



Africa

Central Africa

➔ **Cameroon Violence continued in Anglophone and Far North regions; release order in high-profile judicial case caused confusion.**

Violence persisted in Anglophone regions. In North West, separatist militia 12 Dec briefly held eight secondary school students hostage and kidnapped two school staff in Wum town, Menchum division; suspected separatists 20 Dec targeted military convoy with improvised explosive device in same area, killing five soldiers. Defence Minister Beti Assomo 31 Dec started visit to Bakassi Peninsula (South West) following weeks of violence and threats from Nigeria's Biafra separatist militia, which in Oct 2023 signed cooperation agreement with Anglophone separatist group Ambazonia Governing Council. Separatist faction (self-proclaimed Interim Govt of Ambazonia) 11 Dec opened Washington D.C. office after hiring U.S. firm in Oct to lobby for referendum.

Jihadist and other violence continued in Far North region. Suspected Boko Haram combatants 18 Dec attacked security post in Mayo-Sava division; soldiers killed two combatants. Also in Mayo-Sava, residents of Tokombere town 19 Dec demonstrated to demand resignation of mayor, accusing him of land grab and corruption, with some rioters setting gendarmerie office on fire; security forces used live rounds to push back protesters, leaving at least eight dead and others injured.

Military judge dismissed amid tug-of-war over high-profile judicial case. State scandal triggered by kidnapping and murder in Jan 2023 of journalist Martinez Zogo, who had denounced corruption at top of state, continued to linger. Yaoundé military court 1 Dec allegedly ordered provisional release of former intelligence minister Eko Eko and wealthy businessman Amougou Belinga, who have been in detention since March for alleged involvement in Zogo's murder. Decision was reversed later same day, however, and President Biya 13 Dec replaced military judge in charge of case.

Political manoeuvres started ahead of 2025 presidential election. Opposition party Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun 10 Dec re-elected Maurice Kamto, runner-up in 2018 presidential election, as chairman; Kamto was sole candidate as internal critics avoided event. Another opposition leader, Cabral Libii, 19 Dec accused govt of trying to prevent him from standing in 2025 after authorities banned his party's elective congress initially scheduled for 15-17 Dec.

➡ **Central African Republic Rebel groups remained active in northern regions, exposing limits of govt's strategy of weakening them from top down; battle for influence raged between Russia and U.S.**

Northern regions remained subject to armed violence, mainly along Chadian border. Clashes between Russian paramilitary Wagner Group and rebels of Central African Patriotic Movement (MPC) 9 Dec left 30 fighters and one Wagner officer dead in Markounda town (Ouham prefecture); violence, which took place after MPC leader Mahamat Al-Khatim in Nov signed agreement with govt allowing MPC's return to 2019 Khartoum peace deal, illustrated limits of govt's strategy of pushing warlords to announce dissolution of their groups in absence of credible way out for militiamen under their command. Drones 10 Dec dropped explosive charges on Wagner's Kaga-Bandoro base (Nana-Gribizi prefecture), killing four Wagner elements and wounding another 13; alliance of major rebel groups Coalition of Patriots for Change denied responsibility. 3R armed group 21 Dec killed 23 civilians in Nzakoundou village, Lim-Pendé prefecture; UN force 27 Dec announced deployment of peacekeepers to reinforce security in area and facilitate humanitarian access.

Russian govt tightened grip on paramilitary Wagner Group empire in CAR. Unconfirmed rumours circulated in capital Bangui of upcoming departure of Vitali Perfilev, once in charge of Wagner Group military operations in Central African Republic, and his replacement by secret intelligence agent Vladimirovich Denis Pavlov, who arrived in Bangui in Sept. Move would suggest that Russian defence ministry is taking control of paramilitary organisation's activities in country.

U.S. activism against Wagner sparked tensions. As part of its strategy to reduce Wagner influence in Bangui, Washington continued to negotiate security alternatives. U.S.-based private military company Bancroft Global Development late Dec denied having deployed to Bangui but admitted contacts with President Touadéra's govt to discuss potential cooperation. Presidency late Dec confirmed govt is working to diversify security partnerships, said U.S. is offering to train soldiers. Recent cases of harassment against U.S. nationals suggest reaction to U.S. activism from pro-Wagner factions in govt. Notably, authorities have arrested at least ten international and private sector American workers in Bangui since Oct.

➡ **Chad Country approved junta-sponsored constitution in divisive referendum marred by calls for boycott; mounting accusations of Chad taking sides in Sudan conflict strained bilateral relations.**

New constitution approved by referendum amid opposition boycott. Constitutional referendum held 17 Dec, with low turnout observed in most major towns and particularly in country's south; military rulers promoted new constitution as key step toward elections in late 2024 and return to civilian rule, but some opposition and civil society groups had called for referendum boycott, saying new constitution silences debate on federalism by entrenching unitary state, and prepares ground for election of military leader Gen Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno as president. Succès Masra, president of prominent opposition party Les Transformateurs, who returned from exile in Nov, 9 Dec however called for "yes" vote, paving way for his appointment as PM. Electoral commission 24 Dec said new constitution approved by almost 86% of voters, and placed turnout at 63.75%; some opposition leaders

including former PM Pahimi Padacké and former minister Yaya Dillo 26 Dec contested figures before Supreme Court, which nonetheless validated results 28 Dec.

Accusation of Chadian interference in Sudanese conflict soured bilateral relations. Sudanese army and foreign affairs ministry late Nov-early Dec alleged Chad is facilitating United Arab Emirates' support to paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. N'Djamena vehemently denied allegation and 16 Dec expelled four Sudanese diplomats. Khartoum immediately took reciprocal action and expelled three Chadian diplomats.

