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BLUE LINES

African leaders have put on an impressive display of unity at the UN General Assembly this week. On climate change and the campaign for permanent African seats on the Security Council, they have been on message. The UNSC's five permanent members 'make decisions on behalf of more than 85% of the world's population living in countries of the Global South,' said South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa on 23 September, adding 'they continue to use their veto powers to paralyse collective action and prevent timely responses to crises, even in the face of clear violations of international law.'

That won plaudits from most of the 193 UN member states, but the focus of the permanent five members on the UNSC – Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States – has shifted from an acceptance of reform to defending the status quo.

Ramaphosa, his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Canada's prime minister Mark Carney struggled to keep a focus on the UN's key roles – on security and peacekeeping as well as development finance – as the UN faces its most serious financial crisis since its foundation. Yet the issues are tightly connected as UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Izumi Nakamitsu argued: global arms spending hit a record US$2.7 trillion in 2024 while the funding gap for the Sustainable Development Goals is now running at $4trn a year and widening.

ETHIOPIA/ERITREA

Tigray's widening schisms are threatening regional security

The leaders in Addis Ababa and Asmara are picking sides in Tigray and could break apart the 2022 peace deal

Persistent fears of renewed large-scale war in northern Ethiopia stem from the failings of the Pretoria peace agreement – radical in ambition, limited in scope. In 2022, Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed** shocked his Eritrean and Amhara allies by striking a deal with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) (Dispatches 24/10/22, AC Vol 63 Nos 22 & 25). But it was more an elite pact than a broad-based settlement. The accord is now unravelling: Amhara remains gripped by an anti-Abiy insurgency and relations between Abiy and Eritrean President **Issayas Afewerki** have nosedived.

Issayas has raised the prospect of a new Ethiopia-Eritrea war – the two fought a brutal two-year conflict that ended in 2000 – centred on Tigray, where the region's elite have split. One faction now aligns with Abiy, supporting rebellion against former TPLF comrades, while the TPLF-led regional government flirts with long-time enemies from Eritrea's regime. With Tigray as the potential flashpoint, rising volatility could ignite a regional conflagration.

Abiy's post-war strategy in Tigray has been divide and rule, but recent infighting has forced a tactical shift. A TPLF insider told *Africa Confidential* that after Pretoria, Addis Ababa proposed joint military operations to its new Tigrayan allies – first against Amhara Fano militants, then Eritrea – but failed to win over party and military elites in Mekelle. Power struggles and accountability disputes fractured Tigray's leadership.

After the peace deal, Abiy handed control of the region to senior TPLF figure **Getachew Reda**, who led the Tigray Interim Regional Administration (TIRA). Federal backing brought funds and influence – but also subservience. For the first time, TPLF dominance in Tigray looked vulnerable. Party conservatives rallied behind veteran leader **Debretsion Gebremichael**, leaving Mekelle paralysed for months.

The rupture widened when the TPLF, backed by Tigray's security apparatus, held a congress on 13 August 2024 and purged Getachew's faction, reasserting control. Addis, having once threatened intervention, now faced the prospect of a TPLF–Eritrea alliance with Fano militants poised to join (AC Vol 66 No 15). Lieutenant-General **Tadesse Werede** was installed as TIRA president – widely seen as the TPLF's choice (AC Vol 65 No 19).

FACADE OF PEACE

Addis pulled economic and political levers. State media reclassified contested territories formerly administered by Tigray as part of Amhara. Fuel and commodity shipments were curtailed. Proxy activity intensified. Federal authorities backed an anti-TPLF front under the banner of Tigray Democratic Solidarity (Simret), which called for civil disobedience – gaining traction in southern areas, including Getachew's home turf.

Some fighters reconstituted as the 'Tigray Peace Forces', receiving support from bases in Afar and Amhara. Addis portrays the conflict as intra-Tigrayan, maintaining the facade of compliance with Pretoria's non-hostility clause.

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Federal-backed militias have achieved little militarily. Many fighters, disillusioned, returned to Tigray or were detained trying to do so. Addis's real gains have come in the battle of narratives.

Residents say TPLF opponents now enjoy public backing. In Tigray, overt support for the TPLF is increasingly frowned upon. The contrast is stark: months before Pretoria, public opinion rallied behind the TPLF-led resistance. Criticising the party or praising Abiy's Prosperity Party was seen as treasonous. Today, that consensus has fractured.

Online campaigns, amplified by pro-federal Tigrayans, and the hardship of postwar life have converged with TPLF missteps – wartime mismanagement, and a lacklustre settlement. Among youth facing exile or unemployment, ridicule of party officials and commanders is routine. Once-sacrosanct narratives of resistance are mocked, while federal successes circulate with little backlash.

POLITICAL FOOTHOLD

In Raya – Getachew's southern Tigray stronghold, long resentful of marginalisation – pro-federal Tigrayan factions, notably Simret, have built strong grassroots support. For Abiy, this is a strategic prize. But loyalties remain fluid. Pro-TPLF sentiment persists, while fears of a renewed TPLF-Eritrea alliance turning Raya into a battlefield keep tensions high.

Recent shifts suggest the pendulum may be swinging back. In August, Simret-affiliated zonal head **Haftu Kiros** was quietly replaced by TPLF-backed **Zenabu Gebremedhin** – a sign the party is regaining ground. Volatility endures, and the risk of local militias reverting to insurgency cannot be ruled out.

Federal strategy has proved corrosive. By strangling Tigray's economy, delaying reconstruction and fuelling youth flight, Addis has left the region's social fabric threadbare (**AC Vol 65 No 15**). Military checks by Eritrea and Fano constrain Abiy's battlefield options, but insiders argue his economic blockade has inflicted deeper damage – fostering despair, displacement and self-recrimination. They warn such desperation could yet push the TPLF back to war. If that happens, Issayas may well take their side – incensed by Abiy's betrayal at Pretoria and his ambitions for Eritrea's Red Sea ports.

For now, the peace holds – just. Tigray's fractured politics have allowed TIRA President Tadesse to position himself as a third pole, aligned with neither the TPLF nor Addis. Known for guarded phrasing and deliberate ambiguity, he keeps both sides guessing. His measures suggest a strategy of concessions and assertions – eroding TPLF power bases while avoiding overt federal subservience, anchoring his administration as the 'centre'.

A decisive move came with his appointment of **Alem Gebrewahid**, a disaffected former TPLF executive, as supervisor of zonal and district affairs. By bypassing party hierarchies and empowering Alem – whose grassroots influence remains unmatched – Tadesse signalled his intent to consolidate local control through the TPLF's own networks.

Alem's trajectory reflects the bitterness of Tigray's factional churn. Once party secretary, he was sidelined during the army-brokered reshuffle that elevated Getachew and installed **Fetlework 'Monjorino' Gebregziabher**. Later, during the disputed congress that ousted Getachew's bloc, Alem was demoted to a mere Central Committee member – a humbling said to have left him embittered and ripe for Tadesse's patronage.

The result was an internal rift severe enough to raise fears of another split. A subsequent party congress papered over the discord, but Alem's appointment came from outside formal party channels. The tensions remain unresolved, and the prospect of renewed fracture hangs over Mekelle.

UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Tigray's political map is increasingly polarised. One camp advocates '*Tsimdo*' – accommodation with Eritrea. The other, led by Simret, seeks closer alignment with Addis. These poles are pulling public opinion in opposing directions, raising fears of further fragmentation.

Abiy's shifting tactics have boxed the TPLF into a defensive posture. But the party's ability to convert discontent into military action remains unclear. Intra-party rifts, the rise of the more pacifist TIRA, and a fractured public mean the TPLF remains divided and unable to act decisively.

Addis has managed its challenges more deftly, but unrest simmers on multiple fronts. Beyond insurgencies in Amhara and Oromia, a new alliance of prominent politicians from both regions is eroding fragile public support – already strained by the rising cost of living. As with the TPLF, these pressures limit the federal government's ability to mobilise backing for renewed military action. Though veiled threats persist, Abiy is unlikely to go to war before putting out domestic fires.

Still, insiders tell us it's only a matter of time. In the Horn of Africa, political trajectories rarely follow logic. They are shaped by circumstance, friction and sudden turns of fortune. Under these conditions, a relapse into war is far from improbable. ●

ETHIOPIA/WORLD BANK/IMF

Abiy gambles on IMF-backed reforms

Published online 23 September

The Prime Minister's claims of an economic miracle clash with the reality of unremitting austerity for tens of millions

After a year of sweeping macro-economic reforms – floating the birr, tightening budgets and adopting an interest rate-based monetary policy – Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed's** government has secured a third IMF review disbursement and formalised a debt accord with official creditors, amid growing regional insecurity and social schisms at home. The IMF's latest review under its four-year US$3.4 billion adjustment programme unlocked $262.3 million and praised gains in inflation, exports, and reserves, while warning that waning donor support and security risks could undermine momentum.

After launching its Homegrown Economic Reform Agenda in 2019, the government has sought to correct macroeconomic imbalances while sustaining growth (**AC Vol 60 No 22** & **Vol 61 No 2**). A key reform came in July 2024 when the birr was floated – part of several liberalising measures under its IMF-backed programme (**AC Vol 65 No 16**).

The government claims the reforms have driven growth across all sectors, with agriculture leading the way – reportedly seeing a 25% increase in production. Goods export revenues, historically low, rose by 115% in the first nine months of 2024/25, fuelled largely by high international prices for coffee and gold.

The IMF has endorsed the government's strategy with some reservations (**AC Vol 66 No 8**). It praises reduced inflation, rising exports and improved foreign exchange availability, but criticises persistent shortcomings such as delays in privatisations and low foreign investment. Rampant insecurity, climate shocks and declining external assistance further dampen the outlook. In July, the IMF revised its growth forecast from 6.5% to 7.2%, citing favourable rainfall and increased gold and electricity production. The government projects 8.4%, though Abiy has suggested it could be even higher, given recent output gains.

Beyond the impressive headline figures, the reforms are pushing up the cost of living. Devaluation of the birr, aggressive taxation and soaring costs of essentials – fertiliser, food and fuel – are hitting Ethiopians already pushed to the brink by seven years of double-digit inflation. There is a gulf between household realities and the government's claim of macroeconomic success.

MAMO BREAKS WITH MAMMON

Monetary policy evolved under Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed**, overseen in part by the outgoing central bank governor, **Mamo Mihretu**. In 2024, under his stewardship, the National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE) shifted to a system where interest rate control plays the central role (**AC Vol 66 No 18**). A new benchmark – the National Bank Rate, currently set at 15% – now guides monetary policy. To ensure bank lending rates remain aligned with the NBR, the central bank conducts fortnightly auctions known as Open Market Operations to 'either withdraw or supply liquidity to the banking system'.

On the fiscal side, the government is pursuing sweeping tax reforms aimed at boosting revenue, reducing the budget deficit and curbing inflation. The first full fiscal year under Ethiopia's IMF loan programme ended in early July. A key shift during this period was the NBE's decision to stop directly financing government deficits.

