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BLUE LINES

The start of production this week, after years of delay, of the Dangote Group's $18.5 billion oil refinery opens a brave new world for Nigeria's oil and gas sector, after 50 years of dependence on refined petroleum products from Europe. The refinery will initially produce diesel and aviation fuel, then ramp up production over the next year or more to reach 650,000 barrels a day of refined products, including petrol.

Aside from the new jobs created at the plant in Lagos, the refinery could transform Nigeria's economy and energy sector, cutting imports massively.

Aliko Dangote thanked President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on social media for his support and encouragement, but relations between the two have deteriorated badly. The Dangote Group is under investigation by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and its Lagos offices were raided at the beginning of the year by anti-corruption investigators in relation to US dollars secured by Dangote from the central bank, which is the centre of a wider investigation.

Beyond the Dangote-Tinubu animus lies a bigger question about the lack of investors in Africa's biggest economy. Dangote says the commercial viability of the refinery would demonstrate Nigeria's capacity to build and run major capital projects. If that holds, why are more leading investors leaving the market than entering it?

ETHIOPIA/SOMALIA/SOMALILAND

Why Abiy and Muse signed a 'memorandum of misunderstanding'

A hasty deal offering recognition of Somaliland's sovereignty and a port for Ethiopia has angered the region

By announcing a trade-off on New Year's Day – putative recognition of Somaliland's 'independence' in exchange for access to the Gulf of Aden – Ethiopia's Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed** and his Somaliland counterpart **Muse Bihi Abdi** have united the region against them, ramping up tensions at a highly volatile time.

Most of the other states in the region believe they will lose out from Ethiopia's deal to access Somaliland's coastline. Under the agreement Ethiopia would lease 20 kilometres of coast on the Gulf of Aden for commercial and military use in exchange for formally recognising the Somaliland state which broke away from Somalia in 1991.

Many of the details are meant to be hammered out in discussions over the next month between technical and legal teams appointed by Addis Ababa and Hargeisa. This suggests there was little or no preparatory work done to define these highly sensitive issues before the bombshell announcement by Abiy and Muse Bihi on 1 January (AC Vol 64 No 23). Journalists and politicians in Ethiopia and Somaliland interpreted the agreement in starkly different ways.

In Ethiopia, no journalist referred to Addis Ababa's future recognition of Somaliland as a sovereign state. The federal government in Addis Ababa said the deal would trigger an in-depth assessment of the recognition issue, without stipulating a timeline. For state media, the main point was to congratulate Abiy for 'walking in the shoes of Menelik' – and regaining Ethiopia's access to the sea.

In Somaliland, journalists close to the presidency were singing a different song: the core of the deal was Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland and victory in a struggle that had started in 1991.

Official sources said nothing about the location of the planned Ethiopian presence and the military component of the agreement. In Hargeisa, as in Addis Ababa, people were expected to celebrate, not ask for clarifications. When three journalists organised an online debate on the agreement they were arrested.

PORT PLAN

For the last six months, Abiy has made access to the sea a recurrent theme in his speeches: land-locked Ethiopia needed access to the sea to rebuild its power in the Horn (AC Vol 64 No 23). Initially, Ethiopians thought he was alluding to an arrangement with **Eritrea**. In July 2018, Eritrea's President **Issayas Afewerki** had said Ethiopia would be able to use Assab port as part of their grand rapprochement.

Since then, relations between Abiy and Issayas have waned. Issayas distrusted the Pretoria accord that Abiy signed in November 2022 to end the war with Tigray (AC Vol 63 No 22). His scepticism deepened after Abiy launched the war against the Fano militias in Amhara region in mid-2023. Issayas backs the Fano militia's opposition to the peace with Tigray and any territorial concessions it entails. Now with the Ethiopia-Somaliland deal, Eritrea is posturing as a defender of regional interests along with Somalia and **Djibouti**.

MOGADISHU LASHES OUT AT ETHIOPIA'S 'AGGRESSION'

In Mogadishu President **Hassan Sheikh Mohamud** reacted furiously to the Ethiopia-Somaliland deal calling it an act of 'aggression' and a 'clear violation' of Somali sovereignty as he recalled his ambassador to Addis Ababa. On 6 January, he signed a bill rushed through parliament annulling the deal.

After trying to maintain good relations with **Muse Bihi Abdi** and **Abiy Ahmed**, it seems that Hassan Sheikh felt stabbed in the back. He had refused to help the Darod clan, which stretches across the region, and had been pushing him to endorse the Dhulbahante rebellion against Muse Bihi in Las Anod. Neither did he act on suspicions that Ethiopia wanted to build a buffer zone in Bay, Bakool and Gedo regions.

Hassan Sheikh saw that **Djibouti** and **Eritrea** would be natural allies against the Ethiopia-Somaliland deal and quickly arranged meetings with Presidents **Ismaïl Omar Guelleh** and **Issayas Afewerki**. On 2 January, he called **Egypt**, **Qatar**, and **Turkey** to show he could build an alternative coalition to back Somalia.

Politicians and acivitists in Somalia speedily singled out Ethiopia's role in the deal, re-igniting long-held suspicions against Addis Ababa despite its policy shifts and less interventionist stance.

The Islamist militia *Al Shabaab* exploited such sentiments to pose as true defenders of Somali sovereignty against Ethiopia's expansionism. Ethiopia had sent several thousand troops to fight *Al Shabaab* as part of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and for border security on its own account (AC Vol 64 No 21).

In one way, the Memorandum of Understanding was a seasonal gift for the Islamist militia. But *Al Shabaab* is making serious money in Somaliland so it does not want to weaken its economy. It's providing useful revenue for *Al Shabaab* as it wages a long war against Mogadishu.

Many Somalis found the nationalistic tone used by the prime minister, **Hamza Abdi Barre**, more convincing than *Al Shabaab's* opportunistic position. Yet these regional shifts will be difficult for Somalia to manage. Ethiopia is a neighbour and a powerful one. Whatever the fate of the MoU, it has reopened multiple wounds between Mogadishu and Addis Ababa.

Neither has the deal done much for the **United Arab Emirates'** (UAE) role in the region. It's yet to speak publicly on the deal but it has strongly supported Abiy Ahmed in other areas; helping with weapons when the federal forces were losing ground in the war against Tigray. Abu Dhabi may continue to back Abiy because of his help in the alliances that it has built in Sudan (with General **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'**) and in Somalia (with **Saïd Abdullahi Deni** and former President of Jubaland **Ahmed Madobe**, more than Hassan Sheikh).

Yet the UAE has spent nearly US$1 billion to rehabilitate Berbera port and the main road from Berbera to Tog Wajaale, the border point with Ethiopia. Currently, the port is under-used and it would make sense for the UAE to pressure its partners on this issue. For now, the MoU creates more uncertainties than opportunities for Abu Dhabi as well as many other states in the region. ●

When Abiy raised the question of Ethiopia's access to the sea last year, some saw it as a way to distract attention from bad news: lack of military success against the Amhara militias; the debt default in December; or the call by an Amhara religious leader, Archbishop **Abune Lukas**, to revolt against Abiy after he claimed that pilgrims of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had been killed by government drones (AC Vol 65 No 1).

Somalis pin this latest plan on two high-ranking Ethiopian missions to Hargeisa, in July and October, when they discussed access to the sea. Rumours spread among experts but were never substantiated. Presidents **Hassan Sheikh Mohamud** and **Ismaïl Omar Guelleh** did not pay attention. They were already coordinating with Muse Bihi on how to restart Somalia/Somaliland talks and were not ready to believe that the latter would risk such a gamble.

When the three leaders met in the last days of December in Djibouti, their meeting was not productive. The first day was very tense as Muse Bihi wanted to only talk about recognition while Hassan Sheikh would talk about everything except recognition. Eventually, Guelleh got Muse Bihi to appoint a technical team to discuss with another team in Mogadishu led by **Abdikarim Hussein Guled.** Hassan Sheikh proposed that they review the grievances that Somaliland nationalists (and their international supporters) have accumulated against Mogadishu between 1960 and 1991.

Muse Bihi left Djibouti frustrated. He landed in Addis Ababa determined to put Mogadishu under pressure and scupper any discussions that avoided the independence issue. That is how the Memorandum of Understanding was signed.

Neither Abiy nor Muse Bihi had a clear understanding of its implications. But both needed the statement to keep their opponents at bay and remobilise their constituencies.

Abiy Ahmed was calculating that access to the sea would allow him to save money (AC Vol 64 No 16).

Addis Ababa was meant to be paying Djibouti about US$1 billion a year for port services; the actual sum was much less. It could also win support from the many Ethiopians who saw the granting of independence to Eritrea as a strategic error.

Muse Bihi saw that announcing the deal with Addis Ababa would boost him politically (AC Vol 64 No 19). He had been unable to defeat the Dhulbahante uprising that threatened the idea of

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Deputy Editor: Andrew Weir
Website Editor: Juliet Amissah
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Somaliland's sovereignty. And with time, the Gadabuursi and Isse clans may also split with many joining the opposition to Somaliland's sovereignty.

Obtaining 'international recognition' was timely. According to some of Muse's advisors, he had planned to pressure Mogadishu to endorse it first; a move he would reward by cancelling the deal with Addis Ababa.

Both Abiy and Muse Bihi miscalculated the internal and international reactions that the MoU would trigger.

Paradoxically, the MoU may weaken Addis Ababa by offering a chance for the supporters of Greater Somalia to show their influence in Ethiopia and beyond. In Mogadishu and then in Jijiga, capital of Ethiopia's Somalia region and in **Kenya's** North Eastern Province, and Somaliland, people reacted, some overreacted, to the project.

Internationally, the implications of an ad hoc redrawing of borders were too serious to ignore. The European Union, the **United States**, **Saudi Arabia** and **Britain** quickly raised concerns about the territorial integrity of Somalia. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU) expressed deep concern and called for dialogue.

No country, including the **United Arab Emirates** (UAE) which was thought to have encouraged the deal, showed support for the MoU. Opinions about the deal are rapidly polarising in the region. And Djibouti has called on both sides to ease the tensions and restart talks.

OPPOSITION

In Somaliland, despite official celebrations, negative reactions came in quickly. The main opposition party Waddani saw it as another ruse by Muse Bihi to extend his presidency further; it demanded that the text of the agreement be presented to Parliament for approval. Dhulbahante elders and politicians argued that the ruling Isaaq clan had failed to defeat them so was now trying to get Ethiopia's army on its side (AC Vol 64 No 6).

The Isse elders based in Lughaya (a mooted location for Ethiopia's military) denounced the MoU, arguing that the Isaaq should sell their own land. The youth in Boorama, the capital of Awdal region, protested and called on their supporters to oppose any Ethiopian presence. Instead of reunifying Somaliland behind the president, the MoU was splitting it further.

In Hargeisa, the plan was also opposed, for different reasons.

On 6 January, the main mosques discussed the agreement and their imams argued against giving 'Muslim land' to 'Christians'. Then, Somaliland's Defence Minister, **Abdiqani Mohamoud Ateye**, who hails from Awdal, resigned in protest at the MoU.

ETHIOPIA/SOMALIA:
Addis Ababa wants a port

These quick-fire responses show Muse Bihi misjudged popular sentiment both on Somaliland's sovereignty and opposition to any Ethiopian presence. And he failed to clarify the key questions: Who is going to control Berbera? Where is the Ethiopian facility going to be located: Lughaya, Eel Sheikh (between Lughaya and Berbera), or Berbera itself? What about the corridor to the Ethiopian border mentioned by Abiy Ahmed and his National Security Affairs Advisor, **Redwan Hussein**? ●

SOUTH AFRICA/ISRAEL

Genocide case tests the UN system

Ramaphosa is reaping political dividends by taking on the Netanyahu government at the Hague

Whether South Africa has made a plausible case to prove Israel has violated the genocide convention with its bombardment of Gaza is likely to be decided at the International Court of Justice in the Hague (ICJ) by the end of January. It will be a high bar to prove that Israel has breached the convention and has done so with 'the intent to destroy in whole and in part, a national, ethnical or religious group'.

The court also has to rule on South Africa's request for 'provisional measures' – effectively an injunction on Israel to adhere to a ceasefire. Under this injunction, Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu's** government would be liable for the actions of the Israel Defense Forces, utterances by its top officials and the limiting of humanitarian relief to Gaza.

It is as politically contentious a case as the ICJ has faced since its establishment in 1948 in the wake of the Nazi Holocaust and the Second World War. It pits Israel and its closest ally, the **United States**, along with with most governments in Europe against South Africa and most of the countries in the global south who voted at the UN for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Whether or not the ICJ grants South Africa its injunction, it has no way to enforce the ruling. Given the stakes, with over 24,000 civilian deaths reported in Gaza by the third week of January, the ICJ and the wider UN system would face another crisis of credibility if Israel and the US chose to ingnore the injunction. Either way the ICJ risks being accused of judicial favouritism.

