

BLUE LINES

'Mission accomplished. We're going home' was the statement on the Wagner Group's social media platforms in early June, signalling its departure from Mali. In truth, a rebranding exercise is taking place. Most Wagner fighters in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger will be staying put, but now as members of the Africa Corps. Formed after the death of Wagner's leader Yevgeny Prigozhin in 2023, Africa Corps is directly controlled by the Russian state. A report by American investigation group, The Sentry, published on 27 August, suggests that Wagner's operations in Mali have been a 'multi-layered catastrophe' for civilians and military leaders alike, and that 'heavy-handed and poorly informed counter-terrorism operations have strengthened alliances among armed groups challenging the state'. Wagner forces have failed to take control in northern and central Mali, where armed terrorist and separatist groups remain most active. The result has been battlefield losses for Wagner and rising civilian casualties. Africa Corps' recruitment efforts have intensified since February, offering hefty bonuses to new recruits. That suggests that Russia aims to expand its footprint - though its hopes of securing access to mineral resources have largely been unrealised as the juntas seek to retain control. Western powers have lamented Russia's influence but accepted the expulsion of their own troops without offering any credible alternative.

NIGERIA

Escalating violence could reshape Tinubu's plan for 2027 vote

Northern states have been hit hardest by jihadist insurgents together with banditry and kidnapping alongside murderous herder-farmer clashes

When Nigeria's National Security Advisor, Nuhu Ribadu, announced the arrest of two senior fighters affiliated with Al Qaida on 17 August, officials cited it as another success for President Bola Tinubu. His campaign team fears that the government's poor record on security could complicate his bid for a second term in the 2027 elections.

The evidence is mixed. President Goodluck Jonathan, the country's first leader from the South-South, lost the 2015 election largely due to his failings on security. The kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok by Islamist insurgents became a global *cause célèbre* on social media (AC Vol 55 Nos 10, 11 & 12). The government's response ranged from denial to obfuscation. It then delayed the scheduled elections and hired South African mercenaries flying helicopter gunships to attack insurgent camps.

Security conditions improved initially under President Muhammadu Buhari, a former general from Katsina State in the north-west, but later deteriorated. The government was accused - particularly by the predominantly southern-owned media - of complicity in a spate of attacks by herders, many of whom were, like Buhari, Fulani, on sedentary farmers in the North-Central states.

Competition for land between herders and farmers has long been a source of clashes in Nigeria, as in many other agrarian economies. But it has particular salience in Nigeria because some of the country's best cattle grazing land is in the North-Central region - the key

swing region in successive elections. No candidate has won the presidency without securing a majority of votes there.

In June, at least 200 people were killed in Yelewata and Dauda communities in Benue - often referred to as Nigeria's food basket. Over 200 people were also killed in neighbouring Plateau State. Some farmers in Benue and Plateau accuse the herders of trying to seize land but the clashes fit into a long-standing pattern of competition for grazing territory.

SOUTHWARD CREEP

Security experts warn that the violence, in various forms, is slowly spreading southwards. The political class in Abuja was particularly alarmed by an attack by Islamic State fighters on Kuje prison near the Federal capital in July 2022 (AC Vol 63 No 16). The insurgents killed five people and released 879 prisoners, many of whom joined their ranks. A new insurgent group in North-Central, known as *Mahmuda*, has launched attacks in Kwara and Niger States - both previously spared large-scale violence.

Another source of insecurity ballooned under Buhari's rule: the proliferation of armed groups smuggling gold, drugs and weapons took the northern states by siege. Described as 'bandits' by officials, few had discernible political affiliations. Many were drawn to the gold mining zones in Zamfara and neighbouring states, where violence peaked. At one point, the illicit operations became so lucrative - and security conditions so perilous - that traders flew helicopters over the mining

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After their Sahel exit, French troops prioritise partnerships and blunting Russia's influence		The government is counting on loans, rate cuts and privatisation to ease its debt woes		A general's foreign policy pronouncement in Tehran exposes Ramaphosa's waning authority		A secret meeting between Trump's envoy and SAF leader Burhan may cut across regional rivalries			

AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL

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sites to airlift the day's production.

Zamfara State, whose reserves of gold have drawn in tens of thousands of illicit miners along with armed bandits, mirrors dynamics seen in Ghana, where rival political groupings and their allies have become part of the lucrative business.

In 2023, Dauda Lawal of the opposition People's Democratic Party won the Zamfara governorship,

defeating Bello Matawalle of the All Progressives Congress (APC), who had presided over a near-total breakdown of security in the state.

Yet Matawalle remains an important ally for Tinubu in the North-West and was appointed junior defence minister in the federal government after losing the state. That gubernatorial election exposed the APC's vulnerability on security.

For at least a decade, national insecurity has been so severe that troops have been stationed in at least 30 of the country's 36 states. Yet these parlous conditions hardly dented Buhari's political following – anchored by his vaunted 12 million voters in the North-West and North-East, and bolstered by enough support in North-Central to outpoint his rivals.

But Tinubu – the first President to be elected on a minority of the vote (37% in the 2023 elections) – cannot depend

on a similar vote bank in the north. His party, the APC, whose leadership he inherited from Buhari, has nonetheless managed to trounce the increasingly fragmented opposition parties in recent by-elections.

NORTHERN STRATEGY

His campaign team is taking no chances. They have a threefold strategy in the north: to push out enough economic benefits through APC-controlled state governments; intensify their co-opting or bludgeoning of opposition activists; and bombard the media with stories of the armed forces' successes against insurgents.

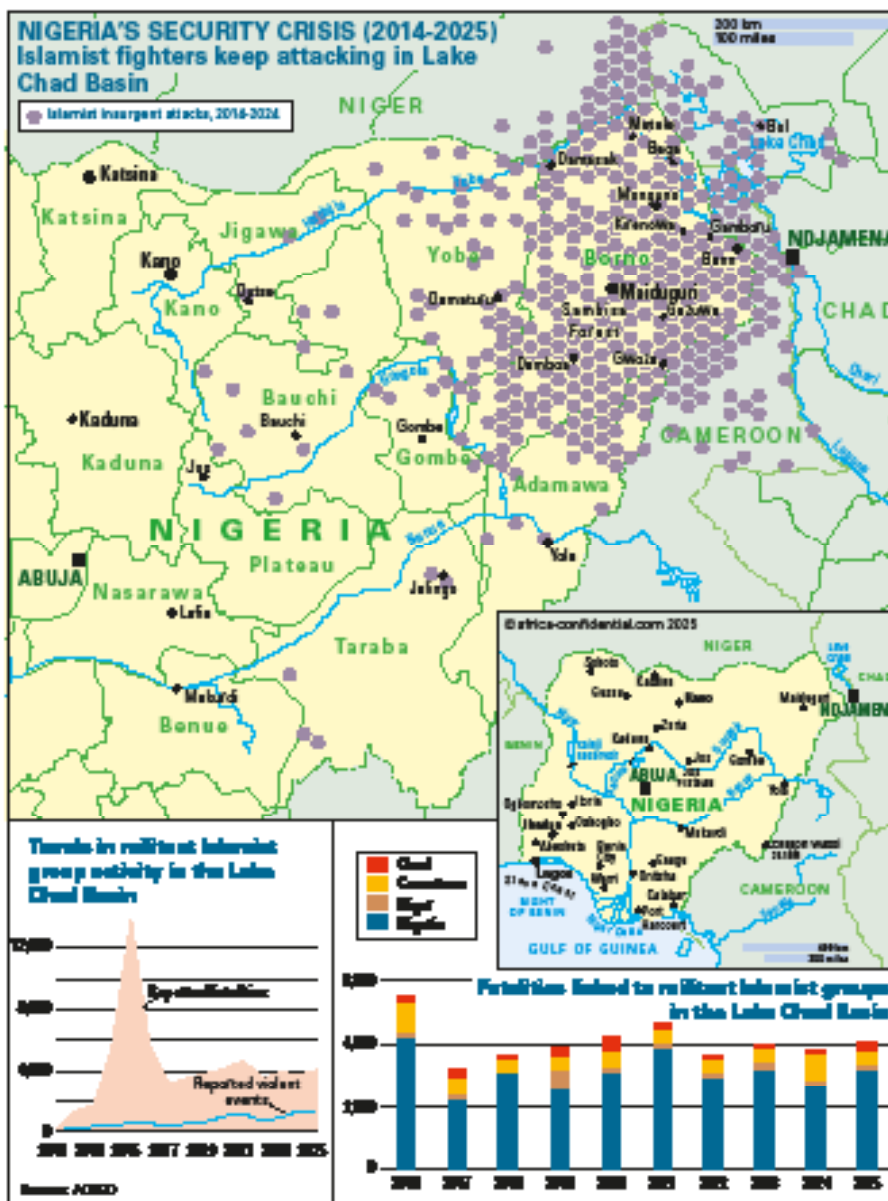
That explains the gung-ho pronouncements from Ribadu, the anti-corruption czar under Olusegun Obasanjo's presidency and now a contender for the top job when Tinubu bows out. Foreign diplomats are helping the media campaign.

Statements from the United States and Britain praising the government for capturing Mahmud Muhammad Usman, the self-styled 'Emir of Ansaru'; and his deputy, Mahmud al-Nigeri, were seized on by officials in Abuja, who claimed it marked the end of the jihadist campaigns – without presenting much evidence to support this. The operation is expected to bolster the government's arms procurement efforts. In mid-August, the Tinubu government finalised a deal with the US State Department to buy US\$346 million of weaponry – including bombs, rockets and ammunition – subject to Congressional approval.

The arrest of the Al Qaida fighters followed months of criticism from opposition parties and rights activists, who argued that Tinubu's government was losing control of security, having failed to prevent a spate of violence across the country. But just three days after the celebrated arrest, a separate group bombed a mosque in Malumfashi, Katsina, killing over 50 worshippers. A day later, herders invaded two communities, killing a woman, her son and two others in Agatu, Benue State – in the key North-Central region. Many others were wounded.

And then, like a brutal counterstrike, the military announced on 23 August that it had killed more than 35 jihadi fighters in an air strike near the border with Cameroon. It described the operation as precision attacks on four identified assembly areas. Air force officers said they were supporting ground forces who were 'disrupting terrorist logistics and movement corridors along the North-East border regions'.

Before this latest operation, the military said it had killed 592 armed



insurgents this year – a substantial uptick from last year. Whatever the reality on the ground, where reports in remote areas are hard to verify, officials in Abuja are determined to push the government's version.

The military's fight against *Boko Haram* – officially known as *Jama'at Ahl al Sunna li al Da'wa wa al Jihad* – began when the Islamist group launched armed attacks following the murder of its founder, **Mohammed Yusuf**, by the Nigerian police in 2009 (AC Vol 54 No 6). Since then, more than 40,000 people have been killed and over two million driven from their homes.

OVER 10,000 KILLED

According to Amnesty International, at least 10,000 people have been killed by jihadist fighters and criminal gangs in northern Nigeria since President Tinubu took office in May 2023. That compares with the 13,883 civilians killed in Ukraine, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, since Russia's invasion in February 2022. Nigeria ranks 147 out of 163 countries in the Global Peace Index, placing it in the red zone for the most dangerous countries. It faces the eighth-highest terrorist threat level – after Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Mali, Israel and Burkina Faso.

The Amnesty report blamed Tinubu's government for failing to protect people in the most targeted areas. Concurring with Amnesty that security in Nigeria is worsening, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) – which relies on government figures – estimates that just over 6,000 have been killed by insurgents or bandits since Tinubu took over the presidency.

The NHRC reported that 2,266 people were killed in the first six months of 2025 – compared with the official toll of 2,194 killed by jihadist attacks for all of 2024. In June 2025 alone, 606 people were killed in attacks.

