun* (MRC).

Tensions persist within Biya's camp. Ministers are vying for his favour as power struggles intensify. The Minister of Territorial Administration **Paul Atanga Nji** banned five NGOs, accusing them of 'excessive' foreign funding, in a bid to prevent civil society from scrutinising the election.

Secretary-General of the Presidency **Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh** is competing with Prime Minister **Joseph Dion Ngute** for control of Biya's campaign, travelling across the country to rally support for Africa's oldest leader. Ngoh held an outreach rally in Douala, the stronghold of his rival within Biya's inner circle, Justice Minister **Laurent Esso** who has been hospitalised in France since January (AC Vol 66 No 8). ●

SOUTH AFRICA

Treasury is the big loser after the tax hike fiasco

28 April

The ANC and the DA are both battered by the budget delay but more fights over spending are likely

The latest compromise on rates for value added tax in the much-delayed budget has kept the Government of National Unity in power – but at the expense of South Africa's revered Treasury. For many decades, the Treasury, with the backing of the ruling party has set the fiscal framework for the budget and its spending priorities.

Then last month, the coalition structure of the GNU forced the Treasury, led by Finance Minister and African National Congress loyalist **Enoch Godongwana**, to drop a key plank of its fiscal plan – raising the rate of VAT to 17% from 15% (Dispatches 17/3/25). That forced a rare delay to the reading of the budget in parliament and triggered a feud between the ANC and the centre-right DA, the second biggest party in the coalition.

To some investors that signals the diminishing of the Treasury and a growing partisanship fiscal policy. It has also left Godongwana and the Treasury with a 75 billion rand (US$4bn) to fill over the next three years. The final decisions on how to do that will be taken by parliament before the end of July.

Neither the ANC nor the DA can claim a clear win. The budget fight has exposed splits in the ranks of both parties. Supporters of ANC Deputy President **Paul Mashatile** have been emboldened in their opposition to the DA's inclusion in the coalition; and critics, such as **Helen Zille**, of **John Steenhuisen's** leadership of the DA lamented that he didn't capitalise more on the ANC's discomfiture over the budget.

The DA takes the credit for getting the Treasury to drop the increase in VAT. But it may also get the blame for the consequences of not raising the rate. Explaining the fiscal hole facing the government, a Treasury official added that the 'decision not to increase VAT means that the measures to cushion lower income households against the potential negative impact of the rate increase now need to be withdrawn and other expenditure decisions revisited,' and that this will mean 'unavoidable expenditure adjustments'.

That is code for cuts and finance ministry officials concede that cuts are the only realistic outcome. But many in the ANC resent the DA's tough tactics and are likely to blame it for new spending cuts, further straining the coalition. Parties in the GNU are now planning a shorter-term compromise to find savings of R13bn (US$0.7bn), the amount that would be raised by the 0.5% VAT increase.

The dispute has highlighted the powerful role played by **Mmusi Maimane**, the former DA leader who now chairs the National Assembly's Appropriations Committee, which has sweeping powers over government spending.

The DA's Steenhuisen believes he secured enough concessions from the Treasury to put a positive spin on the negotiations on 25 April. He told journalist that he had no intention of walking away from the coalition. And he added that is what the markets wanted.

President **Cyril Ramaphosa** also won a boost from keeping the fractious coalition together on 25 and was able to tell South Africans about a planned meeting with **United States** President **Donald Trump** to resolve the rumbling diplomatic differences between the two countries. And South Africa's Standard Bank reports an uptick in private investment in the country since the GNU was launched last year with Gulf States boosting their investments in South Africa's renewable sector.

None of that is enough for Deputy President Mashatile, now in full 2027 ANC leadership election mode. He has grown increasingly vocal in recent weeks (AC Vol 66 No 8), arguing the DA should be 'ashamed' to be in office after voting against the budget.