Several incidents of violence reported across country. In south, farmer-herder violence 7 Dec broke out in Koida village, Moyen-Chari province, with one dead and at least two injured, and 11 Dec left several people seriously injured in Birigui village, Logone Oriental province. Road blockers made comeback to Nord Kanem department, Kanem province in west near border with Niger, with 9 Dec attack on vehicle leaving at least two dead in Nokou locality.

Chad disengaged from region amid reconfiguration of Sahel security architecture. Amid pull-out of UN Mission (MINUSMA) from Mali, Chadian contingent 1 Dec returned home. Chad and Mauritania 6 Dec said exit of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from G5 Sahel means effective dissolution of anti-jihadist alliance created in 2014.

Great Lakes

↓ Burundi RED-Tabara rebels launched deadly attacks, dealing major blow to security forces and confirming group's comeback in Burundi after lull in violence since 2021; Gitega accused Kigali of supporting rebellion.

Rebel group made comeback with several security forces and civilians killed. DR Congo (DRC)-based RED-Tabara rebels 10 Dec allegedly clashed with army in Bubanza province, killing three soldiers, and 22 Dec launched attack in Vugizo town near border with DR Congo; govt said raid left 19 civilians and one policeman dead, while RED-Tabara claimed nine military and one policeman killed, saying attack targeted Vugizo border post. Incidents come after RED-Tabara in Sept launched first attack on Burundian soil since 2021. Violence led to renewed tensions with Rwanda after months of improvement. President Ndayishimiye 29 Dec accused Kigali of funding and training rebel group, which Kigali immediately denied.

Allegations persisted of Burundian troops fighting Rwanda-backed M23 in DRC. Army 11 Dec reported "all" soldiers of Burundian contingent deployed in eastern DRC as part of East African Community regional force had returned to Burundi after force's mandate ended. Army same day refused to comment on allegations that Burundian troops have been deployed to DR Congo as part of bilateral agreement between Kinshasa and Gitega, including various accounts of Burundian soldiers wearing Congolese army uniform and combatting Rwanda-backed M23 rebels.

In other important developments. Supreme Court 8 Dec sentenced former PM Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni to life imprisonment on several charges including

attempting to overthrow govt and threatening president's life; alleged violations by security forces during his time as security minister until 2020 were not investigated. Ahead of 2025 legislative elections and 2027 presidential election, Senate 6 Dec and National Assembly next day approved composition of electoral commission, with govt spokesman, Prosper Ntshurwamiye, as commission's president.

↓ **DR Congo Opposition rejected presidential election results giving victory to President Tshisekedi, amid widespread logistical issues and reports of irregularities; former election commission chief launched political-military alliance including M23, vowing to oust Tshisekedi.**

Electoral commission declared Tshisekedi presidential winner, opposition cried foul. Electoral commission 20 Dec extended voting for general elections by one day amid widespread reports of voting stations unable to operate properly due to missing equipment, voter registers or other paperwork. Four opposition candidates, including Martin Fayulu and Denis Mukwege, 20 Dec denounced breach of electoral law and uneven playing field, calling for rerun. Former President Kabila's political party same day issued strong statement, implicitly threatening destabilisation. Banned opposition protest 27 Dec left several people wounded in capital Kinshasa, with some protesters throwing stones at security forces who fired tear gas and stormed Fayulu's campaign headquarters. Election observers from DR Congo's Protestant and Catholic churches 28 Dec reported "numerous cases of irregularities likely to affect the integrity of the results". Electoral commission 31 Dec said Tshisekedi re-elected with over 73% of vote. Moïse Katumbi and Fayulu, who came second and third respectively, denounced election as sham and rejected result outright.

Fighting continued between M23 rebels and govt-aligned forces in east. In North Kivu province, M23 maintained pressure on govt forces and allies especially around Sake town in Masisi territory. Fighting reported 4-7 Dec near Mushaki and Kilolirwe towns as M23 reportedly attempted to take over Mushaki. U.S.-sponsored 72-hour ceasefire 11 Dec entered into force, but M23 reportedly used pause to reinforce positions around Sake, allegedly with major reinforcements from Rwanda. M23 around 26 Dec moved closer to Sake and attempted breakthrough toward mining town of Rubaya, further west. East African regional force 21 Dec completed withdrawal after mandate expired.

Political-military coalition, allied to M23, created in Kenya. In Kenya's capital Nairobi, former head of Congolese electoral commission Corneille Nangaa 15 Dec presented new political-military alliance with M23 and other groups. Kinshasa next day summoned Kenyan ambassador and recalled its own ambassador to Nairobi in protest. Nangaa, speaking from M23 stronghold of Rutshuru territory, 31 Dec vowed to march on Kinshasa to oust Tshisekedi from power.

➡ **Rwanda Kinshasa's rhetoric against Kigali reached new heights, while Burundi accused Kigali of supporting RED-Tabara rebel group.**

Regional tensions remained elevated. Amid sustained offensive by Rwanda-backed M23 rebels in eastern DR Congo (see DR Congo), Congolese President Tshisekedi 8 Dec compared President Kagame to Hitler and his "expansionist aims", and around 19 Dec threatened to declare war should Rwanda "persist in its aggression". Renewed

RED-Tabara rebel attacks in Burundi ratcheted up bilateral tensions after months of improvement. Burundi's President Ndayishimiye 29 Dec accused Rwanda of funding and training rebel group, which Kigali immediately denied (see Burundi).