By being the only country in the world to take on Israel at the UN's highest court, South Africa has heightened debate on the Gaza conflict. Concerned at the wider diplomatic fall-out, Israel is taking the South African case extremely seriously, hiring a senior **British** lawyer to lead its team (Dispatches 16/1/2024).

South Africa was the only party cited as applicant in the 84-page statement ahead of the hearing but the 57 nations of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) – 26 from Africa – supported the application while **Turkey** and **Malaysia** issued

PRETORIA'S LEGAL TEAM IN THE HAGUE

The legal team which took on Israel at the International Court of Justice on 11 January, received a hero's welcome on returning to South Africa. The nine-strong team was headed by veteran international law expert **John Dugard**, who is based in The Hague having left South Africa during the apartheid era of which he was a prominent critic. The chief strategist and advisor to the South African team, Dugard is a former UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine and member of the International Law Commission of the UN.

Adila Hassim, Senior Counsel (SC), who opened the presentation for South Africa, explained the four actions which constituted genocide under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. She contended that Israel had exceeded its obligations under the Convention.

Tembeka Ngcukaitobi SC, is a young advocate whose star has risen in South Africa and who has established a reputation as the go-to lawyer on land dispossession. He defined genocidal intent in relation to Israel's actions in Gaza.

Binne Ní Ghrálaigh, King's Counsel (KC), is a **British**-based lawyer focused on human rights, public international law, and criminal and public law. She was consulted by the South African team over several months before the ICJ application.

Vaughan Lowe KC has appeared in many cases at the ICJ and is Professor of Public International Law at Oxford University.

Max du Plessis has appeared in several ICJ cases as well as at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. He is an associate fellow in international law at Chatham House, London and adjunct professor in international law at Cape Town and Nelson Mandela universities.

Also on the team were: **Sarah Pudifin-Jones**, who has excelled in constitutional, administrative, and international law; **Tshidiso Ramogale**, an advocate of the High Court of South Africa and **Lerato Zikalala**, a member of the Johannesburg Society of Advocates and a researcher at the Constitutional Court of South Africa.

The South African ad hoc judge is former Deputy Chief Justice **Dikgang Moseneke**.

The President of the Court, **Joan Donoghue**, is being assisted by judges from 15 countries including **Russia**, **China**, the **United States**, **France**, **Australia**, **Brazil**, **Germany**, **India**, **Lebanon** and **Morocco**.

The Israeli legal team is headed by Britain's **Malcolm Shaw** KC who is considered a leading expert in international law. Israel's ad hoc judge is ex-Israeli Supreme Court Chief **Aharon Barak**. ●

supporting statements of their own.

'I have never felt as proud as I felt today when our legal team was arguing the Palestinian case in the Hague,' President **Cyril Ramaphosa** told the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) on the day of the hearing. That may also reflect some relief that, for once, a South African foreign policy initiative has garnered mass support at home and overseas.

QUESTIONS

It is also benefiting Ramaphosa's and the ANC's ratings. And that raises awkward questions about what's behind the case. The first is political opportunism: with elections less than six months away, were they a factor in South Africa's recourse to the ICJ?

Another goes much deeper: why Palestine and not **Sudan**, **Ethiopia** or **Congo-Kinshasa**? South Africa's failure to act on the devastating wars in the Horn of Africa is seen by diplomats as helping to weaken the African Union and empower militaristic regimes. Ramaphosa's warm welcome to Sudanese militia leader, General **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'**, who arrived in Pretoria just days before South Africa's case opened at the ICJ. Hemeti is widely accused of overseeing a genocide of the Masalit people in Darfur.

The other charge, much relayed on pro-Israel WhatsApp groups, is that the South Africa's government's ties to Hamas and **Iran** render it highly partisan in Israel's war on Gaza. Their main target is Foreign Minister **Naledi Pandor** and her call with **Ismaïl Haniyeh**, leader of Hamas's **Qatar**-based political wing, in the aftermath of the organisation's 7 October onslaught on southern Israel. Haniyeh said it was a solidarity call; Pandor insisted it was about delivering aid to Gaza. Her next move, a flight to Tehran to meet Iran's President **Ebrahim Raisi** for discussions on the crisis, triggered more western condemnation.

Despite that backdrop, South Africa's opening presentation at the Hague on 11 January won widespread acclaim in international legal and diplomatic circles, particularly in the global south. It failed to win over western nations, the United States dismissed the initiative as 'without merit' and Britain reacted in similar terms.

Those who had initially dismissed the South African application on 29 December as a gimmick were surprised by the meticulous nature of its submission as well as the diversity and quality of its nine-strong legal team.

'South Africa might not achieve everything it wanted but it has done something very important by putting this issue on the table,' said **Daniel Levy**, a former Israeli negotiator and now head of the US/Middle East Project (USMEP). 'This is something we will be left with regardless of the outcome in the court's judgment,' he said.

Independent lawyers observers said that South Africa had made powerful arguments to prove genocidal intent and that Israel's response on access to humanitarian aid and protecting civilians had been weak. South Africa's legal team listed public statements by senior Israeli officials following the Hamas attacks on 7 October. They ranged from vowing to wipe Gaza off the map, describing Palestinians as 'human animals' and denying Palestinians water, fuel and medical equipment in breach of international law.

The 7 October attack by Hamas killed over 1,200 Israelis and seized more than 200 hostages. The counterattack by Israel after a declaration of war had claimed more than 23,000 lives – mainly women and children, and displaced 85% of the territory's 2.4 million inhabitants the time the case opened at the ICJ.

If the court granted the injunction to demand Israel cease hostilities, it would wrongfoot the Netyanhu government as criticism is mounting of its tactics in Gaza. It could also make the US complicit in the commission of genocide by providing Israel with weapons, said veteran American expert in international law at the University of Illinois, Professor **Francis Boyle**.

HISTORY

The African National Congress (ANC) and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) had a particularly close relationship in exile. When former President **Nelson Mandela** was released from jail, the late PLO leader **Yasser Arafat** was the first liberation leader he met to thank for his contribution to the ANC's struggle.

The two leaders saw close parallels between apartheid in South Africa and the Israeli denial of self-determination for the Palestinians, aided and abetted by the west. We hear that Mandela came very close to visiting Israel and Palestine in late 1997–early 1998 but the visit was called off due to fears that Israel would use it to legitimise its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. 'We know only too well that our freedom will be incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians,' Mandela said in 1997.

Boyle, the first lawyer to win a genocide case under the 1948 Genocide Convention at the ICJ, said that it was the failure of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to make progress with investigating Prime Minister Netanyahu for suspected war crimes that led to the decision to approach the ICJ, which settles disputes between states.

'That is why we set up a campaign to find a state to file a case at the ICJ against Israel,' said Boyle in an interview on the *US Democracy Now!* channel.

In 1993, Boyle won two orders restraining Yugoslavia from committing serial killings and rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1993. The ruling led to an almost immediate no-fly zone being declared over the territory.

Boyle indicated that Ramaphosa, the late Archbishop **Desmond Tutu** and veteran South African lawyer Professor **John Dugard**, who led the South African team, were instrumental in preparing the ground for South Africa to challenge Israel in court first at the ICC and then at the ICJ.

Another option for the court would be to stop short of granting the injunction but to admonish Israel for exceeding the limits of self-defence in terms of international law and impose a series of demands regarding access to humanitarian aid, offering more protection to civilians, reducing troop levels and allowing the UN to investigate and monitor implementation.

Since South Africa filed the ICJ application, Netanyahu has approved a UN delegation to visit North Gaza, recalled civilian conscripts and rowed back on statements by some his ministers who had equated the war against Hamas with a war against Palestinian civilians.

But after the initial hearings ended on 12 January, a defiant Netanyahu said in a televised address that Israel would continue its programme to destroy Hamas and would not be stopped by anyone 'including the World Court'.

It appeared from the Israeli case that South Africa could be vulnerable on the legal requirement of engaging Israel before bringing the case for it to qualify as a dispute between two states, legal experts said. But rejecting the injunction on what many would see as a technicality, given the appalling state of bilateral relations between South Africa and Israel, might prompt more derision for the court. With tacit support for the case from the UN Secretary-General **António Guterres** and countervailing pressure from Washington, the task of the ICJ panel will be made harder still.

There was surprise in legal and political circles that Israel decided to defend the case at the court after a long history of ignoring such cases. The ICJ issued an order for Israel to dismantle a barrier in the occupied West Bank but it is still there, two decades later. ●

SOUTH AFRICA/MOROCCO/UN

Global alliances trounce human rights

Backroom machinations have landed Morocco the coveted chair of the UN's leading human rights body

Elections to the presidency of the 47-member UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) are normally a routine affair. But this year, **Israel** and **Morocco's** concerns that the issues of the civilian casualties in Gaza and the sovereignty of Western Sahara would reach the top of the human rights agenda combined to subvert the process.

This year it was the turn of the African caucus to nominate a candidate for president of the council and South Africa was its majority choice. And their choice would have prevailed had it not been for Morocco's canny tactics which forced the matter to a vote among the wider 47-member Council, where South Africa's position on Israel-Palestine, the Western Sahara and **Russia's** invasion of **Ukraine** had some powerful opponents.

Each year, the five UN-designated regional groupings – Africa (13 seats), Asia-Pacific (13 seats), Latin America and the Caribbean (eight seats), Western Europe and others (seven seats) and Eastern Europe (six seats) – take turns in nominating a candidate, who usually gets unanimously endorsed by the 47-member Council.

This time geopolitics intervened. Morocco challenged South Africa for the chair, splitting the African caucus, and forced the matter to a vote on the 47-member Council. There Morocco had enough powerful supporters to win, given opposition to South Africa's case against Israel in the International Court of Justice, and its support for the independence of Western Sahara, over which Morocco claims sovereignty.

Insiders say South Africa's espousal of LGBTQ+ rights has also earned it enemies among conservative governments, especially Middle Eastern states aligned with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). And South Africa's refusal to condemn Russia over the Ukraine war did it no favours with the west.

Most of all, Morocco has a de facto alliance with Israel under the Abraham Accord (AC Vol 63 No 7). Rabat recognised Israel in 2021 in a three-cornered pact in which the **United States** recognised Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara (Dispatches 27/7/21).

The succession to the UNHCR presidency began calmly over a year ago when South Africa's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, **Mxolisi Nkosi**, signalled his interest to other African representatives. And it was assumed that nobody would challenge Nkosi when the African Group has its 'turn' at the presidency.

But Morocco's intense diplomacy in Africa, its economic support to poorer countries, its airline Royal Air Maroc, which flies to most African capitals, and its determined campaign for sovereignty over Western Sahara has worn away resistance (AC Vol 63 No 1).

It leaves the pro-Polisario Front support of **Algeria**, South Africa, and **Zimbabwe** outgunned. **Nigeria**, once a stalwart defender of Polisario, is wavering; **Kenya** and **Uganda** may also drop the cause.

AGENDA SETTING

The UNHRC has influence but no real power. But for countries like Morocco, any support for its Sahara campaign is valuable. So, the right of the president to set the council's agenda is a key prize. A Moroccan president of the council can help keep both Western Sahara and Gaza off the agenda.

In November, South Africa was confident it would get the presidency because it was backed by a clear majority of the African ambassadors' group in Geneva.

So Morocco quietly submitted to the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa the candidacy of its UN ambassador in

Geneva, **Omar Zniber**, for the UNHRC presidency.

Morocco calculated that its candidacy would be opposed in Addis Ababa. And so it was: Algeria objected immediately, and the AU then referred the matter from the African caucus to the wider 47-member UNHRC where Morocco knew it had the numbers to win, especially in a secret ballot.

The AU stated only that it had 'noted' the candidacy of the Kingdom of Morocco for the Council Presidency.

Armed with this non-decision, Zniber, a genial diplomat whose teeth bared only when the subject of Western Sahara comes up, canvassed support in the African group as the sole candidate 'recognised' by the AU.

This was quickly rejected by South Africa, which had formally announced the candidacy of Nkosi but had not launched an aggressive campaign. Algeria and many other African ambassadors backed Nkosi. But a decision can only be reached by consensus.

To avoid the matter going to a vote on the 47-member Council, the African Group of ambassadors would have to reach consensus. South Africa called for a secret vote in the African Group, which Zniber, knowing Morocco would lose, rejected. He then requested the vote be referred to the Council.