The number of kidnapping victims is growing almost exponentially. Its repercussions – across all the northern states and many in the south – could represent more of a political threat to the Tinubu government than the jihadi attacks, which are mainly in the north-east. There were 2.23 million kidnappings in 2024 alone, with 63.5% in Nigeria's North-West, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. It also reported that 2.2 trillion naira (US\$1.4 billion) was paid as ransoms.

This deepening insecurity reverberates across the political system – sometimes even spurring the National Assembly, widely seen as a rubber stamp for the executive, into action. It has launched inconclusive probes into

HOW THE NORTH SHAPES THE ECONOMY AND ELECTIONS

Northern Nigeria, with 19 of the federation's 36 states, has been hardest hit by the attacks. Over 65% of the country's 133 million people in multi-dimensional poverty, out of a total population of 234 million, live in the northern states.

Since the launch of military operations to *Boko Haram* in Borno state in 2009, most of the jihadist attacks were concentrated in the north-east. An internal UN document dated July and seen by *Africa Confidential* showed that all of Borno was still marked as high-risk along with over half of neighbouring Yobe State.

Borno Governor **Babagana Zulum**, who won on the All Progressives Congress (APC) ticket, says the two main insurgent groups – the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) and *Jama'at Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (JAS) – have stepped up attacks this year on civilians and government installations, after such attacks had declined in 2023 and 2024. Both groups have reorganised. With ISWAP in the ascendant, they have access to drones and more sophisticated weapons, often outgunning and outmanoeuvring the Nigerian military.

The UN-backed *Cadre Harmonisé* analysis of April 2025 projected that 5.4m children under five years would suffer from acute malnutrition in the north-west and the north-east this year. Over 30 million people are classified as food insecure. Funding shortfalls have forced the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) to warn that it would have to suspend nutritional aid for 1.3 million people in July, worsening an already critical situation.

The question now for northern Nigeria is to what extent the federal government under Tinubu steps into help. Senior officials in Abuja told *Africa Confidential* that country would be far less badly affected by aid cuts by the **United States** and other western countries because of its national revenue base.

Rebuilding that base has been one of Tinubu's priorities with a radical restructuring of revenue collection authorities and a determined drive to boost oil and gas production.

The latest economic data shows success on both counts. That together with the government's plan, approved by the National Assembly, to borrow over US\$22 billion over the next three years for infrastructure and energy projects would give it a phenomenal pre-election war chest if just half of that was disbursed to northern Nigeria.

Those plans will depend critically on improving security conditions. If the current level of killings, kidnappings and displacements continue into 2026, Tinubu's APC will be penalised electorally. That could force him to rely more on the incumbency factor, and electoral chicanery, to hang on to those states where his support has been dropping.

A better than incremental improvement in security and economic conditions – that is visible declines in abductions and high-profile attacks together with a slowing of inflation and a strengthening of the naira – could position the APC for a far better outturn in 2027 than in 2023.

Former vice-president and serial presidential candidate **Atiku Abubakar** plans to capitalise on the current dissatisfaction with Tinubu in the north. He has teamed up with the Labour Party's presidential candidate in 2023, **Peter Obi**, to adopt the African Democratic Congress (ADC) as an opposition coalition vehicle.

They have generated media buzz and attracted some wavering politicians, but without a strong national grassroots movement they lack the political and organisational weight to take on Tinubu and the APC across the country – unless it is chronically weakened by another security shock. ●

security failures and claims of corrupt diversion of budgets by the military.

On 23 August, politicians from all the leading political parties and 19 human rights activists published an open letter to Tinubu urging him to create a Presidential Task Force on National Security 'to coordinate and execute emergency measures to halt the violence'. The letter calls for community-based early warning systems, a disarmament and reintegration programme for conflict zones, and the release of quarterly public security reports to restore trust.

The group known as Concerned Nigerian Leaders included senior international journalist **Kadaria Ahmed**, ruling party chieftain **Ismaeel Ahmed**, and Lagos-based activist **Opeyemi Adamolekun**. They called for a task force on national security with extraordinary powers and a mandate to execute emergency measures to halt the violence. 'Nigeria stands on a knife-edge. Whether we tip into chaos or climb toward peace depends on what we do next,' the statement read.

Aware of these sentiments gathering mass support – public trust in the Tinubu

government is already at historic lows – some loyalists and senior military officers are pushing back hard. ‘The election is coming. You cannot rule out the fact that some people are controlling these

criminals to ensure there is no peace, and the government is discredited,’ a senior officer told *Africa Confidential*.

As anger grows in the north about growing insecurity and criminality –

amid the government’s ostentatious shows of wealth – some in the political elite are looking for a candidate who could defeat Tinubu in the next election. ●

FRANCE/AFRICA

Paris resets military ties in Africa, tilting to Europe

Published online 14 August

After their exit from the Sahel, French troops prioritise flexible partnerships and blunting Russia’s influence

When France’s Secretary of State for *la Francophonie* and International Partnerships, **Thani Mohamed-Soilihi** told journalists on 27 July that the security crisis in the

Sahel was no longer was a matter for his government, some interpreted this as posturing. But he insisted: ‘I’m sorry to say but it no longer concerns us.’

Reports of an attempted putsch

in Mali on 10-11 August, followed by multiple arrests, as well as reports of mutinies in Niger, have met with a resounding silence in Paris. It’s a shame, Mohamed-Soilihi told Reuters correspondent **Tim Cocks** in South Africa: ‘...because everyone can see the difference between now and then, but we are looking for ways to maintain ties [that are] not necessarily military.’

Mohamed-Soilihi was explaining the reality, not announcing policy. All the Sahelian regimes have cut military ties with France but this year has seen a surge in jihadist attacks. ‘We continue to deal with countries that so wish,’ said Mohamed-Soilihi, ‘but France won’t be able to respond to countries with which there is no longer a relationship.’

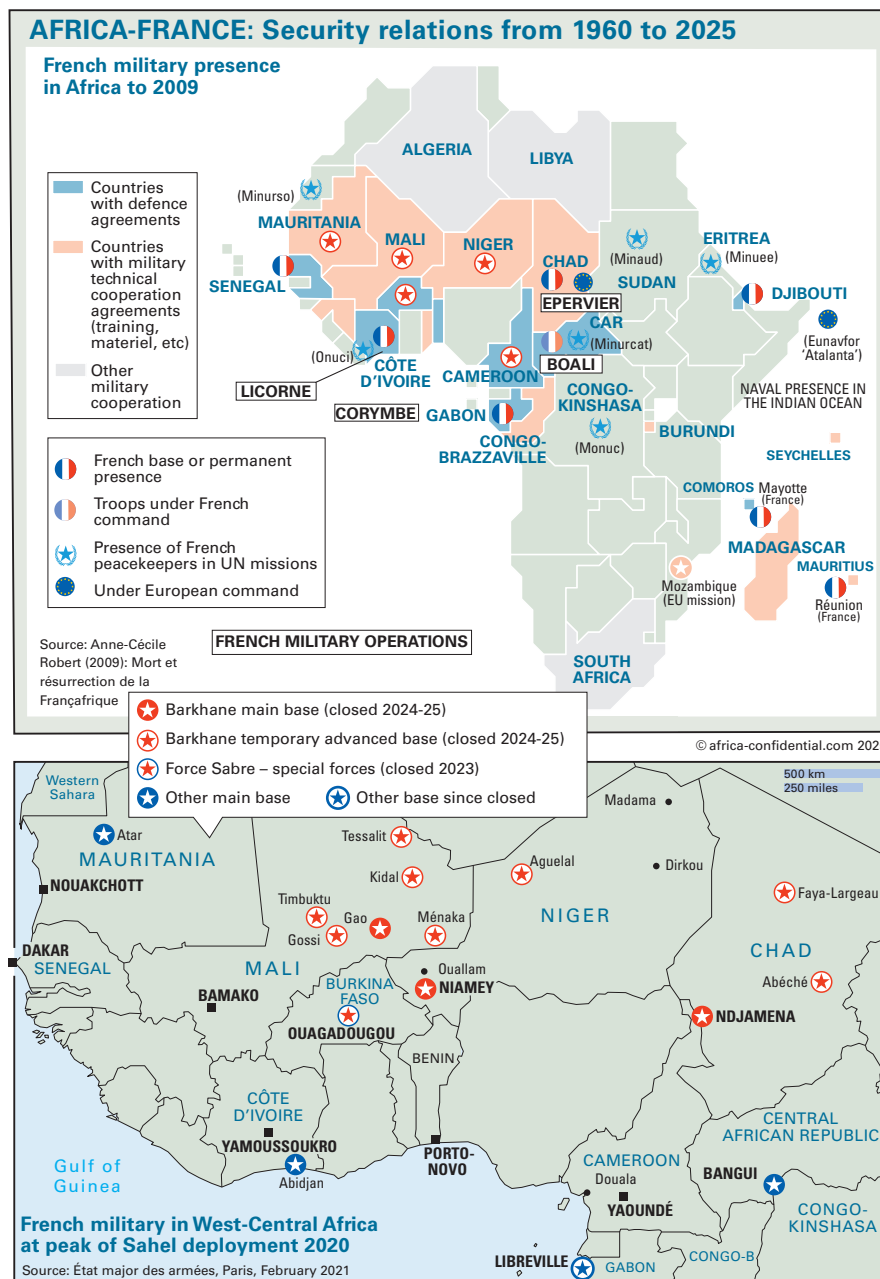
This fits into the new posture announced by General **Pascal Ianni**, appointed last year to lead France’s newly created Africa Command, overseeing operations across the continent. Training, security cooperation and counter-disinformation will be the priorities for his outfit.

An information specialist and former spokesman for the armed forces chief of staff, Ianni aims to develop new forms of security collaboration. His appointment follows France’s withdrawal from the Sahel and West Africa, culminating in the handover of Camp Geille in Dakar to Senegalese control on 17 July. French commanders have been grappling with growing hostility towards France’s military and diplomatic presence for decades, especially since 2022 (AC Vol 63 No 4 & Vol 64 No 18).

Relations with the juntas that seized power in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger between 2020 and 2023 broke asunder, compelling the withdrawal of French forces (AC Vol 66 No 11). Resentment was rising in the Sahelian capitals and the wider region.

Outgoing Chief of Staff Gen **Thierry Burkhard** told journalists on 11 July that bases in Chad, Gabon, Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal were operationally useful but had become politically damaging.

‘In the past our bases meant that we



were in touch with our African partners and able to react, because we had troops there. In today's climate of instability and sovereignty... the disadvantages were becoming unbearable, mainly because we were being attacked, not militarily but in how we were perceived.'

Both Ianni and Burkhard appear more attuned to West African sentiment than some political leaders. Burkhard drew historical parallels with France's own experience: 'When I speak of the "sovereignty" that more and more African countries assert, we French know what this means. In '66 when General [Charles] de Gaulle said France must reinforce its sovereignty or recover its sovereignty, he identified what for him was the main indicator of the loss of sovereignty or disputed sovereignty – which was the foreign military bases on its territory. And he asked the Americans and Canadians to leave France.'

'So, we should understand how the Africans can see things the same way, or at least how, in the context of information wars, someone could attack us on this point. The message, "You are occupied; you are not sovereign." That works.'

NEW DIRECTION

The shift marks a significant break. French troops had been stationed in Chad, Gabon, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire since independence. By contrast, their presence in the central Sahel – Burkina

Faso (2009) and Mali (2013) – was at the request of host governments seeking help against jihadist insurgencies.

France retains 1,500 troops in Djibouti, which it treats as a separate strategic zone focused on the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Peninsula, in coordination with forces based in the United Arab Emirates (AC Vol 65 No 19).

With permanent bases in West and Central Africa closed or downsized, Ianni will lead a new strategy centred on training and technical cooperation with individual African partners. He rejects a single Africa policy but calls for tailored approaches. His officers are talking to Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon about hosting training teams. Troops will deploy from France and return after the mission.