In another important development. Election commission 12 Dec scheduled presidential and parliamentary polls for 15-16 July 2024; Kagame expected to run for fourth term in office.

➔ **Uganda Islamic State-affiliated rebels intensified violence and govt remained under pressure over human rights abuses.**

Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) stepped up attacks on Ugandan soil. Two bombs 2 Dec exploded in suburbs of capital Kampala, injuring one. President Museveni next day blamed Islamic State-affiliated ADF and vowed to "intensify" army operations against group in neighbouring DR Congo. ADF 19 Dec launched attack in Kitehurizi village in Kamwenge district, killing ten civilians and forcing hundreds to flee; Museveni 20 Dec announced retaliatory airstrikes against group in DR Congo. ADF 25 Dec killed three civilians in another village of Kamwenge.

Controversy over human rights persisted, inflamed by army scandal. As political opposition 30 Nov ended month-long parliamentary boycott over human rights abuses, U.S. 4 Dec expanded visa restrictions on senior govt officials over human rights and democracy concerns. Govt 13 Dec ordered investigation into viral video purportedly showing soldiers torturing suspected thief in Lagot village, Kitgum district, and military court 15 Dec sentenced soldiers identified in video to one year in prison.

In other important developments. Military court 5 Dec remanded into custody 31 people, including seven soldiers, on charges related to alleged plot to overthrow Museveni between Feb 2022 and Oct 2023. Leader of Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti", 27 Dec said he travelled to Uganda to discuss developments in Sudan with Museveni; trip is Hemedti's first confirmed appearance outside of Sudan since war between RSF and Sudanese army broke out in April.

East and Southern Africa

➔ **Kenya Cost of living crisis remained centre stage; Al-Shabaab and cattle-related violence persisted.**

Govt struggled with cost of living crisis, bribery allegations. Treasury Cabinet Secretary Njuguna Ndun'gu 6 Dec admitted govt has been unable to pay public servants for five months. During independence celebrations, President Ruto 12 Dec acknowledged cost of living crisis but said tough fiscal policies were necessary and helped stabilise economy. Opposition leader Raila Odinga 31 Dec warned of new wave of demonstrations if Finance Act of 2023 is not repealed. Meanwhile, allegations mid-month surfaced in local media that Odinga received \$30mn from President Ruto to stop anti-govt protests.

Al-Shabaab and cattle-related attacks continued. Al-Shabaab 2 Dec attacked police station in Hagadera refugee camp, Garissa County, injuring one; 15 Dec detonated

explosive device on govt vehicle travelling on Dabaab-Garissa road, killing four. Meanwhile, gunmen 5 Dec attacked herders in Kangeta settlement, Meru County, killing one; herders retaliated killing one. Local residents 9 Dec killed three suspected cattle rustlers in Isiolo County, and police next day killed two cattle raiders in Kapturo village, Baringo County. Interior Cabinet Secretary Kithure Kindiki 28 Dec announced extension of Operation Maliza Uhalifu, launched in early 2023 in Rift Valley, to other banditry-prone areas in Meru, Isiolo and Marsabit counties.

Nairobi withdrew troops from DR Congo, prepared for deployment to Haiti. Kenyan-led East African Community regional force 21 Dec completed withdrawal from eastern DR Congo as force's mandate expired. Nairobi prepared for deployment of police officers to lead UN-backed multinational force in Haiti despite High Court temporarily blocking deployment: Kenyan delegation 5-7 Dec visited Haiti, and Kenyan police chief Japhet Koome 14 Dec received Haitian police chief in capital Nairobi.

➔ **Madagascar Top court confirmed President Rajoelina's re-election for third term as opposition insisted it will not recognise result.**

High Constitutional Court 1 Dec validated re-election in November polls of President Rajoelina, who was sworn in for third term 16 Dec. Collective of 11 opposition candidates 1 Dec once again rejected election results and called for national protest movement, and 8 Dec announced creation of "crisis unit" aimed at coordinating nationwide action. Police 11 Dec detained prominent journalist Gascar Fenoso and opposition politician Christian Tabera for allegedly inciting police mutiny during 4 Dec TV interview. Antananarivo court 13 Dec gave senior opposition party official Ny Riana Randriamasinoro two-year suspended sentence for participating in unauthorised demonstration before election. Rajoelina sworn in 16 Dec; ahead of inauguration ceremony, authorities banned protests in capital.

➔ **Mozambique Insurgents launched deadly attacks on security forces and continued move southward in northern Cabo Delgado province, while partial re-run of municipal elections kept political tensions high.**

Islamic State launched deadly attacks on security forces, continued to move south. Islamic State Mozambique Province (ISMP) combatants 7 Dec attacked military positions near Manhiça, Muidumbe district, killing five soldiers and looting food and weaponry in deadliest attack on security forces since Sept; ISMP 26-28 Dec killed unconfirmed number of soldiers in Pangane and Mucojo-Sede areas of Macomia district, displacing hundreds of civilians. Group of militants continued to move toward Cabo Delgado's southern districts of Meluco and Quissanga in apparent attempt to avoid Rwandan and Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) patrols in Macomia, Mocimboa da Praia and Muidumbe districts; at least 50 armed insurgents 11 Dec passed through village in Quissanga without engaging local community. President of Islamic Council of Mozambique late Nov announced creation of international commission due to begin work in Jan to promote talks between govt and insurgents in Cabo Delgado.