After African Group chair, **Rwanda's** ambassador, **Marie Chantal Rwakazina**, sought a consensus, the ambassadors agreed to refer the matter to the Council where South Africa and Morocco would vie for votes from the 47 member states.

VOTE

On 10 January, when the members of the council voted, Zniber secured 30 votes to Nkosi's 17 in a secret ballot. South Africa's allies suspect that western and Moroccan pressure played a key role.

Morocco, like **China**, regards human rights as strictly internal affairs of sovereign states, characterising outside criticism as 'politicisation of human rights', 'denying development opportunities' by emphasising human rights. ●

MOROCCO

Royalty shows signs of stress

The King's private life is causing alarm as questions about the succession increase alongside fears over drought and 'normalisation' with Israel

Deep discomfort in and out of the Palace is abroad over a resurgence of reports about King **Mohammed** VI's (M6) friendship with three Moroccan-**German** Mixed Martial Arts fighters with controversial reputations. For seven years now, M6 has apparently been content for ex-convict **Abubakr Abu Azaitar** to post numerous photos of himself with the King on his Instagram page, attracting prurient comment in influential foreign media and – more alarmingly in the Moroccan context – recently in domestic outlets.

Commentators claim the former Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) fighter Abubakr and his twin **Omar Azaitar** exert a 'Rasputin-like' influence over the King, destabilising the monarchy and outraging its conservative supporters.

Yet M6 appears as happy to be pictured with the flashy Azaitars as much as in a business-suit driving forward-looking policies, or as the jellaba-clad *Al Amir al Muminin* (the Commander of the Faithful), the Sherifian title that aligns the Moroccan monarchy with the Prophet Mohammed (AC Vol 60 No 25).

With scant regard for what traditionalists would call decorum, M6 travels with the Azaitars, including to the **United Arab Emirates**, where he has close relations with its President, **Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahayan** (MBZ). Abubakr Abu Azaitar flaunts pictures with M6, along with his own family's bling and jetset lifestyle, on Instagram at www.instagram.com/abuazaitar.

Rulers like M6 and MBZ may seem to rule with impunity but are usually highly sensitive to negative public opinion – either crushing it or responding sympathetically – seeking to balance autocracy with modern, efficient government, and technology- and leisure-driven economies to maintain power.

But M6's indifference to the Azaitars' image seems to be a blind spot. Moroccans complain – usually sotto voce – as the Azaitars commandeer the Palace's luxury motorcade and police escort (which then halts the traffic) to drive down to Marrakech's hot spots. Even the staunchest loyalists privately display their angst.

Divisions within the usually highly opaque royal palace emerged when the mainstream Barlamane.com/fr website identified the Azaitars as 'notorious crooks' – Abubakr has been jailed several times in Germany. The family responded by launching three defamation suits against a defiant Barlamane, which hit back on 11 January with a detailed article on Omar Azaitar's business dealings.

Barlamane publisher **Mohammed Khabachi** is no muckraker but a former director of the state news agency *Maghreb Arabe Presse* (MAP) whose political connections go up to M6's political advisor and friend from childhood **Fouad Ali al Hima**, and the head of the domestic intelligence service, the *Direction Général de Surveillance du Térritoire* (DGST), **Abdellatif Hammouchi**.

That such staunch allies and defenders of the throne might be worried enough about the Azaitars to countenance such revelations being made public speaks volumes about the 60-year-old monarch.

The position of Morocco's other top securocrat, *Direction Générale des Études et de la Documentation* (DGED) head **Mohammed Yassine Mansouri**, is unknown, but he is a close royal advisor and may be in a power struggle with Hammouchi.

A MOOD OF DISQUIET

Another contributor to the current general disquiet is the chronic drought, now in its fifth year, and the conflict in Palestine, which has brought tens of thousands onto the streets – if not the 300,000 reports said to have demonstrated in Rabat – to sympathise with Gazans and protest against M6's diplomatic recognition of **Israel**, one of the few 'normalisation' initiatives to have survived.

Islamist groups like the unrecognised *Al adl wal Ihsane* have tried, without much luck, to exploit the crisis (Vol 64 No 21). And speculation that former *Parti de la justice et du développement* (PJD) premier **Abdelilah Benkirane** could use the crisis to make a political comeback is overstated, sources told *Africa Confidential*.

The regime is exposed to danger from popular anger at Israel's actions in Gaza and its continued adherence to the December 2020 Abraham Accords. To sweeten that deal, President **Donald Trump** recognised Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara. Mainstream Moroccan politicians believe this should be enough to allow the kingdom to weather the public fury over Palestine (AC Vol 65 No 1).

As for the drought, the majority of the population may now live in urban and peri-urban communities, but distress on the farm stresses Moroccans like little else thanks to the rural roots of most of them. Prime Minister **Aziz Akhannouch's** government has moved quickly to invest its resources in major new pipelines to bring water from dams in the wetter north southwards.

LIKE FATHER LIKE SON

M6's very long absences from Morocco leaving only a technocrat government in charge add to the general malaise and power vacuum and beg questions about the eventual succession of Crown Prince **Moulay el Hassan bin Mohammed al Alaoui**, who turns 21 on 8 May.

Schooled for the succession by his father in much the way M6 was schooled by his, the Crown Prince has a public image honed in royal engagements since his childhood. He is edging closer to an age where becoming King Hassan III can be imagined. When he was under 16 it was understood that M6's younger brother Prince **Moulay Rachid** would hold the reins of government under Article 21 of the constitution. A legally mature Moulay el Hassan would rule alone, albeit with influence from his uncle, who is widely seen as a playboy and a political lightweight lacking in popularity. His mother, **Salma Bennani**, remains an influence, despite her divorce from M6 (AC Vol 60 No 17).

How Hima, Mansouri and other M6-era royal advisors would fare under Hassan III is unclear. When M6 became King at the age of 35 he stamped his authority by very publicly sacking his father's powerful interior minister **Driss Basri** early on, and quietly retired other of his father's close aides (AC Vol 40 No 23 & Vol 39 No 9).

The heir apparent may have a carefully manicured public image, but he is known for his hot temper – possibly even more than his father's trademark '*colères royales*', which became an instrument of government. One Rabat source called him 'a good study' in learning the Alawite family business.

Moulay el Hassan attended the Royal College alongside a class of carefully selected contemporaries and obtained his baccalaureate in 2020. It is not yet known whether he will continue his apprenticeship for power abroad. His grandfather sent M6 to Brussels for a stage (internship) with the late European Commission chief **Jacques Delors**.

COMBUSTIBLE

Primogeniture is a very recent innovation in the Alawite dynasty, the historical criterion for succession rather being seniority, but no one doubts Crown Prince Hassan will become monarch. The question is when, in what circumstances and then how King Hassan III can ensure the monarchy survives its current challenges in a kingdom that has been loyal but has the potential to explode. ●

KENYA

Judges stand up as Ruto takes them on

Chief Justice Martha Koome has pushed back hard after the President accused the judiciary of chronic corruption

The presidency could lose badly if the sniping between it and the judiciary escalates. In his New Year's address, President **William Ruto** accused opposition leaders of using the courts as 'anti-people weapons' with the 'sole aim to delay, derail and sabotage the delivery of public programmes and defeat public interest' (AC Vol 65 No 1).

That prompted a flurry of criticism from lawyers, opposition politicians and civic activists. Days later, Ruto doubled down, claiming in a funeral eulogy – a favoured pulpit for politicians here – that some judges were being bribed to rule against his government's policies.

'It is not possible that we respect the judiciary while a few individuals who are beneficiaries of corruption are using corrupt judicial officials to block our development projects,' said Ruto without naming any judges. The government would disobey orders issued by 'corrupt courts', he added. In response, the Law Society of Kenya organised a peaceful protest accusing Ruto of overstepping his mandate.

The Kenyan judiciary has emerged as arguably the country's strongest – and certainly most independent – arm of government in recent years, annulling the August 2017 presidential elections. And in 2021 and 2022, it struck down the ambitious constitutional reform, known as the Building Bridges Initiative, that was designed by former President **Uhuru Kenyatta** and opposition leader **Raila Odinga** as part of the latter's failed bid for the presidency (AC Vol 62 No 17).

Ruto has had chequered relations with the judiciary since taking office. One of his first acts as president was to appoint six judges who had been rejected by his predecessor because of allegations of corruption against them. He raised the judicial budget by 3 billion shillings ($20 million) on his first day as a gesture of support.

Yet since Ruto's election in August 2022, it has been the courts, rather than an emasculated opposition led by Odinga and Wiper party leader **Kalonzo Musyoka**, that have been most effective in holding the presidency to account.

Last year, opposition petitions led to the High Court suspending the government's housing levy, intended to finance the building of 250,000 affordable homes each year, ruling that it discriminated against those on pay-as-you-earn employment tax who would finance it (Dispatches 11/7/23). In November, the courts also put the government's privatisation plans on hold.

Hitting back in the strongest terms, Chief Justice **Martha Koome** accused the Ruto government of trying to undermine judicial independence. 'We are ready to process any complaint against any judge or judicial officer implicated in corruption or any other act of misconduct. Such complaints must be lodged and processed in the manner prescribed by the Constitution. Days are gone when officers were hounded out of office through name-calling,' she said.

Judicial officials should respect their oaths of office and the law, added Koome, 'without fear of intimidation and without any favour'.

The 2010 constitution's provisions allowing greater public participation in governance have encouraged a wave of public interest litigation. Civic activists frequently challenge government policies and decisions in court.

Ruto led the campaign against the new constitution back in 2009-2010 but insists that he has no plans to change it. Seeing another opportunity, opposition *Azimio la Umoja* leader Odinga has threatened to launch a million-person demonstration to defend judicial independence.

The opposition points out that Ruto benefited from the judiciary's independence himself. Koome confirmed his election following the disputed presidential polls in August 2022 when many allies of incumbent President Kenyatta questioned the official results. And the Supreme Court's rejection of the Building Bridges Initiative boosted Ruto's presidential campaign (AC Vol 63 No 18).

'Ruto's presidency is hinged on a judgement that essentially makes it a 'product' of the courts', said Nairobi county senator **Edwin Sifuna**, the Secretary General of Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement.

'You would imagine that Ruto would have the magnanimity to extend goodwill, or at the very least, to leave constitutional organs to function without attempting to emasculate them,' he added.

Ruto's frustration is understandable. He has chosen to prioritise debt repayments – the most of significant of which is Kenya's $1bn Eurobond in June – but he does not want austerity measures to define his first term, even if he blames them on the profligacy of Kenyatta's government.

POLITICAL PRICE

Raising money from privatising parastatals is vital for government's efforts to finance its heavy debt repayments and is a key measure encouraged by the IMF, from which Ruto wants to secure more credits in the coming months.

The housing and health funds, suspended by the courts, are now the President's flagship social policy promises after he watered down his 'Hustler Fund' for small businesses. That much-hyped loan and grant scheme has been reduced to a programme offering loans at interest rates only marginally lower than those from high street lenders.

Yet Ruto's rhetoric, with thinly veiled threats, has prompted comparisons with the President's authoritarian mentor, **Daniel arap Moi**. Taking on the courts won't play well with the western leaders and businesses whom Ruto has courted for political support and investment.

Nor is it likely to help at home. Ruto may have co-opted or marginalised his main rivals but public support for his government has cratered. Kenyans suffering from higher prices and higher taxes blame the government. There is no obvious political gain from blaming judges for what most Kenyans believe are the government's failings. ●

AFRICA ECONOMY

Biggest economies turn laggards

Smaller countries will grow faster this year but will be held back by a lacklustre outturn in the continent's biggest economies

Forecasts by the World Bank, IMF, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the UN that the continent's economies should grow faster this year should be set against its weak per capita GDP growth over the past decade and the risks of a deepening sovereign debt crisis.

The 3.8% real GDP growth forecast by the World Bank for sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), 3.8% (including North Africa) forecast by the AfDB, and 4% (SSA) forecast by the IMF is still insufficient in per-capita terms for a continent with annual population growth of over 2%, and with its food-insecure population soaring by almost a quarter last year to well over 500 million. This astonishing World Bank and UN World Food Programme estimate that over a third of the continent's population is facing food insecurity or 'crisis' is more than double the number in 2020. That was before the twin hits of Covid-19 and **Russia's** invasion of **Ukraine** on global supply chains.

World Bank economists calculate that SSA has suffered – by a clear margin – the lowest average per capita growth of any developing region since 2010, and during 2021-25 will lose significant ground on high-income economies. Past talk of income convergence of developing economies to wealthier nations is far from SSA's current reality, with North Africa faring little better in a region which includes flood-hit **Libya**, **Morocco** recovering from last year's earthquake and political crises confronting **Tunisia** and **Egypt**. Calls by the Bank and AfDB for markedly greater investment, in infrastructure and otherwise, are much needed.