Primarily, this has meant the state selling Treasury bills (T-bills) and other forms of debt. These helped finance a 262-billion-birr (US$1.81bn) budget deficit last fiscal year. The current year's deficit stands at 417bn birr – with 278bn birr to be financed through domestic borrowing and the remainder from external loans and grants. To attract buyers, interest rates on T-bills have increased. As a result, debt financing has become the largest single budgetary item this fiscal year, accounting for nearly a third of the federal budget at 463bn birr, more than double the previous year.

In July, following a debt restructuring negotiated under the G20 Common Framework, Minister of Finance **Ahmed Shide** attributed the debt servicing hike to four factors. First, T-bills and bonds are maturing and must be collected for reuse within the fiscal year. Second, much of the debt held by state-owned enterprises has been absorbed by the federal government, prompting the issuance of an additional 900bn birr in 10-year bonds. Third, the suspension on external debt servicing – in place during the last two years of restructuring negotiations – will end this fiscal year following the agreement's conclusion. After the birr was floated in July 2024, much more domestic currency is required to meet external debt obligations. ●

FLUID FIGURES

A lack of transparency and independent assessment makes it difficult to corroborate the figures released by the government, as was the case under previous prime ministers. Data on irrigation and wheat production raises further doubts.

Growth in agriculture – Ethiopia's largest sector, contributing around 35% of economic output – is attributed by the government to a 5.8m hectare expansion in cultivated land. Abiy and other officials credit better irrigation, particularly in semi-arid lowland areas, and the shift to year-round production as key drivers.

But irrigation figures tell a different story. Ethiopia still utilises only a fraction of its irrigation potential. In July 2024, the Ministry of Irrigation and Lowlands (MoIL) estimated that just 1.2m ha were irrigated. That same month, Abiy told parliament the figure stood at 10m ha, with plans to reach 24m ha the following year. Yet the ministry's own data from August shows only 2m ha of farmland under irrigation.

Since its establishment in 2021, MoIL has faced challenges. Last May, a parliamentary committee investigation revealed woeful execution of projects, which the then minister blamed on resource constraints, stating that the ministry oversees contracts worth 10 times its budget. A backlog of poorly designed projects from the previous administration, along with contractors' failings, were also cited as obstacles to execution.

Last fiscal year, irrigation projects were allocated a budget of 9bn birr ($62m) – just 1bn more than the previous year. The new minister requested an additional 32bn birr to complete 11 stalled projects but did not receive it.

Such shortfalls, although critical, are the tip of the iceberg. Closer inspection reveals rampant waste and mismanagement. Several irrigation projects are running at half their capacity. All this makes the claims of increased yields due to more irrigation seem far-fetched.

GRAIN OF TRUTH?

Another success reported by the Ethiopian Statistical Service is wheat production. It claims 30m tonnes were grown in 2024-25 – a 30% increase on the previous year. Yet imports have continued, and external estimates differ sharply: the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) put production at 7.8m tonnes and 6.2m tonnes, respectively.

Higher yields should have led to lower costs for consumers, but the local price of wheat is still much higher than the average international price. These issues led critics, including London-based weekly *The Economist*, to question Abiy's celebration of achieving wheat self-sufficiency.

His government says the USDA is lowballing, as it relies on satellite-based estimates and historical cropping patterns and so fails to account for recent irrigation expansion. It argues most of the wheat importation is by aid agencies, such as in 2023 when the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) shipped in 1.4m tonnes. Then it attributes high local prices to rising consumption and retention, suggesting Ethiopia is stockpiling the cereal for future export and food security.

Economists such as Addis Ababa University's **Alemayehu Geda** and **Abebe Aemro Selassie**, Deputy Director in the IMF's African Department, have questioned the self-sufficiency claims. Alemayehu points to trade registry data and Abebe to customs records, which show substantial wheat imports by the private sector.

Some worry that production could suffer this year after fertiliser prices doubled over 12 months. Concerning reports are coming out of Amhara region regarding severe fertiliser shortages and insufficient rainfall in the main growing season between May and September.

SURVIVAL STORIES

The holes in Ethiopia's growth story are evident in the experience of the masses, many of whom are struggling to survive – as even Abiy's officials acknowledge. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, a fifth of Ethiopia's population of almost 130m required aid in 2024.

An economics professor in Addis Ababa told *Africa Confidential* that three factors illustrate the disparity between official figures and citizens' experience. First, incomes have not kept up with inflation. Second, widespread insecurity limits movement and economic opportunities. Third, growing corruption within the government means the fruits of growth are harvested by a well-connected few.

Acknowledging the strain on those with fixed incomes, the government has raised civil servant salaries twice over the past year. Some low-income workers have resorted to begging. Eight months after the first increment, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU) offered to present evidence to a parliamentary standing committee. Its representatives say many workers can no longer afford to feed themselves and now rely on scraps from restaurants.

August's salary increases for government employees were broadly welcomed; but some see them as a pre-emptive move to quell worker unrest ahead of next year's elections. In May, doctors and other health sector staff staged a nationwide strike demanding better pay and working conditions. The government declared the action illegal and arrested around 150 participants. The organisers paused the strike after government promised to address the grievances. All the detainees have been released. But more industrial action is expected in the coming months; teachers and taxi drivers are likely to join in.

Annual inflation fell to 13.7% in July; down from over 30% in 2022. The government and the IMF cite this as a key achievement of recent reforms.

But other economists argue that reining in the money supply has dampened spending and investment, causing economic harm. Economic commentator **Wasyhun Belay** argues that lasting improvements in people's lives depend on cheaper basic goods, higher incomes and more jobs.

Another contributing factor is the recent pay hike for civil servants, which could push prices up again. The defence budget is also rising, reaching 81bn birr, a 25% increase on last year.

Abiy's critics blame Ethiopia's economic woes in part on wasteful public spending on vanity projects such as parks, palaces and tourist lodges. The government has yet to explain how it intends to address the cost-of-living crisis. In parliament in June, Abiy described the hardship as a necessary sacrifice to secure prosperity for the next generation. To those citizens who have survived decades of political and economic upheaval, that argument is getting less and less persuasive. ●

SUDAN/GULF STATES/EGYPT/UNITED STATES

Khartoum rebuffs US-Arab peace roadmap

Published online 24 September

Calling for a three-month humanitarian truce and banning Islamists, the Quad plan brings civilian politicians into talks for a post-war transition

After multiple failed attempts to chart a route out of Sudan's devastating civil war, the statement by the Quad - **Egypt**, **Saudi Arabia**, **United Arab Emirates** and the **United States** – agreed on 12 September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, has the makings of a breakthrough with its plan for a ceasefire and a political transition led by civilians that would exclude warring parties from power (**AC Vol 66 No 18**).

On the same day, the US Treasury Department sanctioned two Islamist factions allied with the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) regime under General **Abdel Fattah al Burhan** in Khartoum. Washington's push for peace is part of its strategy to counter Islamism and **Iranian** influence in Sudan, and the wider region (**AC Vol 66 No 14**). Without such measures, the US fears the risk of growing Islamist influence facilitated by the implosion of the Sudanese state.

How much of a breakthrough the Quad plan turns out to be on the ground will depend on the four countries' willingness to implement it and punish spoilers. Some fear that US officials will lose interest or get distracted by other crises. Two important policy shifts could unlock serious negotiations involving the warring parties – Gen Burhan's SAF and Gen **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'** and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – and civilian groups wanting to organise a post-war transition.

The first is that Egypt's President **Abdel Fattah el Sisi** has abandoned his long-held position that the SAF is the sole legitimate force in Sudan and generals should control its post-war transition. Secondly, the UAE, which has backed Hemeti and the RSF, militarily and politically, signed the Quad statement calling for all external parties supporting the belligerents to stop fuelling the war.

Accused of bias against the SAF and its allies due to the sanctions, Washington doesn't support the partition of Sudan and doesn't recognise the Darfur-based government set up by the leader of the RSF, Hemeti, and his allies in the Sudan Founding Alliance (Tasis), the civilian group he has formed in a bid for legitimacy (**Dispatches 11/8/25**).

The Quad statement rules out any military solution to the war. It calls for aid agencies to have immediate and unhindered access to all parts of Sudan, as stipulated by international humanitarian law. It calls on both sides to stop fighting, initially, for three months. That should lead, it says, to a permanent ceasefire alongside negotiations between all civilian forces about a future political structure. And then a nine-month transition under civilian leadership.

The statement insists that the warring parties should not lead the transition and that Islamist groups, including Sudan's branch of the *Al Ikhwan al Muslimun* (Muslim Brothers), should be kept at bay. US officials say that is the reason Washington has imposed sanctions on the Minister of Finance **Jibril Ibrahim**, the leader of the Justice and Equality Movement and the *Al Baraa Bin Malik* Brigade, the biggest Islamist militia allied with the SAF regime under Burhan in Khartoum.

The statement is less forceful on external military support; it just says that ending it is essential to stopping the war. None of the foreign suppliers of military aid, cash fuel and other supplies to the warring factions are mentioned by name. That is probably because three of the suppliers – Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE – signed the statement and the US has close security ties with all three in the wider region (**AC Vol 66 No 11**). So far, western officials have proved reluctant to criticise the sponsors of Sudan's war (to which could be added **Turkey**, **Russia** and Iran) let alone call for sanctions.

There are multiple sins of omission. It lacks detail about the mechanics and parameters of the political transition. No Sudanese civil society groups or political parties were brought into the discussions. This suggests that the Quad sees them as less important. Arranging a meeting between the Quad and civilian forces will be difficult. The statement refers to a meeting in Cairo on this a year ago and was meant to be followed by further negotiations this month.

But Sudan's civilian forces have fragmented further since last year. The Quad statement deepens the confusion created by competing initiatives launched by Egypt, the African Union, and **Algeria's Ramtane Lamamra**, serving as the Special Representative of UN Secretary-General **António Guterres**.

BURHAN'S DILEMMA

Before the SAF-led government in Khartoum rejected the Quad plan on 18 September, some insiders had already questioned its viability because of the strictures on the *Ikhwan* and other Islamist factions. Burhan now insists he is not an Islamist, but he acquiesced to the National Islamic Front-led coup in 1989 and rose through the military ranks as Islamists tightened their control on all arms of state security.

At this stage in the war, Burhan calculates that he cannot distance himself from the political-military units he needs on the front line in El Fasher (such as Jibril's JEM) and in Kordofan (such as *Al Baraa Bin Malik*). Many SAF supporters see the Quad statement as trying to weaken the Burhan and the SAF just as they are regaining ground in North Kordofan, consolidating in El Obeid while maintaining control of El Fasher.

Another shortcoming is the weak commitment of the signatories: none of them have been given a timeline to end their military support for the rival factions. And none has made any public commitment to that effect.

This may make the UAE a net winner in the Quad negotiations, given the volume of military and other backing that President **Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan** (MBZ)'s government has given to Hemeti and the RSF, as reported by UN investigators and independent media organisations, and its suborning of countries such as neighbouring Sudan, **Chad**, **Libya**, **South Sudan** and **Uganda**. But should the Quad's initiative fail to make progress in suspending hostilities, international attention will return to the UAE.

