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BLUE LINES

African trade officials are changing strategies urgently in the wake of the tariff tsunami, ranging from 10%-30%, imposed on 1 August on their exports to the United States. Most governments are concentrating their focus on the three alternatives to the US market: China, the European Union and the African Continental Free Trade Area. But none will offer a quick fix for the financial losses caused by the US tariffs. Hardest hit will be South Africa: the US is its third biggest trading partner and market for 7.5% of its exports. That puts at risk 100,000 jobs and about $10billion in revenues. That is the worst outcome on the continent, but most economies will take a hit. The US is now Africa's third biggest trading partner, behind China and the EU, and likely to head south after the tariffs – apart from those countries with bountiful reserves of critical minerals.

Kenya is one of Africa's few net importers from the US to the tune of just under $100m. But some Republican politicians have been calling for Kenya to be stripped of its non-NATO ally status with Washington due its close commercial ties with China. That is unlikely to slow China's economic expansion in Kenya and the wider region. Contrasting its policies with the prospect of higher US tariffs, China offered tariff and quota-free trade to all African states in June. The EU plans to boost African investment via its Global Gateway programme, focusing on energy and critical raw materials.

NIGERIA

Tinubu's biggest challenge - ructions in the ruling party

The country's shrewdest political strategist has to contend with multiple schisms in the 36 states

On most measures, President Bola Tinubu has emphatically improved the position of the ruling All Progressives Congress in Nigeria – despite the unpopularity of many of its economic policies. It controls two-thirds of the state parliaments in the 36-state federation, and it has boosted its numbers in the National Assembly to give it a comfortable majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate (AC Vol 66 No 9).

Much of this is down to the Tinubu method: relentlessly wooing opposition politicians from the critical swing states. Sometimes he gets politicians such as Delta State Governor **Sheriff Oborevwori** to defect, along with their allies in the state assembly, to the ruling APC. That delivers the state, and its election financing capacity to Tinubu and the APC – in return for a political promise.

In other cases, Tinubu recruits an outgoing governor, such as Rivers State Governor **Nyesom Wike** to stay in the opposition People's Democratic Party to instigate division and confusion. So effective was Wike in persuading voters in Rivers, against all historical trends, to back Tinubu and the APC that he was given the prime patronage portfolio of Minister of the Federal Capital Territory in the Federal Government after the February 2023 elections.

Thanks to Wike causing chaos in the PDP, the party that once boasted of being the biggest political party in Africa, has almost imploded. Its lead financier and former presidential candidate **Atiku Abubakar** has quit and transferred his money and ambition to the new opposition alliance, the African Democratic Congress (ADC).

There he was joined by **Peter Obi**, presidential candidate of the Labour party, which has also been hit by saboteurs that party loyalists claim were backed by Tinubu adherents. Other politicians to have fallen foul of Tinubu – such as ex-Senate President **David Mark**, ex-Transport Minister **Rotimi Amaechi** and ex-governor of Kaduna State **Nasir el-Rufai** – are also circling the ADC, mulling a run for the presidency in 2027.

So effective has this campaign against opposition leaders proved to be that most of them have crowded into a political vehicle determined to oppose Tinubu (AC Vol 66 No 10). The other side of the story is that the ruling APC is struggling to accommodate waves of defectors from the opposition who are demanding jobs and privileges for switching allegiance.

In some states and local government areas, this is proving highly disruptive. So serious are some of these disputes that they could derail what was looking like a clear run for Tinubu in the presidential elections in 2027. Much of this may be positioning ahead of the primary elections in the states which are due to be held early next year.

On the regional rotation principle, between north and south in Nigeria, southern governors, regardless of party, are calling for a southern presidential candidate in 2027. And the ruling APC controls 14 out of the 17 states in southern Nigeria.

Tinubu, the godfather of the commercial capital Lagos, in the south-west, is the pre-eminent southern candidate. His backers in the APC handed him the presidential nomination without the fuss of a primary election. Rivals to Tinubu, especially in the northern states, calculated that it was not the time for a direct challenge.

States in the north-east and north-west of Nigeria are Tinubu's biggest headaches. He may not be able to win a majority in most of the northern states, but he must win a geographical spread of votes: that is at least 25% of the votes in two thirds of the 36 states.

Along with his strong base in the south, Tinubu is determined to boost his standing in the north. And his backers have been trying relentlessly to harvest at least some of the 10 million votes that helped elect the previous APC leader Muhammadu Buhari who died on 13 July (AC Vol 66 No 15).

Tinubu's campaign team is convinced that the combination of Buhari's APC legacy vote and the party's growing support in the ethnically and religiously diverse north-central states should carry their man over the line in 2027.

But they must also manage the serial personal rivalries and turf-fights in seven key states. Should these go badly for the APC it would open the election to the opposition ADC or another formation that could unite around a credible candidate. For now, these are the most troublesome states for Tinubu.

DELTA STATE

The oil-rich Delta State shows the fluidity of national politics. Since 1999, the state has been held by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and funded its presidential campaigns. The state receives the highest federal allocation and oil revenues in the country. Last year, it got N485billion ($317million) as federal allocation and then generated another N158bn through taxes, making it the third wealthiest state in the country behind Lagos and Rivers.

In 2023, the PDP's presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, nominated then Delta Governor **Ifeanyi Okowa**, as his running mate because of the state's political weight and financial muscle. When Tinubu took office, his administration began investigating Delta State's finances. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission called Okowa for questioning amid reports that $1bn was unaccounted for.

Amid the probe, Okowa along with his successor, Governor Sheriff Oborevwori and all other elected officials in the state defected to the APC, endorsing Tinubu for re-election, undermining a key opposition base. But it has also caused ructions in the ruling party in the state. Political tradition states that whenever a governor defects to a new party, he automatically becomes the leader: so Governor Oborevwori now leads the APC in Delta. That frustrates longer established members of the APC led by former Deputy Senate President **Ovie Omo-Agege** who have now been relegated. They are now talking-to the opposition ADC alliance and could soon defect. Delta State had over 3.2m registered voters in the last election likely to rise to 4m in 2027.

ADAMAWA STATE

With just 2.1m voters, Adamawa state's political weight is symbolic rather than strategic. Last year, it received N140bn from the federal account and generated N127bn in taxes, making it one of the poorest states. But it is the home turf of former Vice President **Atiku Abubakar**. He won the presidential vote in Adamawa on the PDP ticket in the last two elections. Atiku has quit the PDP and has quarrelled with Adamawa's PDP governor **Ahmadu Fintiri**. Exacerbating the rift, Fintiri's opponent in the last election, **Aisha Binani**, has joined Atiku in the ADC. Binani wants to become the first female governor in Nigeria. She lost the election by a tiny margin in 2023.

Because the Tinubu administration wants to disgrace Atiku at the polls, it will pay special attention to Adamawa State. National Security Advisor, **Nuhu Ribadu**, is from the state and has his own presidential ambitions in 2031. Delivering Adamawa State to Tinubu would greatly boost Ribadu in the political rankings.

RIVERS STATE

Nigeria's second wealthiest state was a PDP stronghold until 2023 but its politics are now in disarray. Tinubu suspended Governor **Siminalayi Fubara** and all elected officials in the state, imposing a state of emergency after a power struggle erupted between them and former governor **Nyesome Wike**, now a federal minister in Abuja (AC Vol 66 No 7).

A shaky reconciliation deal brokered by Tinubu reasserted Wike's political leadership in the state, rendering Governor Fubara a lame duck. Both men have pledged to support President Tinubu at the next election but the key question of the APC's gubernatorial candidate in 2027 has been left open. **Rotimi Amaechi**, a former governor and ex-transport minister who has joined the opposition ADC, is pushing a candidate who can exploit the grassroots dissatisfaction with all three protagonists, Fubara, Wike and Tinubu.

Rivers state revenue for last year was some N811bn, mostly from federal and oil income (N462bn) and state taxes (N348.1bn). It got over N100bn from other sources such as grants. It is the second wealthiest state after Lagos. With over 3.5 million registered voters, it is the fourth biggest state electorate.

LAGOS STATE

Nigeria's commercial capital is Tinubu's home state and has over 7m registered voters – the highest in the country – but it has the lowest voter turnout in percentage terms. It generated about N1.3tn in taxes last year and received over N321bn from the federal purse, bringing its revenue to over N1.62tn last year. A national melting pot, Lagos has the most diverse voting patterns. In 2023, **Peter Obi**, of Igbo ethnicity, defeated President **Tinubu, a Yoruba**, on his home turf. Local government officials loyal to Tinubu have run a xenophobic campaign: trying to erase traces of Igbo heritage, changing streets with Igbo names and trying to suppress voting in areas with high numbers of Igbos.

Have reasserted the APC's grip on the state, Tinubu wants to win it by a landslide in 2027 but he has quarrelled with the outgoing governor **Babajide Sanwo-Olu** and has kept his preferred gubernatorial candidate of 2027 under wraps. Countering speculation that Tinubu may back his son Seyi as the APC candidate, insiders say he resents any idea that he is starting a dynasty. His wife is a long-standing senator.

OYO STATE

In south-west Nigeria, Oyo state has four political divisions – Ibadan (the capital), Oyo, Oke Ogun and Ogbomosho. Ibadan usually produces the governor due to its voting population and historic significance. But the other divisions want a turn. Governor **Seyi Makind**e, from the Ibadan bloc, plans to rotate power in the state but faces multiple hurdles.

Makinde, a member of the PDP, plans to run for presidency in 2027 and to pick his successor as governor. But Tinubu's godson, **Bayo Adelabu**, who is Minister of Power in the federal government wants to run for governor of Oyo on the APC ticket. But Adelabu is from Ibadan and his candidacy upsets the other political blocs. Makinde must work out how to take advantage of those rivalries and whether to challenge or strike a deal with Tinubu. At stake are over 3.2m votes in Oyo. Its total revenue is N345bn, making it a mid-ranking state financially.

KANO STATE

In elections, Kano is the most significant state. It had 5.9m registered voters in the last election but this could exceed 6.5m after the next round of voter registration. It comes second to Lagos in numbers of registered voters but it has a larger turnout, making it the country's 'vote capital'.

