



CrisisWatch 2023 – February Trends and March Alerts

Africa

Central Africa

➔ **Cameroon** Tensions between govt and Anglophone separatists remained high amid stalled peace initiative, and jihadist violence persisted in Far North.

Future of Canada-led facilitation of Anglophone crisis remained uncertain. After President Biya late Jan denied asking any country to organise peace talks with Anglophone separatists, and announced massive drive to recruit 9,500 soldiers, Ottawa launched diplomatic effort to change his stance. Meanwhile, separatist leaders, who are divided into distinct militia factions, late Jan-early Feb started discussing possibility of more united anti-govt front.

Both parties intensified military activities in North West (NW), South West (SW). After army 31 Jan killed separatist group Ambazonia Defence Forces commander “General Transporter” Ayuk Ndifon Defcam, group early Feb announced stepping up attacks and use of IEDs against military. Govt forces 7 Feb clashed with separatist combatants in Baba 1 village, Ngo-Ketunjia division (NW), with at least five killed on each side. Ahead of 11 Feb National Youth Day marking 1961 plebiscite in which British Southern Cameroons (current NW and SW) voted to join independent Republic of Cameroon, unidentified gunmen 10 Feb attacked Cameroon Development Corporation plantation workers near Tiko town, Fako division (SW), killing five and wounding at least 40. During annual Mount Cameroon Race of Hope in South West capital Buea, three roadside bombs 25 Feb exploded, wounding 19 people.

Jihadist attacks continued in Far North region. Boko Haram 2 Feb killed five people in Koza commune, Mayo-Tsanaga division; overnight 6-7 Feb killed eight fishermen near Blaram village, Logone-et-Chari division; 26 Feb killed one vigilante in Tumbun Ali island, also Logone-et-Chari. Meanwhile, clashes between fishermen and farmers 27 Feb left three people seriously wounded in Moulva locality, Mayo-Kani division.

In other important developments. After killing of investigative journalist Martinez Zogo in Jan caused national outcry, Biya 2 Feb ordered investigation and authorities in following days detained several intelligence officials as well as businessman Jean-Pierre Amougou-Belinga in relation to case, lending credence to theory that Zogo’s murder was state crime. Biya 13 Feb celebrated 90th birthday and over 40 years in power.

➔ **Central African Republic President Touadéra moved closer to holding constitutional referendum in 2023, rebel groups continued to step up attacks in hinterlands, and anti-French sentiment ran high.**

Touadéra enacted referendum law ahead of local elections. Touadéra 6 Feb enacted referendum bill passed by parliament in Dec 2022, raising concern he will pair local elections (scheduled for July and Oct) with constitutional referendum that could allow him to run for third term in 2025. Meanwhile, UN mission in CAR 14 Feb announced agreement with govt to secure local elections.

Rebels' advance continued in north east, use of explosives spread in north west. In Vakaga prefecture (north east), Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) rebels 14 Feb attacked army base in Sikikédé locality, leaving at least three soldiers dead, four injured and another 20 held hostage; CPC retreated with hostages after army and Russian paramilitary Wagner Group 23 Feb retook locality. North-western prefectures saw series of explosive-related incidents in Feb. Notably in Ouham-Pendé, improvised explosive devices 6 Feb killed two soldiers and one civilian near Ndim locality, and 10 Feb seriously injured five civilians near Bozoum town.

Disinformation campaign and violent attacks targeted French companies. After Wagner Group in Jan opened brewery in country, media campaign from late Jan targeted French-owned local brewery MOCAF, accusing it of financing rebel group Union for Peace in CAR; pro-govt youth platform and one minister reportedly involved in campaign. Trade ministry 2 Feb condemned violent demonstrations against MOCAF held 19-20 Jan in capital Bangui. Meanwhile, unidentified individuals 3 Feb threw grenades at two petrol stations owned by French company TotalEnergies in Bangui.

In other important developments. Touadéra and Chadian Transitional President Mahamat Idriss Déby 9 Feb met in Angola's capital Luanda to discuss increasing activities of armed groups along shared border; leaders reportedly agreed to work together to address security issues (see Chad). UN independent expert on human rights Yao Agetse 20 Feb accused govt forces and allies of committing "arbitrary arrests and detentions, violations of the right to life" in last quarter of 2022.

➔ **Chad Hundreds of rebels faced trial over President Idriss Déby's death, and interim govt launched security-oriented diplomatic push.**

Trial of rebels accused of killing Chad's long-time strongman kicked off. First audience in closed trial of 454 Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) rebels, captured in April 2021 during clashes that led to death of then-President Idriss Déby, held 13 Feb in capital N'Djamena; trial adjourned 15 Feb after security guard reportedly accidentally detonated teargas grenade. FACT leader Mahamat Mahdi Ali mid-Feb questioned trial, citing Transitional President Mahamat Idriss Déby's pledge in Oct 2022 to free all prisoners of war.

Security challenges persisted. Security forces from late Jan to mid-Feb conducted series of weapons search operations in Ouaddaï region (east) and capital N'Djamena, allegedly amid concerns over intercommunal tensions. Search at house of influential senior army official, Gen. Tahir Erda, 14 Feb sparked outrage among ruling Zaghawa clan. Chadian governors in their annual conference held 3-4 Feb confirmed creation in Jan of new rebel group in Logone Oriental region (south west). Communications

Minister Aziz Mahamat-Saleh late Feb however denied existence of any rebellion on Chadian territory.