After meeting Burhan in Zurich on 11 August, **Massad Boulos** has not met any senior RSF representatives but he did meet with key Hemeti ally, the UAE's Vice-President and National Security Advisor **Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al Nahyan** shortly afterwards (**AC Vol 66 No 18**).

The RSF and its allies maintain contact with the key international players, including the US and **Britain**, but these are kept at a low level given its serial human rights violations in the war. The difficulties in negotiating humanitarian access across Sudan reflect the reality that the RSF and SAF ground forces are unable or unwilling

RISING GULF POWERS MULL WASHINGTON'S LINE

Saudi Arabia's Prince **Mohammed bin Salman al Saud** (MBS) has stayed silent on Sudan for months, but he has clear interests in the conflict and its implications for the balance of power in the region. Saudi policy on Sudan is based on two pillars. Riyadh does not want any foreign powers, such as **Iran**, **Russia** or the **United Arab Emirates**, to establish a base on the Red Sea.

Riyadh opposes any development that could favour democratic politics, especially if it has a leftist tinge. Equally, it opposes any groups aligned with *Al Ikhwan al Muslimun* (Muslim Brothers) whose power to mobilise Islamist activists against the Gulf monarchies is seen as threatening both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi but not Doha.

The recent ill-fated visit of **Burhan's** Prime Minister, **Kamil Idris**, to Riyad illustrates this approach. He arrived in the capital and met twice with Saudi Arabia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince **Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdallah** (**Dispatches 9/6/25**). When Idris became ill with food poisoning, Prince Faisal checked on his condition after he was hospitalised. He did not meet MBS although Saudi Arabia's Ambassador in Port Sudan had tried to arrange this. The Treaty of Jeddah signed in May 2023, one of many unsuccessful attempts at a sustainable ceasefire, is cited by the Quad statement as showing Saudi Arabia's engagement.

The framing of Sudan's war by US officials has prompted some scepticism in the region. Current sanctions are seen to target one side and over-emphasise Iran's role. Regional officials say that even if Tehran is involved in rebuilding the military capabilities of the Sudan Armed Forces, the role of other factions such as the Rapid Support Forces and its external allies should also be scrutinised. Critics of the US stance are asking why it is tougher on the backers of the SAF than it is on those supplying the RSF.

Some cite a recent *New York Times* investigation showing the UAE's extraordinary financial generosity towards US President **Donald Trump** and his envoy at large, real estate magnate **Steve Witkoff**.

Others point to the reappraisal of US relations with Libya as well as the Sahel. Added to that are the gains expected from Libya's relaunch of its oil industry, with a clutch of new international investors, and how Washington's positioning on Sudan and SAF could help negotiations with Turkey in other arenas.

Washington's insistence on viewing Sudan's devastating conflict through a prism of 'regional security' and 'counterterrorism' obliges the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to join its initiative. Both organisations have signed a joint statement in support of the Quad principles. The US wants to show that those who oppose its plan will be seen as spoilers and dealt with accordingly.

Eritrea and **South Sudan** may prove difficult interlocutors. Trump's Africa advisor **Massad Boulos** was due to meet with delegations from Asmara and Juba at the UN General Assembly in the week-ending 27 September. **China** is courting them for its own reasons.

For now, the Quad's roadmap for Sudan looks inadequate for complex national political fights or the intense regional geopolitics. It is out of kilter with the position of Sudan's armed factions or civilian activists, who are being asked to work towards universal humanitarian access, set up an accountable process, and work out the route to a transition.

There is little sign that the authors of the Quad plan have learned much from the sabotaged political transition after revolutionary committees across the country pressured the military to oust President **Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir** in April 2019. Time is pressing. If the next Quad meeting at the end of September fails to produce an implementation schedule and more practical ideas, the initiative may wither on the vine. ●

to implement decisions taken by their leadership.

Because of its close ties to the RSF, the Abu Dhabi monarchy will be held accountable for such failures – but the SAF-allied militia groups are also unwilling to allow humanitarian access unless it serves their interests.

Egypt's support for the Quad stance is surprising. Cairo has consistently supported the SAF and its appointed government as legitimate national institutions fighting the RSF, which it dismisses as rebel insurgents. Cairo is recalibrating regional security after the Israeli strike on Doha and Washington's lack of response.

President Sisi refuses to host Gaza residents in Egypt. His security officials insist that he will not travel to Washington DC to meet President **Donald Trump** while the plan to displace Gazans to Egypt is still on the US policy agenda. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) ground offensive on Gaza City is seen in Cairo, and many other capitals, as trying to force Palestinians to leave the Gaza Strip with no guarantee they will be allowed to return.

Most of them, including cadres and supporters of *Hamas*, would go to Egypt, a development that Sisi sees as an existential security threat. Publicly, he will rail against IDF tactics in ostensible solidarity with the Palestinians.

Another concern for El Sisi is the Nile, and the ambiguous position taken by President Trump and some of his advisors on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed's** government in Addis Ababa. El Sisi sees **Ethiopia's** dam and its growing regional power backed by the UAE, as a far greater threat to Egypt's security than the Sudan war. ●

BOTSWANA

Boko risks all in a battle for De Beers

Rival contenders in the diamond industry are challenging Gaborone's resource nationalism

When President **Duma Boko** announced in New York on 22 September that his government was preparing to take a majority stake in the De Beers diamond conglomerate by the end of October, he added another layer of complexity to the battle to win control of the company as its biggest investor, Anglo American, tries to sell.

Officials at Anglo American, which has 85% of the equity in De Beers, say they received eight bids for the conglomerate by the end of August and would be evaluating the offers. De Beers has a book value of US$4.5 billion but industry officials expect the selling price to be much lower. Anglo officials didn't comment on the position of Botswana, which has 15% of De Beers's equity, but relations between the two deteriorated sharply in July when Boko accused the company of mishandling the marketing of Botswana's diamonds.

Without referring to the Anglo American-led sales process, Boko told Bloomberg News that he was working with the Omani Investment Authority on a plan to take a controlling stake in De Beers. But a senior official at the Ministry of Mines in Gaborone claimed to be 'in the dark' about the transaction.

Industry sources say that Boko has been running Botswana's strategy on the De Beers purchase without fully consulting Vice-President and Finance Minister **Ndaba Gaolathe** and Minerals and Energy Minister **Bogolo Kenewendo**.

Angola's state-owned diamond company Endiama accentuated such concerns when it said on 24 September it had submitted a fully financed bid for a strategic stake in De Beers but did not seek majority control. Without mentioning Boko's claims about **Omani** backing, Angola's Minister for Mining and Oil **Diamantino Pedro** said that Luanda's bid was to foster a 'meaningful partnership' between Angola, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa – one in which no party would dominate.

Pedro added that Angola's aim was to ensure that De Beers continued to operate as an 'independent, globally competitive enterprise'. Angola's diamond production exceeded Botswana's last year, making it the biggest producer in Africa for the first time in two decades.

CLOUDY DIAMONDS

Boko faces mounting pressures after sweeping to power last November, pledging a higher minimum wage and increased student allowances (**AC Vol 65 No 23**). His flagship promises have stalled amid a downturn in the diamond market – the bedrock of Botswana's wealth.

He wants to rebuild Botswana's fortunes by taking control of De Beers (**AC Vol 65 No 12**). Initially Boko's recovery plan appeared to be based on a $12bn investment deal with **Qatar's** Al Mansour Holdings, signed on 21 August in Gaborone (**Dispatches 25/8/25**). The agreement – with the state-owned Botswana Development Corporation – targets infrastructure, energy, mining, diamond refinement, agriculture, tourism, cybersecurity and defence. But Mansour made no specific pledge on a De Beers stake.

It is a turning point for Botswana's economic model – built on a 50/50 partnership with De Beers through the Debswana joint venture – underpinning decades of stability, infrastructure development and relative prosperity (**AC Vol 66 No 6**). But the post-pandemic landscape has been punishing. A sluggish global economy, the rise of lab-grown diamonds and geopolitical trade disruptions have created a supply glut and depressed prices. Botswana is heading for a second consecutive recession after contracting by 3% last year. The 2025/26 budget deficit is forecast at 7.6% of GDP – down from this year's projected 9%.

Pressed by the fiscal crisis, which has disrupted basic services including medicine provision, Boko is frustrated by falling diamond revenues. De Beers paused operations at its Botswana mines two months ago to stabilise prices by curbing production at the site that supplies 70% of its rough diamonds. It has since been selling from stockpiles to manage high inventory levels.

The closure has hit government revenues, which depend on sales from Debswana through the Diamond Trading Company Botswana and the state-owned Okavango Diamond Company. The impact has been severe – the government failed to pay workers on a poverty relief scheme, and Boko declared a national health emergency on 25 August as clinics ran out of medicine.

To compound matters, De Beers posted a first-half loss, meaning Botswana – which holds a 15% stake – will receive no dividend. The government is banking on the Al Mansour investment to ease the economic gloom.

While in **Lesotho** in July, Boko publicly lambasted De Beers, threatening to take control after expressing frustration with what his government views as a lack of transparency in the sales process.

Taking a position reminiscent of former President **Mokgweetsi Masisi**, Boko said: 'the country needs the money, and it has the diamonds, and somebody who is supposed to be selling the diamonds is not doing the job. We will take the diamonds and see what we can do with them. They are ours. These diamonds are ours. And so, before the end of this year, something very drastic in that space will happen. If it doesn't happen, we will die trying.'

BROKEN PROMISES

The crisis is not only economic. Boko's failure to deliver on student allowances and wage increases has triggered public frustration. Students, unions representing low-wage workers and opposition parties have grown increasingly vocal. A student protest application was declined by police, while a union march proceeded peacefully in July. Boko's administration, elected on a mandate for change, now risks being defined by its inability to enact reforms amid forces beyond its control. The domestic honeymoon is over – replaced by the realities of governing through a commodity bust.

Anglo American's divestment from De Beers is a turning point for Botswana's economic sovereignty. Kenewendo says the government wants to increase its stake to gain full control over the asset and its entire value chain, including marketing.

On 31 July, Anglo CEO **Duncan Wanblad** confirmed Botswana would not be offered a discount for an increased stake despite its pre-emptive rights. It would need to match third-party offers.

Botswana, Anglo American and De Beers have remained tight-lipped. Wanblad said a shortlist of purchasers had been compiled. He added that the successful bidder must have a deep association with the industry, and the sale would likely require a consortium, rather than a single buyer.

OLD FACES

Two former De Beers CEOs are lining up bids. **Gareth Penny**, chair of the investment manager Ninety One, and **Bruce Cleaver**, chair of Gemfields and former De Beers chief executive, are among the top contenders, as is **Australian** mining veteran **Michael O'Keeffe**. The credentials of Penny and Cleaver, former colleagues at the top management at De Beers but with good political connections in Southern Africa, would favour them as leaders in new De Beers ownership arrangement.

We hear that several Gulf funds including Al Mirqab Capital in Qatar, the Omani Investment Authority and investors based in the **United Arab Emirates**, have been talking to Penny and Cleaver.

Other contenders include commodities billionaire **Anil Agarwal** and **Indian** diamond firms KGK Group and Kapu Gems, though reports suggest they are not seen as frontrunners.