As continental growth improves from a low base, 2024 should see lower inflation in several Africa economies, as the impact of the Ukraine war, which sparked the massive 2022 hike in energy and food prices recedes, and the 2022/23 wave of central bank policy interest rate hikes has had time to moderate inflationary pressures. Whether inflation is brought under control sufficiently to allow central banks to cut rates also depends on **United States** Federal Reserve rate decisions and the avoidance of a wider war in the Middle East that could raise oil prices by significantly more than 50% according to the World Bank.

Oil prices well over $100/barrel would spell trouble for Africa's oil and fuel importers. Many of these are attempting to bring down their hefty deficits as the IMF advises them to boost debt sustainability and build fiscal space for the next crisis. As Tellimer's chief economist **Stuart Culverhouse** observes, the impact on global financing conditions and economic activity of an escalated Middle East conflict could greatly reduce the net benefit to indebted oil exporters, such as **Nigeria** and **Angola**, perhaps counting on a price-driven boost to export revenues.

Africa's economies begin 2024 with a revenue share of GDP well below global averages, and interest payments on a upwards path. This increases the pressure for central bank financing of government deficits, and could again drive cuts in capital spending – instead of cutting recurrent spending on wages that could spark domestic unrest.

Greater continental food production is critical for reducing Africa's vulnerability to events beyond its control. In the past four years, according to World Bank estimates, the proportion of Africa hit by 'adverse weather events' has more than doubled compared with the last decade. But populations in agriculture-intensive regions have been less affected than elsewhere.

National elections due in **South Africa**, **Mozambique**, **Ghana**, **Algeria** and Tunisia could trigger some security problems as well as budgetary glitches if ruling parties succumb to the pressure to hike spending.

Since October's joint IMF and World Bank annual meetings, the Fund has approved new Extended Credit Facilities (ECFs) to **Malawi**, **Somalia** and **Gambia**, new climate-focused Resilience and Sustainability Facilities (RSFs) to **Cabo Verde**, **Benin** and **Mauritania**, a new standby credit facility for **Rwanda**, and approved further disbursements to other Africa borrowers under existing lending agreements.

The IMF and World Bank's December announcement of a $4.5 billion debt relief deal for Somalia, incorporating concessions by multilateral creditors including the Fund, the International Development Association (IDA) arm of the World Bank, and AfDB, by bilateral and commercial creditors, under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, contrasts with the struggles of higher income Africa nations – including **Ghana, Zambia** and **Ethiopia** – to restructure their debts under the much-criticised G20-backed Common Framework.

On 17 January, Ghana announced it has won a moratorium on $5.4bn debt with its official creditors (Paris Club and **China**), and awaits IMF Board approval of its second $600 million ECF disbursement. That will boost President **Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's** government ahead of elections in December (AC Vol 65 No 1 & Dispatches 11/1/24).

But Zambia – where a contested bondholder deal has for now derailed any agreement on restructuring with its bilateral creditors and China acting as the holdout – is a cautionary tale for other governments contemplating debt negotiations under the Common Framework. Ethiopia's struggles with the Common Framework – it defaulted on a Eurobond last month – could discourage other Africa nations from joining.

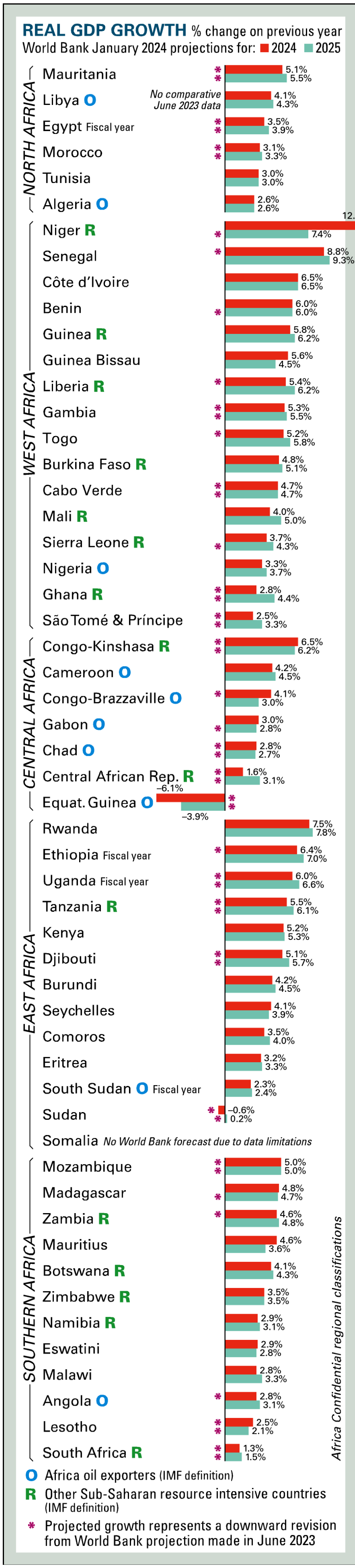
Also in search of IMF financing is Egypt, which faces risks from escalation of the Middle East conflict spreading out from its Gaza border, including the inflationary impact and loss of tourism revenues. The holdup of Egypt's second tranche under its $3bn IMF deal depends not on external creditors but agreement and implementation of key monetary, fiscal and foreign exchange market reforms.

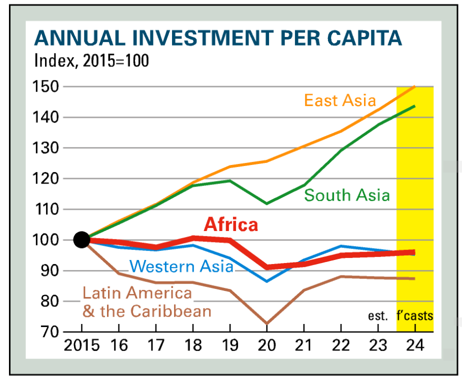
President **Abdel Fattah el Sisi's** government still eyes the greater prize of an increased ECF of up to $10bn, which is even more than the multi-billions in 'rapid' and 'stand-by' IMF financing provided to Egypt back in 2020 to alleviate the economic fallout of Covid-19 (AC Vol 65 No 1). Just as economic underperformance of Nigeria, South Africa and Angola harms continental growth both statistically and functionally, a modestly growing Egypt (projected to grow only 3.5% in 2024) will hold back its neighbours.

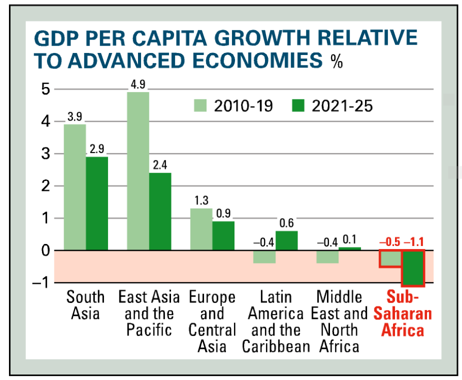
REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

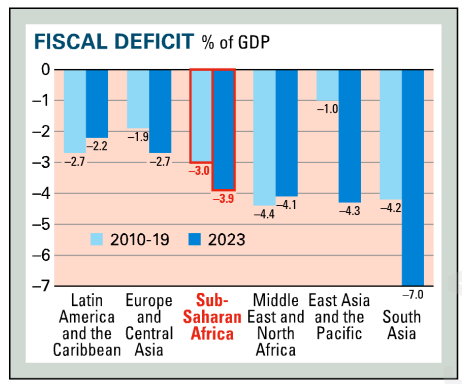
SSA's largest economies are forecast to underperform the continental average, reaching only 3.3% (Nigeria), 1.3% (South Africa) and 2.8% (Angola) respectively. Southern Africa and Angola's Central Africa are set to be the continent's slowest growing regions, while the East African economy could expand by over 5%, followed by a West Africa region incorporating nine countries projected by the World Bank to meet or exceed 5% growth, including **Senegal** (8.8%)

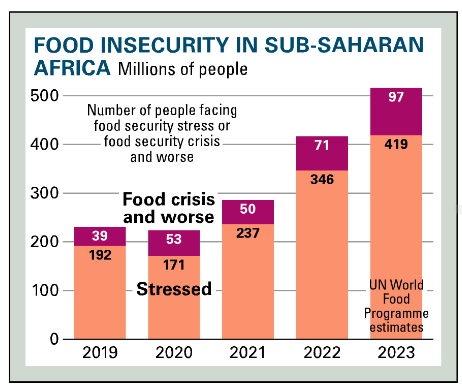
AFRICA GROWTH RECOVERY INSUFFICIENT, FOOD INSECURITY SPIRALS

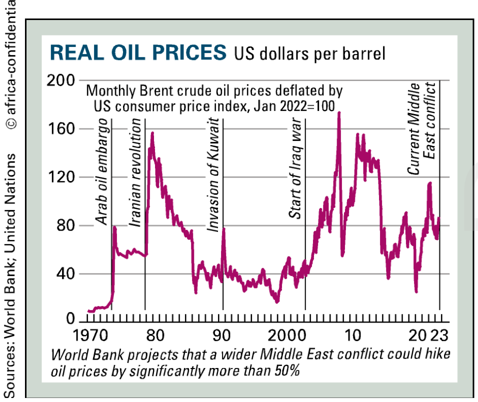












World Bank projects that a wider Middle East conflict could hike oil prices by significantly more than 50%

Sources: World Bank; United Nations © africa-confidential.com 2024

BATTLE FOR THE BONDS

The announcement by **Côte d'Ivoire** President **Alassane Ouattara** of plans to issue another Eurobond on the international markets, later this month, follows recent speculation that 2024 could see the return of sub-Saharan Africa sovereigns to the markets as global financing conditions improve and the hefty Africa borrowing premium possibly diminishes. Last year, as **Kenya** shelved its ambitious Eurobond plans, **Morocco** and **Egypt** were among the few African nations to raise dollar funds on the international bond market (AC Vol 64 No 10).

Abidjan's planned Eurobond will be closely watched, with a successful issuance potentially reassuring international investors on Africa debt and encouraging existing Africa Eurobond borrowers to return to the markets.

Bankers have suggested that Kenya, **South Africa** and oil producers **Nigeria** and **Angola** are 2024 Eurobond contenders – Kenya to assist refinancing of US$2 billion in June-maturing Eurobonds that it currently faces a struggle to repay. They add that lower Eurobond issuance from other developing regions offers an opportunity to Africa to attract bond investors seeking higher yields and exposure to emerging markets.

But typical yields for African dollar debt still exceed 10%, a major stumbling block unless a reduction in **United States** policy interest rate and yields – combined with lower spreads on Africa debt as risk tolerance increases – brings the cost of African borrowing down.

Tellimer's **Stuart Culverhouse**, who includes Côte d'Ivoire, **Benin** and **Rwanda** among the countries best placed from a 'fundamentals' perspective to access the international markets this year, views an improvement in global financing conditions as increasing the likelihood of upcoming, 2024-issued Eurobonds from Africa sovereigns. Likewise, market confidence and the accessibility of the international bond markets to Africa could be swayed by the outcome of **Ghana**, **Zambia** and **Ethiopia's** debt negotiations with external bondholders.

Regardless of whether other Africa sovereigns follow Abidjan, 2024 sees the first half of the much-anticipated spike in scheduled Eurobond redemption payments facing African borrowers – around $5bn involving SSA debt in 2024 and over $6bn to be repaid by SSA borrowers next year. Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, **Senegal**, South Africa and **Tunisia** are among the countries joining Kenya in facing scheduled Eurobond repayments this year, with Nigeria, Ghana and Angola among the several Africa borrowers needing to pay down Eurobonds in 2025. ●

and Africa Cup of Nations hosts **Côte d'Ivoire** (6.5%).

As in recent years, non-resource intensive economies are expected to outpace Africa's oil exporters. Metals exporters will hope that price drops driven by lower Chinese demand do not repeat, and countries seeking to exploit rare minerals (including lithium) should benefit more from the energy transition.

The threat from energy transition to Africa's oil and gas producer revenues, although complicating project financing and the renewal of declining reserves, is not yet hitting government coffers.

The recently approved increase in IMF member quotas is intended to 'maintain' current IMF lending capacity by replacing the planned reduction in its bilateral borrowing agreements. African nations could still benefit from the Executive Board's mid-December approval of a significant one-year increase in annual (to 200% of quota) and total cumulative (to 600% of quota) access limits of borrower nations under the Fund's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT), which African finance ministers requested last year.

