



Africa

Central Africa

↓ **Cameroon** Canadian peace initiative to settle Anglophone conflict suffered setback as Yaoundé denied giving any country facilitation mandate, while fighting continued between govt forces and separatists in Anglophone regions.

Yaoundé denied seeking Canadian facilitation in Anglophone conflict. Following series of discreet pre-talks between Yaoundé and separatist groups held in Canada in Nov-Dec 2022, Canadian FM Mélanie Joly 20 Jan announced Ottawa had accepted mandate to facilitate talks between Yaoundé and six Anglophone separatist groups. Anglophone separatists 21 Jan said they were committed to negotiated process mandated by Canada, and civil society and religious leaders as well as women's groups from Anglophone regions in following days welcomed announcement. Govt 23 Jan however denied asking any country to organise peace talks with separatists. Canadian foreign ministry immediately said it was in touch with conflict parties and "previous statement stands".

Tensions remained high in Anglophone regions. In New Year address, President Biya referred to Anglophone separatists as "terrorist groups" and said troops had crushed many of them. Military 2 Jan said they had deployed troops to Oku, Kumbo and Jakiri areas in North West region (NW) after armed groups in preceding days sealed markets, chased people and vehicles from streets and abducted scores of civilians. Armed separatists 13-15 Jan launched new offensive against govt forces, attacking armoured military convoys in Mbengwi area in Momo division (NW), Banga Bakundu locality in Meme division (South West region, SW), and military post in Mamfe city in Manyu division (SW), reportedly killing at least one soldier in each attack. Suspected separatists 18 Jan killed electoral body official in Bamenda city (NW) one day after separatist leaders rejected Senate elections scheduled for 12 March. Govt forces 25 Jan attacked separatist positions in Ngo-Ketunja and Mezam divisions (NW), with unknown casualties.

Jihadist attacks continued in Far North, particularly in Mayo-Tsanaga division. Suspected Boko Haram (JAS) or Islamic State West Africa Province militants 1 Jan attacked Zeneme military outpost, injuring soldier; 3 Jan ambushed Multinational Joint Task Force in Djeneme area of Mozogo commune, injuring two; 11 Jan reportedly killed at least one civilian in Dingliding area; and 22 Jan killed two civilians and one soldier in Nguetchéwé locality (all Mayo-Tsanaga).

➔ 🌍* **Central African Republic** Several hundred Sudan-based rebels entered country; fighting between armed groups on one hand, and govt forces and allies on the other, could escalate in coming weeks.

CAR and Sudan shut shared border citing security challenges. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Zéphirin Mamadou and Vice-Chairman of Sudan's Transitional Sovereign Council Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti" 4-5 Jan announced closure of Central African Republic (CAR)-Sudan land border, with Hemedti warning Sudan-based rebels could seek to overthrow CAR President Touadéra (see Sudan). Sudanese troops in following days deployed to border areas, with some crossing into CAR and taking position near Birao town (Vakaga prefecture). Several hundred Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) rebels 24 Jan reportedly entered CAR from Sudan near Sam-Ouandja town (Haute-Kotto prefecture). CPC rebels around 25 Jan clashed with govt forces and allied Russian private military company Wagner Group near Gordil (Vakaga).

Rebel groups reinforced presence around main towns in west. In Nana-Mambéré prefecture, CPC 21 and 24 Jan launched major attacks on army positions in Béloko and Besson towns, with several dead; unidentified gunmen 7 Jan attacked security forces in Yenga village near Bouar town, leaving two soldiers dead and one missing. In Mambéré-Kadei prefecture, 3R rebel group (which is part of CPC) 2 Jan attacked mining site near Abba town, killing one miner; 12 Jan killed one soldier and wounded another in raid on army positions in same area.

Constitutional Court cleared way for constitutional referendum. Constitutional Court 3 Jan validated nomination of Jean-Pierre Waboé as new court president to replace Danièle Darlan, whom Touadéra dismissed in Oct, but said Darlan's dismissal was unconstitutional. Court 20 Jan also confirmed constitutionality of 28 Dec law on referendum procedures, paving way for Touadéra to hold constitutional referendum and potentially run for third term.

Humanitarian needs soared as financial crisis loomed. After Legislative Assembly 27 Dec voted 2023 budget forecasting deficit of over \$67mn, govt 3 Jan increased price of fuel by 50%; deterioration of financial situation unfolds as international donors maintain suspension of budgetary aid. UN humanitarian office 18 Jan warned humanitarian situation in CAR is degrading with 50% of population now critically food-insecure.

➔ **Chad** New rebel group emerged in country's south, while interim govt signed peace deal with Miski self-defence committee and strengthened grip on transitional institutions.

New rebel group emerged in country's south. In video published early Jan and widely circulated on social media, armed men announced creation of new rebel group Revolution Movement for Southern Chad allegedly comprising 12,000 combatants, including hundreds based across Chad's southern border in Central African Republic; also appealed to Russia for support. Governor of Logone Oriental province, Gen. Ahmat Dari Bazine, 15 Jan confirmed existence of rebel group, said it "must be defeated". Moscow next day denied supporting rebellion.

Govt signed peace agreement with prominent self-defence committee in north. Transitional govt 8 Jan signed peace deal with self-defence group which has long

opposed state control of local mining sites in and around Miski locality (Tibesti province). Some committee members rejected agreement, whose terms were not made public, saying it could pave way for govt to loot Tibesti's gold resources. Oil and energy minister 10 Jan froze all mining activities in province.