Transitional authorities sought security cooperation with partners. Déby 2 Feb inaugurated Chad's first embassy in Israel amid reported plans to acquire Israeli military equipment to defend Chadian borders. Déby 6 Feb met with French President Macron in Paris to discuss bilateral cooperation; 9 Feb met with Central African counterpart, President Touadéra, in Angolan capital Luanda, to discuss security issues, notably increasing activity of armed groups on CAR side of shared border (see CAR). G5 Sahel (Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania) 20 Feb held summit in N'Djamena, first since Mali pulled out in June last year, reaffirmed joint commitment to fighting terrorism in Sahel.

In other important developments. U.S. daily *The Wall Street Journal* 23 Feb reported U.S. warned Chadian authorities that Russian Wagner Group was working with Chadian rebels to destabilise country and oust President Déby.

East and Southern Africa

➔ Kenya Military launched new operation against banditry and cattle rustling in north west, and Al-Shabaab continued deadly attacks along border with Somalia.

Military deployed in north west to curb banditry and cattle rustling. In Turkana county, suspected bandits 6 Feb killed four people in Lomelo village; 10-11 Feb killed seven police officers on Kitale-Lodwar highway and Kainuk town. Govt 15 Feb deployed military to support police operations against banditry and cattle rustling in drought-affected counties of Turkana, West Pokot, Elgeyo-Marakwet, Baringo, Laikipia and Samburu. Violence continued in second half of month. Notably, suspected bandits 22 Feb ambushed govt forces near Kainuk town (Turkana), resulting in fierce shootout. Suspected cattle rustlers 24-25 Feb killed three, including local chief, in raids on four villages in Ikek-Sabuki area of Samburu.

Al-Shabaab continued attacks along Somali border in north east. Amid concern that offensive against Al-Shabaab in neighbouring Somalia could have pushed some fighters south, notably toward Kenya, President Ruto 1 Feb called for regional effort against Al-Shabaab at Somalia-Frontline States Summit in Somali capital Mogadishu (see Somalia). Govt 3 Feb announced plans to reopen Mandera border crossing with Somalia for first time since 2012 in bid to crack down on smuggling and improve border security. U.S. 9 Feb issued alert for potential "terror attacks" in capital Nairobi. In Garissa county, suspected Al-Shabaab roadside bombs 14 and 24 Feb killed at least five police officers along Garissa-Dadaab road.

In other important developments. Clashes between Toposa pastoralists from South Sudan and Turkana pastoralists from Kenya along shared border 6-8 Feb reportedly left over 20 dead. South Sudan 8 Feb summoned Kenyan envoy to Juba Samuel Nandwa to protest armed Kenyans' alleged encroachment upon its territory; Kenya denied claims. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification 21 Feb warned 5.4mn Kenyans likely to experience acute food insecurity from March amid worst drought in decades.

➔ **Mozambique** **Islamist insurgents launched series of attacks on Cabo Delgado province's main highways during visit of TotalEnergies' head, while also trying to garner support from residents.**

Insurgent attacks persisted notably in Cabo Delgado's central districts. In Meluco district, alleged Islamic State Mozambique Province (ISMP) 1-4 Feb launched ambushes along N380 road connecting Cabo Delgado's capital Pemba to province's north, killing up to seven people near 19 de Outubro village and at least one civilian near Mitambo village. In Mueda district, ISMP 4 Feb attacked Chapa village on R698 road connecting Mueda to Montepuez towns, beheading at least two civilians and kidnapping several others. Further south in Montepuez district, ISMP same day entered Namoro village, also located along R698 road, and set several buildings on fire; 12-13 Feb raided military outpost at Nairoto village, reportedly killing five soldiers and prompting UK-based precious stone mining company Gemfields to 14 Feb evacuate staff from nearby exploration camp. As levels of violence decreased in second half of Feb, govt forces together with Rwandan troops 27 Feb captured at least ten militants after shootout in Makulo, Cabecera and Malinde villages in Mocímboa da Praia district.

Insurgents reached out to villagers in apparent change of strategy. Alleged ISMP militants 3 and 7 Feb appeared in Maculo village, Mocímboa da Praia district, called on residents to cooperate with them rather than with security forces. In Montepuez district, alleged ISMP elements around 9 Feb left handwritten note in settlement near Nairoto village, imploring villagers not to fear insurgency. Emerging trend could aim to garner support from population and secure supply lines to offset ISMP's gradual losses since deployment of Rwandan and Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique troops in 2021.

TotalEnergies CEO in Cabo Delgado to assess resuming operations. TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanné 3 Feb visited site of group's liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in Afungi Peninsula, Palma district, as part of determining when company will resume operations (on hold since April 2021 due to insecurity); same day met with President Nyusi in Pemba as Maputo bets on resumption of LNG project to attract other investors.

➔ **Zimbabwe** **Political tensions remained high ahead of general elections, as new boundaries for constituencies and wards faced backlash.**

Politically motivated violence continued to run high. Members of main opposition party Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) and ruling Zanu-PF party 12 Feb clashed at CCC rallies in towns of Gokwe (Midlands province) and Chivi (Masvingo province); both sides traded blame for violence. Authorities 18 Feb arrested CCC councillor in Masvingo city (Masvingo province) for holding unauthorised meeting at his house. CCC leader Nelson Chamisa 26 Feb called out President Mnangagwa over banned rallies and continued persecution of party activists.

