



FRONTLINE AFRICA
— **ADVISORY** —



Africa Report

April 2024

Introduction

- The April report covers the ongoing rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and the impact on the African continent, Senegal's Bassirou Diomaye Faye's inauguration, Kenya's proposed maritime treaty to ease Somalia-Ethiopia tensions, and South Sudan's roadmap towards civilian rule.
- From an economic perspective, the report delves into the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Regional Economic Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa which projects a steady growth for the region's economy.
- On the security front, the report covers the United States' agreement to withdraw from Niger, the aftermath of the war in Sudan a year later, and the agreement between South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame on the need to politically end the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).
- Also covered in the report is the outcome of the 29 April legislative election in Togo, Chad's political campaign ahead of the upcoming Presidential election on 06 May, and the announcement by Mali's military government to hold elections once security is stabilised.



POLITICAL UPDATES

Geopolitics Split African states' Response to Middle East Tensions

- Recent events in the Middle East have raised political temperatures and catalysed a new and dangerous phase of brinkmanship, with potentially grave consequences for the global political economy.
- Six months into Israel's war on Gaza, fears of a wider conflict in the Middle East are mounting. On April 13, Iran launched more than 300 drones and missiles towards Israel in an unprecedented attack. The strike came after Israel's bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria that killed two top generals linked to Hamas on 01 April.
- Israel vowed retaliation and, less than a week later, reportedly launched a drone strike on Isfahan, in central Iran. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said his country has "not been involved in any offensive operations".
- While there have been calls for urgent de-escalation in the wake of rising tensions between the two countries from the UN Secretary General, the European Union Commission and the G7, the African Union's position has been unclear regarding the debate on whether Israel should retaliate, de-escalate or if Iran was wrong or right in launching missiles attack on Israel. Thus far, South Africa, Kenya, Egypt, and Nigeria among others have called for restraint.
- Outside of the Israel-Iran tensions, there is deep concern about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with the G7 ministers reaffirming their support for a "sustainable peace based on a two-state solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State" in their final document. All sides were urged to "refrain from unilateral actions that undermine the prospect of a two-state solution."
- The G7 ministers also strongly opposed a potential full-scale Israeli military operation in Rafah, where a majority of the 1.7 million displaced Palestinians from the conflict are sheltering. Furthermore, they called for immediate measures to increase humanitarian aid to Gaza, citing the imminent risk of famine for a large portion of the population.
- The G7 pronouncements contrasted with the US stance on 18 April, where it voted against Palestinian membership at the UN Security Council – a decision that raises concerns about the US commitment to Palestinian rights.
- Since the October 2023 outbreak of hostilities, Israeli attacks have resulted in nearly 34,000 Palestinian fatalities and over 76,000 injuries, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that at least 13,800 Palestinian children were among the dead.

Possible Implications

- The ongoing tensions in the Middle East stoke long-held fears of an escalation that draws in proxies and regional and global powers.
- For African countries already reeling from multiple adverse shocks, this is another headache, as financial market losses, trade disruptions and heightened risk aversion are likely.
- Just like the tensions between Israel-Palestine, the AU's uncertain position regarding the Israel-Iran tensions once again reflect the continent's geopolitical divide along the two feuding states and the broader Middle East.
- Meanwhile, Washington wary of escalating tensions amidst global pressures from Russia advancing in Ukraine and China's in the South China Sea, would likely favour negotiating for de-escalation in order to avoid being overstretched, especially with a pivotal national election November election edging closer. The US, together with its Western Allies, is simply not ready for a multifaced full-blown war involving Russia and China.
- However, Netanyahu's domestic issues may prompt him to resist de-escalation efforts to undermine Joe Biden, hoping for support from a different US administration post-election.
- Ultimately, any failure to settle issues politically could lead to a miscalculation by either party – which could give grounds for further escalation and thus, plunging the entire Middle East into war.