Interim govt strengthened grip on transitional institutions. Transitional govt 25 Jan named members of commission charged with organising constitutional referendum; parties from across political spectrum next day denounced body's lack of representativeness, saying it risked facilitating "massive fraud". Meanwhile, transitional govt 5 Jan confirmed security forces early Dec thwarted coup attempt and detained 11 army officers along with group's alleged leader, human rights activist Baradine Berdeï Targuio; same day reportedly transferred all suspects to Koro-Toro high-security prison. Authorities also 5 Jan removed Transitional President Mahamat Déby's brother, Saleh Déby, from police force after he accused Mahamat Déby of involvement in their father's death in audio recording circulated on social media.

East and Southern Africa

➔ Eswatini Killing of prominent pro-democracy activist sparked domestic and international outrage.

Unidentified gunman 21 Jan shot dead human rights lawyer and prominent pro-democracy activist Thulani Maseko at his house in Manzini region. South Africa-based opposition group Swaziland Solidarity Network 22 Jan blamed killing on King Mswati III's regime. UN human rights chief Volker Türk 23 Jan condemned "cold-blooded killing" and called for "impartial and effective" investigation, while Southern African Development Community Organ Troika Chairperson Hage Geingob 25 Jan warned of looming civil war absent dialogue. Govt late Jan denied involvement in Maseko's killing, said it launched investigation to find those responsible. Hundreds of pro-democracy activists 27 Jan reportedly marched to Manzini police headquarters demanding justice for Maseko; police reportedly opened fire and injured at least one demonstrator.

➔ Kenya Govt and opposition traded accusations of misconduct during August elections, while Al-Shabaab and cattle rustlers carried out deadly attacks.

Govt and opposition argued over presidential election results. President Ruto 17 Jan made unsubstantiated allegation of plot to assassinate electoral commission's former Chairman Wafula Chebukati for allegedly refusing to rig Aug 2022 presidential election in favour of opposition leader Raila Odinga. At opposition coalition Azimio la Umoja rally gathering thousands in capital Nairobi, Odinga 23 Jan urged supporters to "resist" Ruto's govt, calling it "illegitimate" and demanding its resignation.

Al-Shabaab launched new attacks in east along border with Somalia. In Garissa county, explosive device likely planted by Al-Shabaab combatants 11 Jan killed four road workers between Garissa and Bura towns, while security forces 18 Jan killed ten suspected Al-Shabaab militants in Galmagalla village.

Deadly cattle raids continued in drought-affected north west. Unidentified gunmen 1 Jan killed two girls and stole 70 heads of cattle in Kotut village, Elgeyo-Marakwet county; another cattle raid 12 Jan reportedly left eight people dead in Laisamis town, Marsabit county.

Nairobi's efforts at regional diplomacy continued. Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua and President Ruto 9, 10 Jan respectively met Vice-Chairman of Sudan's Transitional Sovereign Council Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti" in Nairobi, reportedly to discuss Sudan's possible reintegration into African Union among other matters (see Sudan). Representatives of M23 rebel group 12 Jan met East African Community facilitator for peace process in eastern DR Congo (DRC), Uhuru Kenyatta, in Kenya's Mombasa city, reiterated readiness to withdraw from captured territory in DRC's North Kivu province and adhere to ceasefire (see DR Congo).

➔ **Mozambique** **Fighting continued in Cabo Delgado province as govt forces and allies redoubled efforts to tackle Islamist insurgency.**

Govt launched new counter-insurgency operation in Cabo Delgado. Security forces 1 Jan undertook operation "Vulcão IV" reportedly with support of Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) in bid to clear Messalo River basin in Muidumbe district and nearby forests of northern and western Macomia district. Operation coincided with uptick in insurgent attacks and clashes between security forces and insurgents in both districts. In Macomia, Islamic State Mozambique Province (ISMP) 8 Jan ambushed joint Mozambican and SAMIM force near Litandacua village, claimed injuring several soldiers and stealing military equipment; ISMP 22 Jan again clashed with security forces in Litandacua. In Muidumbe, fighting 9 Jan reportedly erupted between security forces and ISMP in Mandava village, leaving unconfirmed number of casualties; ISMP next day attacked military post at Xitaxi village, killing at least three soldiers, and 15 Jan reportedly launched explosive device attack against govt forces along N380 road. Also in Muidumbe, local militia 19 Jan killed six alleged ISMP militants in Namacule village. Attacks on civilians also persisted in Cabo Delgado. Notably in Nangade district, alleged ISMP 4 Jan raided Chacamba village, less than 10km from district headquarters, beheading one man and kidnapping up to three women; attack coincided with Cabo Delgado governor's visit to area. In Mocímboa da Praia district, alleged ISMP 25 Jan entered Calugo village, reportedly to resupply themselves.

Rwandan forces expanded area of operations to southern Cabo Delgado. Rwandan security forces 12 Jan confirmed that they had deployed to Ancuabe district in southern Cabo Delgado amid ongoing operations in Palma and Mocímboa da Praia districts in province's north.

In other important developments. Video 9 Jan emerged online allegedly showing SAMIM troops burning corpses in Nkonga forest of Nangade district in Nov 2022; SAMIM 11 Jan said it "does not condone acts reflected in the video" and announced investigation. UN World Food Programme 27 Jan announced it would as from Feb suspend food aid to people displaced by conflict in Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Nampula provinces.