Political fallout from contested municipal elections continued. Preliminary results gave ruling FRELIMO party winner of by-elections held 10 Dec in four municipalities where Constitutional Court had ordered new vote (either for whole municipality, or

only for number of polling stations) due to widespread irregularities in October local elections. In some places, notably in Nacala, where main opposition party RENAMO boycotted vote, turnout was below 30%. Heavy police presence and clashes with opposition supporters reported near most polling stations on voting day, and RENAMO alleged police attacked party supporters in run-up to vote including raiding party offices in capital of Nampula province 5 Dec. Following elections, RENAMO 11 and 16 Dec marched in capital Maputo and police 12 Dec killed civilian bystander during opposition protest in Marromeu town, Sofala province. Constitutional Court 26 Dec said process had “deficient organisation, administration and management” but 30 Dec confirmed FRELIMO had won repeated votes.

➔ **Zimbabwe Ruling party won most parliamentary seats in controversial by-elections; conduct of election cycle stymied international re-engagement efforts.**

Ruling party won majority of seats in contested recall vote. ZANU-PF 9 Dec won seven of nine by-elections for parliamentary seats which had been secured by main opposition party Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) candidates in Aug elections; by-elections were triggered by recall of CCC MPs by party’s self-proclaimed secretary-general Sengezo Tshabangu, who CCC leader Nelson Chamisa claims is working for ruling ZANU-PF party. ZANU-PF now holds 184 National Assembly seats, three short of two-thirds majority lost during Aug elections, with CCC claiming govt is using recalls to reclaim majority. Tensions likely to continue with another round of by-elections due 3 Feb as dozens of other CCC MPs, senators and local councillors have been recalled by Tshabangu. In lead-up to by-elections, High Court 7 Dec barred recalled CCC MPs from contesting votes, while police 3 Dec reportedly prevented opposition rallies in cities of Bulawayo and Masvingo.

Conduct of elections continued to isolate Zimbabwe internationally. Govt’s international re-engagement drive, which seeks to receive debt and sanctions relief, faltered amid widespread criticism of handling of votes. Notably, U.S. 4 Dec announced additional sanctions including visa restrictions on individuals responsible for “undermining democracy”.

Horn of Africa

➔ **Eritrea 23rd anniversary of Algiers Agreement with Ethiopia passed amid deteriorating bilateral relations.**

12 Dec marked 23 years since Ethiopia and Eritrea concluded Algiers Agreement to establish peace and demarcate common border. U.S. and UK issued statements urging sides to honour their commitments under deal and emphasising respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and pursuit of regional peace and stability. Anniversary came amid deteriorating bilateral relations, however, fuelled by competing ambitions and unresolved grievances; Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed’s Oct comments on access to Red Sea port exacerbated mistrust. Rising tensions have increased prospect of slide toward war, though unlikely in near term given both countries’ weakened militaries and war-ravaged economies. Meanwhile, clashes 30 Dec erupted in UK capital London between supporters and opponents of Isaias’ govt,

with supporters reportedly calling on Eritrean community to prepare for another war with Ethiopia; police intervened, said four officers were injured in violence.

➡ **Ethiopia Hostilities in Amhara and Oromia regions continued unabated; Tigray region faced prospect of large-scale famine.**

Amhara rebellion persisted amid human rights abuses. Clashes between federal forces and Amhara nationalist militia known as Fano continued, with govt stepping up airstrikes. Notably, Ethiopian Air Force early Dec conducted drone strikes in North Wollo and North Shewa zones, killing fifteen; drone attacks in South Wollo Zone 10 Dec killed around 40. Civilians suspected of Fano ties faced extrajudicial killings; notably, BBC 12 Dec reported that Ethiopian soldiers killed around 30 people allegedly providing Fano with resources. Rebels, meanwhile, targeted local officials, notably claiming 7 Dec assassination of ruling party head in Sayint Woreda (South Wollo).

Violence in Oromia intensified. Hostilities escalated in Oromia region following collapse of negotiations between govt and Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in Nov. Notably, govt-insurgent clashes erupted in Kombolcha district late Dec, with drone strike 25 Dec killing eight. Meanwhile, Oromo-Amhara tensions triggered more attacks on civilians. Notably, suspected Fano militants 12 Dec attacked civilians in Horo Guduru Wollega Zone, killing at least thirteen; Oromo militants, possibly OLA, 24 Nov-4 Dec attacked Orthodox Christians and mostly Amhara civilians in Arsi Zone, killing around 40.

Tigray truce held despite unresolved issues, threat of famine loomed. African Union's monitoring team, established to oversee implementation of Tigray peace process, 1 Dec met with federal and Tigray leaders in capital Addis Ababa; sides extended team's mandate until Dec 2024 and committed to talks within two months to address outstanding issues, including demobilisation of Tigray combatants, disputed territories and Eritrean troop presence. Meanwhile, interim administration 29 Dec appealed to federal govt and international partners, warning that over 90% of Tigray's population are on brink of starvation due to drought, exacerbated by war's destruction of agricultural systems.

In other important developments. Authorities 12 Dec arrested State Minister of Peace and former ally of PM Abiy, Taye Dendea, who days before criticised govt's failure to end conflicts and tackle corruption. Latest round of talks on Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam failed (see Nile Waters). Ethiopia-Eritrea relations remained strained (see Eritrea).

➡ **Nile Waters Latest round of talks on Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) failed to produce agreement.**

Latest round of trilateral talks between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan on GERD 19 Dec ended without agreement. Cairo 19 Dec issued statement saying "meeting was unsuccessful due to Ethiopia's persistent refusal ... to accept any of the technical or legal compromise solutions that would safeguard the interests of all three countries"; Addis Ababa same day said it sought "amicable agreement" but accused Egypt of maintaining "colonial era mentality" and erecting "roadblocks against efforts toward convergence".