Hope for Democracy in West Africa after Faye Sworn in



- On 02 April, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, 44, who was officially inaugurated as Senegal's fifth president since the country's independence from France, appointed his political mentor, Ousmane Sonko as Prime Minister.
- Faye, who unlike his mentor, has never held an elected office, swept to a first-round victory by obtaining 54% of votes on a promise of radical reform just 10 days after being released from prison.
- He was among a group of political opponents freed from prison 10 days before the 24 March presidential ballot under an amnesty announced by the previous president, Macky Sall, who had tried to delay the vote.
- Faye vowed during his inauguration speech that he would work towards a united Africa and a Senegal that abided by its laws and institutions, while also pledging systemic change, greater sovereignty, economic prosperity, and calm after years of deadly turmoil.
- On the international stage, Faye seeks to bring military-run Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger back into the fold of the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) bloc.

Possible Implications

- In a region where a large majority of the population are under 30, Faye's victory offers hope to those young people frustrated by a lack of economic opportunities, with old elites seemingly clinging to power.
- His accession to power serves as a stark reminder that elections still represent the best way to remove a failing government for many citizens in Africa.
- Not only has his win removed an unpopular government from office but has also strengthened the country's democratic institutions and reinvigorated popular confidence in democracy at a time when coups in other West African states have done the opposite.
- However, Faye and the government will quickly face major challenges. He does not have a majority in the national assembly and will need to build alliances to pass new laws, or call a legislative election, which will become an option from mid-November.
- The biggest challenge will be creating enough jobs in a nation where 75% of the 18-million population is under 35 and the unemployment rate is officially 20%. Many young people consider the future to be so bleak they have risked their lives trying to migrate to Europe.

Kenya Proposes Maritime Treaty to Ease Ethiopia-Somalia Tensions

- On 11 April, Kenya proposed a regional maritime treaty to defuse tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia over a deal allowing Ethiopia to set up a naval base and giving it port access in Somalia's breakaway region of Somaliland.
- This after landlocked Ethiopia agreed on 01 January to lease 20 km (12 miles) of coastline in Somaliland, a part of Somalia which claims independence and has had effective autonomy since 1991, offering possible recognition of Somaliland in exchange.
- This prompted a defiant response from Somalia and fueled concern the deal could further destabilise the Horn of Africa region.
- The treaty Kenya is proposing in consultation with Djibouti and regional bloc Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) would govern how landlocked states in the region can access ports on commercial terms, according to Korir Sing'oei, Kenya's principal secretary for foreign affairs.



Possible Implications

- The proposed treaty signifies a pivotal moment in regional diplomacy, offering a pathway to resolve the current tensions and establishing a framework for future cooperation in the Horn of Africa.
- If accepted, Nairobi's solution would offer Ethiopia stable and predictable access to maritime resources, so it can carry out its business unhindered, while also respecting Somalia's territorial integrity.
- However, time would be of essence since al-Shabaab militants in Somalia are using the dispute to portray the government in Mogadishu as being unable to protect Somalia's sovereignty.

Can South Sudan's Transitional Leaders Guide it to Civilian-Led Government?

- As South Sudan races against the clock to hold the nation's first national elections in December 2024, an event bringing together political actors and civil society representatives to agree upon a Code of Conduct that will govern the actions of political parties was recently convened.
- The forum was hosted on 04 April by South Sudan's reconstituted Political Parties Council and supported by the United Nations Mission in the country (UNMISS), as part of efforts to galvanise consensus and political will among parties to the 2018 peace deal.
- Juba is rushing to achieve peace benchmarks as well as putting in place the technical, logistical, operational, and political framework for a fair electoral process.
- Meanwhile, South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa recently held series of talks with South Sudanese leaders, President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar as part of the efforts by South Africa as the chair of the AU- appointed High-Level Ad hoc Committee for South Sudan.
- South Sudan's deputy minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation Ramadan Mahomed Abdallah Gulch said President Kiir and his deputies assured the South African leader of their readiness to conduct elections as stipulated in the agreement and the roadmap.
- South Sudan has never held elections, as they have been postponed multiple times. Elections are scheduled for December 2024 to end the transitional period, but peace monitors and the international community say the transitional government has not built up the structure necessary to hold free and fair elections this year.