➔ **Tanzania** **In important step toward reconciliation with opposition, govt lifted six-year ban on political rallies; U.S. embassy issued security alert over possible terror threat.**

Opposition held first rally since 2016 after authorities lifted longstanding ban. President Suluha Hassan 3 Jan lifted 2016 ban on political rallies. Main opposition party Chadema 21 Jan held first rally in six years in Mwanza city, with thousands attending. Chadema prominent leader Tundu Lissu 25 Jan returned from exile, vowed to “get back to work”. Meanwhile, independent body Media Council of Tanzania early Jan reported improvement in press freedom, with 17 “press violations” recorded in 2022 compared with 25 in 2021 and 41 in 2020.

U.S. embassy and Dutch airline warned of security risk. U.S. embassy in Tanzania 25 Jan issued security alert for Tanzania, citing terrorist threat in “locations frequented by U.S. citizens and other Westerners” in Dar es Salaam city and elsewhere. Police next day called for citizens to remain calm, insisted country was safe. Dutch Airline KLM around 27 Jan briefly halted flights to Tanzania, citing “civil unrest”. Govt next day rejected claim as “baseless, alarmist, unfounded, inconsiderate and insensitive”, urged public to “ignore KLM’s statement”. KLM 29 Jan issued apology, saying it had incorrectly described reason for barring crew stop-over in Dar es Salaam.

➡ **Zimbabwe Harassment of opposition supporters continued months away from general elections, and constituency delimitation report faced fierce criticism.**

Main opposition party members faced violence and arrests. Mob 7 Jan assaulted members of main opposition party Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) during party meeting in Murehwa town, north east of capital Harare, reportedly leaving seven injured; CCC accused ruling ZANU-PF party of unleashing vigilantes ahead of general elections slated for mid-2023. Police 14 Jan stormed CCC legislator’s home in Budiriro, Harare suburb, detained 26 party activists over accusations of holding illegal gathering. NGO Amnesty International 17 Jan called for their immediate release, condemned “escalating crackdown against freedom of association and assembly” in run-up to elections. All activists granted bail 27 Jan.

Report on delimitation of constituencies criticised across party lines. Govt 6 Jan presented electoral commission’s preliminary report on delimitation of constituencies to both houses of parliament. Ad-hoc committee of 13 legislators charged with examining report 13 Jan criticised document, saying electoral commission must use final census results and ensure equal number of voters in all constituencies as provided for by constitution. NGO Zimbabwe Democracy Institute 13 Jan said preliminary report showed capture of electoral system “through gerrymandering, calculated to disorient the main opposition and benefit the ruling party”, and civil society platform Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition around 20 Jan said delimitation process fraught with irregularities and part of broader scheme to rig elections in favour of ZANU-PF. Meanwhile, opposition People’s Unity Party late Jan vowed to hold nationwide demonstrations on 25 March in attempt to stop elections.

Great Lakes

➡ **Burundi Military faced accusations of human rights abuses in South Kivu (DR Congo) and Cibitoke province, while ruling party’s youth militia Imbonerakure continued intimidating population.**

Congolese Tutsi community accused military of attacking ethnic Tutsi in DR Congo. Burundian troops' continued support to Congolese army against Burundian and Congolese armed groups in South Kivu (including Tutsi-led RED-Tabara rebel group opposing Burundi's Hutu-dominated govt), fuelled fears among Congolese Tutsi Banyamulenge community. Local Banyamulenge chiefs from Minembwe territory 4 Jan sent letter to Burundian President Evariste Ndayishimiye in his capacity as chair of East African Community, denouncing alleged ethnic cleansing of their community by Burundian and Congolese forces alongside Congolese Mai-Mai armed groups. Media outlet *La Libre Afrique* 19 Jan reported Burundian forces had lost 40 soldiers since deployment in South Kivu in Aug 2022.

Locals accused military of inflicting degrading treatment on local population. As military continued operations against Kinyarwanda-speaking rebels based in Kibira forest (north west). Defence Minister Alain Tribert Mutabazi 10 Jan hosted meeting with residents in Mabayi, Cibitoke province; residents accused army elements of collaborating with rebels and complained about behaviour of security forces, including their raping, beating and coercing labour from local population.

Imbonerakure continued harassing population amid general climate of impunity. Five members of ruling party youth militia Imbonerakure 3 Jan stabbed and injured individual in Birohe locality, Gitega province, allegedly due to dispute over theft of personal belongings. Meanwhile, after residents 1 and 16 Jan found dead bodies with signs of torture in Buganda and Rugombo communes, Cibitoke province, local authorities buried bodies without prior investigation.

In other important developments. During ruling CNDD-FDD party congress in capital Gitega, President Ndayishimiye 22 Jan called out corruption in state administration.

↓ **DR Congo As M23 rebels' pledge to withdraw from North Kivu province failed to materialise, Rwandan military shot at Congolese fighter jet; massacres and clashes involving ethnic militias and Islamist militants left over 100 dead in east.**

M23 continued to clash with govt forces and other armed groups in North Kivu. M23 rebels 4 Jan took over Nyamilima town before withdrawing mid-Jan, seemingly to reinforce positions elsewhere; 26 Jan seized strategic Kitshanga town, 100km west of North Kivu's capital Goma, now surrounded to the north and west by rebellion. FM Christophe Lutundula 18 Jan said M23 still occupies Kibumba town despite announcing withdrawal in Dec. As Kinshasa and Kigali continued to trade accusations of supporting rebels in eastern DRC (see Rwanda), Rwanda's forces 24 Jan fired missile at Congolese fighter jet for allegedly violating Rwandan airspace, urging Kinshasa to "stop this aggression". Congolese govt same day condemned "act of war", denied airspace violation.

