

# Africa Briefs

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## South Africa's President Ramaphosa Blames NATO for War in Ukraine

“The war could have been avoided if NATO had heeded the warnings from amongst its own leaders and officials over the years that its eastward expansion would lead to greater, not less, instability in the region,” South African President Cyril Ramaphosa [charged](#) March 17 in responding to a legislator’s question in parliament. Nor will economic sanctions bring peace, he said.

South Africa does not “condone the use of force or violation of international law,” Ramaphosa told parliament, but “it is important to understand and articulate the causes of the conflict.” He continued,

“While there are people within our country and elsewhere that want South Africa to adopt a more adversarial position, our position seeks to contribute to the creation of conditions that make the achievement of a durable resolution of the conflict possible.

“Our approach is informed by an analysis of the causes of this conflict. This includes a view shared by many leading scholars, politicians and other people, that the war could have been avoided if NATO had heeded the warnings from among its own leaders and officials over the years that its eastward expansion would lead to greater, not less, instability in the region....

“We also need to recognize that coercive measures, such as sanctions outside of the legal prescripts of the United Nations, may serve to prolong and intensify the conflict.”

In the March 2 vote in the UN Gen-

eral Assembly, half of Africa’s governments—including South Africa—refused to condemn Russia as the aggressor in Ukraine. South Africa maintained the position of a government that could mediate, if requested—until President Ramaphosa shifted on March 17 and identified NATO as having provoked the war.

In the intervening days, key South African institutions issued statements of support for Ramaphosa, including the Nelson Mandela Foundation, the South African Communist Party, and the Jacob Zuma Foundation. They [saw](#) the present conflict as a Cuban missile crisis in reverse and [condemned](#) the imperial western order for its serial aggressions—such as against Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya—thus providing clarity and support for President Ramaphosa to adopt his shift of March 17.

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## Exploding All-Africa Food Crisis Seen Through Nigerian Lens

Nigerians should be prepared for an impending food crisis within the next two to three months, according to a prominent Nigerian, Aliko Dangote, chairman of the Dangote Group, the *Premium Times* (Abuja) [reported](#) March 12. The food crisis *already exists*, but Dangote’s report is nevertheless highly relevant.

Dangote spoke against a background of agricultural success and social failure. Nigeria’s maize production reached its highest level since independence in 2021—a 16% increase over 2020—while still 4 million metric tons short of demand in the market. A major factor in the increase was the decision of the Central Bank of Nigeria a

year earlier to refuse requests for foreign exchange for the importation of maize, in order to encourage domestic production.

At the same time, *outside the money concepts of supply and demand*, in 2022, 19.4 million Nigerians face, or will face, food insecurity—they will live in debilitating hunger and may die of starvation—according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Either they have no money, or they have no access to sufficient food. The 19.4 million figure is 25% higher than the 14.4 million in 2021.

Against this background, on March 8, Dangote assessed the further impact on Nigeria of the war in Ukraine, as reported in the *Premium Times* March 12:

“Mr. Dangote said that Nigerians should be prepared for a food crisis within the next two to three months and urged the government to immediately stop the ongoing export of maize. The government has previously lifted its ban on maize exports.

“Mr. Dangote, who said the effects of the Ukraine crisis are already being felt in the food processing chain, said prices of fertilizer, wheat, maize, among other products, will go up.

““There will be a shortage of wheat, maize and a lot of products because as we speak, Russia and Ukraine do almost 30 per cent of the world’s urea and 26 per cent of the world’s potash; and even phosphate also, they are one of the largest [producers] in the world,” he said.

“There would be a scarcity of food generally, we would not be able to access fertilizers going forward, we would not see the effects now, but in the next two, three months’.”

Dangote overlooks other factors

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also at work to produce this catastrophe. General inflation is high, especially in Africa, as part of the current global tendency toward hyperinflation. In addition, the international bankers' green policies are—and are stated to be—hostile to investments in energy and food production. In particular, the prices of fertilizers and other farm inputs began to skyrocket many months before the war in Ukraine. The war has made matters worse.