Mnangagwa gazetted constituency delimitation report despite opposition. Electoral commission 3 Feb presented final delimitation report to Mnangagwa, with commission president saying constituency and ward boundaries had been redrawn following feedback received in Jan. Opposition and civil society however said new delimitation of constituencies and wards tilts electoral playing field in favour of

Zanu-PF. Notably, opposition Movement for Democratic Change 6 Feb said elections may be null and void because of massive defects in delimitation exercise, while CCC around 17 Feb said Zanu-PF was resorting to “their usual dirty tactics of violating the Constitution, political violence and electoral malpractices”. Mnangagwa 20 Feb gazetted delimitation report, setting stage for general elections in July-Aug.

Senate passed controversial amendment to Private Voluntary Organisations Act. Senate 1 Feb approved amendment bill to Private Voluntary Organisations Act meant to counter terrorism and money laundering by giving govt greater control of NGOs and other non-profits. CCC VP Tendai Biti next day warned of “unprecedented attack on human rights defenders”, while UN experts 14 Feb urged Mnangagwa to refrain from enacting bill, warning it would “severely restrict civic space and the right to freedom of association”. Mnangagwa 19 Feb said bill will protect country from “foreign interests” and vowed to sign it into law.

Great Lakes

➔ Burundi Human rights record received mixed reviews from local and international actors, and relations with Rwanda warmed up.

National and international bodies recorded modest human rights improvement. Local NGO Burundi Human Rights Initiative 1 Feb published report covering state of human rights in country in 2022, noting modest progress but highlighting continued impunity for ruling party’s youth militia, Imbonerakure. During three-day visit to Burundi, European Union Special Representative for Human Rights Eamon Gilmore 2-4 Feb held meetings with President Ndayishimiye, govt ministers and civil society; welcomed “progress” in human rights record, but said “challenges” remain, particularly regarding rule of law and women’s rights, and called on country to collaborate with UN special rapporteur for Burundi. Meanwhile, police 14 Feb arrested five human rights activists en route to Ugandan capital Kampala on accusations of financing terrorism.

Ruling party figure proposed removal of ethnic quotas. Senate President Emmanuel Sinzohagera 6 Feb called for repeal of ethnic balance quotas in public sector employment provided in 2018 constitution and Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation; move, if taken, could legitimise exclusion of Tutsi minority and may become issue in view of 2025 legislative elections, though Hutus already hold almost all positions in public sector.

In other important developments. Rwandan President Kagame 4 Feb visited Burundi for first time since 2012 to attend extraordinary East African Community heads of state summit in Bujumbura city, held bilateral talks with Ndayishimiye on sidelines of summit. FM Albert Shingiro 9 Feb said encounter represented progress in normalising ties, though reiterated call on Rwanda to hand over suspects of 2015 coup attempt. Meanwhile, Congolese civil society mid-Feb questioned mission of Burundian forces in South Kivu province, particularly their presence around gold mine in Luhwindja chiefdom, Mwenga territory, citing absence of armed group activity in area.

↓ DR Congo M23 offensive moved closer to North Kivu's capital Goma with rebels capturing more ground in Masisi territory as fighting fuelled regional tensions despite efforts to resolve crisis; voter registration kicked off in eastern provinces.

M23 made major gains in North Kivu province's Masisi territory. Fighting between M23 and govt forces early Feb moved to area around Sake, last major town before North Kivu's capital Goma in Masisi territory. As clashes throughout month continued on hills around Sake, M23 captured several other localities in area, notably strategic town of Mushaki 24 Feb, and 26 Feb seized important mining town of Rubaya.

Frosty Kinshasa-Kigali relations continued to dominate regional diplomacy. Demonstrations 6 Feb erupted in Goma over frustration with UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) and East African Community (EAC) regional force's failure to stop M23 rebels' advance. Mob next day attacked MONUSCO convoy on its way to Goma, with eight civilians killed in skirmishes. Govt 16 Feb claimed 350 Rwandan troops had just entered North Kivu to reinforce M23 positions (see Rwanda). EAC summits 4 and 17 Feb failed to break new ground, reiterating calls for ceasefire.

Armed group violence remained widespread in North Kivu, Ituri provinces. Islamist militia Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) 8 Feb killed 12 civilians in Konge Pwendi village, Beni territory (North Kivu), and 12 Feb killed another 12 in two villages of Irumu territory (Ituri). Congolese and Ugandan joint operations nonetheless recorded modest successes against ADF, including 5 Feb killing four ADF members attacking civilian convoy in Irumu territory. Meanwhile, CODECO ethnic militia carried out several attacks in Ituri, notably killing 21 people across several villages of Djugu territory 12 Feb. Rival "Zaire" ethnic militia 5 Feb attacked Dyambu village, also Djugu, killing 11 people.

Voter registration kicked off in conflict-ridden eastern provinces. Ahead of general elections scheduled for Dec, voter registration 16 Feb began in conflict-ridden eastern provinces. Registration 19 Feb started in two large camps hosting displaced persons around Goma; electoral commission said those living in M23-controlled areas will be registered gradually, depending on army's reconquest of these zones.

➔ Rwanda Kigali and Kinshasa continued to trade blame for eastern DR Congo violence amid alleged border post clash and deployment of hundreds of troops by Rwanda.

Tensions continued to run high between Kigali and Kinshasa. Rwandan military 15 Feb said its troops briefly exchanged fire with a dozen Congolese soldiers who entered neutral zone in western district of Rusizi and opened fire at Rwandan border post, condemned "act of provocation". Congolese authorities immediately denied entering neutral zone, said clashes took place between its military and "bandits" near border with Rwanda in Bukavu city, South Kivu province. Congolese army 16 Feb accused Rwandan army of deploying 350 troops to North Kivu to reinforce M23 positions on "western axis". President Kagame continued to deny Rwanda's support for M23, and 22 Feb argued that Kinshasa had "crossed the red line" by collaborating with Hutu-led Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia. Kigali 27 Feb announced reinforcing security along border with DR Congo (DRC),

claiming that Kinshasa is “bellicose” and is massing military hardware and foreign mercenaries along Rwandan border.