Kano is also northern Nigeria's commercial nerve centre. In 2024, it had a total revenue of about N390bn. **Rabiu Kwankwaso**, a former governor and godfather to current Governor **Abba Yusuf**, attracts a cult following. He has been courted by President Tinubu and opposition elements, but he declines to commit to either. But many of his lieutenants have defected to the APC. The Deputy President of the Senate in Abuja, **Barau Jibrin**, a member of the APC, wants to run for the governorship and could get Tinubu's backing if Kwankwaso doesn't broker a deal for his own candidate.

BAUCHI STATE

A north-east state Bauchi had 2.7m voters in the 2023 elections but its registered voters are likely to exceed 3m in 2027. Led by Governor **Bala Mohammed**, the chairman of the PDP Governors Forum, Bauchi is struggling financially, with total revenue last year running at about N207bn.

Governor Mohammed wants to campaign for President but lacks national appeal so he is urging his mentor, former President **Goodluck Jonathan**, to contest so he could be the running mate. But few think this will happen. Governor Mohammed has also been feuding with Foreign Minister, **Yusuf Tuggar**, who is mulling a run for the governorship on the APC ticket. Health Minister, **Ali Pate**, is also interested in the post, adding further drama in the gubernatorial elections. ●

KENYA

Odinga's big tent politics are close to collapse

An ODM top official is threatening to quit – as party grandees jostle for influence in Ruto's second term, unity is on borrowed time

The price of propping up an unpopular president is rising for veteran opposition figure and kingmaker **Raila Odinga**. He still wants to chart a course that preserves his status as the power behind the throne, keeps his allies in top government jobs, and maintains his Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) as a distinct party (AC Vol 66 No 15).

ODM has been bitterly divided over Odinga's support for President **William Ruto** since the two rivals from the 2022 elections struck a surprise deal last July – just as Ruto's presidency was faltering under the weight of Gen Z-led protests (AC Vol 65 No 16).

In a resolution passed on 29 July by the party's Central Committee, chaired by Odinga, ODM confirmed its support for Ruto's unofficial unity government until the next elections in August 2027. The party also affirmed its 'commitment to promoting national stability and addressing citizens' concerns through constitutional and democratic means'.

These statements were read to the press by ODM Secretary-General **Edwin Sifuna** just days after he had publicly declared the pact 'dead', citing a lack of government commitment. He also hinted that ODM could back **Fred Matiang'i**, the nominee of **Uhuru Kenyatta**'s Jubilee Party and a combative former interior cabinet secretary (Dispatches 28/7/25).

Yet ODM's internal divisions are too deep for any statement to paper over. After Ruto urged police to shoot protesters in the legs following deadly protests on 29 June, Sifuna cited the remarks as evidence that Kenya had 'totally lost' its way. On 4 August, a group led by Sifuna – who is also Nairobi Senator – launched a new outfit dubbed Kenya Moja (Kenya First), positioning it as a youth-led alternative to both government and opposition.

Supporters of the group, including prominent ODM youth politicians such as **Caleb Amisi** and **Babu Owino**, say this is the first step towards a breakaway party if ODM continues to support Ruto. They argue that their faction will push for a new generation of leaders and greater accountability.

Other notable members include **Gathoni Wa Muchomba** (Githunguri), **Jack Wamboka** (Bumula) and **Oscar Nabulindo** (Matungu). For now, they remain within ODM – a sign, say critics, that Sifuna and his allies lack the confidence to win seats without Odinga's party machinery and the youth vote alone. Straddling both camps may also weaken their appeal to younger voters.

Even so, the episode underscores the delicate balance Odinga must strike to keep his party – founded during the 2005 constitutional referendum campaign – intact. Sifuna remains deeply unpopular

If ODM backs Ruto in 2027 – a move that could well cost it parliamentary seats in western Kenya and Nairobi – it would expect the deputy presidency, key ministries and parastatal appointments in return. Mining Cabinet Secretary **Ali Hassan Joho** is among those touted as Ruto's running mate. The former Mombasa governor and ODM deputy party leader could deliver votes from the Coastal counties. That would mark a dramatic comeback for Joho, who has faced allegations of corruption and links to organised crime – and who, weeks before joining Ruto's government last year, said he had 'never seen a liar, corrupt, and tribal person like Ruto' (AC Vol 65 No 25).

Homa Bay Governor **Gladys Wanga** has also been floated as a possible running mate particularly if Ruto opts for a gender-balanced ticket. Such names would signal a continuation of ethnic identity, grandee-driven politics – precisely what many Kenyans, particularly Gen Z and its leaders, have rejected.

The 29 July statement gives ODM some room for manoeuvre. In theory, it could support Ruto until his term ends, then field its own candidates in the August 2027 general election. It is already expected to do so for parliamentary, gubernatorial and county elections. That allows Sifuna and his allies to remain in ODM – at least for now. 'I am willing to read whatever statement ODM comes up with for dissemination, even if they were to insult me. But the day the party decides it wants to support Ruto come 2027, that one I will not read,' said Sifuna on 3 August.

ODM says it will appoint a 10-member technical committee to work with counterparts from Ruto's United Democratic Alliance to oversee implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in March, following Gen Z protests that forced Ruto to shelve a Finance Bill and sack his cabinet (AC Vol 65 No 14 & Vol 66 No 6).

The statement identified the absence of such a committee as 'the missing link in the implementation of the document' – a ten-point policy agenda based on recommendations from the National Dialogue Committee report last year (AC Vol 65 No 7).

But Ruto has shown little movement. He remains non-committal on Odinga's proposal for a national dialogue process – the so-called 'Intergenerational National Conclave' – aimed at drawing up a youth agenda focused on job creation and the cost of living. He has also rejected calls to compensate families of the dozens of young people killed by police during the June and July protests.

The MoU also includes promises to increase funding for the devolved county governments to a minimum of 450 billion shillings (US$3.2bn) per year and to complete the devolution process. Meanwhile, ODM is pressing ahead with grassroots elections – delayed for over a year – and stepping up its planning for 2027. Two days after the Central Committee meeting, Odinga and Sifuna convened ODM leaders from five western counties at a Nairobi hotel in a fresh show of party unity. But Odinga's big tent politics is close to bursting. ●

SOUTH AFRICA/UNITED STATES

Tariff calamity deepens rift with Washington

Pretoria warns of long-term economic damage as the US weaponises trade for political pressure

There is little prospect of relief from the United States increasing tariffs to 30% on a wide range of South African imports, with the new rates coming into force on 8 August. Bilateral detailed negotiations to cut the rates on specific South African exports such as wine, citrus fruits and motor vehicles could take weeks to prepare. Unlike British and European Union trade representatives, which were locked in line-by-line negotiations with their US counterparts for weeks in the run-up to the 1 August tariff deadline, South African officials were unable to engage officials in Washington DC. That is symptomatic of the political froideur between the two countries.

President **Cyril Ramaphosa** described the tariffs as 'punitive' and calamitous after a meeting of African National Congress officials in Johannesburg on 4 August, adding that the country would have to do much more to speed the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area, launched in 2021. The tariffs will inflict serious economic and diplomatic damage, with agricultural and automotive exports among the hardest hit.

Pretoria is still pursuing a 'mutually beneficial' trade agreement, say officials, and has avoided the public recriminations seen between the US and fellow BRICS member Brazil. But negotiations are complicated by political demands from President **Donald Trump**, which – though not formally part of trade talks – are driving Washington's hardline stance. These include the expulsion of a South African ambassador, denial of a visa to a special envoy and a refusal to engage diplomatically (AC Vol 66 No 7).

Trump has said he 'probably' won't attend the G20 summit in South Africa in November, citing the country's 'bad policies'. Senior officials including US Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** and Treasury Secretary **Scott Bessent** have already boycotted preparatory meetings hosted by South Africa (Dispatches 21/7/25).

The administration's objections include South Africa's affirmative action policies – such as black economic empowerment, employment equity and land expropriation laws – as well as its diplomatic ties with Russia, China, Iran, Hamas and Hizbollah (Dispatches 5/2/25 & AC Vol 66 No 11). Pretoria's application to the International Court of Justice, seeking a determination that Israel's conduct in Gaza constitutes genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention, has also drawn criticism (AC Vol 65 No 3).

'It is not out of cowardice that we have refrained from responding [to the US tariffs] even under very extreme provocation,' said **Ronald Lamola**, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation at a media conference on 3 August. He said the complexity of the geopolitical environment and the scale of potential job losses had reinforced the government's focus on the negotiating table rather than political speculation. The weaponisation of tariffs to achieve unspecified political goals, he added, had made it harder to respond within the framework of trade negotiations.

To coordinate its response, the government has created a tariff desk within the Department of Trade and Industry. The desk is working with affected companies and accelerating efforts to diversify export markets, particularly with China, Japan, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Domestic politics have further complicated Pretoria's position. The Democratic Alliance, the African National Congress's main coalition partner, has been accused of undermining trade talks through 'reckless statements', according to Trade Minister **Parks Tau**. He called the DA's behaviour 'downright irresponsible for a party in the Government of National Unity'. DA spokesperson **Mark Burke** responded that the ANC was using 'a new deflection' to mask its 'failed foreign-policy pageant', particularly in relation to Iran.

Conservative Afrikaner groups such as AfriForum and Solidarity have lobbied Washington with some success. South African-born figures including billionaire **Elon Musk**, tech investor **Peter Thiel**, journalist **Joel Pollak** and Hudson Institute analyst **Joshua Meservey** have also amplified criticism of Pretoria's policies. (See box).

Lamola urged South Africans to unite on foreign policy and relations with a major trading partner. That had been the DA's initial position, he noted, but it had since become increasingly critical of the ANC's handing of negotiations – a shift underscored by the resignation of its foreign affairs spokeswoman, **Emma Powell**.