Other armed group violence plagued Ituri and North Kivu provinces. Clashes between rival ethnic militias CODECO and "Zaire" 8 Jan left at least 23 dead near Djugu town (Ituri), while UN 18 Jan announced discovery near Ituri's capital Bunia of bodies of nearly 50 people killed 14-15 Jan in attacks attributed to CODECO. Another suspected CODECO raid 27 Jan took place 60km from Bunia; religious leaders reported 15 soldiers killed, while army claimed seven combatants dead. Islamist militia Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) launched spate of attacks against

civilians: dozen people killed 15 Jan in bomb raid on church in Kasindi town (North Kivu); at least 24 killed overnight 22-23 Jan in Makungwe village, Beni territory (North Kivu); and at least 15 villagers killed 29 Jan in Irumu territory (Ituri).

National politics remained polarised ahead of December 2023 elections. Election Commission 22 Jan prolonged voter registration in western provinces, admitting only 37% of eligible voters had registered, and 25 Jan launched registration exercise in nine other provinces. Former President Kabila's party boycotted exercise. Adviser of political heavyweight Moïse Katumbi (who has a non-Congolese parent) 19 Jan condemned "racist regime" after ministers from ruling party raised issue of eligibility for public office of dual nationals or nationals with parents of different nationality.

↓ **Rwanda Tensions with DR Congo (DRC) ratcheted up as Rwandan military shot at Congolese fighter jet.**

U.S. 4 Jan urged "Rwanda to cease all support to M23 and withdraw its troops from eastern DRC". In apparent response, President Kagame 9 Jan told senators country would no longer accept refugees from DRC, claiming Rwanda had been "insulted and abused" despite hosting Congolese refugees for 20 years; govt next day however backtracked on position, saying "Rwanda has no intention to expel or ban refugees". Kigali and Kinshasa throughout month accused other side of breaking ceasefire agreement in eastern DRC. Speaking at World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Congolese President Tshisekedi 17 Jan said "problem of insecurity in the Great Lakes region is called Rwanda". President Kagame 27 Jan denied Rwandan support for M23, but claimed Rwanda had legitimate right to intervene in DR Congo to fight rebel group Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda. Congolese army next day again accused Rwanda of invading DRC and also of planning massacres of Congolese Tutsis in order to justify incursions. Qatar-mediated talks between Kagame and Tshisekedi to follow up on 2022 Luanda agreement postponed 23 Jan after Tshisekedi reportedly pulled out. Meanwhile, Rwandan defence forces 24 Jan fired missile at Congolese fighter jet for allegedly violating Rwandan airspace, urging Kinshasa to "stop this aggression". Congolese govt same day denied jet violated Rwandan airspace and called incident "act of war". Rwandan troops 28 Jan reportedly clashed with DRC police on Ibindja Island of Lake Kivu (South Kivu province), with one Congolese policeman injured.

➔ **Uganda Tensions over President Museveni's succession continued to run high within ruling party; authorities reinforced security along border with DR Congo.**

Museveni's son and ruling party's old guard remained at loggerheads. Museveni's son Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba 3 Jan lashed out at ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party's old guard, saying he would "teach" them that "their time is absolutely over"; deleted tweet after Internal Affairs Minister Maj-Gen. Otafiire 5 Jan responded that Kainerugaba should not "disrespect" them. VP Jessica Alupo 8 and 12 Jan said President Museveni will stand for re-election in 2026; Kainerugaba's allies next day denounced her assertion as "lies". Meanwhile, main opposition party National Unity Platform 15 Jan welcomed 40 new members defecting from other prominent opposition party Forum for Democratic Change in move that could undermine parties' recent efforts at building united front against NRM.

Security situation remained volatile along border with DR Congo. Army 4 Jan announced capture of leader of Islamist militia Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) unit that had entered Uganda from DR Congo and attacked civilians in Dec. Security forces around 12 Jan arrested individual in capital Kampala and seized bomb-making material, said suspect was involved in plot to attack govt officials and linked to ADF. Meanwhile, local media outlet Daily Monitor 8 Jan reported army was deploying troops in Kanungu district, near Congolese border, to prevent spillover of conflict between M23 insurgent group and Congolese army.

Several cattle-related incidents reported in Northern and Eastern regions. In Northern region's Karamoja sub-region, suspected cattle rustlers 9 Jan killed three Kenyan pastoralists and stole over 100 cattle in Napak district. In Eastern region, residents 11 Jan drove Balaalo pastoralists out of Ongongoja sub-county to Katakwi district headquarters, accusing them of encroaching their grazing land; authorities ordered them to leave district by 15 Jan.

Horn of Africa

➡ **Eritrea Significant Eritrean troop withdrawals from Ethiopia's Tigray region occurred after progress on Tigray's disarmament; Russian FM met with President Afwerki to boost support for war in Ukraine.**

Eritrean troops withdrew from most major cities in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Ethiopia's federal govt and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) continued to make progress on implementing peace accord (see Ethiopia). Notably, Tigray's forces 10 Jan began handing over heavy weapons to Ethiopia's federal military. Within days, Eritrea withdrew its troops from most major cities in Tigray. Notably, news agency Reuters 21 Jan reported that troops had left Shire (North Western Zone), while other witnesses reported their withdrawal from Adwa (Central Zone) and Axum (North Western Zone). Senior Ethiopian military officer Teshome Gemechu 28 Jan claimed "there is no other security force in the Tigray region except the Federal Defence Forces". However, Eritrean forces reportedly retained presence in outskirts of some urban areas and in rural areas. Since it is not party to peace accord, which stipulates withdrawal of foreign and non-federal troops from Tigray concurrent with heavy weapons handover, Eritrea may retain military presence in region until TPLF's full disarmament. Meanwhile, Tigrayan reports of Eritrean attacks on civilians and looting of properties in region continued to emerge during month.