Paris hasn't disclosed details of the personnel, equipment or funding for these partnerships. Substantial cuts are expected as France and other European states boost defence spending to counter Russia.

President Emmanuel Macron has warned about Moscow's military, diplomatic and social media campaigns, undermining French officials in Africa. Burkhard, like Macron's Africa envoy Jean-Marie Bockel, argues strongly for deepening ties between Africa and Europe. 'If there are two continents in the role that are intimately connected, they are Europe and Africa, and

everything that happens in one has impacts on the other... Africa is very important for France and in many parts of Africa there is a real need for France.' He said African-European cooperation on climate change and terrorism was vital to both sides.

Gen Fabien Mandon, France's new Chief of Staff and former Mirage fighter pilot, has served in Chad and Congo-Kinshasa. For the past two years, he has headed Macron's personal military staff and played a central role in reshaping France's military posture in Africa.

Ianni continues to push for a sustained, broad-based engagement with Africa. He questions the efficacy of Russia's force-led strategy in the Sahel – typically in the form of Wagner or Africa Corps – arguing that terrorism cannot be countered by military force alone but requires a political response. He is also expanding France's partnerships beyond its traditional Francophone sphere to work with Nigeria and Ghana; Ianni was in Angola last month.

France's role as an arms supplier has been eclipsed by China – whose Norinco group is rapidly expanding its sales network in West Africa – and often by Russia and Turkey. Instead, France is focusing on technical cooperation and training. In some cases, this extends to discreet operational support, such as its assistance to Benin in countering jihadist fighters in the rural north (AC Vol 63 No 25). ●

KENYA

Looking east, Ruto targets yen and yuan

As dissent mounts, the government is counting on loans, interest rate cuts and a stalled privatisation programme to ease its debt woes

To ease the cashflow crisis that triggered mass protests and weakened the shilling – as the Treasury used precious dollars to pay its Eurobond debts – President William Ruto's government is looking east, seeking to shift foreign loans from dollars to yen and renminbi.

On the margins of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Yokohama from 20-22 August, Kenya and Japan agreed the terms of a yen loan after earlier plans for a Samurai bond were shelved. At US\$169 million (25 billion yen), the loan, which will be backed by Nippon Export and Investment Insurance, is far smaller than the yen-denominated \$500m Samurai bond initially announced by Nairobi and Tokyo in February

2024. Although the terms of the loan had not been made public, they are likely to be close to the interest rate of between 1% and 2%, which Ruto said would be attached to a Samurai bond – significantly lower than domestic borrowing costs.

Ahead of the summit, Ruto urged Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba to lower tariffs on Kenyan exports, potentially matching China's offer of tariff and quota-free trade. Kenya is seeking to offset the impact of new US tariffs, set at 10% in its case, imposed by President Donald Trump.

'Our trade has grown exponentially in that period, growing by 33% in 2024. However, the trade relationship is heavily in favour of Japan,' Ruto said. 'There is a need for Japan to deal with

tariff and non-tariff barriers so that Kenyan agricultural produce, including avocados and tea, can get more access to the Japanese market.' According to State House Nairobi, bilateral trade reached \$900m last year, with Kenyan exports accounting for just \$70m.

More consequential to Kenya's debt profile are talks between Treasury Cabinet Secretary John Mbadi and Chinese officials to convert the \$5bn Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) loan – one of the country's largest infrastructure projects – from dollars to yuan. The move would cut the interest rate from 6.37% to around 3%.

China remains Kenya's largest external creditor. Mbadi confirmed the government's strategy to diversify its foreign debt currency mix to reduce costs. 'When the loan is in US dollars, it is SOFR [Secured Overnight Financing Rate], plus a markup, but a renminbi comes at a fixed rate, nearly half the cost,' he said.

For the financial year ending June 2026, the Treasury has budgeted 129.90bn shillings (\$1bn) for Chinese loans – KSh95.64bn in principal and KSh34.26bn in interest, most of it owed

to China's Exim Bank, which financed the bulk of the SGR.

To manage a looming wall of maturities, Kenya is exploring buybacks of short-term local bonds using proceeds from longer-dated issues.

Debt service now consumes well over 60% of revenue – a central concern for the Ruto administration (AC Vol 66 No 8). While the next Eurobond repayment is not due until 2027, the Treasury faces KSh495bn in local bond maturities this year, rising to KSh822bn in 2025.

PRIVATISATION PUSH

Alongside new loans and renegotiated rates, the government has committed to partially privatising a group of assets and parastatals – including the Kenyatta International Convention Centre and the National Oil Corporation. But progress has been slow since the plan was announced in 2023, with 11 companies listed for potential sale (Dispatches 29/11/23).

In July, Ruto announced plans to sell stakes in the Kenya Pipeline Company worth up to KSh100bn via the Nairobi Securities Exchange in September. However, a Supreme Court ruling in August halted the sale, citing a lack of parliamentary oversight. A public consultation on the draft Privatisation Bill concluded on 22 August. The bill

was originally proposed in 2023 but was rejected as unconstitutional by the Court last year.

As *Africa Confidential* went to press, ministers were making plans to break up Safaricom – the telecoms giant that controls the lucrative M-Pesa mobile money service – in another bid to raise revenue.

Ruto and his ministers insist they are tackling the cost-of-living crisis that has fuelled public discontent. Some headline figures support their claims.

The president projects 5.6% GDP growth this year – above the Treasury's 5.3% forecast and the central bank's 5.2% – and up from 4.7% in 2024. Kenya has also overtaken Ethiopia as East Africa's largest economy (Dispatches 28/4/25).

Inflation fell to 3.8% in July and the Central Bank of Kenya cut its benchmark rate to 9.5% in August – the seventh reduction in two years. Ministers say this will improve access to credit, though high street lenders still charge around 15% and non-performing loans remain at 17.6% – the highest level since 2015.

Credit ratings agency Standard & Poor's upgraded Kenya's long-term sovereign credit rating to 'B' from 'B-' on 22 August, citing 'robust export earnings and diaspora remittances' that have bolstered foreign exchange reserves.

Ruto's relative success with China and Japan is a significant win for his chief economic advisor, **David Ndii** – a long-time sceptic of the US and Bretton Woods institutions. Kenya forfeited \$800m when its \$3.6bn Extended Fund Facility and Extended Credit Facility with the International Monetary Fund was suspended in March. The government remains publicly committed to negotiating a new programme and will host IMF officials in September.

AMERICAN CONCERNS

But Ruto's eastern tilt has drawn criticism in Washington (AC Vol 66 No 9). In July, Republican Senator **Jim Risch** tabled amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act requiring a three-month review of Kenya's major non-NATO ally status (AC Vol 65 No 12).

A three-day visit to Washington by Cabinet Secretary for Investments, Trade and Industry **Lee Kinyanjui** and Principal Secretary for Trade **Regina Ombam** in mid-August included meetings with the US Trade Representative. Nairobi has hired K-Street lobbyists Continental Strategy on a \$2.1m contract – but there is little sign that Trump will revive the Kenya-US trade talks launched during his first term (Dispatches 18/8/25). ●

SOUTH AFRICA/UNITED STATES

General's Iran mission deepens ANC rifts

The defence chief's foreign policy pronouncement in Tehran exposes President Ramaphosa's waning authority

The most serious problem with South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Chief General **Rudzani Maphwanya's** visit to Iran from 12 to 14 August was that President **Cyril Ramaphosa** was neither informed nor involved in authorising it. Defence Minister **Angie Motshekga** approved the trip, but the Presidency was left in the dark.

It was the second time in a month Ramaphosa had been blindsided by the security forces. In July, he suspended Police Minister **Senzo Mchunu** after KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Police Chief **Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi** accused him of shielding criminals and colluding with a drug cartel (AC Vol 66 No 15).

Maphwanya's Tehran visit – during which he aligned South Africa's interests with Iran on Palestine and military strategy – was diplomatically explosive. It coincided with Trade Minister **Parks**

Tau's efforts to renegotiate a 30% tariff imposed on South African exports by United States President **Donald Trump's** administration (AC Vol 66 No 16). The visit followed calls by Trump allies in Congress to revoke South Africa's African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade concessions, with some pushing for secondary sanctions over its ties to Iran, Russia and China.

Maphwanya's remarks drew a swift government disavowal and demands for an explanation. Pressure is mounting on Ramaphosa to reassert civilian control over the military. Options range from court martial – as demanded by the centre-right Democratic Alliance – to reassignment, early retirement or a formal censure. **Songezo Zibi's** Rise Mzansi and other smaller parties want Maphwanya to be sacked swiftly. But Ramaphosa's cautious response suggests that's unlikely.

Ramaphosa appointed Maphwanya as defence chief in 2021, extending his term by five years. Maphwanya is due to retire on 1 December – a week after his 65th birthday on 23 November. Early dismissal could jeopardise his retirement benefits.

LOSING CONTROL

Ramaphosa's reluctance to get tough with Maphwanya reflects his weakened grip on the African National Congress (ANC) a year ahead of key local government elections – and exposes internal schisms. Foreign minister **Ronald Lamola** – once a serious contender to succeed Ramaphosa – condemned Maphwanya, accusing him of encroaching on diplomacy.

But Motshekga met Maphwanya on his return to South Africa and defended the visit as a matter of sovereignty: 'Does the conflict with the US mean that we cannot touch Iran?'

Iran – along with the **United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Ethiopia** – joined BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) at last year's summit chaired by Ramaphosa. The Trump administration continues to single out South Africa's ties with Iran, especially those of the ANC. Some Trump allies claim South Africa's

STRUGGLE VETERAN RAMAPHOSA ATTACKED BY ALL SIDES

One of the last senior politicians from the struggle generation to lead South Africa, **Cyril Ramaphosa** has just two years left in his 10-year double term as President of the African National Congress (ANC) and is grappling with a mountain of unresolved issues: how to fuel growth and investment in the country's ailing economy and to manage his succession. It is no secret within the ANC that Ramaphosa is unenthused about the current choices on offer for the party's next president: Vice-President **Paul Mashatile** or ANC Secretary-General **Fikile Mbalula**.

Local government elections are expected in late 2026 or early 2027, and the ANC risks further losses following its sharp decline in the 2024 national poll (AC Vol 65 No 12). A recent poll suggests the ANC vote could fall to 25% in Johannesburg in the local elections and, perhaps below 35% nationally. That makes it hard to argue that there is a floor to the ANC's decline, let alone a chance of reversing it. The main beneficiaries of its vote collapse will be the populist parties, **Julius Malema's** Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and **Jacob Zuma's** *uMkhonto weSizwe* (MK) party, rather than the centre-right Democratic Alliance (DA).

At that stage if not before, the Government of National Unity (GNU) will face another survival test. Mashatile has already said he wants to dissolve the GNU and is unpersuaded by the threats of an investment meltdown should that happen and the negotiated reforms are abandoned. National elections are due in 2029.

The governing coalition stumbles from one crisis to the next. Relations between the ANC and its main partner, the DA, range from shaky to poisonous. Leading DA figures campaign against government policies such as land expropriation and black economic empowerment. Yet DA leader **John Steenhuisen** has refused to leave the GNU – partly under pressure from party financiers who fear that collapsing the coalition would open the door to an ANC faction allying with the EFF and the MK party.

Ramaphosa needs the GNU as much as the DA does. Without it, he would struggle to form a majority government. His camp had hoped that a state-funded dialogue could help the ANC to bolster unity and gain traction ahead of the local elections. But the launch of the National Dialogue on 15 August quickly soured when civil society groups challenged the ANC's control of the process.