Pretoria has proposed a trade rebalancing package: US$12 billion in liquefied natural gas imports, lower barriers on US food, $3.3bn in South African investment in US mining and recycling, and tariff exemptions for sectors such as shipbuilding and counter-seasonal agriculture. But the proposals may not sway Washington, as they sidestep underlying political grievances. Officials warn that once imposed, tariffs are hard to reverse – even under future administrations.

When the flat 10% tariff rate applied to all BRICS countries rises to 30%, US import duties on South African goods will become among the highest in Africa. The agricultural and automobile sectors are expected to be hardest hit, shaving up to 0.5% off a GDP already struggling to stay above zero in 2025. Reserve Bank Governor **Lesetja Kganyago** has warned that the move could cost up to 100,000 jobs. South Africa's official unemployment rate stands at 32.9%, with youth unemployment reaching 62.4% among those aged 15-24, and 46.1% for the broader 15-34 cohort.

Pretoria estimates that around 30,000 jobs could be lost in the first phase, with the full impact likely to be felt in 2026. Economists have cautioned that up to half of all small businesses could face closure within a year, with as few as 12% surviving two years of sustained tariffs.

Goods shipped before 8 August and arriving by 5 October will qualify for existing tariff rates. The US – South Africa's third-largest trading partner – accounts for 7.5% of exports, with the new measures set to affect goods worth an estimated $10bn annually. **Nick Binedell**, founding director of the Gordon Institute of Business Science, warned that the longer-term effect could be to weaken commercial ties, resulting in a net loss for both sides. ●

BEHIND TRUMP'S POLITICAL AGENDA

These are the key players in Washington pushing for a gloves-off approach to force a policy shift – several are South African-born.

Elon Musk: The world's richest man and founder of SpaceX and its subsidiary Starlink, Musk is also Chief Executive of Tesla, founder and owner of Neuralink, and owner of X. Born and schooled in South Africa, he switched political loyalties between Trump's first and second presidencies, funding the latter's campaign to the tune of US$300 million. His fight with South Africa escalated when he was confronted with having to part with 30% of Starlink's equity to black empowerment partners in order to operate locally (AC Vol 66 No 11). Following a major falling-out with Trump in April, Musk has threatened to return to South Africa if subsidies for Tesla and SpaceX are withdrawn.

Joel Pollak: A South African-born lawyer and former liberal turned right-wing activist, Pollak is editor-at-large at Breitbart News, the alt-right platform once led by **Steve Bannon**, a former Trump campaign manager jailed for contempt of Congress. During a return stint in South Africa, he served as speechwriter to former DA leader **Tony Leon**. Last year, he was a contender for US ambassador to South Africa but did not secure the post. Pollak remains a commentator on South Africa and is among those advocating sanctions in response to its alignment with US adversaries.

Peter Thiel: German-born tech billionaire and co-founder of PayPal, Thiel spent part of his childhood in Swakopmund, Namibia before his family emigrated to the US. He was Facebook's first external investor, acquiring a 10.2% stake for $500,000 and later selling most of it for $1.5 billion. With a net worth of over $20bn, Thiel played a key behind-the-scenes role in shaping Washington's hardline stance on South Africa. He is known to dislike Musk for his extrovert excesses. Musk is said to admire the introvert Thiel for his strategic skills.

David Sacks: Trump's AI and Crypto Czar was born in Cape Town and emigrated to the US aged five. A founder of successful tech companies, he was founding chief operating officer of PayPal –alongside Elon Musk and Peter Thiel – and later co-hosted the All-In podcast. Sacks has used his platform to rally conservatives and disillusioned liberals into a reactionary movement. He co-authored *The Diversity Myth* with Thiel and is an ardent critic of political correctness and affirmative action.

Joshua Meservey: A senior fellow at the conservative Hudson Institute and advisor to the Trump administration, Meservey specialises in big power competition in Africa. He researched African geopolitics and counter-terrorism at the Heritage Foundation. A former US Army Special Operations officer, he was based in Nairobi and travelled extensively in East and Southern Africa interviewing refugees. He recently led a study on the Al Shabaab insurgency in Somalia and is considered an expert on the Ethiopia-Eritrea crisis.

Ronny Jackson: The Republican Congressman who introduced the US-South Africa Bilateral Relations Review Act in the House on 3 April. The bipartisan bill, backed by Congressman **John James** – who first called for a review of US-SA ties in February last year – aims to advance Trump's foreign policy and equip him to sanction South African officials for supporting US adversaries such as China, Russia and Iran. Jackson said South Africa had 'brazenly abandoned' its relationship with the US and undermined national security interests by pursuing an anti-Israel agenda.

AFRICA/UNITED STATES

Trump lessens the tariff pain, but they will still bite

The worst was averted – yet oil states and surplus exporters still face steep duties, as Lesotho breathes easier and AGOA's future hangs in the balance

The final tariff sweep was softer than feared – but still sharp enough to sting. Algeria, Libya and South Africa will face 30% tariffs on goods exports, while 90% of African states will be subject to 15% or 10% rates (Dispatches 14/7/25). In most cases, President **Donald Trump** has targeted countries with large trade surpluses with the United States, in line with his aim to slash the trade deficit.

The biggest sigh of relief will come from Lesotho, which ran a US$240 million surplus last year on $250m in textiles-dominated exports and had faced a 50% tariff (Dispatches 7/4/25). That threat had already triggered mass job cuts and a two-year national state of disaster. Instead, Lesotho will be hit with 15% duties. Africa's denim capital – with 75% of its textile output destined for the US – produces jeans for Wrangler and Levi's. High-end retailers are likely to absorb a 15% rise in production costs. Textile companies in Lesotho are still estimating the extent of the damage but many fear the worst in a country where factory shifts were one of the best remunerated forms of work.

Several other countries have also been hit with lower tariffs than Trump initially proposed in April. Madagascar (47%), Botswana (37%), Angola (32%) and Zimbabwe (17%) will all face the 15% rate. Others have fared worse than expected. Congo-Kinshasa and Cameroon had been threatened with 11%, and Nigeria with 14%, but all now fall into the 15% group.

Algeria and Libya appear to have been targeted as part of Trump's push for US energy independence. Both rank among the top African countries running trade surpluses with Washington. Almost all of Algeria's $2.5 billion exports to the US in 2024 were oil and the US ran a $1.4bn trade deficit with Algiers, according to the Office of the US Trade Representative.

Libya tells a similar story. US-Libya trade was estimated at $2bn in 2024, with an $898.3m US goods deficit. Oil accounts for nearly all of Libya's $1.6bn in exports to the US. Tunisia – the only African country subject to 25% duties – saw its trade surplus more than double to $619.6m in 2024. Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Uganda are also in the 15% group.

All other African countries will face the new minimum 10% tariff Trump has imposed globally, though some sectors – such as critical minerals, access to which is another Trump priority – will be exempt. That is good news for mineral-rich states, particularly those in East and West Africa.

Under its tariff deal with Washington, the European Union pledged to buy $750bn worth of US liquefied natural gas and nuclear fuel over three years, though analysts doubt it can deliver (AC Vol 66 No 9). South Africa is negotiating a similar LNG-for-tariffs arrangement – an option closed to oil and gas exporters like Libya, Algeria, Nigeria and Angola. Countries on the 10% rate – and those previously excluded from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) – may be breathing a sigh of relief. But nobody is better off.

AGOA offered duty and quota-free access to the US and is due to be thoroughly reviewed. A court ruling would be needed to determine whether executive-imposed tariffs override AGOA – a law passed by Congress. But the question may be moot as the programme is due to expire in September. Some senior Republicans and the former acting Assistant Secretary for African Affairs **Troy Fitrell**, have suggested the Trump administration wants to renew AGOA in some form, but there is no proposal on the table.

The US is now Africa's third-largest trading partner, behind the EU and China – both of which offer zero-tariff goods trade to the continent (Dispatches 16/6/25). China, in particular, is seeking to cement its position as Africa's most trusted foreign economic power. Its zero-tariff offer was announced only in June. ●

UGANDA

Muhoozi purges military again in latest power grab

Top officers accused of graft as President's son asserts his authority in his rush for the succession

General **Muhoozi Kainerugaba**, the volatile head of Uganda's military and son of President **Yoweri Museveni**, has launched a further purge of officers as part of efforts to consolidate his grip on the armed forces. Controlling the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) is integral to Muhoozi's bid to succeed his father, who has been in power since 1986 and is campaigning to win another five-year term in polls next year. Since he was appointed Chief of Defence Forces in 2024, Muhoozi has used his power to crush political opponents and publicly threaten critics, including those within the regime. Over the last few weeks, he has doubled down by demoting, arresting and investigating more high-ranking officers, including leaders of an Engineering Brigade.

Those in Muhoozi's crosshairs include former head of military intelligence, Major General **James Birungi**, and leader of the engineering wing, Brigadier General **Cyrus Besigye Bekunda**. Africa Confidential has learned that preliminary investigations say Bekunda is among those who have been siphoning funds out of the military's coffers.

'The criminals we have arrested within our ranks recently are guilty of stealing over 50 billion shillings from the country! We shall decide their fate in High Command,' Muhoozi posted on X on 24 July. Weeks earlier, on 2 July, Muhoozi announced that that he had ordered the arrest of Bekunda and some of his military engineering colleagues for corruption: 'They poisoned, contaminated, and desecrated a sacred principle we have always embraced as the UPDF, i.e., we can be self-sufficient, we can be efficient. They received money and misused it! Let their punishment serve as a lesson to others.' he said.

Over the years, the Engineering Brigade has received numerous contracts for government construction projects. Sources tell Africa Confidential that top officers have in effect turned the company into a slush fund for themselves. That made it a prime target for Muhoozi, who became head of UPDF promising to rid it of the corruption that has haunted it for decades and undermined operations in Uganda, Congo-Kinshasa and Somalia.

Control of Uganda's military is a critical factor in the battle to follow Museveni. Muhoozi has further boosted his position with a powerful political pressure group, the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU). Rivals for the presidency, such as his brother-in-law, **Odrek Rwabwogo**, do not have such tools at their disposal.