↑ Somalia Puntland made breakthrough to resolve electoral dispute, reducing prospect of conflict; govt took steps to resume operations against Al-Shabaab.

Puntland president announced return to clan-based voting system for parliament. Puntland President Said Deni 6 Dec abandoned plan to move from clan-based system to universal suffrage, saying parliamentary elections would be held 8 Jan with clan representatives selecting MPs, who in turn would choose state's next president; decision significantly reduced prospect of conflict between state govt and opposition-aligned forces, but challenges remained. Puntland's parliament 7 Dec announced plans to form committee in charge of electing state's next president and voted to extend its own mandate for another year. Puntland's constitutional court 10 Dec annulled one-year extension following request by govt. Deni 28 Dec announced re-election bid.

Military operations against Al-Shabaab set to resume as rainy season ended. Govt forces took positions in preparation for resumption of offensive as rainy season concluded mid Dec, and clashed with Al-Shabaab in some areas of Galmudug and Hirshabelle states (centre). Harardhere district of Mudug region saw most significant activity: govt claimed around 30 Al-Shabaab members killed 7 Dec in Baraag Gugurte, and 80 insurgents killed around 26 Dec near Caad town. In Hiraan region, govt-aligned clan militias 3 Dec clashed with Al-Shabaab militants trying to infiltrate area along Shabelle river, claimed 60 militants killed. Operations also continued in recently opened front in South West state. Notably, army 1-4 Dec cleared several villages on border between Bay and Bakool regions. Govt said U.S. airstrike 17 Dec killed senior Al-Shabaab leader Maalim Atman in group's stronghold of Jilib (Middle Juba region, Jubaland state). Meanwhile, Al-Shabaab suicide bomber 3 Dec wounded five military recruits at Turkish-run training centre in capital Mogadishu.

In other important developments. AU mission (ATMIS) 17 Dec resumed drawdown including from president's residence in Mogadishu. Meanwhile, Somalia continued to reach milestones on international stage, including UN Security Council 1 Dec lifting arms embargo imposed in 1992. President Mohamud and Somaliland President Bihi 28-29 Dec met in Djibouti, agreed to resume talks to resolve political tensions, after previous negotiations stalled in 2020.

➡ Somaliland Tensions persisted between govt and Dhulbahante clan militias in Sool region, while new Dhulbahante authorities insisted on becoming federal member state of Somalia.

Situation remained precarious in Sool region despite lull in fighting. Govt and Dhulbahante clan militia in Dec continued to reinforce positions near frontline, leading to concerns of resumption in fighting. Risk of further skirmishes between Isaaq (Somaliland's largest clan) and Dhulbahante militias around Buhoodle town also remained high. Meanwhile, govt 4 Dec and 8 Dec claimed arresting spies working for Somali, Dhulbahante and Puntland authorities.

Dhulbahante administration continued to assert independence. SSC-Khatumo state (new self-declared administration for Dhulbahante community) 23 Dec rejected participation in Puntland elections in Jan and insisted on being autonomous Somalia state.

Somaliland and Somalia agreed to resume dialogue. President Bihi and Somalia President Mohamud 28-29 Dec met in Djibouti, agreed to resume dialogue to resolve political issues, after previous talks stalled in 2020; sides also agreed to cooperate on security and fight against organised crime. Bihi 31 Dec also travelled to Ethiopia for talks with PM Abiy Ahmed.

➡ **South Sudan Intercommunal fighting continued in Abyei region and spilled into Warrap state, tensions between Riek Machar's forces and defected commander escalated in Unity state, and concerns about 2024 poll persisted.**

Hostilities between rival Dinka in Abyei and Warrap state continued. Fighting between Ngok Dinka from disputed Abyei Administrative Area and Twic Dinka from Warrap state continued in Abyei. Notably, Twic 2 Dec set up checkpoints in Athony-Ayuok village, prompting clashes 2, 3 Dec that killed at least six. Armed men 31 Dec killed six, including Abyei deputy chief administrator, on Abyei-Aneet town road; Abyei authorities blamed Twic youth from Warrap state. Crisis contributed to breakdown of security situation in Warrap. Notably, Twic youth 3 Dec attacked state prison, freeing and arming 57 cattle guards, 35 of which reportedly joined militias. Two sections of Rek Dinka 8 Dec fought over ownership of cattle camp, killing five armed Dinka youth. Fighting in Atonj area 14 Dec killed at least eight, 17 Dec killed seven.

Tensions between Riek Machar's forces and defected commander sparked fighting. Standoff between forces of Riek Machar's Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO) and Simon Maguek Gai (IO commander who defected to army in Oct) sparked sporadic fighting in Unity state. SPLA-IO late Nov left Leer town following clashes and by 2 Dec fighting had reached Guit county. Weakened SPLA-IO 14-15 Dec also withdrew from Bentiu town near Guit and moved to cantonment after army allegedly threatened force if they did not leave, which army denied; Panyijiar county now last SPLA-IO stronghold in Unity and likely target of Maguek Gai's next military operation.

Concerns about election preparedness mounted. 70 local civil society organisations 1 Dec issued statement warning country is not ready for elections; UN Special Representative Nicholas Haysom 14 Dec reiterated concerns before UN Security Council. Meanwhile, President Kiir 12 Dec replaced Minister of Presidential Affairs Barnaba Marial Benjamin with new ally Joseph Bakosoro, an Equatorian Zande seen as possible running-mate in election to garner support in Equatorian region.