But global financing conditions and the downwards pressure on African currencies will remain only partially within governments' control. The reduction in Chinese lending shows little sign of reversing, especially with the downturn in its economic growth, and the tense bargaining over African debt restructuring. ●

CONGO-KINSHASA

Harsh realities face Tshisekedi after vote

Its abundance of critical minerals encouraged outsiders to ignore election abuses but Congo's governance crisis holds up everything

Félix Tshisekedi's second presidential mandate is assured, and he has politically vanquished his domestic opposition after the 20 December elections. But his rhetoric on the campaign trail has made war more likely in the eastern provinces, at a time when the UN mission is leaving and his administration cannot stop the Teke-Yaka conflict nearer to Kinshasa in the west. Climate change makes life more dangerous for the Congolese – roads have also collapsed in recent weeks in Kananga, the capital of Kasai, because of heavy rain – but the President's attention is elsewhere.

In Kinshasa, the Congo River has risen six metres in recent weeks, swollen with heavy rains across its vast catchment area. Many neighbourhoods are under water, and residents are using dugout canoes to get about. The city is home to some 13 million people but has services – including sewers – for barely any of them, in large part because over the decades urban renewal funds have been wasted on grandiose projects that do nothing to address real needs. Tshisekedi shows signs of going down the same path: there are plans afoot for a new 'smart city' in the capital that will cost billions of dollars and result in lucrative sub-contracts and kickbacks but will do little to fix the city's drainage network.

On New Year's Eve, **Denis Kadima**, president of the *Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante* (CENI), announced Tshisekedi had won the 20 December presidential elections, reckoning he had garnered 73% of the vote. Opposition parties immediately cried foul, alleging all manner of irregularities and fraud, in many cases backed by the findings of independent observers, but most have declined to challenge the result in the Constitutional Court, saying it is pointless.

Instead, opposition party leaders **Moïse Katumbi**, **Martin Fayulu** and **Denis Mukwege** have said they will call out their supporters to the streets to compel the authorities to hold the poll again (Dispatches 2/1/2024). The masses have yet to heed the call and it looks unlikely that they will. The main sign of dissent was a small protest in Kinshasa by supporters of Defence Minister **Jean-Pierre Bemba's** *Mouvement de Libération du Congo* (MLC) who thought their party was cheated – although Bemba had joined the ruling coalition. Police quickly broke up the demonstration.

Theodore Ngoy, the presidential candidate who came last in the vote according to the CENI, did challenge the results in the Constitutional Court, which duly ruled on 10 January, that the results stood. In October 2020, Tshisekedi appointed three Constitutional Court judges, including its President, in a move widely interpreted at the time as intended to shore up his prospects of being declared the winner in the next presidential election (AC Vol 61 No 22).

PARTY SEATS

More good news for Tshisekedi came four days later, when the CENI published the provisional results of the country's national legislative elections. While no single party, including Tshisekedi's own *Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social* (UDPS), gained over 50% of the vote, the UDPS is easily the largest single party in the National Assembly, with 69 of its 500 seats. What is more, Tshisekedi's main partners in the *Union Sacrée pour la Nation* (USN) are the next largest parties, with Katumbi's *Ensemble* party apparently managing only 18 seats. Fayulu, bizarrely, stopped any of his party faithful from contesting the elections, and Mukwege did not manage to win a single seat.

Vital Kamerhe's *Union pour la Nation Congolaise* (UNC) came second with 36 seats, according to the CENI. Kamerhe spent a good portion of Tshisekedi's first term in prison for embezzlement. This is a significant boost for his political fortunes, as it potentially lines him up for the position of Prime Minister or President of the National Assembly.

Incumbent Assembly President **Modeste Bahati Lukwebo's** *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques du Congo* (AFDC) came third, according to the CENI, garnering 35 seats. Fourth was *Agissons et Bâtissons* (AB), a political coalition put together by the incumbent Prime Minister **Sama Lukonde Kyenge**, which includes **Guy Loando Mboyo**, a cabinet minister and lawyer of choice for multiple **Chinese** mining companies in the country.

Much the most disappointed of Tshisekedi's allies was **Jean-Pierre Bemba**, the veteran guerrilla commander/politician who teamed up with the President in July last year and was rewarded with the post of Minister of Defence. Bemba's MLC managed only 19 seats, and the day after the results were posted, angry party activists took to the streets in Kinshasa to protest.

All in all, the USN has over 400 seats in the National Assembly, an overwhelming majority. Ensemble said on 16 January that it would take up its seats, but it will not have much impact unless it can somehow wean any USN parties to its cause.

INTERNATIONAL BACKING

Tshisekedi has been roundly congratulated internationally for his win, with China and **Russia** unequivocal in their praise. The **United States**, **France**, and other western countries were slower out of the blocks but they have done little in response to the opposition's criticism of the polls.

A White House statement announcing that a presidential mission, led by US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, **Molly Phee**, to Tshisekedi's inauguration on 20 January confers a higher level of approbation than for the disputed 2018 election. It is also symptomatic of the rising geopolitical competition in Africa and the eagerness to tie in supplies of critical minerals from Congo-K.

So much went wrong with these elections that while it is likely that the published result does not reflect what actually happened, it is difficult to judge by how much. Tshisekedi's win was at least plausible, given the breadth of his political coalition, and this time – unlike in 2018 – the presidential and legislative results largely correlate. Kadima has, in addition, cleverly bolstered the credibility of the official results by disqualifying over 80 candidates, including a cabinet minister, for fraud or malpractice, and because numerous heavy-hitters around the country, such as Haut-Katanga Province Governor **Jacques Kyabula Katwe**, did not regain their seats. ●

THE UN LEAVES AFTER 25 YEARS – BUT THE FIGHT GOES ON

Another big win for President **Félix Tshisekedi** is that he has secured a commitment from the UN for the departure of Monusco from the country, after a 25-year deployment. Former president **Joseph Kabila** periodically tried and failed to persuade the UN that Monusco should pack its bags. Monusco announced on 13 January that it would be out of the country by the end of the year. It said it would start by pulling its 2,000 peacekeepers from South Kivu, where multiple militia remain active and where the **Rwanda**-backed M23 shows signs of planning an assault, by the end of April (AC Vol 64 No 20).

Kenyan troops from the East African Community (EAC) force flew out of Goma on 3 December, starting the force's withdrawal. Tshisekedi didn't renew its mandate to combat M23 as he was unhappy that the force was unwilling to take on the M23 in combat. **Uganda's** President **Yoweri Museveni** had called for Kinshasa to negotiate with M23. In its place will come a Southern African Development Community (SADC) force, which Tshisekedi says will engage in active combat with the M23, perhaps alongside the mostly **Romanian** mercenaries already in eastern Congo-Kinshasa.

On the campaign trail, Tshisekedi threatened to declare war on Rwanda, apparently seeking a re-match of the Second Congo War (1998-2003), which pitted a Rwanda (and Uganda) backed coalition against a Congolese President backed by SADC troops. Tshisekedi said: 'Tell Kagame that I am not like former leaders of the DRC he used to have fun with. The DRC has changed. I will respond to any provocation'. Rwandan President **Paul Kagame** quickly responded, threatening that 'It is those who wish it for us who will experience it instead.'

With Monusco heading for the exits, the question is whether this alarming rhetoric will translate into intensified combat, first between M23 and the Congolese armed forces – *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) and its SADC and mercenary allies, and second, into open combat between this coalition, no doubt buttressed by multiple eastern Congo militia, and the Rwandan Defence Force. These potential combats will determine how 2024 – and beyond – plays out, not only for the east, but for the country and, if past form is a guide, the region. While Tshisekedi has initiated much of this, with only the FARDC under his command, he cannot and will not be able to control events.

Meanwhile, a vicious, though barely reported inter-ethnic struggle is being fought between the Teke and the Yaka, which is advancing ever closer to the capital. The fighting began in Kwamouth territory, Mai-Ndombe province, but has since spread to three other provinces, Kwilu, Kwango, and Kinshasa. Despite a heavy deployment and apparently bloody tactics, the FARDC has been unable thus far to contain the conflict (AC Vol 64 No 20). ●

What hope for the promised elections?

Published online 17 January

The military rulers in the Sahel have equivocated about their commitments to restoring civilian rule

The promise of electoral contests to restore constitutional and nominally civilian rule will be a key issue across much of West and West-Central Africa this year, and particularly in the continuing battle of wills between Sahelian military regimes and the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas).

THE SAHEL

Mali's military junta leader **Assimi Goïta** postponed the restoration of civilian elections that had been promised for February or March. The political message is clear: democratic formalities will be re-established if and when it suits him, not before.

Goïta's regime knows that Ecowas leaders cannot bring enough pressure to seriously influence its decisions, and the intimidated **Malian** political class cannot mobilise opinion against it. The government's hand has been strengthened by the army's successful campaign against Tuareg movements in the far north, culminating in the occupation of their 'capital', Kidal, but the jihadists are a tougher nut to crack.

The junta's dismissal of the 2014 Algiers Accord arrangements for decentralisation will increase the Tuareg sense of grievance and thus the risk of a resurgence in fighting in the long term. But for now, these moves have increased the junta's popularity in the most populous parts of the south.

The regime's self-confidence will be felt more widely across the Sahel, encouraging **Burkina Faso's** junta leader, Captain **Ibrahim Traoré** and General **Abdourahamane Tiani's** *Conseil national pour la sauvegarde de la patrie* (CNSP) in **Niger** (AC Vol 64 No 17).

Across the Sahel, military leaders have signalled that they are not bothered about suspension from Ecowas and the African Union (AU). Soon after December's visit by the **Russian** vice-minister of defence, General **Yunus-Bek Yevkurov**, Niamey unilaterally scrapped its security force training and support arrangements with the European Union. And there is little sign of compromise from Bamako or Ouagadougou – where continuing arrests and claims of coup plots foster an increasingly paranoid regime outlook.

Within the Niamey military hierarchy the road ahead is more nuanced, despite months of defiant rhetoric, and some sources claim that advocates of a relationship with the Wagner Group were heavily defeated. After a late December visit by **German** defence minister **Boris Pistorius** there is talk of rewriting, rather than scrapping, current military accords with mainly western partners.

Western observers take some heart from statements by Prime Minister **Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine** as recently as November stressing the CNSP's three-year timeframe for returning to elections.

Niger has suffered from months of severe trade and financial sanctions imposed by Ecowas and the West African currency union and in late December it opened serious talks with Ecowas.

The bloc has offered to ease the trade blockade in return for a short transition to civilian rule and the **United States** – keen to keep its two drone bases – has promised a phased restoration of military cooperation and development aid if Niamey cooperates.

A 15-18 month timeframe is reportedly under discussion, with the **Togolese** president, **Faure Gnassingbé**, playing the key mediator role, assisted by his Beninois and Sierra Leonean counterparts.

Beyond the diplomatic game, and the control of Sahelian putschist leaders, is the still spreading security crisis. In contrast to the Tuareg forces, the main jihadist alliances of *Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin* (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) remained highly active – albeit sometimes diverted by rivalries over territorial influence, particularly in Gao region. There is little reason to think they will lose their ambition or capacity to recruit disillusioned young men and thus further spread their military reach.

Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger's recent formation of an Alliance of Sahelian States may have sent a political signal but it does not increase their capacity to tackle the militants. It should improve the cross-border security collaboration that decayed after Goïta and Traoré's coups put cooperation with now deposed Nigérien President **Mohamed Bazoum** into the deep-freeze.

On the other hand, Mali and Niger now have to do without **French** air support and intelligence. Mali also expelled the more than 10,000 troops and the police units and administrative and humanitarian support of the UN's *Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation au Mali* (Minusma). The Blue Helmets were often criticised for not pursuing a more assertive military strategy, but they did maintain a stabilising presence in towns across the north and support a threadbare Malian state apparatus.

COASTAL WEST AFRICA

Beyond the Sahel, one West African military leader seems to be mapping out a divergent political course. **Guinea's** transitional leader **Mamady Doumbouya** has eschewed the rejection of collaboration with France – officials in Conakry praise the *Agence française de développement* as one of the country's most effective partners – and sought to maintain a broad spread of international partnerships.

His bargaining hand is strengthened by the country's mineral wealth and appeal for international investors, including Russia in the bauxite/alumina sector, **China**, and Rio Tinto who are developing the long-delayed Simandou iron ore project.

And while the regime's own human rights record is poor, it has gained public support by pressing ahead with the trial of individuals, including **Moussa Dadis Camara**, head of the then military junta, accused of the 28 September 2009 stadium massacre of opposition supporters (AC Vol 63 No 21).