Possible Implications

- The adoption of a code of conduct for political parties is an essential ingredient for peaceful elections. It is also a good development for the country, and for the exercise of democracy which the country is hoping to build and consolidate.
- The way forward for South Sudan is dependent on widespread public participation in peace processes, as well as a robust, competitive space for political parties. For elections to be held under the 2018 agreement, the transitional government must expedite implementation of critical issues, or else the elections would be null and void.
- However, issues such as human rights violations which threaten peace, as well as inadequate investment in key democratic institutions leaves question marks all over the latest date for the election.
- Overall, the longer South Sudan stays in this quagmire, the greater the risk of additional violence which leaves an estimated 75% of its people in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

ECONOMIC UPDATES

IMF Projects Steady Rise in Growth for Sub-Saharan Africa

- The IMF has projected positive growth trends for Sub-Saharan Africa, indicating a promising trajectory for the region's economic recovery. The Washington based Fund made this known in its Regional Economic Outlook Report for Sub-Saharan Africa.
- According to the IMF, Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to witness a steady increase in growth rates over the next few years. The projected growth is set to rise from an estimated 3.4% in 2023 to 3.8% in 2024 and further to 4% in 2025.
- Additionally, inflation has almost halved, public debt ratios have broadly stabilised, and several countries have issued Eurobonds this year, ending a two-year hiatus from international markets, according to the report.
- However, the report indicates that not all is favourable, with funding squeeze persisting as the region's governments continue to grapple with financing shortages, high borrowing costs, and impending debt repayments.
- The report recommends three policy priorities to help countries adapt to these challenges which includes: improving public finances without undermining development; monetary policy focused on ensuring price stability; and implementing structural reforms to diversify funding sources and economies.



Possible Implications

- The IMF's assessment underscores the importance of addressing sector-specific challenges while leveraging opportunities for sustainable economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- With concerted efforts to mitigate the impacts of external shocks and enhance domestic capabilities, the region could capitalise on its vast potential and contribute significantly to global economic dynamics.
- To drive sustainable growth, governments must effect necessary political and an array of economic reforms that result in a policy mix that bolsters financial, economic and human resource capabilities. The latter is key especially considering that the region's population is expected to double by 2050.

SECURITY UPDATES

US Agrees to Withdraw Troops From Niger: What Now?

- After protesters took to the streets in the capital earlier this month to demand the departure of US forces, Washington agreed on 19 April to withdraw its soldiers from Niger as the West African nation is increasingly turning to Russia and away from Western powers.
- The US Department of State agreed to pull out about 1,000 troops from the country that has been under military rule since July 2023, with Washington committing to begin planning an "orderly and responsible" withdrawal of its troops from the country.
- Washington built a military base in Niger to combat armed groups that pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda and ISIL (ISIS) in the Sahel region, including Burkina Faso and Mali. The major airbase in Agadez, some 920km (572 miles) from the capital Niamey was used for manned and unmanned surveillance flights and other operations.
- Known as Air Base 201, it was built at a cost of more than \$100m. Since 2018, it has been used to target ISIL fighters and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), an al-Qaeda affiliate.
- It remains unclear what access, if any, the US will have to the base in the future, and whether Russian advisers and perhaps even Russian air forces will move in if Niger's relations with the Kremlin deepen.



Possible Implications

- The withdrawal upends the U.S. counterterrorism and security policy in the tumultuous Sahel region of Africa. The move effectively marks a new regional gain for Russia, which has ramped up its focus on Africa and backed military regimes in neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso.
- While the ordinary people of Niger will bear the brunt of the consequences of an American military withdrawal and the subsequent loss of political and diplomatic attention, Washington and its allies also lose, at least in the short term, a strategic military asset that will be very difficult to replace.
- The loss of these bases creates problems for US regional interests in West Africa and cedes ground to Russia and China. For instance, China has in recent years been one of Niger's top trading partners, taking in approximately 9% of Niger's exports and accounted for 22% of Niger's imports in 2022. This places the US in a disadvantageous position for creating political influence in West Africa.