KENYA/EUROPEAN UNION

IMF praises Kenya's growth as Brussels pushes its unpopular trade deals

28 April

After multiple setbacks President Ruto can celebrate some economic boosts during his trip to China

Kenya will overtake **Ethiopia** as East Africa's largest economy this year, the IMF has said. Kenya's gross domestic product will be US$132 billion in 2025, compared to Ethiopia's $117bn, according to the Fund. That will be seized upon by President **William Ruto** as he seeks to convince a deeply sceptical public counting the costs of higher prices and higher taxes about his government's economic stewardship. He has also just completed what he claims is highly investment-seeking trip to **China**.

The EU is using the Kenyan economy to push its much-criticised economic partnership agreements to other African states. Brussels claims that it expects EU-Kenya trade to double after the two sides ratified an EPA last year (Dispatches 20/12/23).

'What we have seen with other countries where EPAs were signed with the EU, they had incredible increases in trade volumes, in comparison to countries that didn't have an EPA,' EU Ambassador **Henriette Geiger** told Bloomberg News last week.

Kenya exported €1.4bn to the EU in 2023 – mainly vegetables, fruits, and flowers – and imported €2bn worth of mineral and chemical products and machinery.

Geiger's remarks will get a mixed reception from African economists. Few of the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) that the EU offered to African regional blocs two decades ago have been agreed and implemented. They have been criticised for focusing too much on opening market access (AC Vol 58 No 21).

'The EPAs were never designed for industrialisation,' says **Carlos Lopes**, a former advisor to the African Union. 'They reinforced raw commodity export patterns and limited African states' ability to use tariffs and subsidies strategically,' he adds.

The imposition of tariffs on cars and goods trade by the Trump administration in the **United States** will mean the EU looking to 'diversify' its trade partnerships, says the European Commission.

'We are still waiting for the EU to signal readiness for a genuine reset. So far, the bureaucratic reflex to defend legacy agreements has prevailed over any strategic recalibration,' adds Lopes.

TUNISIA

Western governments show little unease about Saïed's jailing of oppositionists

28 April

Having spent €1 billion on a cash for migrant control deal, the EU downplays the galloping authoritarianism in Tunis

The crackdown against opposition to President **Kaïs Saïed's** regime is intensifying with over a dozen politicians and activists being jailed for between 18 and 66 years on treason charges.

Last week, the New York-based Human Rights Watch documented 22 politicians, journalists and activists, who had been detained on charges, including terrorism, in connection with their public statements or political activities. Some of them were jailed on 19 April as part of a prosecution of 40 people in a trial that started in March. More than 20 have fled Tunisia since being charged.

On 25 April, thousands of Tunisians protested in the capital against the draconian sentences and called for Saïed's immediate exit. Holding up photographs of imprisoned activists, journalists and lawyers, the demonstrators accused Saïed of controlling the courts since he sacked dozens of judges in 2022.

Businessman **Kamel Ltaif** received the stiffest sentence of 66 years while **Khyam Turki**, a former member of the *Ettakatol* party who then founded a think-tank, received a 48-year sentence (Dispatches 28/2/23). **Ghazi Chaouachi**, the leader of *at-Tayyār ad-Dīmuqrātī* (Democratic Current), **Issam Chebbi**, head of the Republican Party, **Jawahar Ben Mbrak** and **Ridha Belhaj** all received 18-year sentences. They have been in custody since being detained in 2023 (Dispatches 16/7/24). Lawyers for the defendants have likened the prosecutions to 'show trials', with the rulings prepared weeks ago.

The crackdown has attracted little attention from western governments. The French Foreign Ministry referred to 'harsh sentences,' adding that 'we regret the failure to respect fair trial conditions.' Yet the European Union, with whom Saïed has a €1 billion 'cash for migrant control' agreement, on 16 April proposed to designate Tunisia as a 'safe country' for migrants, arguing that 'the population of Tunisia does not, in general, face persecution or real risk of serious harm'.