⚡ **Sudan Rapid Support Forces (RSF) captured Wad Madani city in first major offensive east, raising fears group could try and conquer entire country by force; RSF leader embarked on major diplomatic tour.**

RSF seized Gezira state capital, triggering mass displacement. RSF 15 Dec launched offensive on El-Gezira state capital Wad Madani in east, sparking clashes with army and shattering relative stability of regional state. Paramilitary 18 Dec stormed Wad Madani after capturing army base, army next day announced withdrawal from city. Fighting displaced around 300,000 people, while UN humanitarian agency 15 Dec suspended field missions in state. RSF 20 Dec claimed capture of military base in

Gezira's al-Hasaheisa town. Paramilitary's advance east marked new phase in war and signalled it could attempt to conquer Sudan by force.

RSF eyed capture of North Darfur capital El Fasher. Joint Force of Armed Groups, comprised of Juba Peace Agreement signatories, 2 Dec announced troop deployment to North Darfur in preparation for RSF attack on El Fasher, only Darfur state capital not under its control. Chairman of rebel group Sudan Liberation Movement-Transitional Council Al-Hadi Idris 12 Dec warned RSF attack could "transform the ongoing war into a tribal conflict". Army and RSF 16 Dec clashed in northern El Fasher and Abu Shouk displacement camp.

Fighting continued in capital Khartoum, RSF clashed with rebel group in South Kordofan. Clashes 14 Dec reignited around strategic sites of Khartoum North and persisted elsewhere in capital, killing dozens. In North Kordofan, clashes continued over state capital El Obeid. In South Kordofan state, RSF 5 Dec launched attack on Tukma village, sparking clashes with rebel group Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North.

In other important developments. After army official late Nov accused Chad and United Arab Emirates of supporting RSF, N'Djamena and Abu Dhabi expelled Sudanese diplomats, prompting tit-for-tat measures from Sudan. Regional bloc Intergovernmental Agency on Development (IGAD) 9 Dec held emergency summit in Djibouti; sides agreed to ceasefire and face-to-face meeting, but next day denied commitments were unconditional. RSF leader Mohamed "Hemedti" Hamdan Dagalo late Dec embarked on major diplomatic tour, meeting with leaders of Uganda, Ethiopia and Djibouti in effort to improve RSF's diplomatic standing.

Sahel

➡ **Burkina Faso Civilians remained caught in crossfire between jihadists and govt forces, and Ouagadougou continued to draw closer to other military govts in Sahel region.**

Levels of violence remained elevated, with heavy toll on civilians. Gunmen wearing military uniform 8 Dec allegedly killed over 30 civilians in Dongounani village, Hauts-Bassins region; local sources blamed attack on members of armed forces or army auxiliaries (VDPs). Suspected jihadist militants 14 Dec reportedly killed dozens of people in Balavé commune, Boucle du Mouhoun region. Al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) 24 Dec attacked gendarmerie post in Gorgadji town, Sahel region; security forces claimed repelling attack with a dozen assailants killed. Unidentified jihadist militants 30 Dec attacked Nouna military base (Boucle du Mouhoun), killing unknown number of soldiers and civilians.

Ouagadougou pulled out of G5 Sahel, announced Sahelian confederation. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger 1 Dec announced intention to form three-state confederation and to establish stabilisation fund, investment bank and eventually common currency. Burkina Faso and Niger 2 Dec announced withdrawal from regional anti-jihadist alliance G5 Sahel, following in Mali's footsteps; two remaining members Mauritania and Chad 6 Dec acknowledged departure of three founding members,

which paves the way for alliance's dissolution. Meanwhile, West African regional bloc ECOWAS 10 Dec lifted travel restrictions on key transition officials.

Silencing of dissent continued. Unidentified individuals 1 Dec abducted rights defender Daouda Diallo, who was targeted in Nov by govt's conscription order forcing dozen people into army including journalists, civil society activists and opposition party members; administrative tribunal of Ouagadougou 6 Dec deemed conscription order illegal. Authorities 2 Dec suspended all distribution methods of French newspaper *Le Monde*, citing "biased article" about large-scale jihadist attack on Djibo town (Sahel region) in late Nov. Unidentified individuals 24 Dec abducted another critic of transitional authorities, former FM Ablassé Ouédraogo.

In other important developments. Relations with France continued to worsen as authorities 1 Dec arrested four French citizens in capital Ouagadougou on suspicion of espionage, saying they were intelligence agents; France denied accusations. Transitional President Capt. Traoré 17 Dec reshuffled cabinet, notably replacing education and mine ministers. Russia 28 Dec reopened embassy in Ouagadougou after 31-year gap.

➔ **Mali As UN mission completed troops drawdown, jihadist and rebel blockades in north increased hardship facing civilians, and jihadist attacks targeted army positions in various regions.**

Authorities faced challenges as they took steps to cement control of Kidal region. Govt late Nov-early Dec sent hundreds of soldiers and police to help enforce order in Kidal region after recently capturing regional capital from coalition of 2015 Algiers Accord signatory armed groups Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP) – which includes Coordination of Azawad Movements separatists. New Kidal governor Gen. El Hadj Ag Gamo – tutelary figure of pro-govt signatory armed group, Imghad Tuareg Self-Defence Group and Allies – took office 13 Dec. Troops 20 Dec moved into rural town of Aguelhok and regained control of only vacated UN mission (MINUSMA) camp that had come under CSP control. In leaked document dated 8 Dec, CSP announced blockade on roads leading to major northern towns of Ménaka, Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu and Taoudeni in effort to step up pressure on govt forces. Meanwhile, MINUSMA completed drawdown of troops with handover of Sévaré base (Mopti region) and Timbuktu camp on 8 and 28 Dec, respectively.