- Meanwhile, Washington may be prompted to probe several coastal West African countries as backups to the base in Niger to station its drones just as it has been reported in order to maintain presence in the region.
- However, there are few options in the region that are both allies with the US and do not have a military government. In addition, as US rivals such as Beijing and Moscow gain influence in the region, it may become more expensive for the Washington to set up new military bases in Africa.

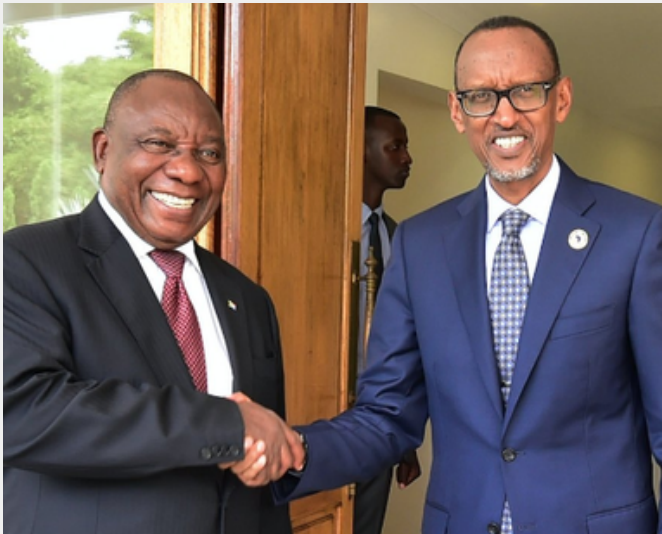
Sudan's Conflict One Year Later: Will Peace Ever Reign?

- On 15 April, Sudan marked a year since a power struggle between two branches of its armed forces exploded into full-scale conflict.
- The effects of twelve months of hostilities have been harrowing, as thousands have died in the fighting, or related atrocities, and millions are desperately hungry, with only 6% of this year's humanitarian appeal having been funded and previous humanitarian pledges having not been honoured.
- While several efforts are under way to bring the war in Sudan to an end, their lack of success has been linked to regional rifts between the mediating countries, as well as competing interests among international players such as Russia, the US, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- Another prominent actor in negotiations is IGAD, a regional body composed of eight countries around the Horn of Africa. In December 2023, IGAD said it had secured commitments from the army chief, al-Burhan, and RSF leader Hemedti to implement a ceasefire and hold political dialogue.
- Meanwhile Emmanuel Macron, France's President, revealed on 17 April that donors have pledged over \$2 billion for Sudan as support for the war-ravaged country. This development comes after France, Germany, and the EU hosted a summit that raised awareness of the country's ongoing civil war.

Possible Implications

- A closer look at the failure of diplomatic efforts to resolve the ongoing conflict lies in the fact that successful mediation requires the mediator to have leverage to offer incentives to the warring parties, and also maintains impartiality between them.
- When it comes to Sudan, no mediator has managed to offer terms acceptable to both warring parties. Furthermore, many of the potential mediators have supported one side or the other.
- The war in Sudan is needless and must be politically resolved through talks. Escalating the conflict to gain negotiation advantages only worsens the wounds that have been inflicted from the beginning.
- While more action is needed by the international community and regional players to pressure the warring factions to stop the violence, the application of the notion that African Solutions to African problems becomes vital in these regards.