The dialogue was initiated by the foundation of former President **Thabo Mbeki** and supported by other legacy institutions – including those of **Nelson Mandela**, **Oliver Tambo**, **FW de Klerk** and **Ahmed Kathrada**. Ramaphosa was lukewarm but Mbeki persuaded him to stay involved. After briefly withdrawing, the foundations have returned to wrest the dialogue away from government control and prevent it becoming an ANC electoral tool. Far from being a rallying call for unity, the dialogue risks becoming yet another site of contestation. ●

law suit at the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of perpetrating genocide in Gaza was coordinated with Iran (Dispatches 16/1/25, AC Vol 65 Nos 2 & 3).

At the very least, Maphwanya's Tehran visit complicates South Africa's efforts to renegotiate US tariffs. The US State Department expressed 'great concern' over his remarks. This isn't Maphwanya's first public clash with Ramaphosa's government. He was accused of defying Motshekga by refusing to reinstate Colonel **Eugene Motati**, whose 2019 dismissal was ruled unlawful by the Military Ombud due to untested sexual harassment allegations. The SANDF has played down the incident, insisting that Maphwanya accepts the Minister's 'constitutional

authority'.

He has also hired lawyers to represent 12 senior SANDF officers from a special forces unit arrested for allegedly killing Hawks investigator **Frans Mathipa** in August 2023.

Mathipa had been investigating the abduction and rendition of terror suspect **Abdella Hussein Abadiga** – reportedly a South African asset at the time. The 12 were arrested in July and initially denied bail, despite providing the necessary documentation. While the SANDF did not formally oppose bail, the National Prosecuting Authority cited risks to public safety and interference with justice.

A judicial commission was due to start hearings on 1 September into the allegations made by Mkhwanazi, which

implicate Mchunu in shielding criminals and collaborating with a drug cartel. But the hearings have been delayed for 'logistical reasons'.

Ramaphosa, who was attending the BRICS summit in Brazil when the allegations surfaced, placed Mchunu on special leave on his return. He appointed **Firoz Cachalia** as acting police minister and, under opposition pressure, dismissed National Education Minister **Nobuhle Nkabane** for misleading Parliament and favouring ANC loyalists in public appointments. But his incrementalist approach to political transgressions often achieves the worst of both worlds: it fails to make corrupt or incompetent officials accountable but it irritates their supporters within the ANC, further undermining Ramaphosa's position. ●

SUDAN/UNITED STATES

Washington revives peace push

Published online 27 August

A secret meeting between Donald Trump's envoy and SAF Commander Burhan may cut across the regional rivalries blocking negotiations

A three hours meeting in Zurich between Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) commander General **Abdel Fattah al Burhan** and US President **Donald Trump's** Senior Africa Advisor **Massad Boulos** on 11 August was the

first sign of serious movement in Sudan peace negotiations for a year. The meeting was arranged by Qatar, a key adjunct to US diplomacy under Trump, and all sides tried to keep the meeting secret. It was significant enough to

prompt the Vice President of the United Arab Emirates **Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan** to fly to Zurich to see **Boulos** the following day. Mansour heads the UAE's security services and his government is the main foreign backer of General **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo** 'Hemeti' and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) which are trying, at horrendous human cost, to wrest control of **El Fasher**, the capital of North Darfur.

The **Boulos** meetings in Zurich followed a failed meeting in early June with ambassadors from the Quad countries – the **United States**, **United Arab Emirates**, **Egypt** and **Saudi Arabia**.

BURHAN'S DIKTAT TO THE MILITIAS

A Gulf State – likely **Saudi Arabia** – is underwriting the Sudan Armed Forces' US\$1.5 billion purchase of advanced weapons systems, we hear. Political as well as financial conditions may have been attached. The deal was signed by the SAF's Air Force Commander, Lieutenant General **Al Tahir Mohamed al Awad al Amin**, says our source.

On 14 August – Sudan's Army Day – SAF Commander General **Abdel Fattah al Burhan** delivered one of his harshest speeches against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of Gen **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'** reiterating his refusal to negotiate and calling for their destruction. He omitted any mention of his meeting with United States envoy **Massad Boulos** just three days earlier.

After reaffirming his hardline stance, Burhan took two further steps. On 17 August, he retired several senior officers – including those who led the battles against the RSF and retook Khartoum earlier this year. It was the first time since the war began in April 2023 that he felt confident enough to reshuffle the high command. His meeting with Boulos may have prompted the move, signalling a fresh leadership to manage a shift in US policy.

Secondly, Burhan ordered all allied militias to obey the SAF command, reclassifying them as surrogate fighters rather than autonomous allies. This marked a break with the policies of ousted President **Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir**, who had deliberately created and financed several semi-autonomous militias – including Hemeti's RSF, formerly the *Janjaweed* – in Darfur.

The SAF's consolidation of control over Khartoum and its suburbs may have triggered this shift. As SAF units and their allied militias withdrew from central Khartoum to the outskirts, local militias moved in. In Omdurman and Bahri (North Khartoum), some have reinstated Islamist rules – banning mixed-gender schooling and requiring women to wear the veil.

These developments – and the tensions they provoke – raise concerns about the Islamists' return to power in Khartoum. They may also set off alarms in the Boulos camp. Burhan's attempt to assert control over allied militias met resistance from the Joint Forces – SAF-aligned armed groups in Darfur – who insisted they were already under SAF orders.

This points to a broader fragmentation of military groupings across the country – not only the de facto partition between Burhan's SAF and Hemeti's RSF, but also the breakdown of command structures within each camp. Some warn that a war of all against all may be the next stage in Sudan's descent. ●

Quad meeting – if only to show the US-led format was still functioning – and to keep the UN and African Union away from any high-stakes military negotiations, in the unlikely event they chose to engage.

A Quad meeting in Washington DC on 30 July rehearsed familiar arguments and ended in the same stalemate. Egypt insisted the SAF and its newly appointed government should lead the transition. But the US draft statement excluded both the SAF and the RSF from any direct role.

EGYPT'S RESOLVE

When Egypt pressed its case, the UAE strongly opposed it – as it did in London in April and again in Washington in June. The meeting ended on that impasse. Most of the regional sponsors of Sudan's war – Egypt, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, though not **Turkey** or **Iran** – are close US allies. The meeting at least clarified positions.

Egypt does not want to restrict the SAF or its civilian government in Port Sudan. President **Abdel Fattah el Sisi** and Burhan maintain cordial ties – shaped by decades of military cooperation, shared strategic interests and their training at the Cairo military academy. Their countries' military-industrial networks are entrenched and interlocking.

Senior officers in both states hold stakes in each other's defence firms. Along with that, Sisi backs Burhan's forces, calculating they can preclude any democratic resolution to Sudan's crisis, and certainly any plan that could threaten Egypt's autocracy.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, due to be inaugurated for the Ethiopian New Year in September, is another pressure point. Sisi sees it as threatening Egypt's economy so Cairo needs allies. That explains the warm reception for Sudan's SAF-aligned Prime Minister **Kamel Idriss**, who met Sisi at the Presidential Palace on 7 August for a long session.

The UAE, under President **Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan**, is Egypt's largest foreign investor – with a US\$35 billion commitment on the Mediterranean coast and shares Sisi's detestation of the *Ikhwan al Muslimun* (Muslim Brotherhood). But MBZ staunchly opposes Egypt's Sudan policy. UAE officials insist the war must end via a civilian transition, excluding the military factions that instigated it.

On that basis, neither the RSF nor the SAF should be part of the transition. MBZ's stance is disingenuous: the UAE remains the RSF's main foreign financier and supplier of materiel. It has also underwritten a parallel civilian

Then US diplomats told their Sudanese counterparts they were working on new policy proposals to end the war (AC Vol 66 No 14).

Conditions in Sudan have deteriorated sharply over the past year, worsened by ferocious attacks on civilians by rival military factions and chronic underfunding of United

Nations relief efforts, driven by western governments – including the US – slashing aid budgets (Dispatches 28/7/25, AC Vol 66 Nos 5 & 13).

Western diplomacy has faltered. Britain's Sudan summit in April ended in deadlock over the final communiqué (AC Vol 66 No 8 & Dispatches 22/4/25). The last US-led initiative, held in Geneva a year ago, also failed. President **Joe Biden's** energetic special envoy **Tom Perriello** left the post soon after. When Trump returned to the presidency on 20 January, his Senior Advisor for Africa – and father-in-law to presidential daughter **Tiffany** – Boulos pushed for renewed engagement. But his efforts were sidelined as he was drawn into the Congo-Kinshasa and Rwanda dossiers with proposals for minerals-for-security deals.

Few details have emerged about who will join Boulos's Sudan team. Many established regional experts have left the State Department and the National Security Council. Nor is it clear what analysis has been commissioned on the latest developments in the war. Boulos was determined to convene a

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ISLAMISTS REGROUP AS UAE TRADES THE GOLD

Sudan's veteran spymaster **Salah Abdallah Gosh** met key Islamist figures in Asmara on 20 August, signalling another shift in political alliances in Khartoum. We hear the talks, hosted by President **Issayas Afewerki's** Saudi Arabia-aligned government, focused on the Islamists' prospects of returning to power.

Gosh – former Director General of the National Intelligence and Security Service under President **Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir** – presided over the meeting. It concluded that Islamists must call for the primacy of 'national interests' over partisan agendas as they try to regain legitimacy. Discussions centred on strengthening the Islamist military component to influence the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) under General **Abdel Fattah al Burhan**, 'without appearing divisive' – a difficult balance while the war against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Gen **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'**, remains deadlocked.

Recent US initiatives have prompted leadership reshuffles but made no impact on the ground or on either side's pursuit of military dominance. Conditions are dire in contested regions – notably northern Kordofan and North Darfur – where the RSF's assault on El Fasher shows no restraint (AC Vol 66 No 14).

Civilian killings are routine, while the SAF attacks humanitarian convoys near Mellit with little regard for Darfur's population. Whichever side prevails will have alienated most of the region. Famine and cholera are widespread. Aid workers face threats from militias and armed individuals dissatisfied with relief operations.

As conditions in Darfur deteriorate and Islamists regroup in Khartoum, the **United Arab Emirates** continues to back the RSF militarily. Regardless of the US-led talks in **Switzerland**, the UAE and its allies are preparing for a prolonged conflict. The RSF has built a base in southern **Libya** near Al Kufra – a strategic move to consolidate control over Darfur and much of western Sudan. This expansion follows the failure of President **Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno's** government in **Chad** – weakened by internal divisions – to maintain its role as the RSF's logistical hub.

The war is also being waged online, with both sides using digital tactics to obscure accurate reporting of the conflict. The SAF recently circulated a fabricated report claiming an Emirati aircraft was bombed while landing at Nyala airport, killing over 40 Colombian mercenaries. RSF recruitment of Colombian fighters was confirmed months ago but this false report caused uproar in Abu Dhabi.

Within hours, the UAE banned flights to SAF-controlled areas such as Khartoum and Port Sudan. Ships bound for Sudan were also said to have been barred from docking in the Emirates. Days later, UAE officials denied any such decisions. They were keen to ensure that gold consignments from SAF-held areas to Dubai continued – another example of the ethical flexibility of Burhan's forces. Amid the devastation and human misery, the gold smugglers working for both sides are resilient. ●

government in western Sudan – led by Hemeti – effectively partitioning the country.

Privately, UAE officials argue that Burhan's SAF must be countered, given the dominance of Islamist factions in its ranks. Abu Dhabi equates the SAF with the ousted National Congress Party/National Islamic Front (NCP/NIF) regime led by **Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir**, who was toppled in April 2019. Many share that analysis but see Hemeti's RSF as the greater danger. A leading secularist and democracy activist in eastern Sudan told *Africa Confidential* he saw Hemeti's forces as more threatening to a civilian transition than the Islamists 'whose organisations and tactics we know'.

QATAR'S ROLE

When Boulos met Burhan in Zurich on 11 August, no details of the conversation were released. But we hear two key issues were discussed: humanitarian access and ending the war. Qatar's role was pivotal. Doha persuaded Burhan to attend, lent him an aircraft to fly to Geneva and ensured the meeting's secrecy. It will continue to play a role – as it has for the Trump administration in Afghanistan, Gaza, Syria, Congo-Kinshasa and Rwanda. Doha is more flexible than Washington, maintaining ties with both the Islamists and the SAF.