Meanwhile, Doumbouya displays a shrewd populist hand, particularly with the construction of eye-catching projects in Conakry, so often the cauldron of street politics and protest. Driving down the main highway towards downtown Kaloum district, the new ministerial housing estate, all shiny glass, steel and concrete, is highly visible, not noticeably extravagant and also conveniently concentrated should there be any need to protect, or corral, its inhabitants.

Also on prominent display is the new school built on the land where, soon after seizing power, the ruling *Comité national du rassemblement pour le développement* (CNRD) junta demolished the house of **Cellou Dalein Diallo**, opponent of both military regimes and former President **Alpha Condé**, and still one of the most powerful challengers if Guinea holds the elections promised for late 2024.

The CNRD has ruled that none of its members nor any current government minister will be allowed to stand in the elections that restore democracy, but the posters of Doumbouya in mufti meeting UN Secretary-General **António Guterres** plastered all over Conakry hint at presidential ambition.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Citizens decide in October 2025 whether President **Alassane Ouattara** should be given a fourth successive term – if he decides to run.

There will be huge pressure from the ruling *Rassemblement des houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et la paix* (RHDP) on him to stand again, to protect the interests of those in and around the government machine.

Yet Ouattara is also acutely aware of the high international regard in which he is held for the role he played in rebuilding his country's economy and political space.

The death in 2023 of one former rival, **Henri Konan Bédié**, and the uncertain electoral appeal and civil status of his other key counterpart, **Laurent Gbagbo**, might persuade him to hand over to a younger generation, something he had said was necessary before the 2020 election, before changing his mind and running again after the sudden death of his planned successor, **Amadou Gon Coulibaly**.

But he is unlikely to decide this year. Much will depend on his view if, as expected, the opposition *Parti démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI) chooses the popular and respected **Tidjane Thiam**, now returned home after a high-profile career in international finance, as its candidate.

SENEGAL

Voters elect a new president in February, or in March if there is a run-off. Prime Minister **Amadou Ba's** status as the favourite has been strengthened by the confirmation of a defamation

AFRICA'S FRANC ZONE: Caught between polls and putsches

conviction against opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and the rejection of his application to stand in the presidential election (AC Vol 64 No 19).

Besides Sonko, the strongest opposition challenger is former Dakar mayor **Khalifa Sall**, who has been on the campaign trail for months.

The year also opens with political uncertainty for **Chad** after massive abstention in last month's constitutional referendum, though the Supreme Court stated there was a 'yes' vote of 85.9% on a 62% turnout (Dispatches 20/12/23).

Much depends on how President **Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno's** ('**Kaka**') strategy of co-opting the leader of the opposition *Les Transformateurs*, **Succès Masra**, as prime minister works out. Kaka is determined to hang on to power while maintaining a veneer of democratic fairness, a tough task but one which the west will hope he succeeds in, now that its security allies in Africa are so few (AC Vol 64 No 11 & Vol 65 No 2)

The theme of political transition is also prominent in **Gabon**, where a constitutional referendum is promised for later in the year. But after a relatively smooth first months in power for coup leader and transitional President **Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema**, a period of greater political complexity threatens.

The 30 August coup was an elite affair, designed to sustain a system that risked being cracked apart by another presidential term for a still evidently unwell **Ali Bongo Ondimba**, widely perceived as the puppet of his wife **Sylvia** and son **Nourredin Bongo Valentin**.

It remains to be seen whether **Oligui Nguema** will attempt to alleviate poverty and spread accountability to meet popular frustrations with one-family rule since independence, or simply redistribute the spoils of power among the already privileged.

Nguema promised a referendum on the shape of government to come, and elections for 2025 after a 'national dialogue' whose timing and scope will say much about what to expect. ●

ETHIOPIA

Oromo peace momentum falters

Published online 12 January

There were high hopes of a resolution to the OLA insurgency, but Abiy fears a deal may alienate other regions

The outlook for a settlement between the government and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) has taken a hit: fighting has resumed after peace talks ended in acrimony late last year. The rebels' demands had proved too much for Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed's** negotiators.

Yet significant progress was made at the discussions, with the parties agreeing on a draft agreement, although they fell at the toughest hurdle. The sticking point was the shape of a power-sharing arrangement, which is essential to ending the fighting that has engulfed large swathes of Oromia region, especially in the south and west, since Abiy took office in 2018.

To make further progress and convince the OLA rank and file it is worth laying down their arms and supporting the political process, a significant shift in attitudes in Oromia would be required. Those in power in the region, especially in security, do not want to make any concessions, but the insurgents are also resistant (AC Vol 64 No 11).

The insurgency is led by **Jaal Marroo**, the *nom de guerre* of the charismatic dreadlocked **Kumsa Diriba**, whose forces have gained influence over the past five years through assassinations, hostage-taking, ambushes, and by controlling plenty of rural areas.

Jaal Marroo and the other OLA commanders believe they are holding their own militarily so they won't accept a lopsided peace deal of the kind signed by the outgunned Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) towards the end of 2022 (AC Vol 64 No 13).

The areas of disagreement go

beyond the details of power-sharing, as seen from the OLA's comments after the second round of talks in Dar es Salaam, **Tanzania**, which followed the first in Zanzibar in April. The rebels accused the government of trying to co-opt them. Jaal Marroo and his lieutenants are not prepared to accept merely figurehead positions in the regional government.

They want assurances that Abiy and his Prosperity Party won't backslide from their commitment to the systemic reforms advocated by the OLA and other Oromo opposition groups. Yet the government believes – probably correctly – that the OLA doesn't pose a strategic threat at either regional or federal level. So why then should it accede to expansive demands from the OLA, the most hard-line of the Oromo nationalist political forces?

Sources at the talks said one of the OLA's boldest requests was for control of the regional parliament on top of the key regional administrative positions. This fell outside the agreed terms of reference for the talks, which were to pursue a peace deal within the existing Ethiopian constitutional framework.

To grant the OLA request would mean reconstituting the Oromia legislature outside of an election, which would be unconstitutional as well as something the government doesn't want to do.

The reason for such an ambitious demand is the feeling in the OLA that it needs guarantees of any power-sharing arrangement since it does not trust Abiy and his allies. On paper, control of Oromia's regional parliament means control of the regional appointments and that would, in theory, prevent any later federal efforts to remove OLA officials.

With an extra-constitutional transitional government also long ruled out by Addis Ababa after the OLA's initial demand for one, one compromise could be for the OLA to keep its arms; but Addis insists that a disarmament process must be part of any deal.

That is ominous, as it was on such treacherous terrain that talks broke down back in 2019. Then, amidst the euphoria of Abiy's dethroning of the TPLF, the OLA was supposed to come in from the cold along with its parent organisation, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the standard bearer of the Oromo nationalist struggle since 1973, now once more a serially harassed opposition party.

A potential solution is to involve third parties. The **United States** has already played a critical role by helping entice Jaal Marroo out of his jungle hideout in western Oromia to participate in the talks. Officials from the influential regional bloc, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), have also played a part, as has **Norway**.

In addition to third-party ceasefire and disarmament monitoring, we hear that the government team, led by Justice Minister **Gedion Timothewos** and National Security adviser **Redwan Hussein**, also approved third-party involvement in monitoring political aspects of a deal. Perhaps the OLA rejected this because they did not believe Addis, which prides itself on its resistance to foreign 'interference', could bring itself to allow it.

Another option would be to simply pause the fighting, as occurred in Tigray. But the conflict in Oromia is not between large formations confronting each other in open terrain, but a messy, lower-level series of skirmishes, with civilians in the firing line and widespread anarchy. This makes any truce hard to enforce on the disparate cast of actors on the ground, let alone to use as a foundation for negotiating a lasting political agreement.

The Oromia conflict also differs from that in Tigray in that formalising OLA's power in the region would be problematic. To end the northern war, the TPLF's control of Tigray's government was simply re-legitimised by Addis Ababa once final agreement was reached. But in Oromia, granting the OLA power means some of Abiy's allies losing out at the regional level.

The failure of the peace talks has roots in Ethiopia's political culture, in which competitive elections are a foreign concept and opposition actors often accuse the government of dictatorship before resorting to armed struggle. Opposition parties want a real say but, as ever, the incumbent is unwilling to give way, casting itself as the guardian of the constitutional order.

Observers of the talks noted the OLA's naiveté in negotiations compared to the government. There is hope that Jaal Marroo may realise that substantive concessions are necessary for peace. That could come quickly if Oromo public pressure grows, following the outcry over the failure of the talks in Dar es Salaam. Both sides recognise the futility of further fighting, and another round of talks might not be that far off.

BALANCE OF PEACE

One complication in Abiy's calculations is the conflict in Amhara, Ethiopia's second-most populous region, which is even further away from resolution (AC Vol 64 No 17). A deal with the OLA would harden Amhara opposition to Abiy, as Amharas would view it as more evidence of Abiy's government taking on an Oromo nationalist character.

This may be a reason Abiy is delaying, despite the spreading misery in Oromia that is harming his domestic and international reputation.

There is a potential silver lining to the failure in Dar es Salaam. With renewed fighting in Oromia, there is less chance of Abiy committing a significant amount of federal military resources to a potential new conflict in Eritrea – not to mention with Somalia after the recent spat over Ethiopia's port deal with Somaliland. But delaying another disastrous war does not take Ethiopia closer to regaining stability.

Despite the momentous achievement of a permanent ceasefire in Tigray, comprehensive nationwide peace seems as distant as ever. Perhaps Ethiopia's best hope is for its creditors to remain patient and for the International Monetary Fund to bail out the government, paving the way at least for some semblance of economic recovery amid the ongoing political chaos (Dispatches 2/1/24). An IMF team is due in Addis Ababa later this month. ●

SIERRA LEONE

Koroma faces treason charges

Published online 10 January

The dispute over last year's elections has escalated as the former President prepares for a treason trial

Political tensions are mounting in Freetown after the secret plan to allow former President **Ernest Bai Koroma** to go into exile in **Nigeria** and drop the treason charges against him was scuppered by Foreign Minister **Timothy Kabba** and senior figures in the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), sources in Freetown have told *Africa Confidential*.

Opposing the plan for Koroma's exile, on 2 January the SLPP officials leaked a letter from **Omar Alieu Touray**, the President of the Economic Commission for West Africa (Ecowas) detailing the relocation arrangements which had been kept confidential by Sierra Leone's President **Julius Maada Bio** and regional leaders, including **Senegal's Macky Sall**, **Ghana's Nana Addo Akufo-Addo**.

After the letter was leaked, Foreign Minister Kabba denied that Maada Bio had ever agreed to the plan, an assertion which, we hear, has irritated other leaders in the region.

Kabba insisted it was 'a unilateral proposition by the president of the Ecowas commission'. He added that the contents of the leaked letter from Touray to the Sierra Leone Presidency 'did not reflect the meeting' that Maada Bio had with Touray and the West African leaders.

Touray's letter stipulated that the Sierra Leone government would:

- Drop all legal and administrative procedures against Koroma;
- continue to pay Koroma his benefits as former president;
- secure all Koroma's properties in Sierra Leone;
- consider refunding Koroma's medical and travel expenses.

It adds that President **Bola Ahmed Tibubu's** government in Nigeria had offered to host Koroma in Abuja and that that the former President has accepted the arrangement. Koroma was due to fly out of Freetown to Abuja on 4 January.

But after the letter was leaked on 2 January, police in Freetown sprang into action and announced the treason charges against Koroma. The case is centred on claims that Koroma was involved in the attempted coup d'etat on 26 November.

Then dozens of gunmen launched an attack at the main armoury and prison in Freetown, freeing the majority of the more than 2,000 inmates, in what Maada Bio's government described as an attempted coup (AC Vol 64 No 24). Former President Koroma was summoned for questioning and placed under house arrest in December (Dispatches 12/12/23).

KAMARA ARREST

Two weeks after the failed putsch, **Samura Kamara**, the presidential candidate of the All People's Congress party, was ordered to be arrested on graft charges.

Kamara was defeated by Maada Bio in the elections in June but after disputing the results, his party has boycotted parliament. After international observers raised concerns about the accuracy of the voting tallies, the **United States** and other western governments have been urging Maada Bio to engage the APC in political dialogue.

Perhaps designed to address the political tensions, Maada Bio pardoned over 350 detainees in an announcement on New Year's Day.

At least 18 members of the security forces were killed during the attempted putsch. The information ministry confirmed that **Amadu Goïta**, who worked as a bodyguard for Koroma until 2018, was among a group of 12 people, including police and military officers, which had also been charged with treason.