Ramaphosa and Kagame Agree a Political Solution is Best for DRC



- Rwandan President Paul Kagame and his South African counterpart Cyril Ramaphosa agreed that a political solution was the best for the eastern DRC conflict.
- They met in Kigali during the 30th Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide in what would be their first direct engagement since SADC mission, known as Southern African Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC), led by South Africa, was deployed to the DRC.
- The SADC Mission joined by Malawi and Tanzania has been fighting in the DRC's North Kivu since December last year, to Rwanda's displeasure, as Kigali accuses the DRC of supporting Hutu elements that oppose Kagame's government - and say they fear South African troops will effectively be fighting alongside those insurgents.
- Former president Thabo Mbeki has also joined Ramaphosa and Kagame in calling for a peaceful resolution to rising tensions between the Kinshasa and Kigali, adding way to achieve that already existed

- Mbeki was referring to the 02 April 2003 deal which was signed at the heads of state level in South Africa before President Felix Tshisekedi came into office, committing Rwanda and DRC to a peaceful solution.
- Meanwhile, as the security situation in the eastern DRC continues to deteriorate following ongoing clashes between the army and M23 rebels near Goma, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, on 16 April appealed for more attention to be given to the conflict, as he visited a camp for displaced people in Goma.
- Thousands of Congolese have been forced to flee their homes due to a conflict between the Congolese army and M23 rebels, leading to what the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says is one of the worst displacement crises in the world.

Possible Implications

- The DRC's conflict is deeply rooted in historical, local, national, and regional grievances. As such, the current crisis needs a well-thought-out hybrid approach to deal with its security challenges — one that blends both diplomatic and military approaches as no single approach may suffice.
- However, this has been complex and difficult to achieve especially considering the many actors (internal and external) involved with competing interests, with some actors merely interested in plundering and extracting the country's abundant natural resources by fuelling tensions to destabilise efforts aimed at bringing peace.

- The international community should re-evaluate the DRC's security sector reform and the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration processes. Most importantly, pressure ought to be put on the DRC government to break ranks with armed groups, and on the Rwandan government to end its support of M23.
- On the continental front, the African Union should urgently bolster its capacity for mediation and diplomatic engagement, striving to bring the warring factions to the negotiating table. Otherwise, without the political will by warring parties to negotiate, the DRC conflict remain far from over.
- Ultimately, overcoming the cycle of conflict and consolidating peace in DRC requires an institutional solution to the problem of ethnic discrimination, especially through institutional mechanisms that ensure adequate representation of demographic minorities in all branches of government and in the security system.
- By alleviating inequalities on the basis of ethnicity and identity, such a system can help consolidate a sense of common Congolese identity for all the citizens and build a robust basis for state legitimacy.

ELECTIONS UPDATES

Togolese Vote in an Election Marred with Controversy

- On 29 April, Togolese citizens voted in the country's historic regional and legislative elections against a backdrop of protests over the government's constitutional change.
- The elections, initially scheduled for 20 April, were rescheduled to 29 April over a highly contested constitutional reform which will see the country moving from a Presidential to a Parliamentary system.
- The reforms will see the President no longer being elected by the electorate but rather by the National Assembly. The reforms also shortened the presidential term to four years, renewable once.
- Additionally, the reforms establish the position of the President of the Council of Ministers, similar to a Prime Minister, with no term limit.
- For two main opposition parties, the National Alliance for Change (ANC) and the Forces Démocratiques Républicaines (FDR), the question of changing the constitution is a major issue at stake in these elections.



Possible Implications

- While the government has presented the proposed reform as simply a change in the political system, it is ultimately seen as a challenge to the peaceful and regular alternation of powers that presidential term limits established in the current constitution.
- The new constitution could enable Gnassingbe to stay in power until 2031 if he is re-elected in 2025, a highly likely scenario if his party wins majority the legislative elections and controls parliament.
- Given Togo's history of simmering political and social tensions, coupled with the growing terrorist threat in the north, the latest move to change the constitution could fuel tensions and further jeopardise Togo's fragile social unity.
- Ultimately, in a region besieged by coups, the change in the constitution also raises legitimate concerns that Togo too could witness a coup. How ECOWAS responds to the constitutional crisis unfolding in the country will be closely monitored by the international community.