US policy – excluding hardline militarists and Islamists – faces

resistance on the ground. Humanitarian aid cannot be delivered without negotiating with militias under Hemeti or Burhan. Commanders use their veto on aid distribution to stake claims in negotiations and the resources on tap. They may also use their ability

to rein in allied militias as leverage. So far, US efforts to end the war have met little opposition from regional backers of the military factions – because they agree with the tactics or believe they will fail, or they have no practical alternative.

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The next step for the US is to identify civilians with whom it can work. Its veto on engaging with Islamists is shared by the UAE and some European Union officials – but not by Doha. Sudanese Islamists are now as factionalised as other political tendencies. Some claim to have demonstrated against Beshir in April 2019, citing his betrayal of **Hassan el Turabi's** legacy. Others, like **Tunisia's Ennahda** Islamist party, claim to support

pluralism. But the core group around **Ali Ahmed Karti** still seeks a restoration of *Ingaz* – authoritarian rule under the NCP/NIF, with full enforcement of the harshest variant of sharia (Islamic law) (AC Vol 50 No 13, 42 No 16 & 66 No 1). Many of today's hardliners began as militia leaders. Ahead of Idriss's visit to Cairo, Egyptian security arrested the commander of the Al Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade, **Almesbah Abu Zeid Talha**. He

had arrived in Alexandria weeks earlier for medical tests.

Neither side in the Boulou-Burhan meeting has disclosed details but the US team appears set on a new strategy: speak first to the Sudanese commanders, then to the regional sponsors. Hemeti may be next on the list. That looks more likely after the UAE Vice-President Sheikh Mansour's meeting with Boulou in Zurich on 12 August. ●

SEYCHELLES

President takes an authoritarian turn

Published online 27 August

Ahead of next month's elections, activists question the value and accountability of new Gulf States investments

The cost of living, Gulf States investors and the government's authoritarian turn are set to dominate the elections on 27 September. They will be the first national electoral test for President **Wavel Ramkalawan's** and his *Linyon Demokratik Seselwa* (LDS) coalition since he defeated his predecessor **Danny Faure** in 2020. Ramkalawan's increasing reliance on the **United Arab Emirates** and **Qatar**, which are investing heavily in tourism on the islands, is raising questions about accountability and environmental conservation as well as their contribution to a more balanced national economy. Seychelles has a high per-capita income, reflecting some very wealthy residents, but it still has a poverty rate of around 23%.

Ramkalawan's main opponent will be **Patrick Herminie**, leader of the United Seychelles party and former speaker of the National Assembly (2007-2016). United Seychelles has a strong national network from its decades in power prior to 2020. That makes Herminie the most serious challenger to Ramkalawan among the 10 opposition contenders.

Ramkalawan's victory in 2020 – the first opposition success since the coup d'état staged by President **France-Albert René** in 1977 – was seen as an historic opportunity to complete the islands' return to fully-fledged democracy (AC Vol 62 No 4, Vol 63 No 2 & Vol 42 No 18).

Faure's United Seychelles party had already lost control of the National Assembly to Ramkalawan's LDS coalition back in 2016, when Faure's predecessor **James Michel** was head of state.

But some of Ramkalawan's staunchest supporters are questioning high-profile decisions made by the president. He recently told journalists he needed them to 'be more mature,

and stop questioning his decisions as a matter of course'. He also said he did not appreciate being told that he was 'bullying the media'.

SHUT DOWN

Critics point to Ramkalawan's closure of the Seychelles News Agency last year – a government-funded but widely respected bureau tasked with reporting Seychelles' news to the world. Founded in 2014, the SNA was regarded as a professional and non-partisan alternative to the state-owned *Seychelles Nation* newspaper.

The Seychelles Association of Media Practitioners questioned the closure, which was followed soon afterwards by the expulsion of a **Mauritian** journalist who had been editor of *Today in Seychelles* – a paper often critical of Ramkalawan. Many in his inner circle have privately noted the irony, given the president's many years in opposition were supported by the satirical newspaper *Regar*, which fearlessly opposed René's corruption and autocracy.

A prominent local commentator has published a blog highlighting that the LDS under Ramkalawan has sanctioned a new hate speech law – unique among international laws of its type for including 'political affiliation' as a protected characteristic. The Assembly also passed a constitutional amendment granting members of the National Assembly immunity from prosecution. This follows a provision that the president is immune from prosecution 'in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by the person in either an official or private capacity'.

We hear that Ramkalawan has given an unofficial green light to a controversial plan to develop one of the last pristine beaches on Mahé, the main

island. The land – earmarked for a hotel and 'luxurious private residences' – lies at Anse Police and has been acquired by an Emirates-based consortium managed by associates of one of the UAE royal families.

Public demonstrations and a petition with some 7,000 signatures forced the project's suspension under Faure's government in 2018, with a promise that the land would be designated a national park. Ramkalawan is thought to have told the developers he will not stand in its way but has asked them to delay any announcement until after the September elections.

This follows his approval of a Qatari hotel on the remote island of Assumption, close to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Aldabra – home to the world's largest population of giant tortoises, rare endemic Indian Ocean flightless birds, manatees and flamingos. Ramkalawan opposed the project while in opposition but now says it will bring investment to the archipelago and benefit the environment.

Last month, the government failed to intervene to halt plans for a large-scale aquaculture project offshore from Mahé's most visited beach, Beau Vallon Bay. The scheme involves suspending nets across a 15-square-kilometre area for oyster farming. Conservationists warn that the bay is a feeding site for whale sharks and that vessels servicing the nets will be in full view of the islands' most iconic beach – known for its sunsets and uninterrupted views of Silhouette and North islands, the latter a favourite with international celebrities since hosting the Prince and Princess of Wales on their honeymoon.

'FLASHY THINGS'

One of Ramkalawan's close inner circle told *Africa Confidential*, 'We do not see eye to eye on any of these projects. But Wavel likes flashy things – watches, the latest phone, smart cars. He's a regular visitor to Dubai, so draw what you will from that.'

Ramkalawan once lambasted predecessor James Michel's close ties to the UAE – especially the amount of land UAE Vice-President Sheikh **Khalifa bin**

Zayed al Nahyan was able to acquire with presidential approval (AC Vol 65

No 8). Yet the structure of Seychelles' public finances means that whoever is

in power has extremely limited options when it comes to raising capital. ●

ALGERIA/MOROCCO/UNITED STATES

Arms, gas and fertiliser

Published online 22 August

After recognising Israel in return for US backing on Western Sahara, Morocco is maximising its commercial gains

Morocco is vying with Egypt to become United States President Donald Trump's main ally in North Africa, after recognising Israel, with which it has long-standing security ties, and launching negotiations for arms supplies and pipeline financing. It is also putting its neighbour and key rival Algeria, which has state security agreements and gas contracts with US companies, in the shade.

To consolidate its position, Rabat has hired Scribe Strategies, close to the Republicans, as its new lobbyist. Scribe's managing director is Joseph Szlavik who has emerged as a key link to the Trump administration. Rabat's contract with Scribe is worth US\$765,000 over the first year. The firm has signed up with South Sudan, Congo-Kinshasa and Côte d'Ivoire since Trump's inauguration in January (AC Vol 66 No 11).

Szlavik's team is to 'provide government affairs representation and strategic consulting services' on 'US-Morocco bilateral relations'. Beyond this are the direct deals between Rabat and Washington. Among them are plans to ramp up defence cooperation and the volume of US military hardware being sold to Morocco.

Rabat is negotiating to acquire up to 600 FIM-92K Stinger Block I missiles from the US in an \$825 million deal, which US officials say will help modernise Morocco's armed forces and expand its army short-range air defence options. Also on Rabat's wish list is an overhaul of the Royal Moroccan Air Force to replace its 14 C-130H Hercules and two KC-130H tanker variants, which are approaching the end of their service lives.

Brazil's Embraer is battling with US firm Lockheed Martin for the contract which could be worth around \$600m. Embraer is pushing its KC-390 Millennium aircraft; Lockheed Martin wants to sell its C-130J Super Hercules.

Boosting arms sales reverses the cautious path taken by President Joe Biden's administration. It kept Trump's stance on Western Sahara but heeded warnings from Democrats in Congress that US weapons could be used against

the Sahrawi people (Dispatches 14/3/22).

Getting President Trump's first administration to recognise Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara as a quid pro quo for the kingdom officially recognising Israel in late 2020 was a diplomatic coup for King Mohammed VI (M6) (AC Vol 61 No 25). Since then, France, Britain and Spain, as well as a handful of African states including Ghana and Kenya have also backed Morocco's regional autonomy plans for Western Sahara (AC Vol 65 No 16).

But Nigeria and South Africa continue to back the African Union position on the Western Sahara and host embassies for the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The AU backs the UN Security Council resolution to organise a referendum for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, but the latest AU Assembly decision in 2018 qualified that with a call for 'renewed efforts to overcome the current impasse in the negotiation process ... to find an acceptable solution to the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara' in line with UN decisions.

Further evidence that Trump favours Morocco came when Rabat was hit with 10% tariffs on its exports to the US earlier this month, the lowest rate imposed by Trump, compared to levies of 30% and 28% on its neighbours Algeria and Tunisia respectively.

In early August, Trump told M6 that 'the United States recognises Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara and supports Morocco's serious, credible and realistic autonomy proposal as the only basis for a just and lasting solution to the dispute.'

Morocco also wants to tap into the Trump administration's promises of US investment in African oil and gas (AC Vol 66 No 15). At the US-Africa Energy Forum held in Houston, Texas on 6-7 August, Moroccan officials pitched the ambitious Gazoduc Pipeline project, a \$25 billion project to connect Nigeria's gas supply to Moroccan and European markets.

The pipeline is expected to span approximately 6,000 kilometres along the West African littoral and is expected

to carry between 15 and 30 billion cubic meters of gas a year.

Such projects would have been a no-go under Biden, whose government prioritised renewables. That agenda has been reversed under Trump. The US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) is now evaluating several oil and gas investments across Africa.

While the US sells more weapons and provides the pipeline cash, Morocco wants to increase its export of phosphate-based fertilisers to the US. The state-owned OCP Group, formerly known as the *Office Chérifien des Phosphates*, which has always been closely linked to the royal family, was hit with a 14% tariff on its fertilisers by the Biden administration in May 2024. That was partly in response to concerns about the performance of US fertiliser firms.

As Trump's new tariffs could drive up prices globally, Morocco is pitching greater phosphate exports to push down food costs in the US.

The prospect of closer ties between Morocco and the US is more bad news for Algeria, the main supporter of the Sahrawi independence movement, the Polisario Front, and now increasingly marginalised on the issue.

Algiers is also marketing its hydrocarbon reserves, including shale. It is close to concluding agreements with US majors Exxon Mobil Corp and Chevron Corp to tap its gas reserves after President Abdelmadjid Tebboune received delegations from the companies in June.

Tebboune hired his own Republican-focused lobbying firm prior to Trump's election last September, bringing in BGR Group, a firm which has traditionally close ties to the GOP establishment (Dispatches 24/9/24).

Algeria's oil and gas will be an attractive proposition for US firms but the Tebboune government will battle to ward off a campaign by Republicans in Congress to designate Polisario as a terrorist organisation.