While other institutions have been undermined by poor governance and graft, Museveni has always been keen to mould the UPDF into a capable institution. Some former UPDF heads like General **David Muhoozi** and General **Katumba Wamala** are serving in Museveni's cabinet as, respectively, internal affairs and transport ministers. Both are seen as capable contenders to succeed the president. But they are among many purged from the UPDF leadership to clear the path for Muhoozi's ascension.

The day Muhoozi was appointed military head in March last year, his predecessor General **Wilson Mbasu Mbadi** was made trade minister and deputy military head General Peter Elwelu became a presidential advisor. General **Leopold Kyanda**, the Joint Chief of Staff, was designated a military attaché without a deployment and Brigadier **Mathew Gureme**, Chief of Training and a rising star, was appointed as a military attaché in Tanzania.

A few weeks ago, Major Birungi, the former head of the Directorate of Intelligence and Security (DIS) became the highest ranking officer to meet the same fate when he was deployed as Uganda's defence attaché and military advisor in Burundi. Birungi was considered a Muhoozi ally, which may explain why his demotion wasn't publicised. Africa Confidential has been told he is under house arrest and at the centre of an investigation into DIS excesses.

That probe was triggered by claims that DIS operatives may have been behind recent terrorist activities. In two incidents, on 3 June and 22 June, the army announced it had neutralised bomb attacks linked to the Allied Defence Forces (ADF), a rebel group that originated in Uganda in the early 1990s, and operates in Congo-K. In 2019, the ADF pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, which in 2021 claimed responsibility for bomb attack at Uganda's parliament and the Central Police Station in Kampala that killed three. After this incident, the UPDF requested the Kinshasa government to allow it to hunt down the ADF on Congolese territory.

The resulting Operation Shujaa was ongoing when the rebel group launched its most recent attacks on Ugandan soil. In June 2023, the ADF attacked Lhubiriha Secondary School in Kasese District in western Uganda killing 43 people; 37 of them students hacked to death and firebombed in their dormitories.

In the most recent incidents, on 3 June two people, the purported masterminds, died after the bomb they were carrying exploded in the Kampala suburb of Munyonyo as they allegedly prepared to attack pilgrims there. On 22 June, a woman suspected of carrying a bomb in a backpack was gunned down in a market in Kalerwe, north of Kampala. Birungi was no longer head of DIS by this time, but insiders say the key suspects have ties with him. Investigators are also looking into allegations of graft since Birungi took over in 2020.

Birungi was removed in April this year and sent to head the Mountain Infantry Division, which is currently fighting the ADF as part of Operation Shujaa. This deployment was itself seen as a demotion, according to insiders. His latest designation of military attaché is even lower in the UPDF hierarchy. Africa Confidential understands that the Ugandan leadership is also unhappy with the way military intelligence under Birungi handled investigations into detained opposition leader **Kizza Besigye** – presumably the failure to find any credible evidence against him ●

MUHOOZI'S POWER CHARGE

The ambitious military head appears unconcerned about potential blowback

A four-time presidential challenger to Museveni, **Kizza Besigye** was abducted in the Kenyan capital Nairobi in November last year and taken back to Uganda to face a military trial, only for the Supreme Court to rule that trying civilians in military courts was unconstitutional.

Museveni criticised the ruling as 'a wrong decision' and the military establishment initially hesitated to move the hearings to civilian courts. But following a nearly week-long hunger strike by Besigye, the government finally transferred his case.

In the military trial, Besigye had been charged with illegal possession of ammunition and treachery. In the regular

court, Besigye was instead accused of holding meetings in locations including Switzerland and Kenya between 2023 and November 2024 as part of efforts to overthrow the government.

The intelligence feeding into these charges was partly gathered by DIS operatives under the ex-head of military intelligence, Major General **James Birungi**. Insiders say cracks have since emerged in this intelligence, much to the chagrin of Museveni and Muhoozi, who is now cracking the whip in part to ensure such slip ups do not reoccur.

There are some regime jitters that targeting senior officers could fuel simmering discontent within the military establishment and ultimately threaten the Museveni family's hold onto power. Yet Muhoozi does not appear concerned about such consequences. His handlers say his focus is solely on taking over once his father finally bows out. Indeed, Muhoozi recently announced that his son, **Ruhamya Kainerugaba**, had joined the UPDF after graduating from the British officer training school, Sandhurst Royal Military Academy.

Koidu diamond mine shuts indefinitely as managers clash with First Lady

Government is silent after allies of mining mogul Beny Steinmetz accuse it of political meddling and say they've run out of cash

After an ugly fight with President **Julius Maada Bio**'s government over working conditions and back pay, Chief Executive of Koidu Limited, **Dag Cramer** is closing the country's richest diamond mine with a loss of over a thousand jobs and about US$80-100 million a year in export revenues. This latest crisis will further damage Sierra Leone's mining economy.

This month, Cramer told Africa Confidential: 'It's a very difficult situation ... I don't think there is going to be any hard rock mining in the country for the foreseeable future.' He blamed the government, particularly First Lady **Fatima Bio**, wholly for the crisis, adding that he would welcome a regime change: 'I hope we don't have to wait until 2028 [the date of the next election]. It would be wonderful if he [President Bio] walked into a coup or something like that'.

The reasons for the closure, and indeed the ownership of Koidu Ltd, are heavily disputed (AC 57 No 8, Africa probes the Panama connection). But many in its management team have had close ties to Israeli-based mining mogul **Beny Steinmetz**, whose conglomerate Beny Steinmetz Group Resources (BSGR), bought the Koidu lease in 2003 via its Octéa affiliate (AC Vol 62 No 20, Show us the money).

BSGR declared bankruptcy in 2019 when Steinmetz was embroiled in multiple legal battles and his companies' debts were piling up in Sierra Leone (AC Vol 62 No 2, EXCLUSIVE – Inside the Swiss charges against Steinmetz). He was convicted of grand corruption in Switzerland and Romania in 2021 and 2020 respectively (AC Vol 64 No 8, Beny Steinmetz loses appeal in epic Simandou corruption case).

The mine is likely to be closed for several years, Cramer told Africa Confidential although he had claimed in March that Koidu was transitioning its 'operations into a care and maintenance phase due to emergency circumstances.'

The stand-off started a year ago when mineworkers told Minister of Labour, **Mohamed Rahman Swaray** that they had been receiving less than a third of the value of their salaries. Koidu's management was basing salaries on the exchange rate between the leone and the US dollar in 2016, said the mineworkers. They added the company failed to provide drinking water and adequate toilet facilities.

Government officials in Freetown told Africa Confidential that Koidu owed Sierra Leone tens of millions in back taxes and royalties (AC 56 No 24, Stalemate over Koidu diamonds as economy sinks). The payment of those had been suspended a decade ago when Steinmetz and Octéa were struggling to pay creditors such as Standard Chartered Bank and the New York-based Tiffany jewellery company (AC 56 No 23, Koidu's future in the balance).

The workers' complaints about salary levels escalated into a strike in December after talks with management broke down. On 4 March, Fatima Bio joined the mine workers in a coordinated protest around the mine. 'The self-described 'Daughter of Kono' (the historic centre of diamond mining in Sierra Leone), Fatima Bio threatened direct action against Koidu Ltd.

'If we do not receive a satisfactory response by the end of the day, we will have no choice but to peacefully storm Koidu Holdings Limited tomorrow,' she posted on social media.

She has subsequently maintained a barrage of criticism against the company on social media. But President Bio is yet to respond to the deepening crisis.

On 25 March, Koidu told the mines minister it was suspending production, citing 'unresolved illegal industrial actions severely impacting our operational viability and employee safety.' A month later, the Koidu Workers Union reported that at least 17 items of heavy equipment had been moved out of the mine to an undisclosed location. The company sacked 1,000 workers on 6 May. According to **Suleyman Mansaray**, Secretary General of the miners' union, that covered all the company's Sierra Leonean workforce.

That same day, the company launched a legal action in Sierra Leone, accusing the First Lady of fraudulent behaviour, provocation of unrest, and 'malicious statements', demanding $20m in damages. 'Our starting point is that the government has to confirm that we have done nothing wrong.' Cramer told Africa Confidential. He added that Koidu was looking for at least $50m to refinance the mine: 'We don't have the money on our balance sheet to restart operations. Effectively all our capital reserves were working capital ... so the moment you shut down there is this massive hole that has to be filled.'

Minister of labour Swaray says Koidu didn't want to negotiate. The ministry had offered several concessions to resolve the dispute, but according to Swaray Koidu pulled out of the talks at the eleventh hour. Between the government and Koidu, it's difficult to work out which party might benefit most from the stalemate.

Some industry sources suggest the government wants to use the dispute to rescind Koidu's lease; others suggest that the Koidu leaseholders want to exit Sierra Leone because their debts and obligations in the country exceed the probable income from the mine for the remainder of the lease. Koidu has said that K2, the kimberlite pipe currently being exploited, would be exhausted by 2027.

But **Bobby Morse**, Koidu spokesman, insists the mine could generate profits for another seven to eight years. 'There's another three years of underground mining left ...there are also tailings on the surface, which would have gone for another five years.'

Cramer says the mine would still be operating profitably if it had not been for the strike. He hinted that Koidu had plans to take over other concessions in Kono, including Meya, Boroma and Tonguma. But that looks impossible while its dispute with government is raging.

Another hurdle facing Koidu is the case filed against it by Marginalised Property Owners, a local civil society group, which has complained about the company's treatment of local communities. After the group also accused the company of asset stripping the mine, Sierra Leone's Court of Appeal imposed an injunction on 17 July on the company forbidding it from removing any more equipment from the mine. The injunction has been extended until 4 August. ●

As external support ebbs, states seek to plug the revenue

Efforts to raise domestic funds are colliding with political constraints – and public trust remains elusive as global reforms falter

As indebted African governments confront declining aid flows and western reluctance to reform the international financial system (AC Vol 66 No 15), they are again eyeing ways to boost domestic revenues and tap alternative funding sources. Yet despite a panoply of technocratic proposals, practical political solutions remain elusive.

A major obstacle is that increasing domestic resources requires not only internal reforms to address longstanding problems but also effective international action. Top of the list is stemming the annual loss of funds to corruption and illicit financial flows, which the African Development Bank (AfDB) estimates at US$148 billion and $90bn respectively.