Regional and international efforts to resolve crisis continued. Kagame and Congolese President Tshisekedi 4 Feb met in Burundi for East African Community Summit, held first bilateral meeting since UN General Assembly in Sept 2022, but failed to break new ground on M23 issue. European Union 14 Feb blamed Rwanda and DR Congo for ignoring regional peace initiatives, urging “Rwanda to cease its support to the M23” and “DRC to cease all cooperation” with armed groups, “in particular the FDLR”.

➡ **Uganda** **Corruption scandals shook President Museveni’s cabinet; East African military chiefs reportedly directed Uganda to deploy troops to fight M23 in eastern DR Congo.**

Museveni’s ministers faced corruption allegations. Parliament 31 Jan-17 Feb conducted investigation into allegations that Gender, Labour and Social Development Minister Betty Amongi misused \$1.6mn from National Social Security Fund under her supervision. Authorities 11 Feb arrested three relatives of Karamoja Affairs Minister Mary Goretti Kitutu for allegedly selling govt-funded relief items destined for residents of north-eastern Karamoja region; Karamoja legislators 22 Feb started process to have Kitutu censured, while Parliament 27 Feb opened formal investigation into case.

Govt announced closing UN human rights office. Foreign ministry 3 Feb announced govt will not renew mandate of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights office in Uganda beyond its current term, effectively terminating body’s work, citing progress in domestic capacity to monitor rights compliance; human right activists and advocacy groups, notably Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum, in following days denounced “mockery” and accused govt of running from international scrutiny.

Army allegedly set to fight M23 rebels in DR Congo’s east. At meeting in Kenya’s capital Nairobi 9 Feb, East African Community military chiefs reportedly agreed that Uganda (as well as Burundi and South Sudan) will deploy troops in North Kivu province to fight M23 rebels alongside Kenyan forces; Uganda did not officially confirm plan, which, if implemented, could exacerbate regional rivalries. Meanwhile, Ugandan army 18 Feb reportedly handed over to Congolese military 34 civilians rescued from Islamist militia Allied Democratic Forces captivity in eastern DR Congo (see DR Congo).

Horn of Africa

➡ **Eritrea** **During two-day trip to Kenya, President Isaias discussed Ethiopia’s Tigray conflict, strengthened ties with Nairobi and pledged to rejoin regional bloc.**

Isaias spoke about war in Tigray during rare media briefing. President Isaias 8-10 Feb visited Kenya’s capital Nairobi, 9 Feb spoke to international journalists about Ethiopia’s Tigray conflict for first time since war broke out in 2020. Isaias dismissed as “fantasy” claims Eritrean soldiers committed atrocities in Tigray, sidestepping

questions about accountability, significant losses and troop withdrawals from Tigray (Eritrean soldiers have mostly left region but small units remain in strategic positions in border areas). Isaias added Eritrea has “no intention of interfering” in Ethiopia’s peace process amid concerns it could act as spoiler. In separate interview conducted in Asmara, Isaias 12 Feb said it would have been “game over” for Tigray People’s Liberation Front had “Washington enablers” not saved it via peace deal.

Asmara agreed to strengthen ties with Kenya and pledged to rejoin regional bloc. During Kenya trip, President Isaias and Kenyan President Ruto pledged to strengthen bilateral ties, which have been strained since 2011 when Nairobi openly criticised Eritrea for its alleged support of Islamist insurgency Al-Shabaab. Leaders abolished visa requirements for respective countries’ citizens and Kenya agreed to open its embassy in Asmara. In signs Asmara may wish to end its isolation, Isaias also said Eritrea would rejoin regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development; however, Asmara’s conditions for rejoining a bloc it views as dominated by Ethiopia remain unclear.

➔ **Ethiopia PM Abiy met with TPLF leaders as peace process progressed, violence escalated in Oromia after Orthodox Church split, and authorities and Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) hinted at interest in truce.**

Tigray peace process continued to advance. Federal govt and Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) continued to take concrete steps toward consolidating peace. PM Abiy 3 Feb met with TPLF leaders for first time since 2020 in southern Halala Kella resort. National Security Adviser Redwan Hussien next day announced central bank would send 5bn birr (\$90mn) to Tigray to increase cash flows and upped number of daily flights to regional capital Mekelle. TPLF 12 Feb established committee to form regional interim administration. Additionally, TPLF chief negotiator Getachew Reda 6 Feb said Eritrean forces had mostly withdrawn from Tigray but that “small units” remained (see Eritrea). UN humanitarian agency 2 Feb said assistance had scaled up. Meanwhile, news agency Reuters 27 Feb claimed Addis has been “courting support” from other govts for motion to end UN-mandated inquiry into atrocities in Tigray; over 60 human rights organisations next day urged UN Human Rights Council, due to discuss allegations in March, to reject any such resolution.

Ethiopia Orthodox Church split stoked deadly intercommunal violence. After three archbishops in Oromia late Jan formed breakaway synod, accusing Holy Synod in Addis Ababa of discrimination, Abiy 1 Feb instructed his ministers not to get involved. Abiy’s remarks angered Holy Synod and its mostly Amhara supporters, who viewed him as condoning breakaway faction. Some 4 Feb protested in Oromia’s Shashemene town (West Arsi Zone); violence escalated as demonstrators clashed with Oromia regional special forces backed by breakaway faction, leaving around eight dead. Church same day called for nationwide protests, raising fears of more violence, but called them off after Church leaders 10 Feb met with Abiy. Two factions 15 Feb agreed to resolve disagreement peacefully.