'The Polisario is a Marxist militia backed by Iran, Hezbollah and Russia providing Iran a strategic outpost in Africa and destabilising the Kingdom of Morocco, a U.S. ally for 248 years,' Republican Representative Joe Wilson wrote on X. The roots of US-Moroccan ties go back to 1777 with a formal treaty signed in 1786. Wilson is one of the sponsors of a bill tabled in Congress in June, and a similar bill is likely to be tabled in the Senate in the coming weeks. ●

ICJ ruling opens floodgates for billions in pollution payouts

Published online 22 August

The UN court's opinion defining greenhouse gas emissions as 'internationally wrongful acts' argues for climate finance to become a legal obligation for the main polluting countries

The ruling by the UN's top court that countries may be held legally accountable for their greenhouse gas emissions and the environmental damage they cause could help reshape the arguments on global climate finance. The advisory opinion by the UN's International Court of Justice on 23 July put the responsibility for environmental damage onto states, reinforcing the shift to seeing climate finance as a legal obligation, instead of voluntary assistance. Although it applies solely to governments, it will influence jurisprudence around the responsibility of individuals and companies for climate costs. It will also mean that negotiations over climate finance will become still more complex and contested internationally.

Under present conditions there is little prospect of African governments raising the over US\$150-350 billion, as estimated by the African Development Bank (AfDB), required to fund essential adaptation measures to protect countries such as early warning systems, climate-resilient agriculture and infrastructure (AC Vol 65 No 24).

The ICJ's 15 judges unanimously concluded that fossil fuel use and production 'may constitute an internationally wrongful act attributable to that state'. The advisory opinion, non-binding on states, is nonetheless a 'crucial tool for courts, lawyers and advocates to pressure governments to mitigate and adapt,' **Tiffanie Chan**, a Policy Analyst at the Grantham Research Institute, told *Africa Confidential*.

'Although it's been less than a month since the advisory opinion, we have already started to see litigants, for example in South Africa, cite the Court in climate cases.' She was referring to an appeal on 29 July by two **South African** environmental groups against the decision by Director-General of the Department of Mineral and Petroleum **Jacob Mbele** to authorise exploration by Shell offshore of Western Cape. The appeal explains the dangers of spills from drilling in deep waters.

The environmental groups cite the ICJ opinion, arguing that it is 'unacceptable' for the South African government assessment to conclude that it may not be able to evaluate the impact of climate change due to the

complexity of the circumstances.

The ICJ ruling was responding to a request in a UN General Assembly resolution in March 2023. A similar ruling by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in May 2024 concluded that states must 'take all necessary measures to reduce, prevent and control' emissions. The African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights is considering its opinion on states' liability for climate change-related damage. African countries are among those hit hardest by climate change, yet the continent is responsible for, at most, 4% of harmful emissions.

COP BULLETS

The ICJ ruling is useful ammunition for climate activists and government officials ahead of the next round of negotiations at the UN COP30 Climate summit in Belém, **Brazil** on 10-21 November (AC Vol 66 No 14).

There were hopes that **Brazil's** President **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva** would push for a 'frequent fliers' aviation tax or a forest fund but these are evaporating as the summit approaches. Just holding the event is proving troublesome enough. The host is struggling to provide affordable accommodation for 50,000 expected delegates, leading to calls for a switch to another city. Some states are arguing for a rethink of the COP process: holding the substantive annual meetings in **Bonn, Germany**, where the preparatory meetings were held. That would reduce the meetings to bare-bones diplomatic negotiations divorced from the activist and corporate climate jamborees that COP summits have become.

There is little other good news for developing economies seeking more funds to counter the impact of extreme weather (AC Vol 65 No 9). The much-vaunted Glasgow private finance mechanism launched by **Mark Carney**, now the **Canadian** Prime Minister, at the **British**-hosted COP26 has not produced the trillions of dollars in loans that were promised.

The European Union continues to insist that poorer countries commit to reduce future emissions in return for climate finance. This is strongly opposed by **Bolivia**, head of the Like-Minded Developing Countries group

that includes African states such as **Algeria, Egypt and Zimbabwe** as well as **China, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam**.

Brussels is also not backing down on its contested Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and deforestation law, which **India** is challenging as anti-competitive at the World Trade Organization with the backing of Beijing and Rio de Janeiro (AC Vol 66 No 17). Delhi is also planning retaliatory taxes in response to the EU and Britain's carbon levies.

Other funds are flowing to the continent, but they have their own shortcomings. Brussels is being criticised by its own scientific advisors, international climate campaigners the African Climate Foundation, for including EU investments in African carbon sinks as part of Europe's emissions cuts. They point to questions about the credibility of carbon credit schemes, some of which have resulted in the forcible removal of people from their land as well as relieving European countries of the responsibility to cut carbon emissions within their own boundaries.

Such criticisms extend to carbon trading schemes under China's Belt and Road Initiative, the India-Africa partnership and Saudi Arabian and **Emirati** investments which are more focused on raising finance for infrastructure and real estate development. Climate economists argue that the opaque financing structures in many carbon trading schemes conceal the high cost of investment capital on offer.

LEGAL DIRECTION

As industrial economies sharply cut Official Development Assistance (ODA), few western officials are prepared to make concessions on climate finance – either on adaptation or mitigation costs. And few expect serious new contributions to back the principle of 'loss and damage', finally agreed at last year's COP summit in Baku.

The ICJ ruling suggests that the venue for arguments on climate finance will shift to the courts – both for disputes between those countries claiming their environment has been damaged by the actions of another state as well as a tsunami of cases against companies accused of environmental damage. Such claims, known as contingent liabilities,

have emerged as part of the sale of oil and gas assets across Africa and beyond.

Campaigners to criminalise large-scale environmental damage as 'ecocide' are winning support for its inclusion under international law alongside genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression.

More countries and organisations are backing the move such as: **Azerbaijan, Argentina, Congo-Kinshasa, European Union member states, Peru, Turkey and Vanuatu.**

Africa environment ministers have agreed to include ecocide as a priority on the UN-Africa summit agenda in

July and campaigners are due to raise it at the Africa Climate Summit on 8-10 September in Addis Ababa. The ICJ ruling that states are legally obligated to achieve 'deep, sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions' offers still more ballast to the arguments of the ecocide campaign. ●

TUNISIA/ITALY

Meloni's Mattei plan: blocking migrants as power flows north

Published online 20 August

This €400 million strategic partnership props up Kaïs Saïed and offers Europe cheap and reliable energy

Italy's Prime Minister **Giorgia Meloni** returned once more to Tunisia at the end of July to ink the Mattei Plan with President **Kaïs Saïed**. This long-awaited strategic partnership shows there is some common ground on migration, but the latest deal shows Rome benefits disproportionately as in the previous arrangements (AC Vol 64 No 15).

Tunis is set to receive €50 million (US\$58.3m) for energy efficiency schemes and a €55m credit line to support small and medium enterprises, in addition to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the education ministries. The funding is the latest effort by Meloni after the premier claimed progress in the migration struggle, seizing upon figures that showed the number of arrivals from Tunisia and Libya fell by 59% in 2024 as proof of the impact of a 2023 deal with Tunisia.

Formally, the Mattei Plan – named after **Enrico Mattei**, the founder of energy company Eni – consists of projects in **Algeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique** and Tunisia, focusing on education and training, agriculture, health, energy and water. On the ground it means using bilateral support to encourage African governments to free up northward energy flows while constraining those of migrants (AC Vol 66 No 2).

Meloni says investments will address the root causes of migration. But economic support to Tunisia will only have a limited effect on the numbers. Some Tunisians do travel to Italy but most of those crossing the Mediterranean to Italy come from elsewhere in the continent and transit through the North African nation.

The plan focuses on Tunisia's economy. But it intends to make a political statement to Italian voters as well. Meloni, the leader of the *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy) party, was accompanied by Minister for the Interior

Matteo Piantedosi. In the past two years, he has frequently visited Tunis, drip feeding cash, trying to cut the numbers reaching Italian shores (AC Vol 65 No 10). This year, for example, Italy spent €20m on the so-called 'voluntary returns' of migrants by Algeria, Libya and Tunisia.

'VOLUNTARY'

The International Organization for Migration stated that between January and June it facilitated the return of 5,336 migrants from Tunisia, more than double 2023's total. Interior Minister **Khaled Nouri** – who has said Tunisia will not be a transit point or host nation to migrants – has tried to take credit for this. Yet when IOM's Director General **Amy Pope** visited in May, Saïed's government sought cash to fund the return flights.

According to Tunisian authorities, last year there were over 7,000 voluntary repatriations, and a further 3,400 so far in 2025. Over the past two years the Tunisian state has been cracking down on NGOs, especially foreign ones, constraining their activities and access to finance.

It is questionable whether these returns are 'voluntary'. The National Guard has cleared settlements in olive groves near Al Amra and Jebenyena, to the north of Sfax. The area used to be a transit zone for migrants waiting to get a boat to Italy and it was turning into a settlement. That has changed due to financing via a 2023 European Union-Tunisia MoU that promised €900m in support, including €105m for migration. Far fewer would-be travellers across the Mediterranean are coming to the camps around Al Amra.

With Italy delivering a further €4.8m for six new search and rescue boats, interception at sea has also become more effective. But questions are being raised about its priorities. We hear from a source close to the Italian embassy

that Meloni's delegation has sprayed euros around on her numerous visits to Tunisia. NGO SOS Humanity notes that this largesse has not resulted in any life jackets, nor has Tunisia's government invested in basic life-saving items.

Instead of the purported 'rescues', migrants have told *Africa Confidential* that the Tunisian National Guard has been deliberately ramming their boats, causing capsizes and drownings, and seizing engines so vessels are left to drift. Many said that this was just the beginning of their woes, recounting abuses from torture and gang rapes as well as being sold to Libyan militia.

London has been paying attention to Meloni's plan. Foreign Secretary **David Lammy** visited Tunisia in February bearing gifts, notably drones and night vision equipment, which have since been used to monitor migrant camps in Al Amra. Britain's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office told *Africa Confidential* that all allegations of wrongdoing would be investigated. But there is no news of such probes yet.

Earlier this year, a report by outgoing EU Ombudsman **Emily O'Reilly** on abuses in Tunisia supposedly prompted an overhaul of Brussels's support. The European Commission says it is preparing a multi-annual bilateral cooperation programme adapted to current Tunisian realities. That has not materialised alongside the disbursement of €105m agreed this year for borders and migration control. In February, the European Investment Bank accelerated disbursements of loans worth €415m for projects ranging from food security to a new highway from Kasserine on the western border with Algeria to Sfax on the southeastern coast.

The European fixation on migration has been a blessing for Tunisia's authoritarian rulers, but its long-term benefits are by no means clear. After facing struggles in 2022, Saïed adopted the conspiracy theory peddled by the

Tunisian Nationalist Party that the Arab population is being replaced. His infamous 'hordes of sub-Saharan migrants' speech helped consolidate his power. Having arrested his political opponents, black newcomers became public enemy number one – and migration became Saïed's trump card. When funds were slow to arrive

from Brussels, he allowed a flotilla of 75 boats to land in Lampedusa – the EU soon coughed up. Some 7,000 migrants landed on the island which accommodation facilities for just over 400 people in mid-2023.

Rather than making an enemy of Saïed, Meloni saw opportunity. As a result, as well as the migration crackdown, work

is proceeding on renewable energy and electricity transmission schemes worth up to €400m, as well on Eni's Algeria-Tunisia gas pipeline. While tens of millions of euros to prop up the regime in Tunis may be part of the package, it is evident that the bilateral arrangement remains heavily in favour of the European power. ●

EU/AU/COMMODITIES

Farmers facing trade chaos with EU deforestation crackdown

Published online 15 August

Cocoa and coffee smallholders to be hit hardest as EU and 'Big Chocolate' resolve to impose new traceability rules next year

Africa's cocoa and coffee farmers are stepping up pressure on the European Commission to postpone its anti-deforestation law due to come into force next year. They are calling for another year's delay. It is the latest clash between the European Union's pro-environmental policies – protecting rain forests and carbon sinks and discouraging new fossil fuel exploitation – against the urgent imperatives of developing economies.