Russian FM met with Eritrean leader in capital Asmara. President Isaias Afwerki 26 Jan met Russian FM Sergei Lavrov in Asmara during Lavrov's tour of Africa to bolster support for war in Ukraine; Minister of Information Yemane Meskel said discussions centred on "dynamics of the war in Ukraine and enhancement of bilateral ties on sectors of energy, mining, information technology, education and health".

⬆ **Ethiopia Tigray's peace process made notable progress on disarmament and Eritrean troop withdrawals from region; violence continued to worsen in Oromia.**

Tigray handed over heavy weapons, significant Eritrean troop withdrawals occurred. Peace process between federal govt and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) progressed. Most notably, Tigray's forces 10 Jan began handing over heavy weapons to federal forces, a key aspect of Nov peace deal, in Agulae town some 30km north of regional capital Mekelle in presence of African Union monitors. Although peace agreement stipulates foreign and non-federal troop withdrawal as TPLF combatants hand over heavy weapons, Tigrayans reported Eritrea's continued military presence in rural areas and outskirts of some urban areas. Still, around 20 Jan their troops began withdrawing from most major cities, while Amhara forces 11 Jan left Shire. Federal military 17 Jan entered northern Adigrat city from which it will patrol Eritrean border.

Humanitarian flows continued to improve, more services resumed. Private Wegagen Bank 2 Jan resumed banking services in Mekelle but customers were unable to withdraw funds exceeding 2,000 Birr (\$37) due to cash shortages. Ethiopian Airlines same day resumed commercial flights to Shire. UN humanitarian agency 18 Jan said that, between early Oct and 4 Jan, partners had delivered food to around 3.7mn people in Tigray.

Violence in Oromia persisted amid renewed govt resolve to defeat OLA militarily. Federal forces 2 Jan announced renewed military campaigns against Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) amid ongoing fighting in number of zones in central, western and southern Oromia. Amhara militia involvement continued to complicate situation. Although OLA largely conducts rural operations, group 7 Jan launched second major attack in urban area since Nov, breaking into prison in Bule Hora town (West Guji Zone), killing five guards and freeing over 480 inmates. Meanwhile, OLA 23 Jan published manifesto spelling out its vision and goals; announcement follows late-Dec govt decision to rule out negotiations with OLA, citing group's lack of "purpose and leadership".

Sudanese and Ethiopian leaders met. PM Abiy Ahmed 26 Jan met with Sudan's Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan in Sudanese capital Khartoum; Burhan reportedly said sides agree "on all matters regarding Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam".

➡ **Somalia** As govt offensive against Al-Shabaab shifted to Galmudug state, group launched series of attacks to undermine govt's territorial gains in Hirshabelle state; Puntland state suspended ties with Mogadishu.

Anti-Al-Shabaab offensive shifted to Galmudug. Govt forces made progress in Galmudug state, capturing towns of Massargaweyne 1 Jan, Barag Sheikh Amir 15 Jan, Galcad next day, and more significantly Ceel Dheere 17 Jan. Military also pushed south from Hobyso and Wisil towns, taking control of Ceel Huur town 14 Jan and strategic Xarardheere town (which had been major centre of Al-Shabaab activity) 16 Jan. Al-Shabaab militants 20 Jan stormed military base in Galcad town; govt reported seven soldiers and 100 Al-Shabaab killed, but militants claimed significant losses on govt side.

Al-Shabaab increased attacks in Hirshabelle following govt's gains there. Al-Shabaab launched series of deadly improvised explosive device attacks both along main Jowhar-Beledweyne route and near border with Galmudug, temporarily overrunning some army positions. Notably, group 4-17 Jan targeted Mahas,

Jalalaqsi, Bulobarde and Halgan towns as well as Hilowle-Gaab and Hawaddley villages. Al-Shabaab also maintained pressure in Hirshabelle by raiding clan militia positions in Dudan Dad village 4 Jan and Tabantab village 13 Jan, and by attacking civilians accused of supporting govt forces and clan militias in Beer Xano village 2 Jan, and El Xeero village 11 Jan. Meanwhile, suicide bombers 22 Jan attacked Banadir regional office in Mogadishu, killing at least six.

Puntland state suspended relations with Mogadishu. Puntland state govt 9 Jan announced it would operate as autonomous entity until Somalia's provisional constitution is finalised, collaborating with Mogadishu only on humanitarian affairs. Separately, series of small-scale grenade attacks in first half of Jan took place in Bosasso city following onset of voter registration for "one person one vote" polls at district level.

In other important developments. Approximately 2,000 (out of 5,000) Somali troops trained in Eritrea returned starting 21 Dec. After political dispute over South West state President Lafta-Gareen's term extension in Dec turned violent, reconciliation conference organised by national Lower House Speaker Aden Madobe and attended by President Mohamud 16 Jan kicked off in state's largest city Baidoa.