Authorities and Oromo Liberation Army signalled interest in truce. While fighting in Oromia between govt forces and OLA continued, sides indicated growing interest in truce. Reports emerged of informal indirect talks between OLA and Abiy. Oromia

President Shimelis Abdissa 17 Feb urged OLA to negotiate; OLA following day expressed readiness for talks but said request lacked “clarity”.

➔ **Somalia** Govt and clan militia offensive against Al-Shabaab faced resistance in central states but started in southern Jubaland state; political tensions subsided in South West state.

Anti-Al-Shabaab offensive made slow progress in Galmudug, Hirshabelle states. Govt offensive against Al-Shabaab slowed in Galmudug state with govt forces focusing on clearing rural areas, particularly between Xaradheere and Bacadweyne towns in Mudug region. Amid heavy fighting, govt 10-11 Feb took back Doonlaye and Shabellow towns, and 14 Feb took control of Qeycad town, while other fronts in Galmudug remained largely stagnant. In Hirshabelle state, govt forces began pushing westward across Shabelle river and 23 Feb captured Shaw village. Al-Shabaab continued to put up significant resistance in Hirshabelle state, notably targeting Macawisley clan militia and govt position near Afcad village in Hiraan region and Eji village in Middle Shabelle region around 15 Feb. Al-Shabaab 21 Feb also attacked house reportedly hosting recuperating Macawisley members in Mogadishu, killing at least ten people.

Military operations against Al-Shabaab kicked off in southern state of Jubaland. Govt forces launched offensive in Jubaland with aim of clearing main road from state capital Kismayo to Afmadow town; Qunbi village recaptured 12 Feb. Group attempted to stymie operations in Jubaland: militants 11 Feb attacked Afmadow town with vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices; temporarily took control of Bar Sanguni village 16 Feb. During Somalia-Frontline States Summit in capital Mogadishu, leaders from Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti 1 Feb vowed to support Somalia’s war with Al-Shabaab, as expansion of operations to Jubaland and South West states would likely involve Kenya and Ethiopian bilateral forces.

Political tensions subsided in South West state. Conference to reconcile political elites in Baidoa in South West state, led by House Speaker Adan Madobe, 3 Feb concluded. Parties agreed to compensation following late Dec clashes between govt and opposition forces, while opposition accepted South West President Lafta-Gareen’s one-year term extension, with state-level presidential election to be held in Jan 2024. President Mohamud attended closing ceremony, stressing need to resolve political tensions in order to maintain pressure on Al-Shabaab.

⬇️ 🌟* **Somaliland** Situation in Las Anod worsened dramatically, with clashes between Somaliland forces and local militias killing over 100; violence could escalate further in coming weeks if fighting spreads in Sool region or draws in Puntland, Somali or even Ethiopian actors.

Violence in Las Anod left over 100 dead. Conference of Dhulbahante clan representatives 5 Feb concluded in contested Sool region’s administrative capital Las Anod; participants said they did not recognise Somaliland’s administration and wanted to be part of Somalia, demanding withdrawal of Somaliland forces from wider area they inhabit in Sool region. Clashes same day broke out between Somaliland armed forces and Dhulbahante militias in Las Anod. Violence 6 Feb killed at least 34 people and wounded another 40, next day left at least 24 people dead and 53 injured. Hargeisa 7 Feb asserted fighters from neighbouring Puntland state of Somalia were fighting alongside local militias in Las Anod, which Puntland

denied. Hargeisa 10 Feb announced unilateral ceasefire, which promptly broke down amid fresh fighting, and violence continued throughout month with mortar shelling in town itself. Somaliland 25-26 Feb withdrew forces from important military base in Tukaraq village east of Las Anod.

Regional and international actors called for calm. Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud 7 Feb called for negotiated settlement between Somaliland administration and clan elders of Las Anod, said "solution is in our pursuit of united Somalia". UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk same day urged Somali authorities "to carry out a credible and impartial investigation into the clashes to determine who is responsible and to hold them accountable in fair trials". UN humanitarian agency 14 Feb said violence since early Feb had displaced over 185,000 people from Las Anod.

➡ **South Sudan Govt lifted suspension of Rome peace talks ahead of Pope's visit, reports emerged of troop build-up in restive Upper Nile, and violence persisted in several other states.**

Kiir lifted suspension of Rome peace talks ahead of papal visit. As part of his "pilgrimage of peace", Pope Francis 3-5 Feb visited capital Juba, meeting privately with President Kiir on first day. To mark Pope's arrival, Kiir 3 Feb formally lifted suspension of Rome peace talks with holdout opposition groups, but groups' leaders raised doubts about govt's intentions. Meanwhile, govt 21 Feb announced beginning of extended transitional period lasting until Feb 2025.

Reports of mobilisations in Upper Nile state emerged throughout month. Concerns grew early Feb about possible resumption of hostilities in Upper Nile state, where late 2022 fighting pitting ethnic Shilluk "Agwalek" forces under Gen. Johnson Olony against Nuer forces, predominantly backed by Gen. Simon Gatwech, killed hundreds and displaced thousands. UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) 1 Feb stated it was concerned about reported build-up of Agwelek forces, who may want to regain territory lost late 2022. Officials in Jonglei state warned renewed violence could spill into Jonglei. Agwalek forces 24 Feb harassed UNMISS patrol. Situation in Upper Nile began to de-escalate late Feb, however, following Juba's efforts to defuse tensions among local commanders.