As western economies cut climate finance ahead of the UN COP30 summit in **Brazil**, African governments are asking why their farmers have to shoulder this extra expense for a global public good. It could also complicate negotiations on other issues at the African Union-European Union summit due in Luanda on 24-25 November.

Calls for a delay in the law follows a report by the London-based Commonwealth Secretariat that African farmers stand to lose about US\$11 billion in export revenues if they fail to comply with the new law. Of **Nigeria's** average cocoa exports of \$543 million a year, over 55% went to EU customers between 2019-2023. **Ethiopia's** 2.2m coffee farming families sell a substantial percentage to the EU market.

Last November, producers exhaled when EU lawmakers agreed a year's extension before implementation (AC Vol 65 No 24). But the core of the regulation is unchanged.

Some conservative MPs in the European Parliament (MEPs) tried to introduce a 'no risk' designation which would exempt most African exporters but the European Commission rejected it.

Passed by the European Parliament in April 2023, MEPs hailed the law as pushing towards sustainable economies and cutting carbon emissions. The EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)

requires sellers of beef, coffee, chocolate, palm oil and wood to show their goods can be traced to land that has not been deforested since 31 December 2020 (Dispatches, 7/3/24, Missing the trees for the wood).

African governments say this undercuts the smallholders who produce most of the world's coffee and cocoa. Failure to comply would result in fines and bans from exporting to Europe. As the stand-off continues, many African exporters are looking to other markets. The EU is easily the biggest market for African cocoa but the picture is more mixed for coffee.

Cameroon and **Côte d'Ivoire** rely heavily on **Algeria** and Europe. **Ethiopia's** exports lean toward Asia, led by **Saudi Arabia**, **Japan** and **China**, while **Switzerland** and the **United States** are the top buyers for **Rwanda's** coffee. **Uganda** remains tied to Europe, which takes more than 65% of its green coffee, while at least 55% of **Kenyan** coffee exports go to the EU.

LOOKING EAST

Coffee shipments to China are now duty- and tariff-free after Beijing scrapped tariffs on 98% of African goods in May. More Chinese buyers have been bidding in East Africa's coffee auctions recently. China's coffee drinkers are growing but it still imports only 12% of Europe's total.

In Côte d'Ivoire, around 900,000 of its million cocoa farmers have received digital ID cards that may help with EUDR compliance. The system is designed for farmers to get paid directly by exporters after cocoa beans are delivered to ports; it should bypass middlemen and help with tracking. In Cameroon, officials say 24,800 cocoa farmers have been registered as part of a national traceability system covering more than 28,000 cocoa plots that have

been geolocated.

The European Commission did not assess EUDR's impact on African businesses. Subsequently, it helped farmers with compliance in Côte d'Ivoire, **Ghana**, **Ethiopia**, and **Uganda**. But most of the help was given over the past year (AC Vol 65 No 9).

The compliance burden for each country is based on a benchmarking system categorising them as high, standard, or low risk. A list of 194 country designations was published by the Commission in May, with 50 listed as standard risk and 140 as low risk. Only **Belarus**, **North Korea**, **Myanmar** and **Russia** – countries subject to EU sanctions – were listed as high risk.

Ghana, **Kenya** and **South Africa** are among the biggest African exporters to receive the 'low risk' designation. Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Ethiopia are some of the continent's main cocoa and coffee producers labelled 'standard risk'.

The law's enforcement could be delayed again or its provisions amended. Groups of Euro MPs in **Germany** and **Italy** are pushing the Commission to dilute its Green Deal laws. In the European Parliament in May, conservative and liberal MEPs called for an 'insignificant risk' category to be introduced. This would allow producers in countries with minimal deforestation, or net forest gain, to avoid some checks, such as submitting plot coordinates.

INDUSTRY CONCERNS

Industry is divided. European chocolate makers including Ferrero, Nestlé and Tony's Chocolonely told the Commission in June that fresh delays 'would severely undermine one of the EU's flagship policies for tackling global deforestation and nature degradation'.

Mondelēz, one of the strongest corporate supporters of the legislation,

has warned that the chocolate industry was already struggling with 'record prices and supply shocks'. For now,

the Commission insists it has no plans to make changes. It refers critics to a report last year estimating that another

year's delay would result in around 230,000 hectares of deforestation globally. ●

NIGER/SAHEL

Tiani tightens grip as regional rumblings grow louder

Published online 12 August

After failing to repel determined jihadist attacks, the Sahel juntas crack down on internal dissent

The latest round of arrests in Mali, amid reports of a planned putsch on 10 August, looks unlikely to change the centralisation of power in Bamako or in the neighbouring states – under Captain **Ibrahim Traoré** in Burkina Faso and General **Abdourahmane Tiani** in Niger. All three juntas are threatened by intensifying jihadist attacks. The junta's legitimacy, rooted in their claimed ability to repulse the attacks, is wearing thin.

In Niger, this means the weakening of the triumvirate of senior officers that took power on 26 July 2023 coup which convinced soldiers and sceptical citizens to back it. It's now clear that power lies with Tiani, rather than General **Salifou Mody**, deputy head of the *Conseil national pour la sauvegarde de la patrie* (CNSP) junta, or chief of staff General **Moussa Salaou Barmou**.

Tiani marked the anniversary of the coup last month with a thundering peroration denouncing the threat from 'imperialist' and 'neo-colonialist' forces. He neither wants to share power in the transition nor restore elected institutions. **Mohamed Bazoum**, the ousted elected president, remains in detention.

Confirmed as head of state for a further five years in the latest proclamation from Niamey, Tiani will in no way be constrained by the consultative assembly he installed in June. The body has the right only to propose policies – which it submits for consideration.

Tiani tries to emulate **Seyni**

Kountché, the austere putschist who ruled Niger from 1974 to 1987. Kountché, like Tiani, came from Toukounous, near Filingué. Tiani is Hausa but Kountché was from an aristocratic Djerma family. After joining the army in 1984, Tiani saw Kountché's defiance of **Libya's** leader Colonel **Moammar Gaddafi**, who accused Niger of maltreating the Tuareg.

Kountché also kept Paris on side. The regional zeitgeist has changed sharply since then and Tiani has led the charge against the former colonial power, warmly welcoming the anti-French polemicist **Kémi Séba**.

But some Nigériens doubt Tiani's radical posture, 'He has adopted it because it is useful. There is no logic or ideology shaping Tiani's decisions,' an activist in Niamey told us.

After the coup, the anti-French rhetoric played well in Niamey; it was always an opposition town and had voted against Bazoum. Tiani's rhetoric is no longer enough.

The citizenry's patience is being eroded by costlier imports – largely due to the regime's refusal to reopen the border with **Benin** – and the pressure on public services. State finances have been badly hit by foreign aid cuts. Teachers have staged three strikes recently, protesting against salary arrears and lack of job security.

Military morale has been ground down by shortages of supplies and equipment, and delays in salaries. Lethal insurgent attacks in April and June, near the Mali border, exposed these

vulnerabilities, fuelling recriminations. Soldiers in at least four garrisons, in Termit, Tahoua, Filingué and Téra, have mutinied (AC Vol 66 No 14).

In search of some palliatives, Tiani has quietly relaunched some of the policies developed by Bazoum. These include discreet dialogue with armed groups and more targeted investment in schools. This doesn't cut across his posture of projecting strength abroad and stamping on local dissent.

TIANI DEFIANT

His remains defiant towards both France and those civilian governments in the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), which he dismisses as teleguided by Paris. Hopes of a thaw with Benin have faded. Tiani has kept the Gaya/Malanville border crossing closed drives up the cost of imports (AC Vol 65 Nos 5 & 13, & Vol 66 No 3). He has also turned a cold shoulder to **Nigeria**, despite overtures from Abuja's foreign minister, **Yusuf Maitama Tuggar** (AC Vol 66 No 5). Tuggar has been trying to rebuild ties after President **Bola Tinubu's** failed ultimatum as Ecowas leader to Tiani two years ago (AC Vol 64 No 17).

Tiani has nationalised the *Société des mines de l'Air* (Somaïr) – the Niger subsidiary of French nuclear group Orano – as he turns towards **Russia**. Moscow's energy minister **Sergei Tsivilev** visited Niamey for talks in June.

The junta is imposing tight control even over purely humanitarian

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organisations. The International Committee of the Red Cross has been expelled and stop operations, following accusations of 'collusion' with armed groups – claims it strongly denies (AC Vol 66 No 6).

The clampdown on local activists is getting more severe. The junta used the 2019 cybercrime law, amended in June

2024 to include prison sentences, to suppress any 'publication of information conducive to troubling public order' – even if the information is true.

Mayors and regional governors elected under the pre-coup constitutional system have been removed. The legal system – including the highest appeal court, the *Cour de cassation* – has been

subjugated to the junta-created *Cour d'État*. This closes most avenues for state accountability, let alone activism. The attempted separation of powers under civilian governments is over. As an ultimate sanction for dissenters, the regime has strengthened provisions to deprive individuals of their Nigérien nationality. ●

DISPATCHES

LIBYA

Haftar's eastern allies set to approve Turkey oil pact

25 August

Ankara's support for rival Tripoli-based administration had held up legislature's backing

Having previously rejected it due to Ankara's support for the rival government based in Tripoli, the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) aligned with General Khalifa Haftar is set to approve a deal for Turkey to explore for oil and gas off Libya.

The agreement was struck between Turkey and then Prime Minister of Libya's Government of National Accord Faiez el Serraj in November 2019. It delineates maritime zones between the two countries even though they are not adjacent (AC Vol 61 No 3).

HoR speaker **Aguila Saleh** had described the boundary deal as 'null and void' because it was not approved by the assembly, calling it a violation of Libyan sovereignty. The legislature's stance softened in recent months as the Turkish government rebuilt ties with Haftar's allies who control eastern Libya. Libyan oil production recovered this year after the eastern government ordered the suspension of production in 2024 (Dispatches 3/9/24).

In June, Libya's National Oil Corporation signed a memorandum of understanding with Turkey's state oil company for exploration in four offshore blocks between Libya and Crete, Greece's largest island. As a result, Turkish survey and drilling vessels could begin work in a corridor between Turkey and Crete, bolstering Ankara's claims in the eastern Mediterranean.

That will cause a major headache for Greece, which challenges the legality of the MoU, calling it a violation of its national waters. Egypt also opposes the Libya-Turkey deal. Athens wants to exploit the oil and gas reserves itself, and

in May tendered for exploration blocks south of Crete that overlap waters Libya claims.

Greece has the support of the European Union, which contends that the Libya-Turkey MoU infringes third-state rights and conflicts with the UN Law of the Sea, though Turkey is not a signatory of that convention.

BOTSWANA

Qatari cash could help Boko's De Beers bid

25 August

Investments worth up to \$12 billion should help government plug deficit

President **Duma Boko** is hoping that pledged Qatari investments worth up to US\$12 billion will help plug a hefty deficit left by his predecessor and boost his bid to buy a controlling stake in diamond giant De Beers. But no timeframe for the disbursement has been made public yet.

The deal signed on 21 August between Al Mansour Holdings and the state-owned Botswana Development Corporation will focus on sectors including infrastructure, energy, mining, diamond refinement, agriculture, tourism, cybersecurity and defence. It will 'accelerate our national development goals,' Boko said.

Al Mansour is owned by Qatari royal **Sheikh Mansour bin Jabor bin Jassim al Thani**.

Boko inherited an economy that slumped 3% in 2024 on the back of a downturn in the diamond market. He made pre-election promises to increase wages and pensions that are forecast to result in a budget deficit of 22bn pula (\$1.6bn), equivalent to 7.6% of GDP (AC Vol 66 No 6 & Vol 65 No 23).

'This historic move will be enough to address immediate challenges facing the country,' said Boko.