Among the defendants was **Kamel Guizani**, former head of the Directorate General of National Security. Upon the arrest in 2023, President Saïed described the politicians as 'traitors and terrorists' and said that judges who would acquit them were their accomplices.

ZIMBABWE

Backed by gold, the ZIG is still heading 'for extinction'

22 April

Mnangagwa's government executes yet another policy U-turn in bid to keep struggling currency afloat

The government's repeal of exchange rate controls is set to speed up the demise of the Zimbabwe Gold (ZIG) currency, just a year after its introduction.

The move by the Finance Ministry on 15 April is the latest of several contradictory policy decisions by officials who have been flailing, attempting to keep afloat the Zimbabwe Gold (ZIG), the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government's sixth attempt to launch a viable currency since 2009.

In March, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) **John Mushayavanhu** announced that companies were free to use whatever exchange rate they preferred, only to drop the policy days later (AC Vol 66 No 7). Now the government has pivoted back to a floating system.

The ZIG has lost around 50% of its value since being launched a year ago at a rate of 13.56 against the US dollar.

'The ZiG is fast going into extinction,' Imara Asset Management Chief Executive Officer **John Legat** and Chief Investment Officer **Shelton Sibanda** wrote in a note to clients last week. Its demise won't be due to the rapid devaluation that doomed Zimbabwe's previous efforts to establish a local currency, 'but through irrelevance,' they said.

The ZIG is backed by Zimbabwe's gold and foreign currency reserves. But the key problem is that businesses and consumers have not moved away from using dollars to complete transactions (Dispatches 14/2/24).

Legat and Sibanda, the top officials at Zimbabwe's largest brokerage firm, estimate that 80% of transactions in Zimbabwe are being conducted in dollars, with payments in South African rand also outstripping those made using the ZIG.

Multiple economic failures are ramping up opposition to President **Emmerson Mnangagwa**, who has faced recent protests demanding his resignation. They were called by a senior ZANU-PF figure and war veterans' leader, **Blessed 'Bombshell' Geza**, who is rallying support against a ruling party faction which wants the president to rule until 2030, beyond a two-term limit.

SUDAN

Arab proxy war in Sudan laid bare as London summit fails

22 April

The gulf between Saudi Arabia's and the United Arab Emirates' positions prevented the formation of a contact group

Disagreement among the regional sponsors of the main combatants in Sudan's civil war, the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led to the collapse of a summit in London on 15 April aimed at boosting efforts to end the two-year-old conflict.

British diplomats pushed the idea of creating a contact group. The theory was that **Egypt**, **Saudi Arabia** and the **United Arab Emirates** could use the group to pressure their proxies in the war. That meant the SAF in the case of Egypt and Saudi Arabia; and the RSF for the UAE. Yet the Gulf states refused to sign a joint communique after a day of talks London.

In the absence of representatives from the SAF or RSF, or, indeed, any of Sudan's civilian leaders, British officials hosting the ministerial summit on the second anniversary of the civil war's start had hoped to focus on the Middle East states who were providing funding and weapons to the warring factions.

The failure left the UK and its co-hosts, the European Union and African Union, to promise to support 'efforts to find a peaceful solution and reject all activities, including external interference, that heighten tensions or that prolong or enable fighting'.

The statement also called for a solution that did not lead to Sudan's partition after RSF leader General **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'** announced on Tuesday the establishment of the Government of Peace and Unity, a parallel government (AC Vol 66 No 4).

The meeting ended up as little more than a pledging summit for humanitarian aid, and one which ended with meagre new commitments. In February, the United Nations estimated that around US$6 billion would be needed in 2025 to support around 20 million people in Sudan or neighbouring countries who have been displaced or need humanitarian aid. The London summit, however, generated around $750m in new commitments from the UK and the EU (AC Vol 66 No 8).