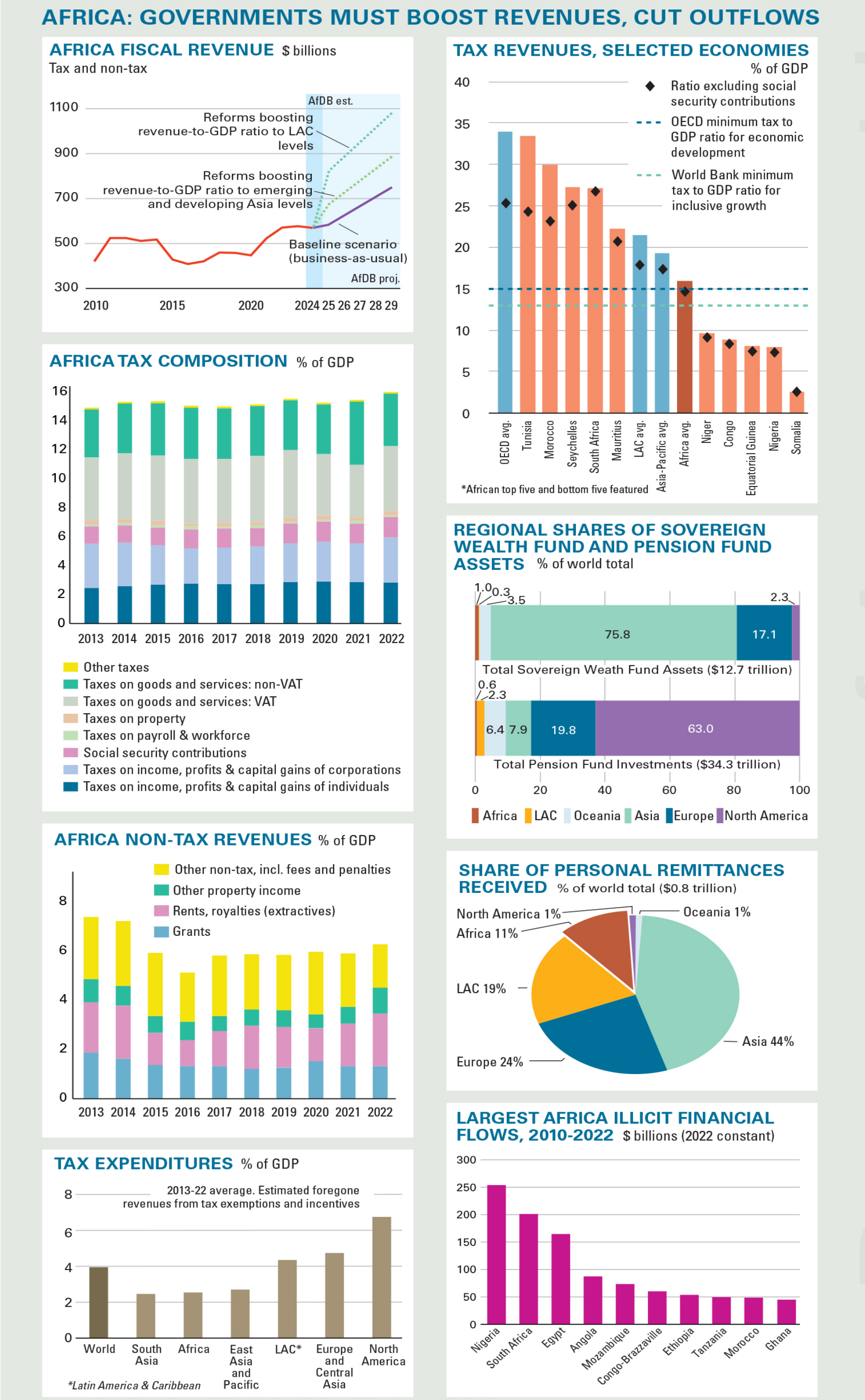
These figures are dwarfed, however, by the $275bn lost annually to multinational profit-shifting. African governments acknowledge that international tax reform has some western backing – such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) proposed15% minimum corporation tax rate. But they argue that the proposed rate is too low, and that it would barely dent these outflows if implemented.

The IMF routinely calls for domestic reforms, echoed by the World Bank, which recently praised President **Bola Tinubu**'s exchange rate reforms and subsidy removals for boosting Nigeria's revenues (AC Vol 65 No 16). In June, the Bank's public finance review of Kenya highlighted a 'continuous decline of tax revenues', a year after protests forced President **William Ruto** to abandon proposed tax increases and reforms (AC Vol 65 No 14).

Thankfully, Kenya's experience is not typical. Some African economies have made progress this decade in raising tax and other revenues. Still, according to a joint OECD, African Union Commission (AUC) and African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF) Revenue Statistics in Africa report, the continent's average tax-to-GDP ratio of 16% in 2022 lags behind Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific regions. Five countries – Niger, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea, Somalia and Nigeria – collected less than 10% of GDP in tax .

Adding non-tax revenues, including from extractives, raises average total revenues to just over 20% of GDP – still well below the 27% in tax revenues alone AfDB economists say is needed for 'structural transformation'.

The AfDB's latest African Economic Outlook, released at May's annual meeting in Abidjan where Mauritania's **Sidi Ould Tah** was elected President,



Sources: African Development Bank, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, African Union Commission, African Tax Administration Forum claims Africa could raise nearly $470bn more annually if it matched the Latin America and Caribbean revenue-to-GDP average. In the near term, however, World Bank data suggests sub-Saharan Africa's revenue-to-GDP ratio fell in 2023 and will only return to 2022 levels this year.

Released in the run up to its annual governance forum in Marrakech from 1-3 June, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation's Africa financing report highlights meagre tax takes and notes – citing Afrobarometer polling – that 69% of Africans support higher taxes on the wealthy. The report also claims that more Africans prefer higher taxes and improved government services, to lower taxes and reduced services.

Yet the foundation's recommendation of wealth taxes – potentially raising several billion dollars annually – is unlikely to gain traction, given close ties between ruling parties and Africa's growing millionaire class. South Africa's treasury, for example, argues that a wealth tax would yield modest revenue and shrink the tax base as wealthy residents relocate.

More promising is the foundation's suggestion – echoed by some economists – that part of Africa's $130bn in sovereign wealth funds and $220bn in pension funds could be channelled into domestic investment. Larger economies such as South Africa and Kenya already allow pension funds to invest modest sums in infrastructure. Still, opportunities to reduce outflows far exceed the potential of these endowments.

Africa's revenue composition has broad policy implications, even though it varies considerably between economies. Compared to world averages the continent collects a lower share of payroll taxes due to its large informal economy; a higher share of trade taxes, especially in low-income states; a larger proportion of corporate income tax; and it collects a VAT take broadly in line with other developing regions.

The OECD, AUC and ATAF report finds that, most African economies – except tourism hubs like Seychelles, Cabo Verde and Mauritius – collect far less of their potential VAT than advanced economies. Addressing this could raise average tax-to-GDP ratios by several points, even before any rate increases.

Low compliance and high enforcement costs support the case for digitising revenue collection. According to the AfDB, seven economies – including Morocco, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Egypt – could each raise at least $5bn annually this way. Yet concerns persist that the digital economy may facilitate greater offshore profit-shifting.

Another worry is the potential loss of trade and customs revenue under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Recent studies suggest short-term losses will be minor, even without the AfCFTA's Adjustment Fund – and that long-term trade and growth benefits will be revenue-positive.

Recent World Bank and IMF recommendations include cutting tax exemptions and incentives, though the AfDB numbers suggest Africa's are modest - compared to world averages - as a share of GDP. Some commentators propose taxing the diaspora, but enforcement would be difficult and politically fraught – especially given high remittance flows.

Non-tax revenue varies considerably between resource-rich and less commodity-dependent economies. Yet even countries such as Equatorial Guinea and Congo-Brazzaville, where resource revenues exceed 20% of GDP, must diversify amid price volatility and the global push for decarbonisation.

Raising more revenue is a political imperative for governments under pressure to improve public services and invest in infrastructure. Yet politics is the core obstacle to winning wider support for radical reforms – few governments are trusted by their citizens to spend higher revenues either wisely or accountably. ●

SOMALIA/TURKEY

Can Turkey can save Mogadishu from its security fiascos?

President Hassan Sheikh calculates that a geological survey showing commercial quantities of oil will get Ankara to step up military aid

National Security Advisor **Hussein Ma'alim Mahamud Sheikh Ali** resigned on 23 July, after many missteps over the last year that have allowed Al Shabaab to recover three-quarters of the territory in Middle Shabelle and Hiran that it lost two years ago.

Behind those personal failings – serious enough, say intelligence sources – lie a catalogue of poor performances by the Somali National Army and other security bodies that analysts lay at the door of national President **Hassan Sheikh Mohamud**.

The day before the resignation, the Puntland Maritime Police Force humiliated Mogadishu by diverting a shipload of Turkish military equipment bound for TurkSom, the training centre in the capital for officers and NCOs.

Hussein Ma'alim was well qualified in his job and claimed good relations with British intelligence, which had been key to his appointment, we hear, but he failed to win the trust of the National Intelligence Security Agency (NISA – the local intelligence service) or the African Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) foreign counter-insurgency force.

Sources in the capital insist Hussein Ma'alim should have left long ago, but instead of shifting him, Hassan Sheikh removed certain files from him and entrusted them to others. Coordination became slower and more difficult, as it relied on direct instructions from the President.

Whatever Hussein Ma'alim's sins, critics say Hassan Sheikh's are worse. In May, he decided to cut funding to the once-successful multi-clan Ma'awisley militia because they were infighting instead of pursuing Al Shabaab. It was true that Harti Abgal fighters stopped fighting the enemy because they said Hawadle militias got more military supplies from Mogadishu than they did.

What's more, those weapons were used in an internal clan fight. Harti Abgal's leader is **Sharif Sheikh Ahmed**, one of the most prominent of the leaders of the opposition. But while funding was cut from Ma'awisley, there was no corresponding increase in resources for the SNA.