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## For Africa, Losses from 'Ukraine' Crisis Outweigh Touted Benefits

With their anticipated loss of Russian oil and natural gas imports, European eyes have turned to Africa as a “politically correct” replacement. On Feb. 25, literally the day after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a Washington think-tank, the Brookings Institution, published a [report](#) titled, “What Does the War in Ukraine Mean for Africa?” which pointed to the [documented](#) 625 trillion cubic feet of natural gas—primarily in Nigeria, but also in Algeria and Mozambique—which could be tapped to replace abandoned Russian supplies.

As Brookings makes clear, however, capitalizing on these reserves is a long way off. A deal among Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria for a 4,000 km natural gas pipeline across the Sahara Desert, signed last month, still lacks financing. In any case, the benefit would not be broadly spread across the huge continent.

Meanwhile, the impact of much more expensive fertilizers and less grain available for import is immediate and widespread. Fertilizer prices were skyrocketing even before the Ukraine war. Thirty percent of all wheat exported to the world market (of which Africa is a major importer) [comes from](#) Ukraine and Russia combined.

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## Kenya, Zimbabwe Sign MOUs, Attack Sanctions Bleeding Zimbabwe

With the specific goal of re-integrating Zimbabwe—isolated and bled by U.S., UK and EU sanctions—into the larger African trade region, the presidents of Kenya and Zimbabwe signed eight MOUs for cooperation and denounced the sanctions as illegal and economically debilitating. President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya and President Emmerson Mnangagwa signed the agreements when they met at State House, Nairobi on March 9. They cover political and diplomatic consultations, tourism and wildlife conservation, civil aircraft accidents, serious incidents investigations, community development, youth affairs, cooperatives, sports activities, and the advancement of women. Cooperation to fight COVID was also discussed. *Business Daily* (Nairobi) saw the agreements as good for trade and investment.

At a joint press conference, President Kenyatta said that Western sanctions were the cause of Zimbabwe's interminable economic crisis. The African Union and Southern African Development Community (SADC) have also demanded an end to the sanctions.

But in February, the EU renewed its sanctions, first imposed in 2002. The EU found Zimbabwe guilty of “continued human rights violations” and closure of the so-called “democratic” space. Zimbabwe sees the U.S. sanctions as the worst.

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## China To Build Heavy Truck Assembly Plant in Tanzania

Chinese heavy truck manufacturer Sinotruk International is planning to build an assembly plant in Tanzania, the first Chinese plant of this type in Africa. The Country Manager of Sinotruk in

Tanzania, Li Zhongyuan, made the [announcement](#) March 5 in Dar es Salaam, according to the *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam) March 8. He said the plant is expected to employ 500 Africans.

Sinotruk makes HOWO trucks, a brand well established in Africa; the company has contracts with many African firms.

Chinese vehicle assembly plants are already operating in Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, and a contract for an assembly plant in Egypt has been signed.

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## Severe Blackout in South Africa, While Copper Thefts Threaten the Grid

South Africa went almost completely dark on March 9, as state-owned power company Eskom announced a Stage 4 loadshedding (blackout) across the nation. The [drastic measure](#) became necessary when four generators—at four different plants, totalling 15 GW of power—all suffered mechanical failures virtually simultaneously. Although the loadshedding was reduced to Stage 3 within 24 hours, the combined outages lasted over 48 hours. At the time, Unit 2 at the dependable Koeberg nuclear power plant was also offline for scheduled maintenance.

Loadshedding has become a fact of life in South Africa, as it is elsewhere in Africa. Alongside it is the thriving black market in stolen transmission line segments—made of high-value, highly purified copper. Primary targets of this theft—feeding into a global black market—are state-owned Eskom and transport company Transnet. Transnet keeps a daily [summary](#) of the reported thefts, which can run from 3,000 to 5,000 meters *per day*. While dozens are arrested every week, others easily step in, because unemployment has been nearing 50% since the pandemic started. Cable theft is not unique to South Africa.