➡ **Somaliland Govt forces withdrew from border town also claimed by Somalia's Puntland state following protests sparked by insecurity.**

Unrest in Las Anod led to govt forces withdrawal. Govt forces 5 Jan pulled out of Las Anod town in contested Sool region for first time since they took over town from Puntland forces in 2007, citing need to "avoid further escalation"; move came after security forces late Dec suppressed protests against insecurity in town, leaving at least 20 people dead. Representatives from Dhulbahante clan (generally opposed to Somaliland's control of Las Anod and areas they inhabit in Sool region) 8 Jan called for Somaliland forces to withdraw from all Sool region. Interior Minister Mohamed Kahin 11 Jan led high-level govt delegation to Las Anod, 15 Jan said govt was committed to resolving issues in Sool region through dialogue. As traditional leaders and elders from Sool, Sanaag and Cayn regions mid- to late-Jan gathered in Las Anod to discuss their future, govt 21 Jan said conference should not be detrimental to Somaliland's unity and warned of foreign interference; President Bihi around 30 Jan said his administration will amicably settle crisis in Las Anod.

Election-sequencing dispute remained unresolved. Voter registration proceeded in Jan despite lack of progress in resolving election-sequencing question.

➡ **South Sudan Month saw progress on peace deal implementation, while space for civil society continued to shrink; intercommunal violence spread in several states as dry season began.**

Govt made some progress toward implementing 2018 peace agreement. President Salva Kiir 1 Jan signed ten laws critical to delayed "roadmap" for implementation of peace agreement, including Constitution-Making Act and Political Parties Act, as concerns about inclusivity of constitution-making process persisted. Final batch of unified armed forces 14 Jan graduated in Bentiu city, nearly four years after 2019 deadline, but questions remain over forces' lack of command structure, weaponry and budget. Head of UN Mission in South Sudan 26 Jan announced UN will provide

assistance on technical preparations for elections. Meanwhile, Kiir 28 Jan announced return to Rome peace talks with holdout opposition groups.

Fighting in Upper Nile decreased, but violence spread elsewhere amid dry season. In Jonglei state, Lou Nuer and Bor Dinka armed groups 30 Dec-2 Jan attacked Likuangle town of Greater Pibor Administrative Area; suspected cattle raiders from Murle ethnic group early Jan attacked several villages in Urur and Duk counties, leaving dozens dead. In disputed Abyei Administrative Area, armed Nuer and Dinka Twic youths 2 Jan attacked Rumamer village, killing 13. In Warrap state, Dinka youths from Rumbek North 10 Jan killed five Dinka civilians in Tonj East village; suspected armed youth from Abyei and Unity state 27 Jan raided cattle camp in Twic county, killing at least 16. In oil-rich Ruweng Special Administrative Area, clashes 7 Jan broke out between national security forces guarding oil fields and cattle herders from Unity state, killing three. Meanwhile, hostilities in Upper Nile de-escalated.

Authorities continued to erode space for civil society. National Security 3 Jan arrested six journalists working for state broadcaster, accusing them of disseminating embarrassing video of President Kiir. Military intelligence next day arrested activist and human rights defender Samuel Garang in capital Juba for alleged links to holdout opposition leader Paul Malong. Meanwhile, gunmen in South Sudan People's Defence Forces uniforms 11 Jan abducted former Western Equatoria Minister of Information, Charles Kisanga, in Juba; 14 Jan released him.

➔ **Sudan Efforts to install civilian govt continued with launch of “Phase II” negotiations, armed groups formed joint military force in Darfur, and security issues emerged at border with Central African Republic.**

Phase II negotiations on political transition produced mixed results, notably with eastern leaders. Following Dec Framework Agreement between military and dozens of civilian leaders on transition to civilian rule, “Phase II” negotiations 9 Jan began, focusing on transitional justice, security sector reform, Juba Peace Agreement, status of ex-regime dismantling committee and crisis in eastern Sudan. Parties 12 Jan concluded talks on dismantling ousted Bashir regime, agreeing to reinstate disbanded Empowerment Removal Committee with new members. However, significant obstacles on other outstanding issues persisted. Notably, eastern Sudan tribal leader Mohamed al-Amin Terik 1 Jan rejected framework agreement along with other Beja Tribal leaders who 15 Jan announced parallel platform to address eastern Sudan governance; Terik warned region may seek self-determination if final agreement for transition period fails to address their priorities. Forces for Freedom and Change-Central Council (FFC-CC) 19 Jan agreed that Trilateral Mechanism including UN mission in Sudan, African Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development would organise negotiations on east Sudan governance as well as review of Juba Peace Agreement, which Beja chieftains rejected.

Military announced creation of joint security force in Darfur. Amid reports of renewed attacks on civilians and proliferation of armed militias in Darfur, Sudan Liberation Army 16 Jan announced formation of joint force with Rapid Support Forces and Sudan Liberation Forces “to end insecurity and restore order”; joint force excluded national army and other armed groups, including coalition of western Darfuri armed groups Sudanese Alliance.

Authorities shut land border with CAR, citing security concerns. Vice-Chairman of Sudan's Transitional Sovereign Council Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti" 5 Jan formally announced closure of border with Central African Republic (CAR), warning Sudan-based rebels could seek to overthrow CAR President Touadéra (see Central African Republic). Authorities in following days deployed troops to border areas but, despite measures, over 1,000 Coalition of Patriots for Change rebels 24 Jan reportedly crossed border into CAR.