The funding could also be vital to the Boko government's plan to purchase a portion of the 85% stake in De Beers that Anglo American is selling. The

UGANDA

Museveni agrees to take US deportees to win Trump's favour

25 August

Uganda's move to accede to Washington's demands follows those by South Sudan and Congo-Kinshasa

Uganda's agreement to accept deported migrants from the United States as long as they don't have criminal records and are not unaccompanied minors is the latest success in President **Donald Trump's** efforts to persuade African states to accept third-country deportees.

Migration control, including deporting individuals whose asylum or immigration claims have been rejected, has been one of the Trump administration's priorities in its African policy (AC Vol 66 No 15). **South Sudan** and **Congo-Kinshasa** are among the governments who have already agreed to take third-country deportees, in Juba's case after the US threatened to close its embassy in the South Sudanese capital (AC Vol 66 No 11).

The Trump administration is following the European Union's 'cash for migrant control' approach, although it is unclear what incentives Washington is offering to African states aside from not imposing visa sanctions and tariffs. Civil society groups have warned that the deportation schemes breach international law.

On 20 August, Uganda's junior foreign affairs minister **Henry Okello Oryem** said that officials were in discussions about 'visas, tariffs,

sanctions, and related issues’.

Currying favour with Trump may be a smart move for President Yoweri Museveni ahead of elections next January that could turn violent with the long-serving ruler’s legitimacy likely to be challenged.

KENYA

Nairobi spends US\$2 million on Trump-linked lobbyists

18 August

Kenyan delegation expected to visit Washington soon to discuss trade deal

Kenya has signalled its intentions to kickstart talks with United States President Donald Trump’s administration on a trade deal by signing a US\$2.1 million contract with Washington DC-based lobbyists Continental Strategy.

Talks on a Kenya-US trade deal were launched during Trump’s first term and evolved into plans for a Strategic Trade and Investment Partnership under his successor President Joe Biden. That culminated in a defence cooperation agreement last year which saw Washington designate Kenya as a major non-NATO ally.

Though Kenya’s exports to the US now face a 10% tariff, the lowest level imposed by Trump on 8 August, his ‘liberation day’ tariffs will still hurt its economy, particularly the apparel sector which was the main contributor to Nairobi’s \$737m of sales to the US last year (AC Vol 66 No 16). Several Trump administration officials have hinted that the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which offered quota- and duty-free trade to more than 30 countries, including Kenya, will be kept on in some form after its expiry in September, but there are no guarantees.

Meanwhile, the close links between President William Ruto and China have also been criticised by some in Washington (AC Vol 66 No 9). Earlier this month, Republican Senator Jim Risch tabled amendments to the National Defence Authorization Act that would require a three-month review of Kenya’s major non-NATO ally status (AC Vol 65 No 12).

Continental Strategy is not one of the establishment K-street lobbying outfits but several of its senior staff have close links to President Trump. The firm’s partners named in the Kenya

contract filing under the Foreign Agents Registration Act include Alex Garcia, the Deputy Political Director for the Trump campaign. Its president Carlos Trujillo was an electoral delegate for Trump in 2016 and 2024 and a senior member of his campaign’s finance team.

Though the filing refers only to generic ‘government relations’, trade is likely to be the main priority, with Kenyan officials planning an imminent trip to Washington.

AFRICAN UNION

Mapping Africa’s future

18 August

The African Union is pushing for wholesale rejection of the misleading Mercator map in favour of a new Equal Earth projection

The African Union (AU) is urging the international community to ditch the 16th century Mercator map by endorsing the Equal Earth Wall Map which bills itself as ‘showing countries and continents at their true sizes relative to each other’.

Drawn up by the Flemish geographer Gerardus Mercator in 1569, the map has been the world standard despite significantly underestimating the size of Africa and Australia. The map depicts Greenland as being of roughly equivalent size to Africa even though the latter is 14 times larger. Madagascar is also too small.

The Mercator map was drawn up primarily for marine navigation but is still widely used on the Internet and by schools for teaching purposes, including across many African countries. The Equal Earth Wall Map was launched in 2018 and a series of advocacy groups want it to be the standard reference for schools.

‘It might seem to be just a map, but in reality, it is not,’ AU Commission Deputy Chairperson Selma Malika Haddadi told Reuters. She added that the Mercator map fostered a false impression that Africa was ‘marginal’, despite being the world’s second-largest continent by area.

The campaign, which Haddadi says is part of ‘reclaiming Africa’s rightful place on the global stage’, has also been backed by Dorbrene O’Marde, Vice-Chair of the Caribbean Community Reparations Commission. O’Marde described the Equal Earth project as a rejection of the Mercator map’s ‘ideology of power and dominance’.

The AU says that it will promote use of the Equal Earth map among

multilateral organisations such as the United Nations and World Bank, though the latter has stated that it is already phasing out use of the Mercator map.

CONGO-KINSHASA

Tshisekedi seeks to broaden his base

18 August

Weakened president brings veterans and youthful rival into government

President Félix Tshisekedi has gone for a broad coalition in a major reshuffle that brings in opposition politicians, senior former ministers and parastatal bosses.

The return of former premier Adolphe Muzito as Vice Prime Minister and Budget Minister brings one of the political ‘godfathers’ of Tshisekedi’s administration back into government (AC Vol 64 No 20). Floribert Anzuluni, meanwhile, a youth activist who ran against Tshisekedi in the 2023 elections on an anti-corruption ticket but polled fewer than 11,000 votes, has been named Minister for Regional Integration.

Eyebrows will be raised at Louis Watam’s appointment as Minister of Mines. A mining industry veteran, Watam was one of the directors of Primera Group, a United Arab Emirates-based company that was awarded ‘exclusive rights’ over Congo-K’s entire artisanal gold, tin, tungsten and coltan production until 2048 by Tshisekedi in December 2022 (AC Vol 64 No 13). The concession was criticised by Congolese civil society actors for offering extremely generous terms to Primera and shutting out a local state-owned refinery, Kamoa Copper.

The reshuffle had been long expected as part of a dialogue process promised by Tshisekedi. His authority remains seriously weakened by the incursions into North and South Kivu by the M23 militia group and the Rwandan army earlier this year, and he will need support in peace talks with Kigali brokered by the United States and Qatar. ●

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POINTERS

South Sudan

SALVA'S FAMILY VALUES

■ President **Salva Kiir Mayardit** has strengthened his control over his government's economic ministries by appointing his eldest daughter, **Adut Salva Kiir**, as a senior economic advisor and dismissing two key economic ministers. Adut was appointed by presidential decree on 20 August as Presidential Envoy on Special Programmes – a role designed to fast-track sensitive initiatives requiring direct oversight from the presidency and which dilutes the authority of the investment and finance ministries.

The post was previously held by **Benjamin Bol Mel** – one of Salva's closest confidants and, until recently, widely seen as his most likely heir. Bol Mel became vice-president for economic policy earlier this year, as well as First Deputy Chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, Salva's party (AC Vol 66 Nos 7 & 8).

A businessman who has also managed Salva's personal financial affairs, Bol Mel, maintains particularly close ties to the **United Arab Emirates**. He was in Abu Dhabi in mid-August as part of the government's latest effort to attract investment and economic cooperation to ease the severe cash shortages it faces.

In July, Salva Kiir undertook a 10-day state visit to the UAE. Adut – who had no prior government experience – joins her brothers **Thiik Kiir** and **Mayar**, both of whom were appointed to ambassador-level roles in the Foreign Ministry in May.

In a reshuffle the same week, Salva dismissed finance minister **Mariar Dongrin Ater**, who had held the post since July 2024, replacing him with **Athian Ding Athian** – previously finance minister between 2020 and 2021. Salva has been notably trigger-happy with his economic portfolios, cycling through seven finance ministers since 2020. Investment minister **Dhieu Mathok Diing** was also dismissed, having failed to secure new foreign funding, while **Joseph Mum Majak** was sacked as trade minister in March.

Mauritania

AGENTS OF REPRESSION

■ The European Union and **Spain** have 'incentivized repression' of migration by funding and supporting Mauritanian forces to bolster border and migration controls without ensuring adequate human rights safeguards, Human Rights

TANZANIA'S CLIMATE CZAR RICHARD MUYUNGI

African unity – alongside climate solutions and access to adaptation finance – will top the agenda at the second Africa Climate Summit in Addis Ababa, which runs from 8 September. The first iteration, held in Nairobi in September 2023, drew over 20,000 delegates but only 15 of the continent's leaders. It was a relative diplomatic success for the host, **Kenya's** President **William Ruto** (AC Vol 64 No 18 & Dispatches 30/8/23).

This time, Tanzania's **Richard Muyungi** – chair of the African Group of Negotiators at the United Nations since March – is emerging as the continent's key figure on climate and environment. He wants African states to stay on message ahead of the COP30 summit in the **Brazilian** port city of Belém in November.

Formerly the top environmental official at the Tanzania Electric Supply Company, Muyungi was appointed as President **Samia Suluhu Hassan's** advisor on climate change and environment in April 2023. He had held the same role under President **Jakaya Kikwete** between 2005 and 2015.

Ahead of COP30, Muyungi and the African Union (AU) are promoting African-led solutions – including green industrialisation, energy access, food systems and resilient infrastructure. He also wants to link the debate on climate finance to long-standing African demands for reform of the global financial architecture. Rising interest rates have deepened debt burdens across the continent, compounding fiscal pressures and limiting climate investment.

Many priorities are not new. The AU says only 18% of the continent's annual mitigation needs are funded, just 20% of adaptation needs are covered, and only 18% of total climate finance comes from private sources – far below global averages. 'Africa is not asking for more pledges but for delivery,' says Muyungi.

A coordinated African response, he argues, reduces the risk of contradictory or competing bargaining positions – and discourages external powers from offering incentives to individual states that could undermine unity and cohesion. He points to African unity – replicated in other UN forums such as the new convention on tax cooperation – as a key factor in elevating adaptation within global climate negotiations, leading to the establishment of the Global Goal on Adaptation.

Muyungi's unity message was sharpened at June's mid-year UN climate summit in Bonn, where he reminded delegates that Africa's strength in climate talks lies not in its economic weight or emissions profile – the continent accounts for just 4% of global emissions – but in its unity. In Bonn, he criticised **Germany** for excluding African voices (AC Vol 66 No 14).

Many African diplomats fear that continued failure on climate finance – including the unmet US\$1.3 trillion annual commitment to developing economies by 2035 – could push vulnerable states into side deals with **China, Russia, Saudi Arabia** or the **United States**. These could involve carbon trading of wetlands and forests, or access to critical minerals in **Congo-Kinshasa, Zambia** and **Zimbabwe** needed for batteries, electric vehicles and solar cells. ●

Watch (HRW) says in a new report.

Mauritanian security forces committed serious human rights violations – including torture and violent arrests – between 2020 and early 2025, targeting hundreds of migrants and asylum seekers from West and Central Africa, often as they attempted to leave or transit the country, HRW said in its report published on 27 August. The findings are based on testimony from 223 people – including more than 100 migrants and asylum seekers – gathered during visits to Mauritania, **Mali, Senegal** and EU institutions in Brussels.

In some cases, Spanish forces were present during abusive arrests and detentions carried out by Mauritanian authorities, HRW said. In response to questions from HRW, the Mauritanian government said it 'reject[s] allegations of torture, racial discrimination, or

systematic violations of migrants' rights'.

The European Commission, in its reply, said its partnership with Mauritania was 'solidly anchored' in respect for human rights. The Atlantic Route – from northwest Africa to Spain's Canary Islands – has become a new hotspot for migration, with thousands departing from Mauritania. Mauritania hosts around 176,000 registered asylum seekers and refugees – mostly from Mali.

The EU's preoccupation with curbing irregular migration has led it to broker a series of 'cash for migration control' deals with North and West African countries, including one with Nouakchott in 2024 offering €210 million in funding (AC Vol 65 No 4). Spain has also increased its bilateral support for Mauritania and maintained its deployment of police and civil guards.