AFRICA/OECD/AID

Western aid spending heads towards the cliff-edge as US cuts bite

22 April

The OECD is warning that assistance to poorest nations must be protected to avoid 'dramatic' impacts

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) says that aid to struggling sub-Saharan African countries should be ringfenced amid the deep spending cuts threatened by the **United States** and many European donors.

Aid fell by 7.1% in 2024, but the OECD expects it to drop by another 17% in 2025, as the USAID cuts bite. By 2030, aid spending could be 30% lower than it was in 2023. Net Official Development Assistance to sub-Saharan Africa dropped by 2% to US$36 billion, while aid to the group of least developed countries (LDCs) was $35bn, a fall of 3% in real terms.

The 2025 cuts would be the largest since it started recording aid spending, OECD officials told journalists on Wednesday 16 April. **Karsten Staur**, who chairs the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, called for aid to the world's 26 poorest countries, of which 23 are in sub-Saharan Africa, to be 'ringfenced' by donors.

He pointed out that in these countries development aid accounts for more than 60% of their external financing and that it is fanciful to expect that the private sector will plug the gap. 'If ODA was stopped it would have an extremely dramatic, cataclysmic effect,' he warned.

African states are already counting the cost of the three-month suspension to most USAID programs, and the shuttering of the agency itself, by US President **Donald Trump** (Dispatches 28/1/25). Healthcare and education budgets are set to be the worst affected. Trump has exempted emergency humanitarian aid from the suspension.

However, the US cuts will be compounded by moves by Europe's major donors, **Germany**, the **United Kingdom** and **France**, to slash their own development spending (AC Vol 66 No 5). All three have announced plans to cut aid budgets by over 30% by 2029. ●

POINTERS

Tanzania/East Africa

KARUA TAKES ON THE AUTOCRATS

Veteran Kenyan politician **Martha Karua** is spearheading a campaign against the suppression of opposition parties in East Africa. Ahead of **Tundu Lissu's** court appearance on 24 April, the Pan-African Progressive Leaders Solidarity Network, founded by Karua, demanded the 'immediate withdrawal of charges against Mr. Lissu and all political prisoners'. The leader of Tanzania's *Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo* (Chadema) party, Lissu was arrested and detained in April on treason charges after holding rallies under the slogan 'No Reforms, No Election' (AC Vol 66 No 8).

Karua's group described Lissu's case as 'emblematic of growing threats to democracy across Africa'. A former MP, cabinet minister, and **Raila Odinga's** running mate in Kenya's 2022 presidential elections, Karua remains vocal in Kenyan politics. She has launched the People's Liberation Party (PLP) and plans to contest the 2027 elections as part of the opposition to President **William Ruto** (AC Vol 66 No 5). She also joined the legal team for **Ugandan** opposition leader **Kizza Besigye** and his ally **Hajji Obeid Lutaale**, who have been jailed without bail as they face treason and weapons charges.

The arrests of Lissu and Besigye – the latter was abducted by Ugandan agents in Nairobi last December – exemplify government attacks on opposition parties (Dispatches 5/2/25).

The shift towards authoritarianism under Tanzanian President **Samia Suluhu Hassan** contrasts with her initial reforms such as releasing opposition politicians after the death of **John Magufuli**. The general elections in October could repeat last year's local polls, where Hassan's *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* secured 99% of the vote after nearly all opposition candidates were banned from standing (Dispatches 22/10/24).

Burkina Faso/Mali/Niger

THE JUNTAS JOIN THE GOLD RUSH

On 23 April, Niger advanced its mineral development by partnering with **Emirati** firm Suvarna Royal Gold Trading LLC. The deal, formalised in Niamey, establishes Royal Gold Niger SA, which will build the country's first gold refinery, jewellery production, and gemstone processing facilities. Yet the Niamey junta's claims of probity took a knock when it invited Suvarna CEO **Kamlesh Mansukhlal Damji Pattni** to the opening ceremony as a putative partner. Exposed for serial fraud in gold trading schemes in **Kenya** and **Zimbabwe**, Pattni is also under US Treasury sanctions for grand corruption.