Anglo's exit from De Beers will shake up the diamond mining industry in the region and internationally. Hailed by Boko, the Omani Investment Authority took over **Russia's** Alrosa operations in Angola last year and is building up its role in the region's mining sector.

De Beers recently announced its first new kimberlite discovery in more than 30 years, at an Angolan site operated through its joint venture with state-owned miner Endiama. If the De Beers sale is managed well, it could open a bright future for a regional diamond mining conglomerate with financial depth from Gulf investors and access to the elite luxury market. ●

KENYA

A referendum redux

Many see the constitutional reform bill as a means for leaders to carve out new jobs and entrench their political control

Few events contributed more to **William Ruto's** presidential victory in August 2022 than the collapse of the Building Bridges Initiative that April (**AC Vol 62 No 17** & **Vol 63 No 8**). The product of a 2018 handshake between opposition leader **Raila Odinga** and President **Uhuru Kenyatta**, BBI sought to carve up power between them by creating the new positions of Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition.

Offering jobs and titles to Kenya's political leaders to satisfy their supporters and hold coalitions together is back on the agenda ahead of the August 2027 elections. For the President, Prime Cabinet Secretary **Musalia Mudavadi** and National Assembly Speaker **Moses Wetang'ula** will need to be rewarded for delivering a substantial share of the Luhya vote in western Kenya – though only Wetang'ula managed this in 2022. So, too, will **Kithure Kindiki**, who replaced the impeached **Rigathi Gachagua** as Deputy President last October.

Along the Coast region, stalwarts in the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) – founded by Odinga, led locally by Mining and Blue Economy Cabinet Secretary **Hassan Joho**, a former governor of Mombasa – claim the Raila-Ruto pact has boosted the region's political representation. On the campaign trail in Kilifi last week, Joho attributed the long-delayed completion of a local bridge project to the personal intervention of Transport Principal Secretary **Mohamed Daghar**, one of his allies.

Joho and Cabinet Secretary for Cooperatives and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises **Wycliffe Oparanya**, both former deputy leaders of ODM and among the five party appointments to Ruto's cabinet last July, are expected to be guaranteed posts in the next government. Securing those positions, however, remains as politically fraught as ever. At the 15th anniversary of the 2010 Constitution – marked as 'Katiba Day' – both used their speeches to call for constitutional reform.

Ideally for Odinga and Ruto, a referendum to enshrine the proposed new posts would appear on the ballot paper in August 2027, alongside the next general elections. But some suggest the polls may be delayed for logistical reasons. The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, only reconstituted in July, is racing to complete overdue boundary reviews and compile a new electoral register.

The BBI agenda had been revived by the National Dialogue Committee (NADCO), established in 2023 following public protests – some led by Odinga – against Ruto's handling of the cost-of-living crisis and the 2022 disputed elections (**AC Vol 64 No 19**).

NADCO made its recommendations in early 2024, including the creation of a formal Leader of the Opposition post and two Deputy Prime Minister positions. But it was soon overtaken by events: Odinga and Ruto's differences evaporated last July when they agreed a de facto unity government (**AC Vol 65 No 7**).

A bipartisan Constitution Amendment Bill was tabled last September and included plans to extend the terms of elected officials, including the president, to seven years. That was hastily scuppered in the Senate, but a revised version has been retabled.

The new bill, which topped the agenda when parliament sittings resumed on 23 September, proposes clearer definitions of the roles of the

ELITE PACTS, FRACTURED OPPOSITION AND A NEW POLITICS

Kenya's opposition leaders are on the brink of formalising their coalition, having narrowed down a shortlist of three names: *Muungano wa Ukombozi* (Liberation Movement), *Komboa* (Deliver) Kenya Alliance, and *Mageuzi* (Change) Coalition. All three have been reserved with the Registrar of Political Parties.

That will bring together a group of former ministers and leaders, among whom former Deputy President **Rigathi Gachagua** and Wiper party leader **Kalonzo Musyoka** are the most senior. But **Fred Matiang'i**, Interior Cabinet Secretary in **Uhuru Kenyatta's** government and now leader of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), is widely seen as the most likely presidential candidate (**AC Vol 66 No 5**).

Gachagua still hopes to stand in 2027, having formed his Democracy for the Citizens Party (DCP) in May. His latest legal challenge to the impeachment that bars him from contesting the next election was dismissed by the courts in August.

Agreeing on a name, which a technical team has been working on for weeks, is the easiest part for opposition activists. Far tougher will be managing and agreeing a joint candidates' list. Currently, opposition factions are wrangling over who will stand in the 24 by-elections due on 27 November. They will be the first test of opinion since **Raila Odinga's** Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) joined President **William Ruto's** government. The by-elections will cost 1 billion shillings (US$8 million), says Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission chair **Erastus Ethekon**.

There is not much ethnic overlap among the opposition leaders. Musyoka and **Eugene Wamalwa** are long-standing powerbrokers in Ukambani and western Kenya respectively.

But in central Kenya, there are some flashpoints. In Mbeere North Constituency – Embu County – Gachagua's DCP withdrew its candidate, **Duncan Mbui**, in favour of **Justin Muturi's** Democratic Party – a move that infuriated Mbui, who promptly quit the DCP. The row has not stopped Matiang'i's UPA from fielding its own candidate, whose campaign posters prominently feature Matiang'i's image.

It's not just a problem for the new opposition. The ODM, which celebrates its 20th anniversary from 9 to 12 October, is deeply divided over whether it should support Ruto in 2027. ODM Secretary-General **Edwin Sifuna**, one of the main critics of the Ruto pact, has repeatedly said that ODM will run its own slate of candidates (**AC Vol 66 No 16**).

In Gusii, the western region from which Matiang'i hails, rows between local United Democratic Alliance (UDA) and ODM officials – along with internal ODM disputes – have left the party without a candidate in several seats.

These internal rows, and the prospect of splitting the opposition or pro-government vote, make upsets more likely on 27 November. They also point to near-unprecedented voter volatility across much of Kenya. The government and opposition coalitions are still vying to deliver the ethnic vote.

But a new politics – one that focuses much more on substantive issues – is gaining ground. If they secure resources and re-establish their organisations, Gen Z activists could disrupt mainstream politics far more effectively, winning mass support across the country as they do so. The Nairobi elite may have miscalculated just how unpopular their latest constitutional meddling could become. ●

two parliamentary chambers, primarily by granting the Senate equal legislative status and streamlining the process for Allocation and Appropriation Bills.

In a nod to devolution, it proposes establishing a County Assembly Fund to reduce county administrations' reliance on disbursements from Nairobi and the discretion of governors.

That is less than full-throated constitutional reform, but it would still require a referendum. The bill could face similar obstacles to the BBI, which collapsed after the courts ruled that constitutional amendments must originate from grassroots initiatives, not central government policymakers.

Ruto and Odinga both want the bill to be opened up. Ruto is using the County Assembly Fund proposal to re-open debate about the National Government Constituencies Development Fund, which allows MPs to initiate projects in their constituencies and is widely seen as a vehicle for corruption. Odinga, meanwhile, wants to reduce the number of counties from 47 to 12 to cut costs.

This smacks of opportunism. Ruto was the main opponent of the BBI before the Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional. He also led the campaign against the 2010 Constitution which was endorsed by a healthy 69-31% margin in a referendum.

In 2021, many Kenyans rejected the ideas behind the BBI; today, public opinion has hardened further. After civil society activists condemned what they described as another elite power grab, officials denied that the Constitution Amendment Bill would alter term limits or introduce new political executive offices.

Vocal Africa, a leading activist group, was clear, calling its supporters on to the streets: 'They've brought a bill that proposes to extend the terms of the President, MPs, MCAs and Governors from 5 to 7 years and create the Office of a Prime Minister appointed by the President. Stop this nonsense of amending the constitution,' said its leaders, warning that MPs from ODM and Ruto's United Democratic Alliance would 'smuggle in' amendments on term limits and new jobs.

Senate officials insist that the bill does not address term limits. The question is whether public scepticism is enough to deter Ruto and Odinga from trying to create more new jobs for the boys. ●

GAMBIA

Barrow fires Auditor, shielding a ballooning family empire

Published online 17 September

After being accused of favouring relatives and friends with state-backed rice deals and discounted bank sales, the President has summarily sacked the Auditor-General

When police forcibly removed Auditor-General **Modou Ceesay** from the National Audit Office on 15 September, they triggered youth-led protests in which several demonstrators were arrested as fighting spilled onto the streets of Banjul.

These clashes followed President **Adama Barrow's** sacking of Ceesay, less than halfway through the auditor's constitutional term and deepened anger against a government accused of corruption, favouritism towards friends and relatives, and arbitrary executive actions. Gambia's Bar Council condemned the violent removal of Ceesay and civil society groups say they will challenge his sacking in the Constitutional Court.

Critics of Barrow say that he appointed Ceesay to his nine-year term in 2022 in the hope of greater leniency towards the government than it received from Ceesay's predecessor, **Karamba Touray**. But we hear that Ceesay proved not to be as amenable as the President had hoped.

RELATIVE PROSPERITY

As attention swirls around the probity of the President, and lawyers condemn the illegality of Ceesay's sacking, the spotlight has fallen on **Amadou Sanneh**, the son of Barrow's twin sister **Hawa**, who until his uncle's election in 2017, was a humble office worker in Barrow's property management company.

Since then, Sanneh has built up a multi-million-dollar business importing food as a joint venture with the government, obtaining preferential access to foreign exchange, and government-backed financial guarantees for loans, according to official records and sources consulted by Gambian investigative website The Republic and *Africa Confidential*.

At the same time, a close associate of the President, Congo-Kinshasa national **Kami Muteba Kashama**, bought a previously state-owned bank at a preferential price, it has been claimed. The bank, Megabank, provided much of the finance for Sanneh's operations through guarantees from the state, even though it did not have the customary collateral. Instead, the state issued the guarantees.

The Office of the Presidency has denied that the President conducts any business with relatives, and it denies giving special favours to anyone, let alone committing any wrongdoing. Relations with Kashama, it insists, are completely above board.

The President has been a target of allegations of nepotism and corruption, among them claims that two years ago sanctions-busting **Russian** oil traders bribed Gambian officials to set up shop in Banjul and sold US$29 million worth of Russian diesel locally without paying tax while spiriting the money to Dubai (**AC Vol 65 No 23**). We contacted Sanneh about the claims of favouritism but he declined to reply.

Sanneh's first claimed benefit – indirectly – from his uncle was when he secured in 2021 a 230-million-dalasi (US$4.3m) overdraft facility to finance food imports such as vegetable oil and rice. At the time, Barrow was anxious to reduce the retail price of rice, an imported staple in Gambia, to help him in his presidential re-election campaign at the end of that year. Financial sources in Banjul said it was hoped that favouring an indigenous company rather than importers controlled by foreigners might help achieve that. It did not, however, result in any reduction in prices.

Sanneh's company, Ecotra Group Ltd. (then under a different name), entered into a joint venture with the ministries of trade and finance to import the rice and oil. The company did not have to apply for credit. It was granted to the state–owned commercial bank, the Megabank, by the ministries of trade and finance. Megabank was the new name for the Keystone bank, (See Box, How Ambassador Kashama bought a bargain bank). As Megabank it was sold at a discount to Kashama.