Violence remained rampant elsewhere. Clashes between Twic Dinka from Warrap State and Ngok Dinka from Abyei Administrative Area continued, with Ngok Dinka 3 Feb attacking Twic communities, killing three; Twic Dinka 6, 13 Feb attacked Alal county in Abyei, killing dozens. In Central Equatoria state, armed Kuku youths 2 Feb attacked Bor Dinka cattle camp in Kajo Keji county, killing several herders; Dinka cattle keepers same day retaliated, killing over 20 civilians. Luacjang armed groups from Tonj East county, Warrap state, 21 Feb attacked Payam communities of Rumbek North county, Lakes state, killing at least 36. Deadly clashes between South Sudan's Toposa and Kenya's Turkana communities 5-8 Feb left 13 dead near Nadapal border crossing in disputed border territory Ilemi Triangle.

➡ **Sudan "Phase II" negotiations to restore civilian rule struggled to make headway as manoeuvring by Egypt and South Sudan risked further complicating transition; Israel sought to advance normalisation.**

Phase II negotiations to resolve outstanding issues and restore civilian rule stalled. Trilateral mechanism led by African Union (AU), UN mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) 31 Jan-3 Feb organised workshop on controversial Juba Peace Agreement (JPA); JPA signatories, who reject December Framework Agreement, boycotted meeting; Quad – U.S., UK, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) – mid-month offered to facilitate talks amid standoff between JPA signatories and main opposition group Forces for Freedom and Change–Central Council (FCC-CC). Meanwhile, number of tribal representatives 12-15 Feb attended conference on crisis in eastern Sudan, but some Beja chieftains boycotted meeting. FCC-CC throughout month held closed meetings on transitional justice and security sector reform to address internal divisions before negotiating with military.

Egypt hosted parallel conference rejecting Framework Agreement. In move widely viewed as attempt to increase Egypt's role in negotiations and secure its interests in Sudan, Cairo 2-7 Feb organised parallel conference on transitional period. Egypt claimed meeting would complement trilateral mechanism, but did not invite UN, AU or IGAD. FCC-CC rejected invitation, accusing Egypt of derailing transition to civilian govt. Over 80 representatives participated, mostly from FCC-Democratic Block, National Movement Forces and Alliance of the Revolution Committees, as well as UAE, South Sudan, U.S., and Arab League. Participants rejected Framework Agreement and 7 Feb outlined new proposals for sovereign council and announced new alliance, National Democratic Forces Coordination.

South Sudan hosted parallel meeting on implementation of JPA. South Sudan 13-19 Feb hosted conference in its capital Juba to discuss JPA implementation. Sudanese military and 13 rebel groups that signed JPA attended but Juba did not invite FCC-CC, which demands amendments to JPA. Participants 19 Feb signed implementation matrix for original JPA, ignoring civilian demands for revision.

In other important developments. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Israeli FM Eli Cohen 2 Feb agreed to move toward normalising relations; scores 6 Feb protested agreement in capital Khartoum. Russian FM Sergei Lavrov 8-9 Feb visited Sudan to garner support against Western sanctions levied against Russia over war in Ukraine.

Sahel

↓ Burkina Faso Military suffered highest death toll from back-to-back jihadist attacks since 2015; govt worked to strengthen ties with other military regimes in West Africa.

Back-to-back jihadist attacks against military left scores dead. In Sahel region's Oudalan province, alleged Islamic State in the Sahel (IS-Sahel) 17 Feb ambushed military convoy between Oursi and Déou localities, leaving at least 51 and as many as 80 soldiers dead. IS-Sahel 20 Feb attacked military detachment camp in Tin Akoff town, also Oudalan, and later took control of town, killing dozens of soldiers, volunteers fighting alongside security forces (VDPs) and civilians. Similar large-scale attacks significantly contributed to former Presidents Kaboré and Damiba's fall. Earlier in month in Sahel region's Seno province, IS-Sahel 4 Feb killed 22 civilians and three police officers in Bani town. In Centre-North region's Namentenga

province, alleged al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) fighters 7 Feb killed seven gendarmes and one VDP in Boala village. In East region's Tapoa province, unidentified jihadists 26 Feb killed as yet unknown number in Partiaga town.

Armed forces and VDPs faced new allegations of abuses in East region. VDPs 1 Feb reportedly killed seven civilians suspected of cooperating with JNIM in Ganyela village (Gourma province). Local NGO Collectif contre l'impunité et la stigmatisation des communautés alleged military same day killed at least 30 civilians in Piega, Sakoani and Kankangou localities (Tapoa province). After Nigeria 6 Feb said unidentified gunmen killed at least 15 Nigerian pilgrims near Boudieri village (Tapoa province), rumours of Burkinabé forces' involvement circulated online; FM Olivia Rouamba same day denied allegations and announced investigation.

Authorities deepened cooperation with military regimes in Mali and Guinea. PM Apollinaire Kyélem de Tambèla 1 Feb met with Malian Interim President Col. Goïta in Mali's capital Bamako to discuss bilateral security cooperation and allegedly also potential partnership with Russia; Kyélem de Tambèla reportedly proposed formation of federation between Mali and Burkina Faso. Malian PM Choguel Maïga 23-26 Feb visited capital Ouagadougou to sign counter-terrorism cooperation agreement. Meanwhile, FM Rouamba 9 Feb met with Malian and Guinean counterparts in capital Ouagadougou, announced "joint initiatives" against West African regional bloc ECOWAS sanctions (see Guinea and Mali).