Koroma's trial is set to start on 17 January. ●

CHAD/SUDAN

Mahamat Kaka co-opts Succès

Published online 8 January

Focused on consolidating power, the junta leader is bringing rivals into the tent and trying to avoid more entanglements in Sudan

The devastating war in Sudan and awkward relations with **France** and the **United Arab Emirates** are casting a long shadow over Chad this year as its military leader **Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno 'Kaka'** prepares the ground for elections, set for October, which he hopes will legitimise his rule.

Mahamat Kaka's junta and his allied in the UAE have been accused by General **Abdel Fattah al Burhan** and the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF)-backed regime of fuelling the war in Sudan by supplying arms to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) under the command of Gen **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'**. The SAF regime has suspended ties with both Chad and UAE.

The Zaghawa ruling elite in Chad, of which the Déby family is a central component, is divided over policy towards Sudan. Two decades ago, it strongly backed the resistance against the ethnic cleansing and genocidal campaign of Gen **Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir's** Islamist regime in Khartoum that left over 300,000 dead.

Much has changed in the wake of the overthrow of Beshir in 2019. Two of the key figures in Khartoum's military campaign in Darfur – Burhan and Hemeti – led the successor regime but fell out badly triggering the civil war in April.

As they divide up Sudan, Hemeti's fighters have taken four of the five provinces of Darfur and are accused of restarting a genocidal campaign against the Masalit people (AC Vol 64 No 14).

This time, Chad's elite is divided.

Two of Mahamat Kaka's uncles are also related to Sudan's Minister of Finance **Jibril Ibrahim,** who has come out strongly against Hemeti and the RSF.

The biggest change is the UAE's entry to the centre stage. This is through its backing of Hemeti and its use of Chad for trans-shipment for materiel and other supplies to the RSF. Abu Dhabi is also understood to have pledged financing of some US$1.5 billion to keep Mahamat Kaka's regime on side.

Just how critical the Emirati role is in Chad and Sudan was underlined when one of Abu Dhabi's senior security officials was part of Mahamat Kaka's delegation when he met France's President **Emmanuel Macron** and officials from the *Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure* (DGSE) in Paris in October (AC Vol 64 No 23). After its troops were pushed out by the juntas in **Mali** and **Niger**, France sees Chad as its key military base in the region.

For now, Mahamat Kaka's primary concern is holding the ruling elite together behind him and co-opting enough of his domestic opponents ahead of the October elections. His organisation of a constitutional referendum on 17 December was partly a dry run for those elections. The revised constitution codified more concentration of power under a unitary arrangement but allowed some very limited devolution of powers to local authorities.

The electoral commission claims the turnout was 64% and that 86% of those voting had backed the constitutional changes. Few in Ndjamena took those figures seriously.

The announcement of the results was followed by an invitation to **Succès Masra**, leader of *Les Transformateurs*, to join the government as prime minister. An important figure who had recently returned to Chad from exile, Masra had called for his supporters to back the revised constitution. His party is one of the seven authorised to stand in the elections.

KAKA'S STRATEGY

Mahamat Kaka emerged as leader in the wake of his father's death in April 2021 while visiting troops fighting insurgents. Yet his grip on power, threatened by ambitious fellow officers, who may feel emboldened by the spate of military coups to the west of Chad. Some in Mahamat Kaka's extended family were also dissatisfied with the division of patronage following his father's death (AC Vol 64 No 4).

Assisted by Abu Dhabi's funding, Mahamat Kaka wants to restructure the government and military ahead of the elections.

First, he wants first to disconnect Chad's Zaghawa from their fellow Zaghawa in Darfur. That means holding back military support for the Zaghawa resistance to Hemeti's forces in Darfur (AC Vol 64 No 5).

In terms of managing his own security, he is rebalancing the role of the Zaghawa by giving more space to his inlaws, the Goranes, who have no direct ties to Sudan. Mahamat Kaka's uncle Gen **Abakar Choua Allahi** runs the *Garde Nationale et Nomade du Tchad* (GNNT). Gen Allahi is Gorane, as are some 75% of the new intake of police officers.

This is going down badly with the Zaghawa officers in the security elite who believe control of the state is theirs by right. Mahamat Kaka is desperately trying to manage these discontents and rivalries within the security system.

By rewarding some, promoting others and firing a few, he wants to prove that he is going to be the sole Zaghawa candidate in elections. To make this point Mahamat Kaka has to keep Chad at peace with Sudan, whichever faction is in control of Darfur.

For lack of other policy initiatives in the deepening regional crisis, the European Commission has allocated €12 million (US$13.1m) to support the Chadian army after months of procrastination. The delay was caused by Ndjamena's expelling **Germany's** Ambassador, **Jan-Christian Gordon Kricke**, in April after he had criticised Mahamat Kaka's government.

And the lack of any serious European or **United States'** criticism of Abu Dhabi's militarisation of eastern Chad and backing of the RSF in Sudan is being widely taken in Ndjamena as a form of endorsement. ●

RWANDA/UNITED STATES

Hacker tapped for fight with Rusesabagina

Published online 5 January

Security services in Rwanda are working with a self-described 'white-hat hacker' to take down their foes

Hostilities are reopening between the security services in Kigali and 'Hotel Rwanda' activist **Paul Rusesabagina** after their agreement in March 2023. Under the deal, Rusesabagina's 25-year sentence was commuted and he agreed to drop all legal cases against President **Paul Kagame's** government for his abduction from Dubai and subsequent torture (AC Vol 64 No 7).

That helped unlock some US$90 million development and security aid to Kigali paused by the **United States** Senate. Because of the Rusesabagina case, Washington had designated Rwanda as a government that wrongfully detains US citizens (AC Vol 61 No 18).

An informal grace period after the deal is over and Kigali is working with a self-described 'white-hat hacker', US-based **Jonathan Scott** and his Milad Group who says he has worked on cybersecurity for **Morocco's** government.

On 27 December, Scott filed under the Foreign Agents Registration Act stating that Milad Group would provide 'consulting on matters of cybersecurity' for the Rwandan National Police. His role would include lobbying US lawmakers on reforming cybersecurity law.

Scott is yet to file on whether the Rwandan National Police (RNP) will be paying him. And the preliminary filing is vague on what other work he may take on for Kigali security.

Some detail of the work appears in screenshot of multiple text messages between Scott and a representative of the RNP, whose name is blanked out, included in the FARA filing.

In one of the messages, the RNP asks if it is 'possible that I get something about your research on Rusesabagina because I want to talk to my Boss about you'. Scott's reply is not included in the screenshot. Others indicate that the RNP would want Scott to provide cybersecurity training for its officers. The FARA filings do not include a formal contract between Scott and the RNP.

As part of the choreographed arrangements for his release, Rusesabagina stated in a letter to President Kagame that he would live in the US in 'quiet reflection' and 'leave all questions about Rwandan politics behind me'.

That stance did not last long. 'They expected me to be silent. To be a good guy and behave. No one can silence me that easily.' Rusesabagina told *The New York Times* in late June.

In February 2023, Scott published a report which, he claimed, exonerated

Morocco's *Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale* (DGSN) from accusations that it had used the Pegasus spyware software made by **Israel's** NSO group to hack the phones of **France's** President **Emmanuel Macron**, several political leaders in the region as well as thousands of Moroccans (AC Vol 62 No 16).

Claims that King **Mohammed** VI was among those whose phones were hacked was dismissed by insiders who said that Director of the DGSN, **Abdellatif Hammouchi**, would have been sacked and prosecuted if that happened.

In a report, 'NSO through the Veil', published in 2022, Scott contended that Amnesty International and Citizen Lab, an internet rights research group based at the University of Toronto in **Canada**, had fabricated a claim that Rusesabagina's adopted daughter **Carine Kanimba's** phone was infected with NSO spyware originating from Rwanda. Scott said the claims were part of 'an international defamation campaign' against Kigali. He accused Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and Citizen Lab of leading the charge.

After the reports prompted high-profile rows in the media, the backlash led to Scott losing his place on a PhD programme at the US's North-Western University, in Illinois. Scott's critics claim he is cashing in on his notoriety.

His social media, on X (formerly Twitter), features postings accusing Rusesabagina of being a *génocidaire* and funding terrorism. His other postings denounce the teaching of the 1994 Rwandan genocide in US schools which refer to Rusesabagina saving lives during the genocide, as documented in the Hollywood film 'Hotel Rwanda'.

President Kagame's government has tried, unsuccessfully, to get US officials to use its preferred designation of the atrocities as 'the genocide against the Tutsis'. That's a formulation that critics of Kagame's administration say erases Hutu victims of the killings from Rwanda's history. ●

DISPATCHES

SOUTH AFRICA/ISRAEL

'Genocide' court case threatens to open new geopolitical divisions

16 January

The EU stays silent amid fears that South Africa's accusations against Israel will further damage relations between Africa and Europe

The legal tussle between Israel and South Africa over Pretoria's claims to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague that Israel is responsible for 'genocide' against the Palestinian people threatens to open new geopolitical fault lines.

Officials in Europe are watching the case anxiously. There are concerns among some EU officials that the war in Gaza will cause further damage to geopolitical relations between Europe and Africa that have already been strained by the fallout from **Russia's** invasion of **Ukraine**. Unlike **Germany**, the **United States** and the **United Kingdom**, all of whom have rejected South Africa's assertion, the EU has remained silent on the ICJ case so far.

No western country has declared support for South Africa's allegations against Israel. The US, a close Israel ally, has rejected them as unfounded, the UK has called them unjustified, and Germany said it 'explicitly rejects' them.

Few African states have broken ranks, although the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, whose 57 members include 26 African states, has backed South Africa's suit. **Namibia** has condemned its former colonial ruler Germany's decision to 'explicitly reject' the accusations of genocide.

Lawyers for the South African government, presenting the case last week, accused Israel of committing the crime of genocide in Gaza in violation of the 1948 Genocide Convention. Israel has described the allegations as a 'blood libel', describing the military actions which have so far killed more than 23,000 people in Gaza as an 'act of self-defence' following the murderous attacks of Hamas on 7 October.

CONGO-KINSHASA

Tshisekedi's ruling coalition strengthened after election

16 January

Despite allegations of election fraud, the President's win is being recognised internationally

President **Félix Tshisekedi** looks set to have a stronger majority in parliament despite widespread opposition anger about the conduct of December's elections.

Provisional results from the legislative elections also held on 20-24 December, released by the *Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante* (CENI), put Tshisekedi's *Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social* (UDPS) party on 66 seats, making it the largest in the 500-seat chamber.

That would represent a 31-seat gain for the UDPS and has been matched by gains for several other parties in the President's *Sacred Union* coalition. The parties of Tshisekedi's allies including Senate President **Modeste Bahati Lukwebo**, Defence Minister **Jean-Pierre Bemba** and Economy Minister **Vital Kamerhe** won 35, 17, and 32 seats respectively. The coalition controlled over 390 seats in the outgoing legislature.

Within the 500-member house, 45 parties won one or more seats, according to CENI, but the boycott of the legislative polls by **Martin Fayulu** has depleted their numbers in parliament. **Moïse Katumbi's** *Ensemble* party meanwhile, is set to be the main opposition party with 22 seats. Katumbi's aides reported last week that the former Katanga governor had been placed under house arrest, although armed police were later ordered to leave his compound.

Although the general election was marred by allegations of fraud, logistical errors and disruption, the **United States** and other western governments have now joined their African counterparts in sending official congratulations to Tshisekedi after the Constitutional Court confirmed his victory (Dispatches 2/1/24).

KENYA/TANZANIA

Crisis talks due as airline clash escalates

16 January

The latest cargo flight trade row threatens to cause economic pain for everyone

Tanzania's foreign minister **January Makamba** and Kenyan counterpart **Musalia Mudavadi** are set to hold emergency talks to resolve the latest tit-for-tat trade row between Nairobi and Arusha.

The Tanzania Civil Aviation Authority (TCAA) announced on Monday (15 January) that it will suspend all Kenya Airways (KQ) passenger flights between Nairobi and Dar es Salaam from 22 January. The move was a response to Kenya's recent rejection of Tanzania's request to allow its airline, Air Tanzania Company Limited (ATCL), to operate cargo flights between Nairobi and third countries.

Within hours of the TCAA's response, Mudavadi and Makamba issued a joint statement vowing to resolve the conflict before the end of the week.

It is not the first time that the national airlines have been dragged into political disputes. In 2020, Tanzania suspended KQ flights after Kenya excluded Tanzania from its list of countries whose citizens could enter without quarantine restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic (Dispatches 17/1/23).

The latest dispute threatens to cause economic pain all round, particularly for business travellers and tourists by increasing prices. It also underscores the weakness of the East African Community (EAC) which, despite purporting to be a tariff and quota-free trade area, with a common external tariff, still has major disputes between its largest economies and protectionism (AC Vol 63 No 2). Intra-EAC trade has fallen in recent years.