Chad Kickstarts Electoral Campaign to Usher Civilian-Led Government

- Campaigning has begun which would see the country's military leader General Mahamat Idriss Deby, attempting to cement his rule with a victory in the country's presidential election.
- Deby kicked off his presidential campaign on 14 April for an election on 06 May meant to be a transition back to democracy after three years of military rule, in which he promised to maintain peace and develop the central African state if elected President.
- The general who seized power after the death of his father in 2021, initially promised an 18-month transition period but later appointed himself as the head of a transitional government.
- Nine candidates, including pro-democracy figure and transitional prime minister Success Masra, are seeking to challenge Deby in the election. They all say that Deby merely wants to cement his rule as he does not want to lose his family's grip on power.
- Although Asra has been cleared to contest as one of the opposition candidates, his standing as a genuine opposition leader has been diminished by his decision to join the transitional government in January.

Possible Implications

- Chad's elections are just a transparent attempt to entrench the rule of the military, with elections merely just a box-ticking exercise to confirm Deby's presidency and return the Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS) to the helm of government.
- To begin with, almost all of its 15 commissioners were appointed by Dery or by institutions he controlled, while its chairman, Ahmed Bartchiret, is a former member of the ruling party and is a close associate of Deby. In addition, the head of the Constitutional Council which is tasked with adjudicating election disputes is a former minister and spokesperson of the MPS.
- Put simply, the military government's capture of election management institutions means that the outcome of the May elections will not reflect the will of the people of Chad.

- As such, the outcome of the upcoming elections is likely being disputed, and this would add to the groundswell of public discontent and risks plunging the country into political instability in the near future.

Mali to Hold Elections Once Security is 'Stabilised', Says Junta



- On 11 April, Mali's Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga said elections will only be organised to hand back power to civilians once the security situation has been completely stabilised.
- Maiga was responding to growing calls by political parties and civil society organisations for the junta to hold elections after it indicated last year in September that it would renege on a promise to organise elections meant to bring back civilian rule this February, citing technical reasons.
- Since then, no new election promises have been made by the junta government, and after the March transition deadline passed without a vote, many political parties and civil society organisations reacted by demanding elections.
- Meanwhile, the junta authorities through government spokesperson, Abdoulaye Maiga, issued on 10 April a decree on national television banning political party activities
- While the statement stated the decision was made in the interest of maintaining public order, it did not specify any threats to public order emanating from political parties, and there was also no indication on when the suspension would be lifted.

Possible Implications

- While the junta cites the need for security stabilisation as a prerequisite for holding elections, this condition could serve as a pretext to further delay the transition to civilian rule. It raises concerns about the junta's commitment to a democratic transition and may be perceived as an attempt to prolong military rule.
- The postponement of elections and the banning of political activities by the military junta represent significant challenges to the country's democratic transition and raise concerns about governance, human rights, and regional stability.
- Meanwhile, the continued uncertainty surrounding the timing of elections and the lack of a clear roadmap for the transition to civilian rule may contribute to political instability in Mali. Without a legitimate and inclusive electoral process, there is a risk of escalating tensions and potential conflicts, further exacerbating the country's security challenges.

Risks

- **Vulnerability to global external shocks** from weaker external demand and elevated geopolitical risks. An escalation of the conflict in the Middle East would result in further disruptions to supply chains, transportation routes, and commodity production, ultimately driving up the prices of commodities and shipping costs.
- **Threat of rising political instability** which is dampening growth through heightened policy uncertainty and diminished investor confidence. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger departure from ECOWAS following prolonged political discord stemming from recent coups exacerbates uncertainty and geoeconomic fragmentation in a region already struggling with fragility, poverty, and food insecurity.
- **Frequent climate changes** which are becoming more frequent and widespread, including droughts of unparalleled severity. These events exacerbate sub-Saharan Africa's struggles, weighing on agricultural yields and labour productivity in an already-vulnerable region.
- **Elevated Debt Distress** especially in countries such as Ghana, Chad, Somalia, and Zambia.

.....END.....