The financial sources said the funds made available to Sanneh for the imports was not backed by the correct amount of collateral. Sanneh owns 45% of Ecotra Group, his wife **Awa Sinyan** owns 10% and one **Mohamed Zeine** holds the remaining 45%. The collateral for the D230m (US$3.2m) facility, according to bank records, was two properties worth a total of D15.5m ($214,000), less than 7% of the value of the total facility. Nonetheless the bank approved it, effectively inflating its book value to D25m.

Even so, this still wasn't enough to back the facility, so the finance ministry issued a state guarantee for the remaining sum, attracting adverse comment in banking circles. If Ecotra's collateral failed to cover its loans, the Gambian taxpayer would be footing the bill. The facility significantly exceeded 25% of the bank's capital, thus requiring a special dispensation from the governor of the Central Bank of The Gambia (CBG) before the deal could go ahead. It was issued.

A senior official at Megabank privately said the required collateral for a facility of this size would normally be 150% of the total. At the time the Megabank was sold in December 2023, Ecotra Group had drawn down D175m of the D230m facility. The facility was then extended and by the first quarter of 2024, the company paid down its outstanding debt to D88m, which was then restructured as a loan.

In July 2024, the bank, which had been sold to Kashama by competitive tender a year before, approved a further D326.1m ($4.5m) facility for the company, Central Bank records show. A similar D326.1m facility was given to

HOW AMBASSADOR KASHAMA BOUGHT A BARGAIN BANK

Much of the finance needed to support Amadou Sanneh's imports of the key staples of rice and vegetable oil came from the Megabank, which in May 2014 was on the verge of collapse under its original name, Keystone Bank. The Central Bank of The Gambia (CBG) took Keystone over before it could collapse and threaten the savings of its depositors, and nursed it back to full function. In 2022 it decided to sell it off but not before writing off bad loans and creating a 'bad bank' for other distressed debt.

In June 2023, the bank was sold to KM Holdings for the equivalent in dalasi of US$15 million, which banking sources estimate to be at least $5m less than the state spent keeping the bank alive before privatisation. In March this year, finance minister **Seedy Keita** admitted to a radio interviewer that he did not know KM Holdings, but company records in Banjul show the owner is 56-year-old **Kami Muteba Kashama**, a citizen of **Congo-Kinshasa**.

Kashama is also an Ambassador-at-Large for The Gambia, personally appointed by the President. The Office of the Presidency insisted to us that Kashama is 'not a personal associate of the President but rather a professional contact whose appointment serves the broader national interest in economic development'.

A statement said: 'The Ambassador at Large position allows Mr. Kashama to leverage his international business networks to attract additional foreign direct investment to The Gambia.'

Yet we hear that President **Adama Barrow** and Kashama are close, although there are few 'natural' connections between Gambia and Congo-K, given that their capital cities are 4,200 kilometres apart and they share no common language. President Barrow has made two visits, the first of which, in March 2022, was the first ever by a Gambian leader.

Kashama hosted Barrow at a dinner during the second visit, in January 2024, a couple of months after the sale of Megabank was closed in Banjul. Kashama was invited to comment on the claims of special treatment but no reply was received before this article went online.

Shortly before the sale, the government wrote off over D285.3m ($4m) in non-performing loans. Taking this together with other bad loans and the capital required to keep the bank afloat, analysts estimate the total cost to the Gambian exchequer at $20m. This implies a net discount of $5 million to Kashama at the time of Megabank's purchase. ●

the state-owned National Food Security Processing and Marketing Corporation (NFSPMC) to import rice. Again, the facilities to both Ecotra and NFSPMC exceeded the capital of Megabank by several hundred percent, meaning another special dispensation from the CBG would be required. It was granted.

That was not all. From 9 February 2022 to 26 September 2024, the Central Bank of sold at least $13.3m in foreign exchange to Ecotra and its predecessor, the requests for the dollars coming through the Ministry of Trade. Like the collateral guarantees, the forex amounts would not normally be available to companies of this size.

A former governor of the CBG, **Bakary Jammeh**, said forex should only be available at auction. 'The CBG does not sell forex to individuals,' he said. 'You cannot also sell to a bank and say sell it to these individuals. That is not appropriate. We sell or buy forex through public auction,' he added.

We asked Ecotra to explain how it obtained privileged access to foreign exchange, why its applications to the CBG for dollars came through the ministry of trade and why Ecotra received such special treatment.

We also asked the presidency if it had ordered the state to smooth the path for Ecotra with government departments because it was headed by the President's nephew, and asked the finance ministry why it backed facilities for Ecotra that were beyond its financial resources to cover. But no answers came. ●

CHINA/AFRICA

How Trump's tariffs help Beijing in Africa

While Beijing has sharpened its trade offer to the continent, US protectionism has triggered record African imports of Chinese goods

China's announcement that it will offer tariff-free trade access for all African exporters was a shrewd soft-power move by Beijing – coming just after the **United States** government had announced a slew of tariffs, many of which disrupted African economies such as **South Africa**, **Botswana**, **Lesotho**, **Mauritius** and **Madagascar**. Many African governments hoped it would boost their processed and manufactured exports to China's giant market.

It came less than a year after China's President **Xi Jinping** had promised new trade and investment deals worth over US$50 billion to African economies that would create a million jobs. That helps explain why the Asia Society found recently that positive views towards China in Africa outnumber negative ones three to one.

So far, dynamics on the ground are less promising for Africa's economies. The positive impacts of Beijing's tariff-free offer to African exporters have been counterbalanced by a more than 20% increase in Chinese exports to Africa's economies this year. At current rates China's exports to Africa this year could surpass a record $200bn. China's global export drive, which is especially energetic in Africa, is being powered by its need to compensate for the punitive tariffs imposed on its exports in the US.

Beijing's 11 June tariff announcement extends treatment already granted to Africa's poorest countries to the continent's 20 more developed economies – other than **Eswatini**, which recognises Taiwan (**Dispatches 16/6/25**). Even before the change, China's Africa trade stance compared favourably with that of the US. Last month, Washington imposed 10% to 15% tariffs on 90% of African nations, and tariffs of 30% or more on out-of-favour countries (**AC Vol 66 No 16**), including South Africa – which remains China's largest single African export destination, ahead of **Nigeria** and **Egypt**.

The US African Growth and Opportunity Act, under which 32 African nations receive preferential access to the US market – in aggregate generating a modest trade surplus – is due to expire on 30 September. It may be renewed in some form but no formal extension has been passed (**Dispatches 25/2/25** & **AC Vol 66 No 9**).

Compared with the European Union (EU), China can claim to offer a better package. But analysts at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) thinktank in London highlight extensive 'non-tariff barriers' – often regulatory – that obstruct African exports to China, despite recent improvements by Beijing.

ODI estimates that China will lose only $1.4bn a year in African tariff revenue from its latest offer, partly because 70% of African exports are already tariff-free. It notes that, at last year's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit, Beijing did not renew its commitment to significantly increase its purchases of African goods, instead pledging more 'balanced' Africa trade and to 'promote' more imports of processed and manufactured items (**AC Vol 65 No 19**).

TRADE DEFICIT

Africa-China trade remains characterised by deep imbalances. The continent runs a large deficit, with its 2023 exports to China amounting to just over half of Africa's $172bn in Chinese imports – though the gap narrowed somewhat in 2024. This contrasts with the late 2000s, when the volume of Africa-China trade was a fraction of today's but was almost balanced.

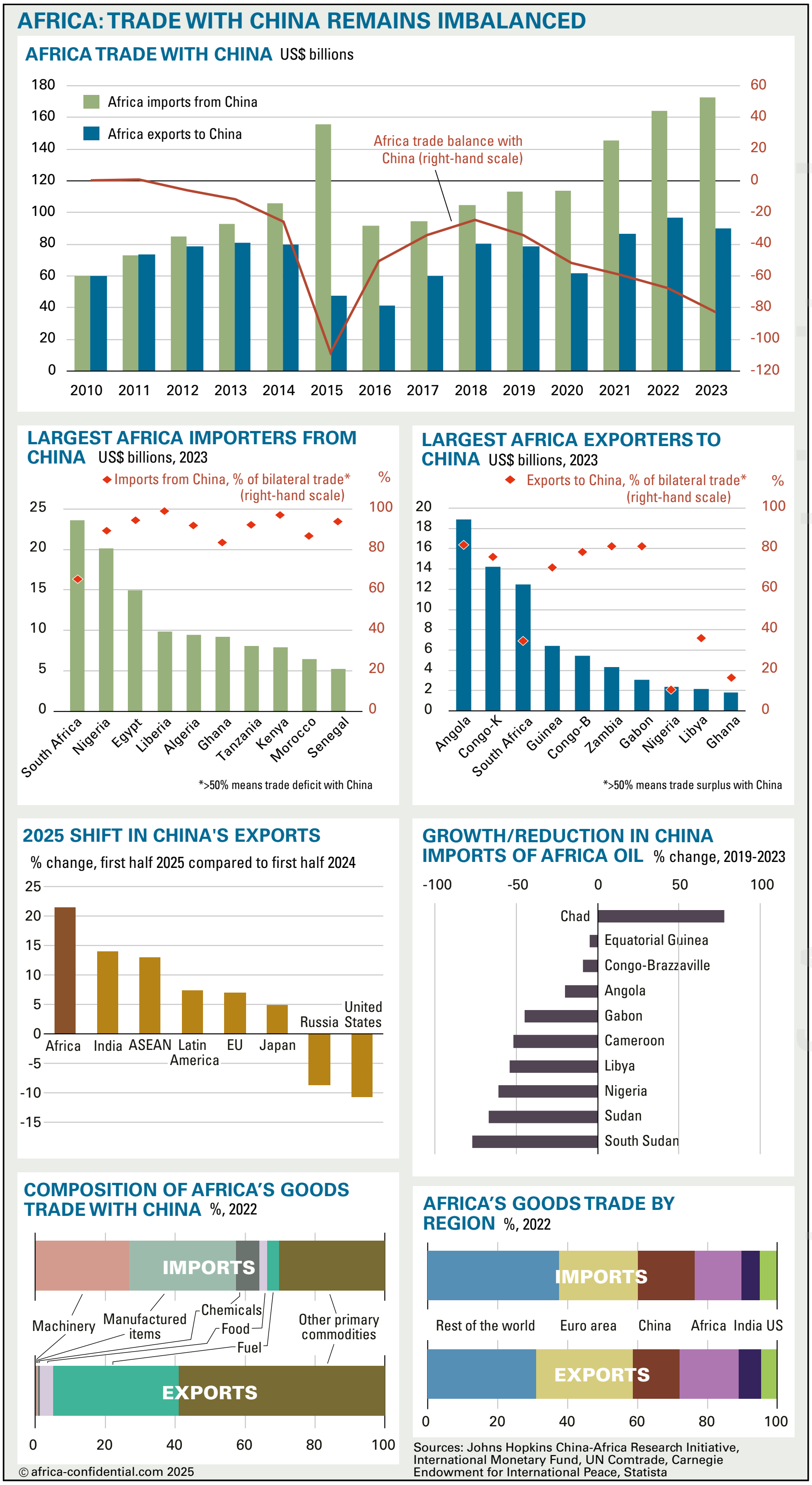
According to World Bank and IMF figures from 2022, China accounted for close to 15% of Africa's exports, whereas Africa accounted for only around 5% of China's. This unbalanced trade relationship between Africa and China augurs poorly for the continent's economic diversification. Commodities account for close to 90% of shipments to China and are sourced from a handful of countries. Africa's imports from China are dominated by capital goods, manufactured goods and other value-added products.