Kenya, Tanzania and **Uganda** account for the bulk of the region's trade. However, increased supplies of goods from Uganda last year prompted Kenya to block imports of a range of staple products including milk and sugar. Uganda, meanwhile, has taken Kenya to the EAC court over the importation of petroleum products.

GHANA/IMF

Agreement likely on $5.4 billion debt restructure this week

11 January

Finance minister claims terms offered by creditors will help unlock next tranche of credits from IMF

As critical talks between ministers and official creditors (including the Paris Club and **Chinese** lenders) on restructuring US$5.4 billion of Ghana's external debt continue this week, a senior IMF official said on 9 January that the fund was optimistic about an agreement which would unlock the next $600 million of financial support as part of the country's $3bn extended fund facility programme.

A deal with official creditors could also unlock $550m of funding from the World Bank. Credits from the IMF and the Bank are conditional on the terms of the debt restructuring and Ghana's ability to meet financial targets.

On 11 January, Ghana's finance minister **Ken Ofori-Atta** told journalists in Accra that the government was reviewing a draft term sheet from the creditors whose scope was sufficient to meet the IMF's concerns about state finances.

Bloomberg News reported that Ghana's US dollar bonds had gained by 1.3-1.4% on the finance minister's statement.

Ofori-Atta led the government team in meetings that began on 8 January with the Official Creditor Committee (OCC), co-chaired by the governments of China and **France**, which holds around 25% of Ghana's $20bn external debt earmarked for restructuring.

Officials have indicated that the talks will also focus on brokering an agreement on a 'cut-off date,' after which new loans from bilateral creditors will not face restructuring. Release of the next tranche of funding from the IMF is contingent on a restructuring deal.

President **Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's** government wants to conclude the debt restructuring and IMF deal early this year. That would give it enough time to engineer some kind of economic feel-good factor ahead of December's general election (AC Vol 65 No 1).

Vice-President **Mahamudu Bawumia** is the ruling New Patriotic Party's presidential candidate and is due to launch his campaign later this month in what is shaping up to be a close contest with the opposition's New Democratic Congress (NDC) candidate, former President **John Mahama**.

KENYA/HAITI

Not enough cops, too much corruption

11 January

Critics of President Ruto's plan to deploy police support to Port au Prince are adding to logistical delays

The scale of the challenge facing the Kenyan police as they prepare to support the Haitian National Police in its fights against criminal gangs has been spelt out in a report by **Belgium**-based International Crisis Group published on 5 January.

Chief among the problems facing the new force are staff shortages. There are currently fewer than 10,000 police officers reckoned to be on duty at any time in a country of more than 11 million people. Ideally, there should be some 25,000 active officers, says the UN.

In its report, the ICG warned that the new international police force would need to sever 'the strong bond between gangs and Haitian business and political elites.'

In addition to corruption, and the links between the police, politicians and gangs, the report pointed to overcrowded prisons and difficulties protecting civilians in urban warfare among the main challenges facing the mission.

The international community was quick to accept the offer by Kenya's President **William Ruto** in July for around 1,000 of his police officers to lead a mission to train and support the Haitian police in their battles against criminal gangs on the Caribbean state (AC Vol 64 No 16). The UN Security Council formally approved the plan in October, with the **United States** immediately pledging US$100m in funding (Dispatches 15/11/23).

Kenya's deployment has been held up by disputes over funding and training, and by domestic opposition to the mission by the opposition politicians in Nairobi, who filed a legal petition challenging whether the mission is in line with the national constitution.

NIGERIA

Local firms protest state tactics in central bank probe

11 January

Raid on Dangote Group and other companies raises 'governance questions' says manufacturers' group

The ballooning investigation into illegal foreign exchange transactions at the Central Bank of Nigeria under suspended governor **Godwin Emefiele** is rattling local firms who argue that some of the arbitrary methods used could deter legitimate investors. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has raided several big companies in Lagos, the commercial capital, prompting headlines about 'crackdowns' in the local media (AC Vol 64 No 12).

Lambasting the agency's tactics, the Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria (MAN) condemned the 'Gestapo-style invasion' of the Dangote Group's offices on 4 January. The EFCC has raided other offices in Lagos including those of Dangote Group rival, BUA Group owned by **Abdul Samad Rabiu**.

'The news has gone around the world and many, including would-be investors, would be taken aback,' the manufacturers' lobby said. 'This may not be the best way to show that Nigeria is committed to good corporate governance.'

Officials at Dangote Group, chaired by Africa's wealthiest man, **Aliko Dangote**, were also angered by the raid, insisting that there are 'no accusations of wrongdoing' against it. It added that the tactics used by the EFCC seemed 'designed to cause unwarranted embarrassment'.

The raid on Dangote Group came just as the company's oil refinery division was preparing to start full operations. It had taken delivery of its first consignments of crude oil from the state-owned Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) early in the new year. Dangote was planning to list the US$20 billion refinery as a separate company on the Nigeria Stock Exchange (NSE) where it would have easily been the biggest single quoted company.

The raid has reinforced concerns, widely punted on Nigeria's social media, about a rift between President **Bola Ahmed Tinubu** and Dangote. Neither side has commented. The first signs of friction were seen in May 2023 when Tinubu, then president-elect, declined to attend the official opening of the Dangote refinery, Africa's biggest industrial project, alongside outgoing President **Muhammadu Buhari** and sundry other Nigerian and other regional dignitaries.

Tinubu's absence from the opening ceremony was doubly remarkable given the refinery is in Lagos and will be the state's biggest economic project and job creator by far. The successful operation of the Dangote refinery should replace most of the gasoline (over 400,000 barrels a day) and diesel that Nigeria currently imports because its state-owned refineries aren't operating efficiently.

Business consultants in Lagos say there is also a political dimension to the central bank probe. Emefiele, the central target of the investigation, was a rival contender for the ruling party's presidential nomination competing against Tinubu in the first stages of the campaign in 2022.

Still governor of the central campaign at the time, Emefiele has launched his presidential campaign with some fanfare, dozens of vehicles were photographed bearing the legend 'Emefiele 2023' (AC Vol 63 No 3).

Aides of Emefiele's at the central bank were briefing journalists, suggesting that the bank governor had high-level endorsement with the government and the ruling All Progressives' Congress (APC).

As tensions mounted over the number of serving office holders who were vying for elective office, President Buhari gave the contenders an ultimatum: either drop the political ambitions or quit and run the campaigns outside government employment (AC Vol 63 No 11).

Emefiele chose to abandon his presidential campaign and stay on as governor of the central bank in mid-2022. But his decision to order new currency notes later in the year in the run-up to the national elections in February 2023 riled Tinubu.

The ostensible aim of the currency changeover was to cut the circulation of laundered money and fake currency notes to tilt the outcome of the elections. Politicians of all stripes were making cash payments to registered voters but Tinubu's campaign team saw Emefiele targeting their operations. ●

POINTERS

Ghana

OFORI-ATTA CLAIMS BIG WIN

Confirmation on 17 January of a deal between Ghana and its official bilateral creditors (Paris Club and **China**) to restructure payments owed on US$5.4 billion of debt, is a political win for Finance Minister **Ken Ofori-Atta** and for his New Patriotic Party's hopes of staying in power after December's elections (AC Vol 65 No 1).

Ofori-Atta, who was able to enjoy the news with a jaunt among political and business leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos this week, said the payments would be repaid in two tranches in 2040 and 2041. He added that a moratorium had been agreed with official creditors on debt payments until May 2026, and that an additional agreement with Eurobond investors to restructure debt worth $13bn should be concluded by the end of March.

Next up is a $600 million tranche from the IMF and $550m from the World Bank. This, and support in the restructuring negotiations, is premised on the IMF's close monitoring of Ghana's finances – due to stretch on to 2026 like the official creditors' moratorium. The next phase of the IMF programme will mean tougher budgetary targets – in theory ruling out a pre-election spending binge (Dispatches 11/1/24). Civic activists in Accra want IMF scrutiny to extend to a raft of contested business deals which renders the state liable to payments of hundreds of millions of dollars.

In the hours that followed the announcement, Ghana's Eurobonds were the top performers in an index of frontier and emerging market sovereign dollar debt.

Concluding this lengthy debt-restructuring in early 2024 is vital to rebuild the reputation of President **Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's** government on economic management. That may be a long shot but there is little evidence that voters are particularly enthused by the opposition National Democratic Congress under **John Dramani Mahama**.

Nigeria

ABDUCTIONS PROMPT SECURITY ALERT

The reported deaths of **Nabeeha Al-Kadriya**r, who was kidnapped along with 22 others in the Bwari Area of Abuja, and 13-year-old **Folasade Ariyo**, who was abducted alongside eleven others, including three of her siblings and their mother in the Dutse-Alhaji Area of Abuja, appears to have jolted ministers into action.

Following the latest abductions, Minister for the Federal Capital Territory, **Nyesom Wike**, has convened an emergency security meeting for officials to tackle the escalating security challenges in the Nigerian capital.

Following the killing of Ariyo and two others, the kidnappers increased their ransom demand from N60 million to N700 million for the remaining victims. President **Bola Ahmed Tinubu's** government has struggled to make any impact in curbing banditry and armed attacks. A priority is to improve intelligence gathering, a shortcoming blamed on the state security agencies (AC Vol 65 No 1).

The outrages have have also shaken opposition leaders out of their post-election inertia. **Peter Obi**, the Labour Party presidential candidate at the 2023 general election and former Governor of Anambra State, has demanded that ministers and officials refrain from making all forms of foreign trips 'until we deal with the ugly situation facing us at home.' He added, 'No foreign investor or partner would like to invest in Nigeria, with the situation we now find ourselves in.'

Former vice president **Atiku Abubakar**, the People's Democratic Party candidate last year, has attributed the spike in attacks and insecurity, which apply across the country, to worsening levels of poverty and hunger. Both leaders are trying to use the security crisis to regain momentum and public support after being comprehensively outmanoeuvred by Tinubu since last year's general elections.

São Tomé & Príncipe

PETROBRAS INVESTS IN OIL SECTOR

Following the signature of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on joint business opportunities in the upstream with Shell in March 2023, on 27 December **Brazil's** state-controlled oil company Petrobras announced that through a competitive process conducted by Shell, it had acquired from the London-based oil major stakes of 45% each in blocks 10 and 13 and 25% interests in block 11 in the archipelago's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) resulting in the following new consortiums:

- Block 10: Shell (40%), Petrobras (45%), ANP-STP (15%)
- Block 11: Shell (40%), Petrobras (25%), Galp Energia (20%), ANP-STP (15%)
- Block 13: Shell (40%), Petrobras (45%), ANP-STP (15%)

Petrobras has not disclosed the amount paid for the acquisition, which is subject to approval by São Tomé´s National Oil Agency (ANP-STP). Undoubtedly, the local authorities welcome Petrobras's decision both for political and economic reasons.

Petrobras's farm-in operation is the first major change in the block ownership of São Tomé's EEZ since September 2022 when Shell took over British Petroleum's interests of 50% each in blocks 10 and 13. Petrobras's farming-in enables Shell to reduce the financial risks of its investments in São Tomé where the existence of commercially viable oil has not been confirmed yet.

Egypt/European Union

THE CAIRO PRICE

The European Commission is hoping to unveil a wide-ranging deal to provide investment in a range of Egyptian economic sectors in exchange for continued cooperation on migration management at the next Association Council with **Abdel Fattah el Sisi's** government on 23 January (AC Vol 64 No 23).

Some of the planned investment will be contingent on Egypt agreeing and implementing reforms with the International Monetary Fund, say EU officials.

Ahead of the meeting in Brussels, EU officials have agreed to provide €87 million and new equipment to Egypt for a migration management project started in 2022, implemented by the UN migration agency and the **French** Interior Ministry operator Civipol, that will focus on increasing the operation capacity of the Egyptian navy and border guards for border surveillance and search and rescue operations at sea.

Talks on a 'cash for migration control' deal between Brussels and Cairo, modelled on similar arrangements with **Tunisia** and **Morocco**, have been in the works for several months, despite the fact that the number of irregular migrant crossings into Europe from Egypt is very low (AC Vol 64 No 21).

The EU has paid €138m to Egypt for migration management projects over the past two years, primarily for border management, anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking activities, voluntary returns and reintegration projects.

The EU's asylum agency's 2023 migration report stated that most of Egypt's irregular migrants to the EU had departed from neighbouring **Libya**, though it noted that there has been a significant increase in Egyptian citizens applying for visas in EU countries in recent years.