Burkina Faso's military government plans to nationalise more foreign-owned industrial mines as the junta seeks to capitalise on gold prices, which have surged by 25% this year to over US$3,500 an ounce. The *Société de Participation Minière du Burkina*, a new state mining company established last year, has taken control of two industrial gold mines – Boungou and Wahgnion – previously owned by London-listed Endeavour Mining. The deal was finalised last year.

This, combined with a new mining code that prioritises national expertise and local suppliers, is what Prime Minister **Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo** describes as a revolution in Burkina Faso's mineral wealth. The government collected more than 11 tonnes of gold in the first three months of 2025, he claims. In late April, Ouédraogo's government issued a mining licence to **Russia's** Nordgold for a gold project in Kourweogo, Plateau-Central region. In Mali, General **Assimi Goïta's** regime is clashing with **Canada's** Barrick Gold (AC Vol 66 No 3). Operations at the Loulo-Gounkoto complex have been suspended since January, after the government seized over three tonnes of gold – worth around $245 million – due to a tax revenue dispute (AC Vol 66 No 2).

VERA DAVES DE SOUSA, ANGOLA'S TRAILBLAZER

Finance Minister **Vera Daves de Sousa** was one of the few African star turns at April's spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, despite her government being shut out of the international markets. Still only in her early 40s, De Sousa is a seasoned veteran of the Finance Ministry and a respected technocrat. Now in her sixth year as minister, she previously served as a senior official in the Treasury before being appointed to the role by President **João Lourenço** in October 2019 (AC Vol 63 No 17).

She has been praised for slashing Angola's debt burden from 119% of GDP in 2020, to 58% of GDP in 2024 – a feat lauded by African Development Bank President **Akinwumi Adesina** last October. The AfDB provided US$160 million in budget support in 2024, with a second tranche planned for 2025. The IMF also praised of Angola's performance in 2024, when economic growth surged to 3.8%, far higher than forecast.

More cheers in Washington last month as De Sousa detailed Angola's decision to continue phasing out fuel subsidies, a move expected to make big savings. She set out the government's reform agenda, diversifying the economy away from oil – which still generates 60% of state revenues – while tackling its debt burden to improve investor confidence, reduce poverty, achieve food and energy security, and create jobs for young people.

The rhetoric serves as a sales pitch and policy agenda. For all the talk of reform, a slump in oil prices and the looming threat of 32% trade tariffs from **United States** President **Donald Trump** – one of the highest rates facing an African country – could deal a hammer blow to Lourenço's reform plans (Dispatches 7/4/25).

Although Trump has delayed the implementation of the tariffs until 9 July, Angola's economy remains vulnerable. Last year, the country exported $1.79 billion worth of goods to the US, over 80% of which was oil.

The average yield on Angola's dollar bonds has soared to 13.5% in recent weeks, prompting De Sousa to shelve plans to test the Eurobond market for up to $1.5bn this year. Instead, she has opened talks with the IMF on a possible loan to explore 'financial options'.

De Sousa says that her ministry is running stress tests to determine how low oil prices can fall before the budget becomes unsustainable. She adds that $55 per barrel is the baseline figure. Any lower and a supplementary budget will be needed. The numbers are not on her side. The Finance Ministry forecasts that debt servicing will reach 13 trillion kwanza (€12.89bn) in 2025 – a substantial burden for an economy whose output was around $115bn last year.

Angola faces rising loan repayments, with $864m due on a bond set to mature in November. De Sousa has promised to 'squeeze' state spending but that risks sparking resistance. Most government revenue is being spent on public sector wages and servicing debt. More austerity will galvanise the government's opponents. When Lourenço's government started cutting subsidies in 2023 amid high inflation, it sparked violent protests (AC Vol 65 No 14). ●