Operational failings by the SNA went uncorrected and unpunished, say military observers. They point to the SNA defeat in Adan Yabal, where more than 1,800 soldiers retreated 80 kilometres to Moqokori when they were attacked by only 700 Al Shabaab fighters (AC Vol 66 No 10).

The SNA commander, General

Odowa Yusuf Rageh, had been in Adan Yabal for nearly three weeks and intelligence indicated an imminent attack by the Islamist insurgents. Yet nothing was done to prevent it and the SNA retreated even though a counter-attack with drone support could have been launched. In other military confrontations, SNA officers warned Mogadishu attacks were coming, but they still failed to prepare for them.

US military advisors have raised concerns about the poor military planning and the lack of support for units in the field. Many assume the SNA's problems are the result of corruption and clannism but others blame cronyism. They say Hassan Sheikh would rather have a less capable officer whom he can trust politically than a capable professional who does not owe all his loyalty to the President. Foreign advisors are ignored.

There is some method to Hassan Sheikh's current calculations, although they are naïve, sources say. First, by mid-August, the Turkish government is expected to release the findings of the 3D seismic survey for oil conducted in the past year.

Then, if the survey shows commercial quantities of oil as everyone in Mogadishu expects, President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan** will send the troops and equipment to achieve what the SNA could not: a full offensive against the Jihadists. The ship seized by the Puntland forces was meant to contribute to such a campaign.

But Turkey may not feel compelled to rescue Mogadishu and the SNA from their own errors. Al Shabaab has been steadily winning new villages recently, and seizing them back will not be easy, especially if the political dimension does not take as strong a role as the military. Senior Turkish officers are aware of the poor quality of SNA commanders and are unlikely to want to bear the burden of leading all attacks and offensives.

The Mogadishu government may be mistaken for thinking that 2,000 Turkish troops and some superior kit can deliver more than nearly 20 years of war against the jihadists. Erdogan is likely only to commit his military to places where Turkish interests are strongest, and he may think that freeing Somalia from Al Shabaab is more properly the role of the country's own government, which is currently run by a president obsessed with keeping power. Al Shabaab can thus appear to be a secondary enemy to all stakeholders in the Somali tragedy. ●

WEST AFRICA/THE SAHEL

Lean and mean – the Sahelian states battle the annual food crisis

As insurgents take over wider swathes of territory, climate change and population shifts are threatening harvests

Cereal production has risen across most of West Africa and the Sahel but the region's annual lean season – *la soudure* – has started, heightening risks of malnutrition. The official figures report that 46.5 million people will need food aid, a slight drop from last year. But accurate data is hard to come by because large areas of Mali, Burkina Faso and northern Nigeria are now under the control of armed insurgents – beyond the reach of governments and international agencies.

The 46.5m figure includes an astonishing 30.6m from Nigeria, 15% of the population, while in Chad the proportion is even higher at 19%. Guinea, The Gambia and Niger are also severely affected and will suffer during the tough June–August period.

Large areas of Burkina Faso are experiencing a food crisis, but there is a lack of reliable data as the government has lost control of at least two-thirds of the country. Similar problems exist elsewhere with insecurity restricting governments and aid agencies from reaching the worst-affected communities.

Compounding the situation is United States President **Donald Trump**'s closure of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) earlier this year, ending one of the main international sources of funding, technical support and grain supplies (AC Vol 66 No 5, Western aid cuts reshape the geopolitical landscape). A key casualty was the highly regarded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET), a critical source of data on crop production and prices in Africa.

Food shortages are a fact of life across the Sahel where rainfall is concentrated between late June and early September. Cereal crops cultivated during this window must sustain families for 12 months, who also need to survive droughts and floods. This year's lean season – where villagers eke out grain stocks before new crops are harvested from September – comes after an unprecedented spread in conflict across the region.

The situation is particularly acute in Nigeria where violence disrupts economic activity and the provision of basic services both in the north-east – where *Boko Haram* and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) are active – and across swathes of the north-west (AC Vol 63 No 16, Attacks shatter Abuja's complacency). The northern Sahelian fringe areas of Benin and Togoare regularly attacked; Ghanaian and Ivorian border zones are also at risk of the fighting spreading south.

The rift between the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) and the breakaway *Alliance des États du Sahel* (AES) has not yet disrupted cooperation on humanitarian action to the extent that it has skewed political, trade and military relations (AC Vol 66 No 1, The Sahel-exit splits open Ecowas).

The early warning system that extends across western Africa from Mauritania to Chad continues to function well under the oversight of the Ouagadougou-based *Comité permanent Inter-États de Lutte contre la sécheresse dans le Sahel* (CILSS). But FEWSNET was a major partner and it will take time to fill the gap left by Trump's USAID shutdown. In response, CILSS is trying to strengthen its relationships with other partners, such as European Union institutions, the French development agency *Agence Française de Développement* and Middle Eastern donors.

Over the next two months difficult conditions are projected where Mali, Burkina and Niger converge, a zone of particularly intense jihadist activity. Another familiar hotspot is Nigeria's

Borno state where Boko Haram and ISWAP operate. But there are also worrying new trends with emergency conditions reported from northern Mali and in neighbouring Algeria where the food crisis is linked to the resumption of war between government forces supported by Russia against Tuareg separatists.

Parts of northern Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana are sliding into crisis, due to the security threats to these near-border regions. Eastern Senegal is also struggling following a catastrophic 50% slump in the 2024/25 cereal harvest.

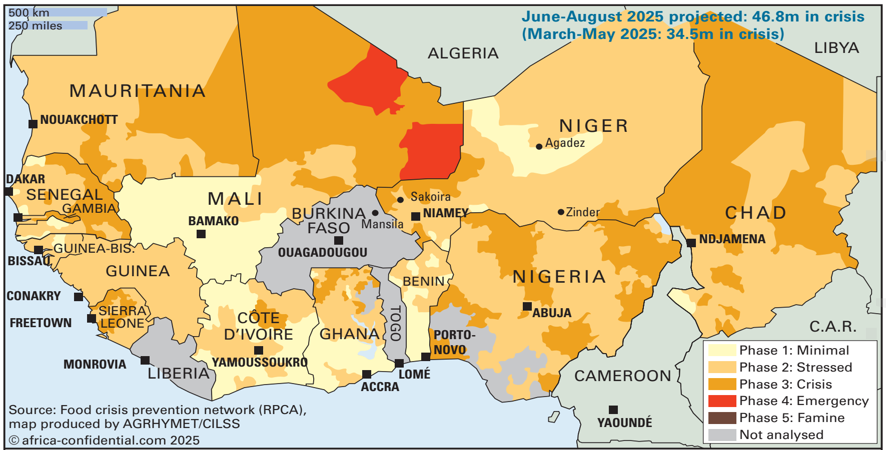
Amid information wars and conflicts that hinder access to many rural areas, there are increasingly large gaps in the reporting of conditions raising questions about the reliability of official numbers. It is becoming harder for governments, aid agencies and donors to gauge how much assistance is needed and where. Then there is the challenge of delivering it, especially to the most insecure remote communities that are only safely accessible by helicopter.

The widespread insecurity can deny farmers access to their fields as the annual rains and planting season gets underway, so increasing the likelihood of a more severe crisis until the 2026 harvests. Many more communities could be pushed into emergency conditions, perhaps even before the end of this year for those that are unable to plant crops now

The prevailing development model in West Africa, even in conflict-affected Sahelian countries, has a record of gradually improving food production. Yet per capita output dropped this year in Chad, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

That was partly due to pressures from surging populations and land scarcity in locations such as south-central Niger, which led many to migrate north to look for work in Saharan gold mines (AC Vol 66 No 3, Sahel-exit tests western miners and Russia's military muscle). Now the rumbling insurgent attacks are intensifying these long-term difficulties. ●

WEST AFRICA FOOD OUTLOOK: Projected situation: June-August 2025



People in food crisis, emergency or famine: June-August 2025

Country	millions	% of pop.	Country	millions	% of pop.	Country	millions	% of pop.
Benin	0.31	2.4	Ghana	2	6.3	Mauritania	0.59	12
Burkina Faso	-	-	Guinea	1.8	12.6	Niger	2.23	8.1
Cape Verde	0.036	6.9	Guinea Bissau	0.15	8	Nigeria	30.6	14.8
Chad	3.31	18.7	Liberia	-	-	Senegal	1.32	6.9
Côte d'Ivoire	1.44	5.8	Mali	1.52	6.5	Sierra Leone	1.23	14
Gambia	0.24	10.1	Mauritania	0.59	12	Togo	-	-
						TOTAL	**46.5**	**11.8**

Source: AGRHYMET/CILSS

JIHADIST INSURGENTS HIT MALI-SENEGAL LINK, DISRUPTING REGIONAL TRADE

The junta leader in Mali, General **Assimi Goïta** and his military allies in Russia's Africa Corps (former fighters in the Wagner Group) make much of the dangers posed by the Touareg separatist fighters such as the Front de libération de l'Azawad (FLA) – but they downplay the vastly more threatening advances by Jihadist insurgents (AC Vol 66 No 12, Jihadists hit harder as junta loses focus).

Local reports suggest Malian forces and the Russian fighters' main strategy against the jihadists is to target Fulani communities, whom they accuse of supporting the insurgents. On 22 July the New York-based Human Rights Watch reported, based local community sources, that Malian soldiers and Russian fighters had summarily executed and 'enforced the disappearance' of dozens of Fulani men since the beginning of the year* (Dispatches 28/7/25, HRW demands African Union investigation into Wagner executions).

Brutal as it is, the strategy isn't working. Jihadist insurgents have gained substantial ground this year and now threaten a critical import route into Mali – the main highway from Dakar in Senegal. On 1 July Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen(JNIM) fighters attacked Kayes, the western regional capital, the frontier post at Diboli, and five other places.

The Dakar-Bamako highway is a major axis of Malian international trade and this assault on a key military base, the airport and the governor's residence in Kayes, shows that even Mali's westernmost region – regarded until recently as relatively safe – is no longer beyond the insurgents' reach.