Sahel

➔ **Burkina Faso Amid rampant jihadist violence countrywide, volunteer fighters reportedly committed abuses against civilians, and authorities ordered French military contingent stationed in Burkina Faso to leave.**

Jihadist violence continued to affect most regions across country. In Sahel region (north), suspected jihadists 12-13 Jan abducted dozens of women and children near Arbinda town (Soum province); authorities 20 Jan announced 66 had been released. Unidentified armed group attack 30 Jan in Falagountou town (Séno province) left at least 12 govt and allied forces, one civilian and 15 assailants dead. Suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) combatants throughout month clashed with volunteer fighters allied with govt forces (VDPs) notably in Centre-East, East and Centre-North regions, with six VDPs and one civilian killed in Rakoengta locality (Bam province) 19 Jan. In Boucle du Mouhoun region (north west), suspected JNIM combatants 2-3 Jan killed at least seven civilians in Sourou and Nayala provinces; attacks by suspected jihadists 19 Jan also killed ten VDPs in Nayala province, and 12 civilians in Banwa province. Nearby in Centre-West region, unidentified assailants 26 Jan killed ten civilians in two attacks in Dassa commune (Sanguié province). In Cascades region further west, suspected JNIM militants 29-30 Jan reportedly killed 15 civilians near Linguekoro village (Comoé province).

Local NGO accused volunteer fighters of serious human rights abuses. Amid transitional authorities' mass mobilisation of VDPs launched late 2022, civil society organisation *Collectif contre l'Impunité et la Stigmatisation des Communautés* 2 Jan accused VDPs of committing serious crimes and other abuses against civilians in Dec, including killings and kidnappings; authorities same day said investigation was under way into killing of 28 Fulani civilians night of 30-31 Dec in Nouna town (Kossi province, Boucle du Mouhoun region).

Tensions with France reached new heights. Ouagadougou 23 Jan announced requesting France to withdraw troops from Operation Sabre within a month; Paris 25 Jan confirmed 400-strong contingent stationed near capital Ouagadougou will leave as requested, and next day recalled Ambassador to Burkina Faso Luc Hallade for consultations.

➔ **Mali Jihadist militants launched spate of attacks in south, transitional govt encountered resistance to constitutional reform plans, and months-long tensions with Côte d'Ivoire abated.**

Jihadist attacks continued including in southern region. Al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) 2 Jan launched simultaneous attacks in southern Koulikoro region, killing two people in Kassela village (20km from Bamako) and another five in Markacoungo town (80km from Bamako). Also in Koulikoro, JNIM 15 Jan reportedly ambushed armed forces near Kolokani village, killing five soldiers while also losing 15 combatants. In centre, JNIM 10 Jan launched twin attacks on govt forces between Dia and Diafarabé towns (Mopti region), and Koumara and Macina towns (Koulikoro and Ségou regions, respectively); 14 soldiers and 31 jihadists reportedly killed. Meanwhile, in Ménaka region further north, Islamic State Sahel Province (IS-Sahel) militants targeted civilians, notably killing eight people in Inagam and Assakereye villages 5 Jan.

Transitional authorities' constitutional reform plan faced opposition. Several opposition groups, including supporters of influential Imam Mahmoud Dicko 9 Jan, announced boycott of meeting convened by govt to discuss draft constitution ahead of constitutional referendum scheduled for March. Meeting 12 Jan proceeded with only 50 of 281 invited participants present. Authorities 14 Jan used tear gas to disperse demonstration to welcome Dicko back from Saudi Arabia to capital Bamako.

Tensions with Côte d'Ivoire eased as Mali freed Ivorian soldiers detained since July. Interim President Col. Assimi Goïta 6 Jan pardoned 49 Ivorian soldiers detained in July 2022 on allegations of undermining state security; 46 soldiers next day returned to Côte d'Ivoire (three had been released in Sept 2022). In phone call, Ivorian President Ouattara 9 Jan invited Goïta to visit Côte d'Ivoire (see Côte d'Ivoire).

In other important developments. After signatory armed groups late Dec suspended participation in 2015 Algiers Accord, Malian FM Abdoulaye Diop 15-16 Jan travelled to Algeria, met counterpart Ramtane Lamamra and President Tebboune to discuss issues related to peace agreement. Bamako later in month reportedly declined Algerian proposal to host meeting between stakeholders of 2015 agreement, which would have conformed with signatory armed groups' request for meeting "on neutral ground".

➡ **Niger** **Jihadist violence continued to fuel insecurity in south west and south east; local peace agreement between communities of Banibangou municipality revived hope for resolution of longstanding conflict.**

Islamic State continued driving insecurity in Tillabery region in south west. Govt forces 8 Jan reportedly killed four suspected Islamic State Sahel Province (IS-Sahel) fighters and arrested another three near Taroum town (Ouallam department), also losing two soldiers; 18 Jan reportedly killed 11 suspected jihadists and detained another six near Doulgou village (Gotheye department), with local sources alleging unknown number of those killed were Fulani civilians. Suspected IS-Sahel elements 10 Jan killed two civilians near Téra town (Téra department); 12 Jan attacked Doukou Koira Tegui village (Tillabery department), killing two and wounding seven residents.

Boko Haram factions kidnapped civilians in Diffa region in south east. Suspected Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) faction of Boko Haram 7 Jan kidnapped two people in Gremari locality (Maine Soroa department); next day kidnapped five

children in Maissirodi village (Diffa department). Suspected Boko Haram (JAS) militants 18 Jan kidnapped at least four women in Rimi village (N'Guigmi department).

In other important developments. Representatives of Zarma and Fulani communities in Banibangou municipality (Ouallam department, Tillabery region) around 23 Jan signed peace agreement to end longstanding conflict fuelled notably by competition for natural resources. Ruling party late Dec elected former President Issoufou's ally Foumakoye Gado as party president, highlighting Issoufou's continuing influence within party and in state matters.

West Africa

➔ Benin Sporadic jihadist violence continued in north as country held peaceful legislative elections.