➔ **Mali Bamako expelled UN mission's human rights chief, tensions between interim authorities and northern armed groups reached new heights, and new reports of human rights abuses emerged amid military operations in centre.**

Relations with UN mission MINUSMA deteriorated further. After civil society representative Aminata Cheick Dicko 27 Jan denounced abuses by Malian and Russian forces before UN Security Council, govt 5 Feb requested MINUSMA's human rights chief leave country within 48 hours, citing his "partiality" in choosing Dicko for Security Council testimony.

Govt strengthened relations with Russia and military-led neighbours. Russian FM Sergei Lavrov 7 Feb met with Interim President Col. Goïta in first ever visit to capital Bamako, saluted ongoing military cooperation. Burkinabé PM Kyélem de Tambèla 1 Feb travelled to Bamako to discuss bilateral security cooperation, while PM Choguel Maïga 23-26 Feb travelled to Burkinabé capital Ouagadougou, signed counter-terrorism cooperation agreement with Burkinabé counterpart. FM Diop 9 Feb met with Burkinabé and Guinean counterparts in Ouagadougou, discussed joining forces against West African regional bloc ECOWAS sanctions (see Burkina Faso and Guinea).

Northern armed groups and Bamako exchanged threats of military action. Permanent Strategic Framework bringing together signatory groups of 2015 Algiers Accord 1 Feb met with accord's international mediation mechanism (led by Algeria), warned armed groups would "take action" if govt continues to block accord's implementation. Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), coalition of three signatory rebel groups, 8 Feb announced merger into single entity. Member of transitional legislature 10 Feb claimed war with signatory armed groups was

“inevitable”; CMA immediately denounced “belligerent” comments. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslim (JNIM) leader Iyad ag Ghaly late Jan-early Feb toured northern Mali, reportedly met with local notables including leaders of signatory armed groups to discuss cooperation against Islamic State-Sahel Province.

Army faced allegations of abuses amid ongoing operations in centre. Military 7 Feb announced operation against JNIM in Korientzé village (Mopti region) had killed 37 fighters. Locals alleged Malian and Russian Wagner forces 13 Feb killed five civilians in Soumouni village (Ségou region), whose inhabitants are believed to have reached agreement with JNIM.

➔ **Niger** **Military court sentenced several soldiers to prison for role in 2021 coup attempt, disinformation campaign targeted President Bazoum; deadly jihadist violence continued, notably in south west.**

Trial of 2021 coup attempt concluded, fake news about new coup circulated online. Military court 24 Feb sentenced 27 people, mainly soldiers, to prison terms for involvement in March 2021 coup attempt during transition between former President Issoufou and President Bazoum. During trial, two mid-level officers admitted to playing role in coup plot, while many defendants claimed without evidence that coup attempt was false flag operation organised by Issoufou to eliminate dissenting officers from military. Rumours of new coup attempt throughout month circulated on social media in apparent bid to destabilise Bazoum, who has expressed vocal opposition to Mali and Burkina Faso’s military regimes and has remained committed to military cooperation with France; govt 17 Feb denied coup, denounced “malicious messages” and attempts to create “psychosis” among population.

Deadly attacks targeted civilians and govt forces, notably near Malian border. In Tahoua region (south west), suspected Islamic State-Sahel Province (IS-Sahel) combatants 1 Feb attacked displaced persons camp near Tillia village (Tchintabaraden department), which hosts Dawsahak people from Mali, leaving at least 18 dead. In Tillabery region (also south west), presumed IS-Sahel militants 10 Feb killed 17 soldiers, with another 13 wounded and 12 missing, in ambush near Intagarmey village (Banibangou department). In Maradi region (south), unidentified armed group 12 Feb attacked Oumba village (Madarounfa department), killing two civilians, wounding seven and abducting at least eight.

West Africa

➔ **Benin** **Sporadic jihadist violence persisted in north despite govt’s efforts to strengthen military power.**

Suspected jihadist attacks continued in northern Atakora department. Suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) militants 3 Feb attacked army position in Kerou commune, causing no confirmed casualties. Hundreds of residents around 4 Feb fled Niéhoun-Daloga village in Matéri commune after unidentified armed group late Jan reportedly gave them ultimatum to leave. Unidentified gunmen 21 Feb clashed with security forces near Daloga village, also in

Matéri commune, reportedly leaving one soldier and at least two assailants dead. Meanwhile, hundreds of refugees arrived in northern Benin following 10 Feb deadly jihadist attack in Togo (see Togo).

Govt acquired new military equipment to help contain jihadist threat. As part of largely militarised response to jihadist violence, authorities 3 Feb acquired two attack helicopters and 9 Feb 50 new military trucks. Troops 19 Feb reportedly began patrolling border with Burkina Faso to prevent jihadist incursion.

➔ **Côte d'Ivoire Political heavyweights continued to position themselves with eye toward 2023 regional and 2025 presidential elections; govt maintained efforts to contain insecurity in north.**

President Ouattara strengthened position as fragmentation of opposition widened. Ouattara's Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) continued to gather strength ahead of local and regional elections due for Oct-Nov. Two prominent Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) figures, including Chief of Staff Narcisse N'dri, 6 Feb defected to RHDP, reflecting growing internal division in Henri Konan Bédié's PDCI. Ouattara, Bédié and former President Gbagbo 8 Feb attended Félix Houphouët-Boigny/UNESCO Peace Prize ceremony in capital Yamoussoukro; Bédié took opportunity to point out Ivorian failure "to engage in a frank dialogue" and "build sustainable peace", in possible criticism of Ouattara's refusal to release certain political prisoners and ensure return of exiled politicians, notably former PM and Parliament Speaker Guillaume Soro. Meanwhile, Court of Appeal in Abidjan 13 Feb confirmed life prison sentence for Soro on charge of "attempting to undermine state security".