Deteriorating local security conditions threaten inbound freight as well as exports of cotton, both via Senegal and the alternative road from Nouakchott in Mauritania. Some businesses may be able to redirect trade to Conakry in Guinea and Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, JNIM's almost unchallenged penetration into the west targets local communities, economic activity and public service provision. It also puts at risk some of Mali's most important gold mines.

A video showing the governor's residence in Kayes on fire has gone viral on social media, while JNIM claims to have temporarily seized control of three military bases and to have shelled the barracks at Molodo, while also raiding other widely scattered communities: Gogui, Nioro du Sahel, Niono and Sandaré, as well as Diboli, on the Senegal border.

This shows how fast the jihadist insurgents are expanding areas under their control. The Senegalese army is cooperating with the Malian armed forces (FAMA) in the border zone and is to intensify its efforts. But it is unclear whether Mali's military and its Russian allies have the resources and technical ability to reverse this jihadist advance into the heart of the west (AC Vol 66 No 3, Sahel-exit tests western miners and Russia's military muscle).

* *Human Rights Watch Report: Mali: Army, Wagner Group Disappear, Execute Fulani Civilians*

A hopeful new state takes the stage

A new federal entity is forming which could spell the end to Somaliland and Puntland as political fiefdoms within Somalia

SOMALILAND'S CONTESTED AREAS

A landmark conference to establish a new Federal Member State of Somalia, Khatumo State, concluded on 31 July in Las Anod, the town that Somaliland's President **Muse Bihi Abdi** tried to subjugate by force two years ago, but was successfully defended by mainly Dhulbahante clan members (AC Vol 64 No 19, Muse Bihi's political headaches worsen).

That resistance effectively called the new state into being, which was formalised on the last day of July under the title North Eastern State.

Khatumo merges three administrative regions, Sool, Sanaag and Cayn (SSC), into a new entity. This has serious implications for Somaliland and Puntland, which should cede respectively eastern and western parts to form the new state. The conference brought together around 500 delegates, representatives of many clans, politicians, businesspeople, elders, intellectuals, and civil society representatives.

The government in Mogadishu sent its Minister of the Interior, Federal Affairs, and Reconciliation, **Ali Yusuf Ali Hosh**, to inaugurate the conference and act as a guarantor for the establishment of a fully-fledged state, which follows its recognition of an interim administration there in October 2023. The advent of Khatumo and the conference itself are momentous developments with crucial consequences for the political geography of the region.

ZERO SUM STATES

The creation of Khatumo state implies the effective end of both Somaliland and Puntland. Somaliland was established within the borders of the former British Protectorate in 1960. After 1991, Somaliland's leaders wanted to convince the two main Darod clans of eastern Somaliland, Dhulbahante and Warsengeli, to integrate into Somaliland, including SSC as well, but no military action followed to enforce the borders for about a decade.

When Puntland was established in August 1998, it also laid claim to SSC but also without planting any flags or border posts. SSC's status remained in limbo until Muse Bihi opened his offensive against Las Anod in December 2022 (AC Vol 64 No 3, Clashes damage recognition campaign).

By that time many Dhulbahante already felt marginalised by the outcome of Somaliland's recent elections, which they saw as cementing the dominance of the Isaaq clan. Muse Bihi believed his army was strong enough to steamroller dissent in Las Anod but when it attacked the effect was to unite the hitherto divided Dhulbahante and make the defence of Las Anod a rallying point. This is how the desire for a Khatumo state came about and for that, all agree, Muse Bihi only has himself to blame.

PUNTLAND POLITICS

Puntland had become established as the territory of the Harti clans, to which Dhulbahante and Warsengeli belong. When **Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed** created Puntland, he needed those two clans to undermine Somaliland's ambitions and build a stronger administration in Puntland (AC Vol 48 No 21, Fall out at the top). As in Somaliland, only the bigger clans received any consideration.

The upshot of the intricate situation inside Puntland was that when the violence erupted in in Las Anod, Puntland President **Said Abdullahi Deni** was politically unable to take a stand against the insurrection.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was at first reluctant to get involved. But deteriorating relations between Mogadishu and Puntland as well as the shock signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Ethiopian prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Muse Bihi on 1 January, 2024, pushed Hassan Sheikh into opposing Hargeisa. After that, Hassan Sheikh favoured the creation of Khatumo (AC Vol 65 No 2, Why Abiy and Muse signed a 'memorandum of misunderstanding').

Today, Khatumo's existence is crucial for the political future of Hassan Sheikh as he expects presidential elections in 2026 to be held there and that they will go his way, even if Puntland and Somaliland boycott them, as looks likely.

NO FIT STATE

The consequences for Somaliland and Puntland may be dire if dialogue does not prevail. In Somaliland, the Gadabursi in the Awdal region may well demand better representation in the running of what is left of the state after Khatumo is carved out.

Something similar is likely to happen in Puntland, with clans such as Lelkasse pressing their claims against the hitherto dominant clans.

Khatumo will begin to feature in federal Somali politics and Deni's patrons, such as the United Arab Emirates, may seek to acquire influence there, since the new state will require funding and development projects to prove its relevance.

CONFERENCE CONSENSUS

On the surface, the Las Anod conference was all about consensus. Political competition for state positions, parties, MPs and selection of a state president will come later, when clan rivalry and competition will strengthen. Among the Dhulbahante, of the 13 sub-clans represented by a Garaad (leader) five were initially opposed to Khatumo and eight were in favour. Now, 12 are attending the conference, and only one remains opposed.

More problematic is the Warsengeli, who are divided into two sub-clans on opposite sides of the current border between Somaliland and Puntland. The leaders of those two states are trying to unite the Warsengeli of each of their territories at a conference in Erigavo, which although supposedly aimed at reconciling them over a recent internecine conflict, might have the effect of uniting them against the new state.

The Warsengeli Sultan, **Sultan Said Sultan Abdisalam**, opted not to participate in the Las Anod conference, but he is only the titular head of the clan and politically active Warsengeli elders participated, ensuring the clan's full representation. The conference was seen as a great success but the future of the region seems uncertain. Mogadishu's strategic aim is to hold elections at all costs to secure a new term for **Hassan Sheikh**. That holds dangers.

This determination results in playing down the threat to elections that Al Shabaab poses, as well as the Ethiopian and Emirati influence on Somaliland and Puntland. And no foreign troops will ensure the security and stability of the newborn federal entity, unlike Puntland, Jubaland, and Southwest State in their early days. A new page is opening.

CAMEROON

Blocking oppositionist Kamto, President Biya clears the field

The 92-year-old President has removed all serious competition in the October election which looks a foregone conclusion

With the cancellation of the candidacy of **Maurice Kamto** by the electoral commission Elecam, President **Paul Biya** removed all doubt he would allow any challenge to his re-election in the general election due on 12 October, nor even to allow his own party the chance to explore alternative candidates.

Biya set the poll date on 11 July and two days later announced he would run, after which the Elecam dismissed Kamto from the race on 25 July. Kamto is appealing the decision for form's sake.

Kamto tried to avoid official restrictions in the way of his own party, the *Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun* (MRC), under whose banner he stood in 2018, by standing for the small opposition party, Manidem, which met Elecam's requirements.

Before the ban on Kamto, some of Biya's operators were trying to produce a split in Manidem that would unseat Kamto as a candidate. To some analysts, the fact that a subtle means of taking Kamto out were considered before the use of a blunt instrument is a sign that the ruling circle fears an outbreak of unrest. Others put the likelihood of public protest very low.

There had been hope that Biya and his ruling circle would allow the smallest consideration of alternative candidates, even among members of the ruling *Rassemblement démocratique du Peuple Camerounais* (RDPC).

Just before Biya declared, even government ministers **Réné Sadi** and **Fame Ndongo** debated on France's RFI radio station the possibility of Biya not standing, proving that whatever counsels the President was taking they were not within the ruling party. Nor had he heeded calls for an electoral congress (AC Vol 66 No 14).

One RDPC party member, **Léon Theiler Onana**, a local councillor, also declared his presidential candidacy, citing '43 wasted years' as his reason for standing, but nobody regarded the challenge as serious. For months, various courts in Yaoundé have refused to rule on Onana's and other petitions disputing Biya's leadership. The electoral commission dismissed his bid.

Meanwhile, Biya and his right-hand man **Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh** have resorted to traditional methods to stave off opposition, among the elite at least.

Much as when the military coup in neighbouring Gabon threatened to set an unwelcome example to Cameroon's military, he promoted eight generals on 15 July and shuffled the heads of the various branches of the armed forces (AC Vol 64 No 22)

Even the former rear-admiral, **Joseph Fouda**, sacked in disgrace after he fell out with the President's wife, **Chantal Biya**, was rewarded with a promotion to 'senior advisor' and an additional star (AC Vol 65 No 25). Pundits predict another round of military reshuffles and promotions around polling day.

These tactics won't work with the disenchanted northern politicians who previously supported Biya, such as **Bello Bouba Maïgari** and **Issa Tchiroma Bakary**, both of whom were approved by the electoral commission as candidates (AC Vol 66 No 14).

If the loss of some northern votes threatened the result, then the candidacy of the two former stalwarts of the regime would not have been allowed, pundits suggested.

The President has not directly spoken to his fellow citizens or been seen by them since National Day on 20 May. He appeared on television with the Vatican's ambassador to Yaoundé two days after announcing his presidential bid but he is not, nor is likely to, go on the campaign trail.

In the last election he was seen campaigning only once, in Maroua, his only domestic visit outside Yaoundé and his home village of Mvomeka in seven years. Voters, handlers and the army will keenly scrutinise the President's behaviour for signs of age. But Biya might not even show up.

With Ngoh Ngoh, Cabinet Director Ayolo and neglected Anglophone Prime Minister **Dion Ngute** all scrambling to be his election mouthpiece, he may see no need to show his face at all since victory is assured. ●

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DISPATCHES

AFRICA/UNITED KINGDOM

Africa faces the brunt of Whitehall's aid cuts

28 Jul 2025

Development budget reduced as military spending increases

Africa will be the main victim of cuts to the UK's foreign aid budget, according to a new report and impact assessment by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. The biggest cuts this year will come in Africa, with less spent on women's health, water and sanitation leading to increased risks, according to the assessment, of disease.