EXPORTERS

A small minority – including natural resource-rich nations such as **Angola**, **Congo-Kinshasa**, **Congo-Brazzaville** and **Gabon** – record surpluses. Countries running hefty deficits include **Kenya**, whose 2023 exports to China of less than $250 million are dwarfed several-fold by imports. In Nigeria, where the situation has prompted criticism that domestic manufacturing and processing capacity has been undermined, the 2023 trade deficit exceeded $17bn, partly driven by growing imports of military hardware. African textile industries have also been undermined by Chinese competition.

It's unclear how US tariffs on China will shape the Africa-China trade relationship in the longer term, or how much current trends are the result of a weaker renminbi making Chinese goods more competitive but it seems to be reinforcing the previous imbalances. Many think the US tariffs will accelerate a wider restructuring of global trade in China's favour.

Provisional data suggests that, so far in 2025, African imports from China increased by more than 20%, pushing the trade deficit through August close to the 2024 total. This growth in exports to Africa has outpaced Chinese increases, in percentage terms, to the EU, **India**, Latin America and the economies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Within the trend, significant variation exists across Africa: some economies – including South Africa – have imported less this year than expected based on previous trends, while others, such as **Côte d'Ivoire**, Nigeria and **Benin**, have imported more from China than expected.



A big question is whether Washington's trade policy will encourage more China-backed Africa manufacturing – or at least rerouting via the continent – in order to evade higher US tariff barriers. What is clearer is that policymakers in countries hit hard by the US approach and now benefiting from Beijing's tariff-free policy should be encouraging exports to China, as recognised by South Africa's Deputy President **Paul Mashatile** in Beijing just days before the 30% US tariff landed (**AC Vol 66 No 16** & **Dispatches 22/9/25**). **Morocco** is a leader here, securing $5.5bn investment from China to build Africa's first battery gigafactory for electric vehicles adding to other investments in solar power storage and manufacturing for Chinese carmaker BYD.

Yet over and above the impact of non-tariff barriers, the ability of African companies to significantly increase shipments to China is limited by the continent's own food needs, inefficient manufacturing and reduced Chinese appetite for African oil. Metals and critical minerals are less likely to be affected by the policy shifts, as they are already a top priority in Beijing which has secured strategic mining rights over the past two decades. That leaves the US and European companies trying to step up mining in countries such as Congo-Kinshasa (cobalt), **Zambia** (copper), and **Zimbabwe** (lithium). ●

ETHIOPIA/AFRICA/CLIMATE CHANGE

Addis summit pushes continent's green industry ambition

Published online 19 September

With climate finance at a premium, delegates focused on bankable projects, trading and refining critical minerals and nature-based initiatives

Alongside the nationalist tub-thumping, Ethiopia's Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed** was making a serious point about climate and energy policy when he invited a group of international leaders for the opening of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Nile midway through the African Climate Summit hosted by Addis Ababa on 8-10 September.

With sun, wind and hydropower, Africa has more renewable energy sources than any other continent but over 600 million of its people lack reliable electricity; just over a quarter of Ethiopians will be connected to the national grid by 2030. **Kenyan** economist **Ken Opalo** points out that per capita electricity consumption in Africa has been declining since 1980: the national average in Kenya is now 200 kilowatt hours, compared to 603 kWh in **Bangladesh** and 2,624 kWh in **Vietnam**. Consumption in the **United States** is 12,500 kWh.

Initially GERD's 13 turbines will generate 500,000 kilowatts and would have a maximum output of 5,150 megawatts, some of which will be sold to Kenya as well as to **Djibouti** and **Sudan**, with which Addis Ababa has had testy relations in recent months (**AC Vol 66 No 18**). Abiy's bigger point was that African economies could make a key contribution to the renewable energy drive and shouldn't wait for multilateral institutions to agree the finance. Some compare Abiy's regional ambitions and support for the GERD against foreign critics with **Egyptian** leader **Gamal Abdel Nasser's** backing for the Aswan Dam, also on the Nile, built in the 1960s. Today, Egypt under President **Abdel Fattah el Sisi** is one of the sternest opponents of Ethiopia's dam.

Conceived during the reign of Emperor **Haile Selassie** and revived under Prime Minister **Meles Zenawi** in 2010, the mega dam project on the Blue Nile was built predominantly with national resources but its business rationale includes at least US$1 billion a year from electricity exports and winning investment in local manufacturing and processing, premised on cheap and reliable power.

CLIMATE ECONOMY

A day before the GERD ceremony, Abiy told delegates to the Second Africa Climate Summit in: 'We are not here to negotiate our survival. We are here to design the world's next climate economy.' With that, he echoed African leaders' drive to sharply boost electricity generation and distribution as the key to attracting industrial investment – green or otherwise.

This climate summit in Addis Ababa was more sparsely attended than the first in Nairobi, with leaders from Kenya, Djibouti and **Somalia** and a few other states, the policy negotiations were more substantive, targeted on agreeing a common African position (**AC Vol 64 No 18**).

That includes a determined drive for more climate adaptation projects (which help low-income countries boost reliable and affordable power) rather than climate mitigation (which are meant to contribute to the global reduction of carbon emissions). The Washington DC-based Center for Global Development reports that 64% of World Bank climate funding in Africa went to mitigation and just 36% to adaptation: 'It is somewhat of a mystery why the World Bank claims to have spent over US$3 billion in two years on mitigation in the poorest countries that account for less than 1% of global emissions.'

African Union Commission Chairman and former foreign minister of Djibouti **Mahmoud Ali Youssouf** and other leaders complained about rich countries failing to make progress on the climate finance goal agreed at the UN COP29 summit in Baku last year towards $300bn a year by 2035. African states had pushed for $1.3 trillion a year on the same timeline but that was beyond the fragile framework agreed in Baku. Since then, negotiating positions have toughened on all sides. And the US, the biggest funder and one of the historically biggest carbon emitters, has again withdrawn from the UN Paris climate treaty.

Little progress has been made on contributions to the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) but the ruling by the International Court of Justice on 23 July that countries may be held legally accountable for their greenhouse gas emissions and the environmental damage caused may have concentrated minds on compensation negotiations (**AC Vol 66 No 17**).

Few delegates expected much progress in Addis on international commitments after projections that global Official Development Assistance (ODA) could drop by 17% this year, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), with even steeper cuts on average bilateral aid to African economies.

That is why the summit's Addis Ababa Declaration focused on alternative financing mechanisms and local initiatives to promote green industrialisation and nature protection. This chimed with a pitch ahead of the

COP30 summit in **Brazil** to position Africa as a global renewable energy hub whose green industrialisation will create economic opportunities, rather than a region devastated by climate change.

NEGOTIATING POWER

The second pillar of the leaders' declaration aimed to build a coalition of African countries with the minerals needed for green industrialisation, to ensure that they and their neighbours secure investments in processing and supply chains.

The European Union and the US are among the leading economies scrambling to catch up with **China** on access to critical minerals. Last month, US authorities proposed adding copper (digital economy), potash (fertilisers), lead, rhenium, silicon and silver to their list of 54 critical minerals. Top US manufacturers such as General Motors, Ford and Tesla are also pushing harder to get access to the minerals, such as lithium, to make electric vehicle batteries.

This challenges Africa's economic policy makers to negotiate harder for manufacturing and processing deals, given China's dominance of critical mineral refining. Access to power projects, such as Ethiopia's GERD, will be critical.

African diplomats say the chronic shortfalls on green investment and climate finance in relation to economies such as Brazil, China and **India**, could push resource-rich economies into purely extractive deals with the biggest industrial economies, weakening efforts to build an African bargaining position. The US, under President **Donald Trump**, has made critical mineral access a condition of investments and, in some cases, of diplomatic engagement with African states.

Over 30% of the world's reserves of minerals for clean energy – such as cobalt, lithium, and copper – are in Africa, placing its economies 'at the very heart of the global energy transition,' said **Claver Gatete**, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa and former governor of the bank of **Rwanda**. 'Without a coordinated African stance: extractive models will persist, environmental degradation will deepen, and inequities in value distribution will widen,' he added.

The final pillar of the Addis declaration – nature protection – was highlighted in the launch of the AU's Great Green Wall Initiative against deforestation in the Sahel, and the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative, a country-led effort to restore 100m hectares (nearly 250m acres) of land in Africa by 2030. ●

BIG NUMBERS ON FINANCE BUT DETAILS ARE FUZZY

The European Union, which brought one of the largest delegations to Addis, launched its Continental Energy Programme in Africa; Germany announced its 'Engaging for Africa's Green Energy Transition' scheme. Both are part of the EU's Global Gateway project to generate US$176 billion for Africa's green and digital transition. Closer to Abiy's heart, the European Commission announced $156 million of investment into a grid-expansion project to allow Ethiopia to expand national transmission lines (over 70% of Ethiopians aren't on the national grid) as well as to export electricity to its East African neighbours from the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

At the opening of the summit, the African Development Bank, Afreximbank, Africa50, Africa Finance Corporation, and the continent's biggest commercial banking groups, committed to mobilise more than $100bn for the Africa Green Industrialisation Initiative (AGII) to build renewable-powered industries and green value chains

Abiy also announced an Africa Climate Innovation Compact (ACIC) and the African Climate Facility (ACF), which aim to mobilise $50bn to finance climate solutions. The numbers are impressive but there's little clarity on how the finance will be raised. It could prove too broad, warned Carlos Lopes, who chairs the African Climate Foundation. It groups together '...too many topics that don't have the same importance,' he says. That could unpick a more coherent African position. Delegates should prioritise unity on aims and ambition, said Richard Muyungi, the Tanzanian chair of the African Group of Negotiators at the UN, ahead of COP30 (**AC Vol 66 No 17**).

Also discussed in Addis was a plan, mooted by developing countries, to replace the annual COP summits with a permanent Climate policy body or council under the aegis of the UN General Assembly. That should give smaller economies a louder voice. The proposal might also appeal to richer countries with COP fatigue, who point to the lack of implementation between the expensive annual summits.

Ethiopia might want to continue with the COPs for a few more years. It is bidding to host COP32 in 2027, after next year's COP has become a competition between Australia and Turkey. 'Africa did not cause this crisis, yet Africa can lead in solving it,' argues Abiy is his messianic push for cheap energy. ●

ECONOMY/AFRICA/UN/TAX

African officials push ahead with global tax treaty

Published online 16 September

After the US walkout, EU states are in talks as Egypt's Youssef aims for a legally binding framework after the Nairobi meeting in November

Against an unpromising diplomatic backdrop, the African-led push for a UN tax convention to boost public revenues by countering illicit financial flows is making progress through the labyrinthine bureaucracy of the international system and the initial hostility of several rich economies. As western treasuries step up the search for revenues, their governments have become more sympathetic to the developing economy case for global tax reform, a senior western-based corporate auditor told *Africa Confidential*.