Govt kept up efforts to contain jihadist threat in country's north. Paris-based news outlet *Africa Intelligence* 14 Feb reported Ivorian army expected delivery of 20 armoured vehicles from Turkish defence manufacturer Otokar to be used in fighting jihadists, following first delivery of armoured vehicles from Otokar in early 2022. *Africa Intelligence* 20 Feb also reported Ivorian govt was close to signing \$60mn deal with Chinese defence company Norinco for 50 infantry fighting vehicles. Ouattara 20 Feb met in economic capital Abidjan with French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu, who pledged to increase military support to Côte d'Ivoire as Paris adjusts strategy in region.

➔ **Guinea Interim President Doumbouya defied West African regional bloc over transition-monitoring body; opposition protests resumed and turned deadly again.**

Relations with ECOWAS soured amid rapprochement with Mali and Burkina Faso. FM Morissanda Kouyaté 9 Feb met with Malian and Burkinabé counterparts, Abdoulaye Diop and Olivia Rouamba, in Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou; ministers pledged to deepen economic and security cooperation and called on West African regional bloc ECOWAS and African Union to lift suspensions imposed on all three countries after military coups in 2021 and 2022. Col. Doumbouya same day unilaterally installed committee to monitor transition back to civilian rule, largely made up of govt ministers and their close aides, overtly disregarding ECOWAS's months-long efforts to create inclusive committee. In response, ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea Thomas Boni Yayi suspended planned visit to country in March, while regional bloc 18-19 Feb called on junta to "refrain from any unilateral action that risks

undermining collaboration” and declined to lift sanctions. In sign of possible concessions, Doumbouya 21 Feb reaffirmed that junta “will not be part of the after-transition”, while PM Bernard Goumou 23 Feb asked ECOWAS to provide “the necessary support” for pursuing transition.

Security forces clashed with opposition protesters. Outlawed coalition National Front for the Defence of the Constitution (FNDC) 15-16 Feb led anti-govt demonstration in capital Conakry, demanding authorities lift nationwide ban on protests, release FNDC leaders and other prisoners detained for political reasons, and hold inclusive dialogue; clashes erupted between protesters and security forces, with FNDC 16 Feb reporting two protesters shot dead, 58 wounded and 47 detained; police said demonstrators erected roadblocks in several locations and threw stones at security vehicles, with seven security personnel injured. Govt later same day threatened to suspend opposition parties that 12 Feb supported FNDC’s call for protest, including Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea and former President Condé’s Rally of the Guinean People.

► **Nigeria Presidential and parliamentary elections proceeded mostly peacefully despite violent incidents disrupting votes in some states; delayed result announcements raised concerns about vote rigging.**

Sporadic attacks disrupted elections while delayed results spurred concerns. Voting 25 Feb proceeded peacefully in most states, though armed individuals attacked polling stations notably in Lagos and Rivers states, destroying ballot boxes and elections materials, in some cases stopping people from casting votes. In Lagos state, gunmen 25 Feb intimidated people into voting for ruling All Progressive Congress’s presidential candidate Bola Tinubu. In Rivers state, youths also 25 Feb protested alleged attempts to manipulate elections; skirmishes with vigilantes left two people dead. Following vote, electoral commission delayed uploading results online, prompting concerns about rigging. Provisional tallies 27-28 Feb showed Tinubu closing in on victory, as Peoples Democratic Party and Labour Party rejected results, citing flawed process.

Violence continued in parts of the country, particularly in North West and North East. In Katsina state, clashes between cattle thieves and vigilantes 2 Feb reportedly left around 100 people killed in Bakori area, prompting thousands of residents to flee. Govt forces continued operations against jihadist groups in North East. In Borno state, army airstrikes 10 Feb killed scores of Boko Haram (BH) militants in Sambisa forest. Meanwhile, clashes between rival jihadists continued in Borno, with Islamic State West Africa Province around 9 Feb killing roughly 15 BH fighters near Gulmari village, Konduga area.

Biafra agitation and other violence persisted in South East. In Anambra state, gunmen 18-20 Feb killed at least eight police officers in spate of attacks on police stations in Idemilli North and Oyi areas. In Enugu state, gunmen 22 Feb killed Labour Party senatorial candidate Oyibo Chukwu and five others in ambush near Agbani town.

Banknotes swap caused cash shortages, sparking unrest. Following 10 Feb deadline (extended from 31 Jan) to turn in old banknotes as part of govt plan to reduce inflation and promote transparency, insufficient supply of new notes prompted protesters to attack banks and erect roadblocks in several cities. Notably, clashes 15

Feb erupted between security forces and protesters in Benin City, Edo state (South-South), with three people shot dead.

↓ **Togo** **Al-Qaeda-affiliated jihadists launched deadliest attack in country to date, with dozens of civilians killed, suggesting group is durably implanted in northern Togo.**

Suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) militants 10 Feb attacked Tola and Gningou villages, Kpendjal prefecture (Savanes region), leaving 31 civilians dead in what amounts to deadliest jihadist attack in Togo to date; in response, army next day reportedly killed around ten suspected assailants. Improvised explosive device (IED) attacks also continued in Savanes region. Notably, IED 2 Feb reportedly killed between four and 12 civilians in Enamoufali locality, also Kpendjal.