Aid for countries experiencing humanitarian crises, such as South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia, will also be cut.

That follows the pattern of the United States aid cuts and shuttering of USAID announced by President **Donald Trump** earlier this year, with the main cuts being to health and education (AC Vol 66 No 13, Development finance implodes with rich countries shifting to military budgets).

Development budgets have been sacrificed as the United Kingdom and other European countries plan to ramp up their defence spending amid US threats to slash spending on NATO's eastern flank. France has cut its development spending by 18.5%, while Germany has announced cuts of 10.5%. Britain's decision to partially fund military spending by cutting its development budget from 0.5% to 0.3% triggered little criticism, though International Development Minister **Anneliese Dodds** resigned in protest (AC Vol 66 No 5, Western aid cuts reshape the geopolitical landscape).

The government said the cuts follow 'a line-by-line strategic review of aid' by the minister, which focused on 'prioritisation, efficiency, protecting planned humanitarian support and live contracts while ensuring responsible exit from programming where necessary'.

However, in June, the UK kept its status as the largest single donor to Gavi, the global vaccine alliance, pledging US$1.7 billion over the next five years as part of a total of more than $9bn.

KENYA

Sifuna goes rogue as ODM splits deepen

28 Jul 2025

Party challenge to Odinga potentially harms Ruto's 2027 re-election bid

Orange Democratic Movement General Secretary **Edwin Sifuna** has stepped up his attacks on the deal between his party leader **Raila Odinga** and President **William Ruto**. Sifuna says that the ten-point pact between Odinga and Ruto, which formalised the arrangement that sees five ODM officials in Ruto's cabinet, is 'dead'.

Sifuna has been a vocal critic of Ruto for years, and particularly since last June's Gen Z protests. He has now hinted that ODM could support **Fred Matiang'i**'s bid for the presidency if that offered the best chance of ousting Ruto at the August 2027 elections (AC Vol 65 No 17, Kenyatta's favourite minister plans presidential bid).

'Matiang'i has his faults, but if he is going to help us remove William Ruto, so be it,' he stated.

That points not just to the divisions within ODM but also to the party's power ahead of the elections. With Ruto and his closest allies waging war on central Kenya – which delivered around two thirds of his votes in 2022 – the President is increasingly reliant of Odinga delivering Western Kenya and the Coast (AC Vol 66 No 15, Gen Z protestors vie with old politics). Without Odinga's base it is hard to see how Ruto could win the 50% plus one required to win an election.

Matiang'i, the Interior Cabinet Secretary in President **Uhuru Kenyatta**'s government, has the nomination of what remains of Kenyatta's Jubilee party and has been touted by some as a potential candidate representing the Gen Z protest movement. But without ODM, or at least a sizable chunk of its vote, it is hard to see how he or any other opposition candidate could be competitive.

Odinga is under growing pressure from the ODM's supporters to dismiss Sifuna but has done little to rein him in thus far. In an interview on 24 July, Sifuna said that he would resign if asked by the party leadership.

ODM will hold its national delegates conference in October, where it will hold long overdue elections for its national officials, and is likely to discuss the party's stance ahead of 2027. Despite his government pact with Ruto, Odinga has consistently stated in public that ODM will run its own slate of candidates, though without specifying whether this would include a run for the presidency.

MALI

HRW demands African Union investigation into Wagner executions

28 Jul 2025

Rights group claims Russian mercenaries worked with Malian army on herder killings

Over 80 Fulani herders have disappeared and at least a dozen have been executed by the Malian army and Wagner group, the Russian mercenary outfit, according to a new report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), an NGO.

HRW says that the killings and abductions, which have taken place since January, have been the result of joint operations targeting Islamist militias. Islamist insurgents, led by **Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen** (JNIM), have sought to recruit Fulani men to the cause, making the community a target for the Malian army.

Elsewhere, HRW says that it has received witness testimony, corroborated by the United Nations, that the Malian army and Wagner operates executed up 65 Fulani herders and cattle traders in the Kayes region, in April after rounding them up and taking them toward an army camp (AC Vol 62 No 20, Toxic relationship in the Sahel).

Kayes, the regional capital of western Mali, has seen a series of JNIM attacks in recent months.

HRW has urged the African Union to push for investigations and prosecutions of the crimes. However, the reports highlight the disconnect between military juntas such as Mali and regional and continental organisations such as the AU.

With French and other European armed forces having been kicked out of Mali and its neighbours in the Sahel by the military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the juntas have instead stepped up their cooperation with Wagner.

POINTERS

KENYA/UGANDA

LONDON COURT BOOSTS KAMPALA-NAIROBI LINK

■ The path towards a revamped passenger and freight rail link between Kenya and Uganda has become clearer, after the London Court of International Arbitration dismissed a US$2 billion claim filed by Rift Valley Railways Investments Ltd and KU Railway Holdings Ltd – lead investors in the Rift Valley Railways (RVR) consortium – over the termination in 2017 of a 25-year concession agreement.

RVR secured the concession in 2006, following years of mismanagement and poor performance by the Kenyan and Ugandan state-owned railway companies. It operated 2,350 kilometres of track linking Mombasa to Kenya's agriculturally rich Highlands and onwards to Kampala (AC Vol 55 No 14).

But RVR's days were numbered after former President **Uhuru Kenyatta** signed a $4bn deal with China in 2014 to build a standard gauge railway (SGR) between Mombasa and Nairobi, with plans to extend the line through the Rift Valley and eventually to Kampala.

Three years later, the Kenyatta government terminated the RVR concession, prompting the firm – a consortium led by Egyptian investor **Ahmed Heikal**'s Citadel Capital and the Kenyan infrastructure investment group TransCentury – to sue for $2bn in damages.

LIBYA/UNITED STATES

CONNECTING TRIPOLI TO TRUMP

■ With a close eye on the oil and gas reserves managed in Tripoli and old ties to rogue general **Khalifa Haftar**, US President **Donald Trump** is trying to balance his interests in Libya. Sensing the tension, Washington-based lobbyists Mercury Public Affairs have expanded their US$2 million contract with Libya's Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), adding a $70,000-a-month deal with the National Economic and Social Development Board. Mercury has represented both the GNA and the Libyan National Oil Corporation for over five years (AC Vol 61 No 14).

The latest contract was filed on 23 July – the same day Trump's senior Africa advisor **Massad Boulos** met Libyan Prime Minister **Abdel Hamid Dubaiba** in Tripoli, before travelling to Benghazi to meet General **Khalifa Haftar** the following day.

NEWS MAKER:

OIL WILL TEST NAMIBIA'S NANDI-NDAITWAH

Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah's presidency will be shaped by how her government manages the fossil fuel bonanza. Her election last December coincided with the take-off of the country's oil boom and she has pledged zero-tolerance towards corruption. After sacking most of the ministers appointed by her predecessor **Hage Geingob**, her team will have to scrutinise the lucrative deals in oil licensing secured by the ruling party's business allies.

Kornelia Shilunga, who heads the Upstream Petroleum Unit (UPU), says Namibia holds an estimated 11 billion barrels of oil and about 2.2 trillion cubic feet of gas. With the country on the cusp of becoming a leading offshore oil and gas producer, TotalEnergies and Shell are queueing to prospect for new discoveries. TotalEnergies's Venus field is expected to be the first to produce oil in 2029. Chevron is to start exploration soon.

The oil and gas windfall will be essential if NNN is to deliver on her pre-election promise to spend 85 billion Namibian dollars (US$5bn) creating 500,000 new jobs by 2029. After winning the election in December, she said the jobs would be in agriculture, construction and the oil and gas sector. Cutting youth unemployment, currently at 53%, is the priority. NNN has promises that Namibia's youth – 70% of the population is under 35 – will benefit economically from the oil boom.

The state-owned National Petroleum Corporation of Namibia (NAMCOR) holds a 10% stake in most licensed blocks and has tripled this to 30% for new exploration awards. The UPU has also launched a review of the country's regulatory framework: the Ministry of Mines and Energy reckons that oil production could double real GDP growth to 8% by 2030 and boost export earnings by 5-10%. Local economists forecast that up to 60% of revenue generated by oil production could return to the exchequer through taxes and royalties.

That sounds like the recipe for a successful – and lucky – presidency. But the political costs of overestimating or squandering the oil and gas riches could be high. NNN's 57% vote share last December was only fractionally higher than the 56% secured by her predecessor Hage Geingob in 2019. Turnout was significantly lower and, in the accompanying National Assembly elections, her South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) fell from 65% to 51% (AC Vol 65 No 24).

Windhoek think-tank analysts say the first five months of her presidency have been short on policy substance. Instead, she has overhauled government administration – merging several ministries and trimming her cabinet from 21 to 14 senior ministers, most of whom are women. She has also appointed 14 regional governors, with Omaheke governor **Pijoo Nganate** the only holdover from the Geingob presidency. NNN warns that corruption and failure to implement government policy would result in dismissal. The only major policy announcement in her first State of the Nation address in April was that students would pay 'no registration [or] tuition fees' at public universities and technical colleges. But the pledge came without detail on timing or funding.

A video showing the governor's residence in Kayes on fire has gone viral on social media, while JNIM claims to have temporarily seized control of three military bases and to have shelled the barracks at Molodo, while also raiding other widely scattered communities: Gogui, Nioro du Sahel, Niono and Sandaré, as well as Diboli, on the Senegal border.

This shows how fast the jihadist insurgents are expanding areas under their control. The Senegalese army is cooperating with the Malian armed forces (FAMA) in the border zone and is to intensify its efforts. But it is unclear whether Mali's military and its Russian allies have the resources and technical ability to reverse this jihadist advance into the heart of the west (AC Vol 66 No 3, Sahel-exit tests western miners and Russia's military muscle).

* *Human Rights Watch Report: Mali: Army, Wagner Group Disappear, Execute Fulani Civilians*