After the second round of negotiations UN tax convention in New York in August, Nairobi will host the third session from 11-22 November and the sixth in November 2026. This may boost **Kenya's** President **William Ruto** diplomatically but his attempt to position himself as a campaigner on financial reform and transparency contradicts his government's record on tax, particularly of billionaires such as himself.

Beyond the credentials of individual

governments, the drive by African officials and activists to win over a majority to set up the UN convention has been a triumph as diplomatic and financial support for the UN has been shrinking as it marks its 80th anniversary this month (**AC Vol 65 No 18**).

Egypt's Deputy Minister of Finance for Tax Policy and Reforms, **Ramy Youssef**, was appointed as chairman of the convention in February. At its meeting in New York, the Africa Group at the UN said it aimed establish the '...sovereign right of every nation to raise revenue justly from the economic activity that occurs within its borders.'

Delegates have set themselves a December deadline to finalise a legally binding Framework Convention to cover dispute prevention, taxation and sustainable development. It might also include taxation of High-Net-Worth Individuals – an issue also taken up by **South Africa's** G20 presidency – and transparency mechanisms (**Dispatches 23/6/25**).

The 'commitments' section of the convention is now looking very ambitious, say civil society leaders. One of its key objectives is to establish 'an international tax system for sustainable development'. The Africa Group at the UN is calling for specific measures to tax extractive industries. It also wants stronger rules on exchange of information on beneficial ownership.

Most of the ambition is coming from African and Latin American delegates demanding structural reform of international taxation. But representatives from member states of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which was formerly the world's leading arbiter on tax policy, are insisting that the UN convention's decisions are aligned with OECD rules.

Many African states are calling for rules on tax governance to be embedded in the Framework Convention, along with a Conference of the Parties (COP), and a permanent secretariat. 'The status quo has been unfair for developing countries,' said Kenya's representative. Given that Egypt, **Nigeria**, South Africa and Kenya suffer from the highest levels of illicit financial flows on the continent, now estimated at over US $150 billion a year, there is an evident gulf between the technocrats on tax negotiations and some of the politicians who have presided over these ballooning losses. Some officials genuinely fear that cracking down on tax abuses could deter investors.

Plans for the convention have had to adapt due to the UN's hiring freeze after Secretary-General **António Guterres** targeted an at least 20% cut in running costs this year. Job adverts to recruit 19 staffers for the secretariat were quietly shelved; the secretarial function is being handled by redeploying existing staff (**AC Vol 66 No 12**).

Many delegates worry that the complexity of the convention's structure and the multiplicity of protocols and different voting systems to adopt new rules might allow for loopholes. Each protocol has a separate governance system, and the signatories to each protocol might not include all of the signatories to the convention.

Delegates agreed that the commitments must be agreed by a simple majority with the protocols requiring a two-thirds majority. Votes of approval, those by simply majority, will not make implementing new tax regimes legally binding on member states.

US BOYCOTT

The UN tax convention project is anathema to **United States** President **Donald Trump**, who took office on 20 January. The US delegation walked out of the convention during its opening session that month (**AC Vol 66 No 2**). It also says it will retaliate against any attempt by international bodies deemed to unfairly target US individuals or companies.

The US boycott, which was not followed by any other opponents of the UN convention, such as the European Union, **Japan** or **Britain**, may have speeded up negotiations, say insiders. Officials in US President **Joe Biden's** administration voted against creating the UN convention in the General Assembly.

Insiders say that US officials could have obstructed the negotiations, arguing that Washington's absence has encouraged other countries to show more ambition. That leaves the bigger problem of how the UN tax convention will operate when the world's biggest economy hasn't signed up to it.

There are also discrepancies between the ambitious and radical statements on transparency by African delegates in New York and the record of their governments at home. Nigeria's delegation called for progress on public country-by-country reporting and effective exchange of information to prevent disputes. But the record of Abuja's anti-corruption agencies is, at best, uneven.

The convention organisers make much of its transparency. All the sessions are livestreamed on UN Web TV. Yet officials run the detailed negotiations on texts and protocols in secret between member states. The absence of US officials has speeded negotiations on taxation of the digital economy, an early priority of the UN convention and topic for the first protocol.

In June in a diplomatic trade off, the G7 proclaimed that US-based multinational corporations should be exempt from the OECD's minimum effective corporate tax rate. The Trump administration rejects both the OECD tax rules and the plan for a UN tax convention. But that does not bind the UN convention and delegates have been pushing for tough digital levies.

'As long as US digital corporations do business in other countries, other countries will also be able to tax them, and several are in fact already doing that through so-called digital services taxes,' says **Tove Maria Ryding** of the European Network for Debt and Development (Eurodad).

The EU, whose 27 member states abstained in the UN vote on the convention, is now allowing member states to negotiate as individual countries instead of tying them to a common approach led by the European Commission in Brussels.

The UN tax convention negotiations were an '...opportunity to consider current tax related challenges and to contribute to enhanced tax cooperation at international level' said **Danish** officials whose government held the EU's rotating presidency in August.

DIFFERENCES

There are still major disagreements between rich states in the OECD and developing economies. Most African states oppose mandatory arbitration in legal fights, citing bitter experience with investor–state dispute settlement (ISDS) regimes seen as favouring big companies. Instead, the Africa group wants mediation and state-to-state mechanisms that respect sovereignty and capacity constraints, also arguing for joint audits and advance pricing agreements to pre-empt disputes.

The next round of talks in Nairobi will move from principles to detailed drafting, enforceability of commitments and the structure of protocols and dispute settlement. They should clarify the scope of the Framework Convention, as well as resolving differences on cross-border services (nexus rules, gross vs net taxation, and digital services). ●

SOUTH AFRICA/US

Ramaphosa faces crunch time on Trump tariff talks

22 September

EU seeks to deepen trade relationship with South Africa in response to US protectionism

President **Cyril Ramaphosa** faces crunch trade talks with United States President **Donald Trump's** administration next week, with talks expected on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York that starts today.

Pretoria has confirmed that preliminary talks involving Ramaphosa's trade adviser **Alistair Ruiter** and between Trade Minister **Parks Tau** and US Trade Representative **Jamieson Greer** have taken place over the past week.

The US imposed 30% duties on South African exports on 8 August, which could deal a crippling economic blow (AC Vol 66 No 16).

The European Union, meanwhile, has held out an olive branch on trade. EU Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen** told a meeting of **German** business leaders on 18 September that her team was in trade talks with Pretoria as part of the EU's attempts to reduce its own reliance on transatlantic trade.

The first priority in the US talks is for Ramaphosa's government to cut the 30% tariff rate for key South African products such as wine, citrus fruits and motor vehicles, though the latter may be trickier because of Trump's desire to make the US car industry more competitive.

Agriculture Minister **John Steenhuisen**, the leader of the Democratic Alliance, Ramaphosa's main coalition partner, has indicated that the government may have to give ground on some of its affirmative action laws, such as black economic empowerment, employment equity and land expropriation laws, to curry favour with Trump (AC Vol 66 No 11).

That would be an extremely bitter pill for Ramaphosa and his African National Congress (ANC) party to swallow. Though Ramaphosa has cancelled joint military exercises with **Russia** and **China** scheduled for November in the hope that Trump will attend a G20 summit in Johannesburg the same month, he has refused to unpick national policy (Dispatches 8/9/25).

Ramaphosa told ANC councillors on Monday that the forthcoming US visit was part of a broader strategy to normalise trade relations with Washington.

SOUTH SUDAN/US

Warlords to Washington

22 September

With the country on the brink of a new war, dissident former deputy chief of staff Thomas Cirillo is planning a visit to Washington

With South Sudan on the brink of return to war, one of the main holdouts to the 2018 peace agreement is returning to the political fray.

Lieutenant General **Thomas Cirillo Swaka's** National Salvation Front (NAS) has hired Washington lobbyists Moran Strategies to secure allies for him on Capitol Hill, paving the way for him to visit Washington.

A trip has been made easier by President **Salva Kiir's** decision to accept United States deportees after President **Donald Trump** threatened to revoke all visas for South Sudanese.

The contract with Moran Strategies filed under the Foreign Agents Registration Act describes NAS as a 'liberation movement' and is signed by Cirillo. It is worth a modest US$72,000 over six months.

Led by former Democratic Congressman **Jim Moran**, Moran Strategies has become the go-to lobbying firm for African dissident movements. It already represents the Ambazonia Governing Council in **Cameroon** the National Representative Council of **Eritrea** and the Biafra Republic Government in Exile (AC Vol 66 No 2 & Vol 65 No 15).

The timing of the contract, signed on 1 September, is significant. South Sudan was already teetering on the brink of a return to civil war before Kiir's government charged First Vice-President **Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon** with murder, treason and crimes against humanity on 11 September. Machar has been under house arrest since March despite entreaties by the international community to release him for the sake of the peace process (Dispatches 15/9/25 & Vol 66 No 18).

Cirillo, whose forces still control chunks of the southern Equatorial region, refused to join the 2018 Khartoum peace agreement. He was Deputy Chief of Staff in South Sudan's military before launching the breakaway NAS in 2017. Cirillo's forces then joined the South Sudan Opposition Alliance in 2018.

MALAWI

Electoral commission issues rebuke after both Chakwera and Mutharika declare victory

22 September

Commission says it has counted 99% of votes although it has not yet published the results

President **Lazarus Chakwera** and his predecessor **Peter Mutharika** have been rebuked by the head of the Malawi Electoral Commission after both claimed they had won the 16 September elections.

The commission has confirmed that 99% of votes have been counted with inside sources saying that Mutharika had a slight lead over Chakwera. Pressure was mounting on the commission to release more results over the weekend. Malawi's electoral law requires the result to be declared within seven days of the election.

'The commission will not hurry the results management process just because some political party leaders and candidates are piling up pressure,' said **Annabel Mtalimanja**, the chair of the commission.

The results are likely to put the country on a knife-edge – opinion polls suggested that no candidate was likely to obtain the 50% plus one needed to avoid a second round run off (AC Vol 66 No 18).

Five years ago, Chakwera defeated Mutharika in a rerun after the constitutional court threw out the 2019 result.

Ahead of the polls, the received wisdom among pundits was that Chakwera's prospects would be damaged by the loss of support from the United Transformation Movement (UTM), led by Chakwera's Vice-President, **Saulos Chilima** – who died in a government plane crash last year – as part of the Tonse Alliance electoral pact (**AC Vol 65 No 19**).

Former President **Joyce Banda**, another member of the Tonse Alliance, was also a candidate on 16 September but her People's Party and the UTM's **Dalitso Kabambe** are unlikely to have obtained 10% of the vote between them.