Jihadist violence continued in north and centre. Jihadist groups 3 Dec launched spate of attacks mainly on military targets in northern regions. Notably, Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) attacks in Ménaka town (Ménaka region) and Labbezanga army base (Gao region) left at least 33 soldiers and three civilians dead; 14 militants also killed, including prominent leader Adamou Diallo. Suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) same day attacked other military posts including Tessalit (Kidal region). JNIM 11 Dec reinstated blockade on Timbuktu town after easing it in Nov following negotiations with local elites. In Ségou region in centre, suspected JNIM militants 12 Dec killed at least 30 soldiers, allied militiamen and civilians in Farabougou village and nearby military camp.

In other important developments. West African regional bloc ECOWAS 10 Dec lifted travel restrictions on key transition officials and refrained from denouncing electoral delays. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger 1 Dec announced forming three-state

confederation and establishing stabilisation fund, investment bank and eventually common currency.

➡ **Niger** West African regional bloc recognised military govt and set up committee to negotiate return to civilian rule; Niamey continued to expand ties with military-led neighbours and move away from erstwhile partners.

West African leaders recognised junta, set conditions for sanctions relief. Regional bloc ECOWAS Court of Justice 7 Dec dismissed junta's request to lift sanctions imposed by ECOWAS after July coup, and 15 Dec ordered "immediate" release of deposed President Bazoum. At ECOWAS summit in Nigeria, West African leaders 10 Dec dropped demand for coup reversal, set up committee of three heads of state to negotiate with junta for "short transition" period to constitutional order, saying sanctions relief would depend on outcome of discussions.

Niger announced federation with Burkina Faso, Mali, withdrew from G5 Sahel. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger 1 Dec announced intention to form three-state confederation and to establish stabilisation fund, investment bank and eventually common currency. Burkina Faso and Niger 2 Dec announced withdrawal from G5 Sahel anti-jihadist alliance, following in Mali's footsteps; two remaining members Mauritania and Chad 6 Dec acknowledged departure of three founding countries, which paves the way for alliance's dissolution. Meanwhile, junta 4 Dec ended two EU defence and security partnerships, and next day joined Mali in denouncing tax cooperation treaty with France. Transitional President Gen. Tchiani 4 Dec received Russian delegation and signed treaties strengthening bilateral military cooperation. Following visit to Niamey, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee 13 Dec said U.S. was ready to resume cooperation with Niger. Last French soldiers deployed in Niger 22 Dec left country following end of bilateral military cooperation.

Insecurity persisted in Tillabery region (south west). Suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims 3 Dec killed two civilians in Tondia village, Gotheye department. Armed forces 27 Nov-3 Dec conducted security operations in Abala and Banibangou areas, killing two suspected Islamic State Sahel Province militants and arresting 19. Unidentified jihadist militants 29 Dec attacked Amara and Loutchi villages, Téra department, reportedly killing 11 civilians.

West Africa

➡ **Benin** Cotonou continued to strengthen ties with Western partners as govt forces combat jihadist violence in northern departments.

Sporadic jihadist violence against military and civilian targets persisted. Troops 12 Dec hit explosive device likely planted by al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) in Karimama commune, Alibori department, leaving two soldiers dead. Meanwhile, 223 of 250 Beninese troops deployed in Mali as part of UN mission (MINUSMA) 11 Dec returned home as peacekeeping force pulled out; soldiers will reportedly be deployed to Benin's northern border to help guard against jihadist incursions.

Govt discussed partnership with Western partners amid jihadist threat. Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Fructueux Gbaguidi, received French and Belgian counterparts to discuss deepening military cooperation. France Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Thierry Burkhard, travelled to Benin 8-9 Dec, and Belgium Chief of Defence Staff, Adm. Michel Hofman, followed suit 13-14 Dec. Military cooperation with former colonial power remains highly unpopular, however, and Burkhard's visit gave wind to rumours on social media of French military base in Benin, which both generals denied in joint press conference.

➡ **Côte d'Ivoire Main opposition party's elective congress highlighted internal divisions and rekindled animosity with ruling party.**

Main opposition party Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) prepared to hold extraordinary congress on 16 Dec to elect successor to long-time party leader, Henri Konan Bédié, who died in Aug. In last-minute ruling, Abidjan court of first instance 15 Dec ordered suspension of congress following urgent request from two senior party members, who alleged lack of transparency and irregularities in process. Controversy highlighted internal divisions between party's old guard and younger reformist wing, and rekindled animosity between PDCI and ruling party Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP). PDCI interim president Alphonse Cowppli-Bony Kwassy 16 Dec denounced "practices from another era that undermine democracy and freedoms", seemingly accusing RHDP of orchestrating suspension of congress. Plaintiffs 21 Dec withdrew complaint, and congress was held 22 Dec in capital Yamoussoukro. Former Credit Suisse CEO Tidjane Thiam won bid with 96,48 % of votes, defeating businessman and diplomat Jean-Marc Yacé.

➡ **Guinea In alleged attempt to tighten grip on power following major jailbreak in Nov, transitional authorities muzzled critical press and continued anti-corruption campaign targeting former state officials.**

Manhunt continued after high-profile prison escape. Former minister of presidential security, Col. Claude Pivi, who escaped from prison in Nov alongside former President Moussa Dadis Camara and several collaborators, remained at large; all escapees had been on trial for alleged involvement in Conakry stadium massacre of 28 September 2009.