Suspected jihadist violence persisted in northern departments. In Atakora department near border with Burkina Faso, unidentified gunmen 1 Jan kidnapped four people in Matéri commune; suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) combatants 14 Jan reportedly gave five-day ultimatum to residents of Niéhoun-Daloga village in Matéri commune to leave, prompting army to conduct operation to clear area of jihadist presence. In Alibori department near border with Niger, improvised explosive device 1 Jan reportedly killed two civilians in Karimama commune.

Pro-govt parties won peaceful parliamentary elections. Constitutional Court 12 Jan announced that two parties supporting President Talon's govt, Republican Bloc and Progressive Union for Renewal, won 81 out of 109 seats in parliamentary elections held 8 Jan; opposition to make return to parliament after four-year absence as main opposition party Les Démocrates won remaining 28 seats.

➔ Côte d'Ivoire Tensions with Bamako eased as Ivorian soldiers detained in Mali since July 2022 returned home.

Soldiers returned home after six-month detention in Mali. Malian Interim President Col. Goïta 6 Jan pardoned all 49 Ivorian soldiers arrested in July 2022 and convicted of conspiracy in Dec – 46 of whom had remained in detention while three others had returned to Côte d'Ivoire in Sept 2022 –, citing commitment to “preserving fraternal relations” with neighbours. President Ouattara next day welcomed pardoned soldiers in economic capital Abidjan. In phone call, Ouattara 9 Jan reportedly invited Goïta to Côte d'Ivoire in apparent attempt to normalise bilateral relations.

Competition ran high between presidential hopefuls. Former President Gbagbo's right-hand man Charles Blé Goudé 11 Jan said he seeks to “govern Côte d'Ivoire one day”, adding to longstanding tensions with former mentor who likely also nurtures presidential ambitions. Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI)'s VP Jean-Louis Billon 14 Jan also announced plan to run in 2025 presidential election, openly challenging PDCI's long-time leader and anticipated presidential candidate Henri Konan Bédié. Meanwhile, Paris-based media outlet Africa Intelligence 17 Jan reported Ouattara and Gbagbo pledged to meet in Feb during phone call held 12 Jan.

➔ **Guinea Interim govt rejected calls to reopen inter-Guinean dialogue outside country amid ongoing stifling of dissent.**

Conakry ruled out possibility of resuming dialogue abroad. Col. Doumbouya's interim govt 12 Jan rejected efforts by West African regional bloc ECOWAS to relaunch dialogue between interim govt and political and civil society groups outside country to include main opposition actors (who boycotted so-called inclusive inter-Guinean dialogue held in late 2022), said "there is no reason to hold talks abroad" as dialogue "has been wrapped up". Meanwhile, UN Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel Giovane Biha 18-20 Jan visited country, met with PM Bernard Goumou and reaffirmed UN's "commitment to support the ongoing transition... in accordance with the 10-point timetable for a rapid return to constitutional order".

Harassment of opposition persisted. Authorities 17 Jan blocked Fodé Oussou Fofana, VP of opposition Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea, from travelling abroad; 21 Jan arrested Mamadou Billo Bah, prominent member of outlawed civil society platform National Front for the Defence of the Constitution, in capital Conakry, later accused him of taking part in "illegal gathering" and "destruction of property".

➔ **Nigeria Insecurity remained rampant ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections due in February.**

Political violence persisted notably in south ahead of general elections. Electoral commission 9 Jan warned that insecurity could derail general elections due 25 Feb and 11 March. Assailants 14 Jan killed uncle of prominent politician in Akokwa town, Imo state. Gunmen next day set electoral commission office on fire in Enugu state, killing policeman, and 20 Jan stormed ruling All Progressives Congress meeting in Ebonyi state, killing two.

Jihadists remained active in North East. In Borno state, clashes between rival jihadist groups persisted, with Boko Haram (BH) 7 Jan reportedly killing 35 Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) fighters near Kukawa town. Jihadist groups also continued to target civilians and security forces in Borno. Notably, Boko Haram 17 Jan raided Makilwe village, killing one farmer and abducting eight others. Govt forces 23 Jan repelled ISWAP ambush near Komala village, killing at least 23 assailants.

Violence continued despite military operations in North West and North Central. Authorities 3 Jan announced arrest of ISWAP commander Abdulmumin Ibrahim Otaru (aka "Abu Mikdad"), said he "operated terrorist cells" in Kogi state. In Kaduna state, unidentified gunmen 9 Jan ambushed security patrol near mining site in Birnin Gwari area, killing 12 security personnel and local vigilantes. Meanwhile, in Benue state, suspected herdsmen 19 Jan killed nine people including displaced persons in Abagena town. Military suspected of mistakenly killing dozens in airstrikes 24 Jan: bomb blast struck group of herders near Rukubi village, Nasarawa state, reportedly leaving 54 dead, and drone strike killed unspecified number of vigilantes near Galadimakogo village, Niger state.

Biafra agitation and other violence persisted in South East. In Imo state, gunmen 2 Jan attacked former state governor's convoy, killing four police officers near Ehime-

Mbano town. In Anambra state, gunmen 9-12 Jan killed at least seven people and set buildings on fire in Ihiala town. Troops 10-13 Jan killed at least seven Indigenous People of Biafra separatists in operations in Imo, Anambra, Abia and Enugu states. Meanwhile in South South, gunmen 7 Jan kidnapped around 20 people at Igueben train station, Edo state; all abductees later rescued.

➡ **Togo Jihadist militants launched further attacks in northern region.**

Suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) militants launched explosive device attacks in Kpendjal prefecture of Savanes region, reportedly killing at least three soldiers near Tiwoli village 2 Jan and injuring four others near Boatou village 18 Jan.