SOUTH SUDAN

Fears of civil war grow as Kiir charges Machar

15 September

First Vice-President accused of murder, treason and crimes against humanity

By charging First Vice-President **Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon** and 20 others with murder, treason and crimes against humanity, President **Salva Kiir Mayardit's** government is raising concerns that all sides will abandon the 2018 peace accord and restart the civil war. The UN Security Council has urged restraint and for the rival factions linked to Riek and Salva to continue working on the agreement to unify the security forces. That looks improbable for now.

An official at the **United States** State Department said that both sides had effectively abandoned the 2018 agreement were continuing to use violence as a political tool. The charges against Machar and allies date back to March when Nuer youth from the White Army clashed with Salva's forces on gunboats and helicopter gunships, according to Justice Minister **Joseph Geng Akech**. Lieutenant-General **David Majur Dak** was killed in the firefight (**AC Vol 66 No 18**).

Machar has been under house arrest since 26 March, together with **Angelina Teny**, his wife and the interior minister, and several bodyguards, despite entreaties from the US and other governments to release them (**AC Vol 66 No 7**). Machar's Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO) has stated that the arrests are a breach of the 2018 peace agreement.

Justice Minister Akech says the charges are meant to send a clear message that no one is above the law – if they attack humanitarian personnel and government soldiers. But Riek's allies insist he had nothing to do with the clashes in March and the charges are an attempt to sideline him politically.

Uganda has sent military support to Salva Kiir in defiance of a UN arms embargo. President **Yoweri Museveni's** son, Gen **Muhoozi Kainerugaba** said that any move against Salva could trigger an intervention by Kampala's forces.

TANZANIA

Samia's tactical electoral concession

15 September

By allowing an opponent to stand, the government may be looking to reduce international criticism

Tanzania's presidential election is set to become slightly more competitive after the High Court ordered that **Luhaga Mpina** of the ACT Wazalendo party should be allowed to submit nomination forms to the Independent National Electoral Commission.

The commission had effectively banned Mpina from standing by suspending his candidacy on a technicality. Delivering the judgement in Dodoma, a judge declared the suspension unconstitutional. But allowing Mpina to run for the October polls is only a minor concession.

With **Tundu Lissu**, the leader of the main opposition party Chadema, still in prison facing treason charges, and Chadema banned from standing candidates, few doubt that President **Samia Suluhu Hassan** will be re-elected with a landslide and that her ruling *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) will win almost all the parliamentary seats (**AC Vol 66 No 11**). ACT Wazalendo won four of the 393 seats in the Tanzanian parliament in 2020 and though former leader **Zitto Kabwe**, the party's best-known face, hopes to return to parliament for a seat in Kingoma, an eastern city, it is hard to see ACT taking even 10% in the presidential poll.

Samia's government has so far escaped major international censure for a concerted campaign of repression that saw CCM win 99% of municipal council seats last year after a ban on most opposition candidates, as well as the jailing of Lissu and a series of violent attacks on Chadema and ACT officials. (**Dispatches 22/10/24**).

But the bans on the main two opposition leaders and public apathy about Samia's record have prompted fears in ruling party circles of a low turnout that could reduce her legitimacy. Allowing a semblance of competitiveness in the polls should, CCM officials calculate, be enough to again avoid significant international criticism.

ZAMBIA/CHINA

Government demands Sino-Metals increases pay out for dam collapse

15 September

February incident led to more than 1 million tonnes of toxic waste spilling into Kafue River

President **Hakainde Hichilema's** government has upped the ante in its dispute with Sino-Metals, demanding more compensation for a collapse at the dam that resulted in more than one million tonnes of toxic waste spilling into Kafue River.

In the aftermath of the February incident at the dam that held waste from the Leach Zambia copper mine, Sino-Metals promised to compensate affected communities but its initial offer of US$580,000 was meagre and many locals say that they have not received anything.

'If the damage to the land and livelihoods proves to be more extensive or long-lasting than initially understood, then further compensation will be necessary and it will be pursued,' said Zambia's Vice-President **Mutale Nalumango** during a meeting with Sino-Metals on 10 September.

The compensation package 'must be guided by a thorough and independent assessment,' she added. The company, which has been a major player in Zambia's copper sector for more than a decade, has not helped itself by initially reporting that 50,000 tonnes of waste material had spilled into waterways connected to the Kafue, close to Kitwe in northern Zambia.

That may have encouraged the government to underplay the effects of the spill on health and the local ecosystem. Drizit, a **South Africa**-based environmental firm contracted by Sino-Metals to investigate the incident, found that 1.5m tonnes of toxic material had been released. Sino-Metals has since sacked Drizit.

Local communities and civil society groups are still assessing the costs of the spill. Human Rights Watch said the acid pollution had 'killed fish, burned maize and groundnut crops, and led to the deaths of livestock, wiping out livelihoods of local farmers'.

There have also been reports of residents being forced to sign away the right to make further compensation claims by Sino-Metals, which has already received demands for $420m (**AAC Vol 5 No 1**).

Activists are putting Zambia's mining industry under greater scrutiny as investor interest in the sector grows. Vedanta Resources, the mining and energy company controlled by **Indian** billionaire **Anil Agarwal**, is considering listing its Zambian copper unit to raise the finance it promised to invest in its operations at Konkola Copper Mines as part of the deal struck with the government (**Dispatches 6/5/2025**). ●

POINTERS

Côte d'Ivoire

MAGA POLITICS COMES TO ABIDJAN

Veteran Trump-supporting lobbyists have found themselves pitted against one another in Abidjan, in an unlikely subplot to Côte d'Ivoire's presidential election campaign. *Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI) leader **Tidjane Thiam** has agreed a three-month US$200,000 contract with Earhart Turner to promote 'free and fair elections'.

Earhart Turner was founded earlier this year by **Karen Giorno**, a former Trump campaign leader in Florida. Its other African engagement – a $5 million, six-month lobbying contract with **Congo-Kinshasa's** President **Félix Tshisekedi** – was abruptly cancelled just weeks after signing, at the insistence of Trump's Africa advisor **Massad Boulos** (**AC Vol 66 No 8**).

This time, Earhart has subcontracted the work to **Christopher Harvin**, another Trump campaign alumnus, who gets just $80,000 out of the contract for two months work. Harvin has spent nearly a decade as an Africa-focused lobbyist, helping to launch the non-profit Vanguard Africa consultancy, which has supported a string of opposition leaders. His other clients include **Congo-Brazzaville's** President **Denis Sassou-Nguesso**.

Thiam – the former Credit Suisse chief executive – was barred from the ballot by an April court ruling. Although he renounced his **French** citizenship in March, the court found that he was not exclusively Ivorian at the time of his voter registration, which it deemed inadmissible under electoral law.

He is now seeking to apply international pressure on President **Alassane Ouattara**, after the Constitutional Court on 9 September upheld the ruling that prevents both him and former president **Laurent Gbagbo** from standing in the 25 October election (Dispatches 8/9/25). Thiam's claims will be contested by fellow Republican lobbyist **Joseph Szlavik**, whose Washington DC-based firm, Scribe Strategies, was hired by Ouattara in July on a $600,000 contract (**AC Vol 66 No 15**).

UNESCO/Africa

A TWO-HORSE RACE FOR THE TOP JOB

The race to succeed **France's Audrey Azoulay** as Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) will be won by an African – but the future of the organisation remains more problematic as the UN system faces swingeing cuts.

Diplomats will vote in November on UNESCO's next leader, following the withdrawal of **Gabonese** candidate **Noël Nelson Messone** and **Mexico's Gabriela Ramos**. That leaves a two-horse race between **Egypt's Khaled El-Enany** and **Congo-Brazzaville's Firmin Édouard Matoko**.

A former Minister for Tourism and Antiquities in Cairo between 2016 and 2022, El-Enany is widely viewed as the favourite. He has had formal backing from the African Union for close to a year, though Matoko has held a series of recent meetings with Southern African leaders including **Madagascar** which currently chairs the Southern African Development Community.

Egypt also hopes that its increasingly close relations with Europe – particularly on migration and energy policy – will help it peel off support from most of the EU27. Spain has publicly pledged its backing for El-Enany. Matoko, meanwhile, is a UNESCO insider who currently serves as Assistant Director-General for Priority Africa and External Relations.

The main battle is likely to be for votes from Asia and Latin America. The latter had been expected to deliver its votes en bloc for Mexico's Ramos.

Matoko's Finance Minister in Brazzaville, **Christian Yoka**, has agreed to pay international lobbying giant APCO Worldwide US$250,000 to run a spin campaign of 'strategic communications, media relations and stakeholder engagement services' in the **United States**, according to a contract filed under the Foreign Agents Registration Act on 12 September.

PARKS TAU – RAMAPHOSA'S TRADE TROUBLESHOOTER

A former African National Congress (ANC) Mayor of Johannesburg, **Parks Tau's** career was in jeopardy after losing the mayoralty to the Democratic Alliance's **Herman Mashaba** in 2016 after just one term: a party stronghold lost and a handsome ANC majority from 2011 wiped out (**AC Vol 57 No 17**). Then in 2019, after being elected to the Gauteng Assembly, Tau was overlooked for a senior job in the provincial government.

But months later, when **Cyril Ramaphosa** was consolidating power as the ANC and national president, he appointed Tau as the only deputy minister from outside parliament (**AC Vol 62 No 16**). Tau also got a seat on the ANC's National Executive Committee. Trade Minister since the creation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) last June, Tau has one of the toughest assignments in Ramaphosa's cabinet: reaching a compromise on trade with **Donald Trump's** administration in the **United States**. That is being tested on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. Pretoria was shocked by the 30% levy on US imports from **South Africa**, the highest imposed on any African country.

Exempting South Africa's wine and fruit from duties may be straightforward but defending its automotive industry, now overtaken by **Morocco** as Africa's largest, will be tough. Trump has targeted imports of vehicles and automotive parts from Europe, **China** and elsewhere for hefty duties after promising to reboot America's struggling manufacturers.

Tau's reputation as a technocratic mayor in Johannesburg did not help him electorally. But his command of the detail is an asset for a trade minister.

To tackle the crisis, Tau had launched a tariff desk within the Department of Trade and Industry. It is a first port of call for companies affected by the Trump tariffs, but also manages negotiations with other markets: China, **Japan**, **Thailand**, the **United Arab Emirates**, **Qatar** and **Saudi Arabia**.

Parks Tau has been in talks with China and the European Union for much of this year, primarily focusing on green industrialisation and enhancing industrial supply chains. But others are sensing weakness in Pretoria's trade stance. After South Africa pressured Taiwan to move its representative office from Pretoria to Johannesburg, thought to be at the behest of Beijing, Taiwan responded on 23 September by requiring pre-approval for the bulk of semi-conductor chips sold to South Africa citing national security concerns.

Perhaps encouraged by Washington, which lambasts South Africa's trade ties with China, Taiwan is setting down a marker in Africa, reminding governments that it retains formidable power in the tech sector. This is another US-related headache for Tau. The same day Taiwan announced its new semi-conductor rules, Business Unity South Africa and the South Africa-China Economy and Trade Association formalised a pact in Midrand, just north of Johannesburg, and presided over by Beijing's ambassador to Pretoria, **Wu Peng**. South Africa-China trade, worth over US$53 billion last year, is over twice South Africa's trade with the US. And Tau is struggling to keep both giant economies on side. ●