Authorities clamped down on critical media. Guinea's media regulator, High Authority for Communication, 6 and 9 Dec ordered suspension of Djoma TV Channel, owned by close aide of deposed President Condé, and two other radio and television stations critical of military rule, citing unspecified "national security reasons". In response, Guinean press union 7 Dec called for boycott of govt-sponsored events, while NGO Reporters Without Borders 14 Dec denounced "attacks on press freedom" and urged authorities to remove restrictions on private media.

Govt continued to harness legal system to silence opponents. Anti-corruption court 11 Dec summoned Amadou Damaro Camara and Mohamed Diané, former president of National Assembly and former defence minister under Condé, respectively, for hearings in corruption cases; Diané failed to appear and was ordered to come before court in Jan. Authorities have used anti-corruption campaign both to build popular support and silence potential opponents and critics.

↓ Guinea-Bissau Fighting broke out between security forces aligned with rival political factions; President Embaló described incident as attempted coup.

Battle overnight 30 Nov-1 Dec erupted between National Guard and special forces in Bissau, leaving two dead. Tensions started to rise after Economy and Finance Minister Souleiman Seidi and Treasury Secretary Antonio Monteiro were detained 30 Nov over corruption allegations prompting National Guard, which reports to Interior Ministry aligned with Seidi's African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), to free pair from police custody in capital Bissau. Fighting 1 Dec subsided by noon after army captured Seidi and Monteiro, as well as National Guard commander. President Embaló immediately called incident "attempted coup" and 4 Dec dissolved PAIGC-dominated parliament, requesting fresh elections without setting date. PAIGC leader and parliamentary speaker Domingos Simões Pereira same day labelled move unconstitutional, vowed to continue holding parliamentary sessions, and 8 Dec reported deputies were being blocked from accessing parliament. Security forces 13 Dec used tear gas to disperse group of PAIGC deputies and supporters attempting to enter parliament. Embaló 20 Dec sacked PM Geraldo Martins, later appointed new govt.

➔ Nigeria Armed groups and govt forces killed 300 civilians as violence remained widespread in North West and North Central zones; Supreme Court ruled separatist leader must be tried for terrorism.

Army mistakenly launched drone strike on civilians in North West Zone. During routine security operation in Kaduna state, army 3 Dec mistook villagers celebrating Muslim festival in Tudun Biri village for armed group members, and struck them with two drones, killing at least 85 people. After some initial confusion, army 4 Dec confirmed striking civilians by mistake, and President Tinubu 5 Dec ordered investigation. UN Human Rights Office 6 Dec urged authorities to "take all feasible steps" to protect civilians as they combat various armed groups in northern states.

Gunmen went on killing spree in North Central Zone. Armed groups 24-25 Dec rampaged through about 25 farming villages of Bokkos and Barkin Ladi areas in Plateau State, killing at least 198 people, and displacing more than 10,000. No group claimed responsibility, but attacks occurred in area long plagued by herder-farmer violence. Kidnappings for ransom continued to surge in Federal Capital Territory, with victims abducted not only in peripheral settlements but also inside city: at least 73 residents abducted 9-29 Dec in Bwari and Kuje areas, as well as villages in neighbouring Niger state.

Supreme Court reinstated terrorism charges against Biafra separatist leader. Supreme Court 15 Dec ruled leader of separatist group Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Nnamdi Kanu, must be tried for terrorism although his extradition from Kenya in 2021 was illegal; decision, which reversed Appeal Court's October 2022 ruling, may prompt hardline IPOB faction to escalate violence. Meanwhile, unidentified gunmen 10 Dec killed seven people, including members of local vigilante group, in attack on nightclub in Oba town, Idemili area of Anambra state.

Cost-of-living crisis deepened as inflation rose to 18-year high. World Bank 13 Dec said national currency (naira) has lost 41% of its value against dollar on official

currency market since May and 30% on parallel market, urged govt to “take additional measures” for economy. National Bureau of Statistics 15 Dec said consumer inflation rose to 28.20% in Nov from 27.33% in Oct.

➡ **Senegal** Court cleared opposition leader Ousmane Sonko to run in February presidential election, but his candidacy continued to face obstacles.

Dakar court of first instance 14 Dec reinstated Sonko on electoral register, clearing him to run for president in February. Sonko’s lawyers same day called on govt to issue Sonko with sponsorship forms needed for candidacy registration ahead of 26 Dec deadline. Sonko’s representatives 18-20 Dec claimed govt was refusing to follow court order and reinstate Sonko on electoral roll, said security forces had denied them access to electoral commission headquarters to collect sponsorship forms. Govt in following days reportedly challenged court decision to reinstate Sonko on electoral roll before Supreme Court. Sonko’s lawyers 26 Dec said they had submitted Sonko’s presidential candidacy to Constitutional Council despite lack of required documents. “Sonko President 2024” coalition 31 Dec nominated Sonko as presidential candidate in online ceremony after authorities banned nomination meeting initially scheduled for 30 Dec in Dakar, citing risks to public order.

➡ **Sierra Leone** Fallout from alleged coup attempt continued to loom large, with former president named as suspect.

Govt 4 Dec announced 43 new arrests, the vast majority of them military personnel, in connection with 26 Nov attack on military barracks and other locations in capital Freetown, which authorities called “attempted coup”. Authorities 9 Dec said former President Ernest Bai Koroma had been confined to his home and summoned for questioning as part of police investigation into case. Police chief 12 Dec confirmed Koroma was “suspect” in organisation of late-Nov events. Authorities 20 Dec lifted nationwide curfew imposed following late-Nov incidents. Meanwhile, leaders of West African regional bloc ECOWAS 10 Dec condemned attempted coup and ordered deployment of stabilisation mission to Sierra Leone; ECOWAS delegation 23 Dec visited country to prepare ground for deployment.