



Africa

Central Africa

➔ **Cameroon Govt continued military campaign to subdue independence-seeking Anglophone militias, while jihadists kept up attacks in Far North region.**

Security situation in Anglophone regions remained dire. Govt aircraft 10 Jan crashed in Kikaikelaki town, near Kumbo city, Bui division (North West region); exchange of fire followed between Anglophone separatist combatants and govt forces, with unknown casualties; military said aircraft suffered mechanical failure, while separatists claimed shooting it down. For first time since Dec 2019, govt 20 Jan said army 9 Jan killed separatist militia Ambazonia Defence Forces ground commander in clashes near Batibo town, Momo division (North West). Meanwhile, govt's renewed attempt to crush weekly general strike called by separatists, dubbed "Monday ghost town", ratcheted up tensions. Notably, separatists reportedly trying to enforce ghost town 15 Jan attacked police station and fired shots for hours in Nkwen neighbourhood of North West regional capital Bamenda. Fako Black Tar separatist militia overnight 29-30 Jan raided parts of South West regional capital Buea and killed at least two civilians, claiming residents did not comply with ghost town order. Separatist faction Interim Government of Ambazonia 29 Jan announced ending cooperation with UN agencies, putting humanitarian operations at risk. Biafra separatist militants from Nigeria 12 Jan reportedly attacked Cameroonian govt forces in Abana town, Bakassi Peninsula (South West).

Jihadist militants kept up attacks on military, civilians in Far North region. Boko Haram 1 Jan killed four Christians and abducted ten others celebrating New Year in Bargaram village, Logone-et-Chari division; in video posted online, militants vowed to avenge Palestinian victims of war in Gaza. Army 7-8 Jan repelled jihadist attack on military post in Zamga town and cleared three landmines near Djibrili town, both Mayo-Tsanaga division, while Boko Haram 20 Jan killed at least five civilians in two villages of Mayo-Tsanaga. Suspected Boko Haram gunmen 10 Jan abducted three staff members of international humanitarian organisation *Première urgence* in Yémé village, Mayo-Sava division.

President Biya announced fuel price increase in bid to cut spending. In his end-of-year address, Biya 31 Dec announced further reduction of fuel subsidy in 2024; move could further increase cost of living and fuel popular discontent.

➡ Central African Republic Authorities appeared set to eliminate potential rivals before 2025 elections, while incidents involving explosive device attacks compounded already dire security situation.

Authorities settled scores with potential dissidents and election rivals. Joint patrol of govt forces and Russian paramilitary Wagner Group 3 Jan arrested mayor of Baboua, Caprang Ephraim, and commander of north west defence zone, Col Modoua, in Nana-Mambéré prefecture; detentions may be related to inter-ethnic disputes within military, particularly over control of mineral resources. Court in capital Bangui 17 Jan sentenced in absentia former National Assembly speaker, Karim Meckassoua, to life imprisonment on charges of endangering state security and colluding with Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) rebels.

President Touadéra continued hazardous push to diversify security partners. Around 150 people from pro-Russian civil society platform Initiative Committee for the Control and Investigation of the U.S. Actions 25 Jan demonstrated in front of U.S. Embassy in Bangui to demand withdrawal of U.S.-based private security company Bancroft Global Development; protest came after presidency in Dec confirmed military cooperation agreement between govt and Bancroft. Wagner's reaction could turn into something more worrisome if Touadéra is not able to share duties and benefits among security partners.

Security situation marked by resurgence of explosive device attacks. Improvised explosive device (IED), possibly linked to armed group Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation (3R), 11 Jan killed three civilians and injured another in Bouar town (Nana-Mambéré prefecture). Another IED 15 Jan killed one UN peacekeeper and wounded another five in Mbindale village (Lim-Pendé prefecture). Meanwhile, Wagner elements 9 Jan attempted to shoot down unidentified object flying over their base in Ndélé town (Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture); local authorities next day imposed curfew and arrested ten civilians. Violent clashes between armed actors took place in various regions. Unity for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) combatants 7 Jan attacked Azandé Ani Kpi Gbé (AAKG) ethnic militia in Obo town (Haut-Mbomou prefecture), resulting in at least three deaths. CPC elements 8 Jan attacked base hosting army and Wagner elements in Kabo town (Ouham-Fafa prefecture); fifteen rebels and four govt soldiers killed, and at least ten civilians wounded.

➡ Chad Transitional president maintained tight grip on power despite appointment of opposition leader as PM; authorities announced foiling destabilisation attempt, and pro-Sudanese armed forces hacking group targeted Chad.

Opposition leader named PM, Deby endorsed as presidential candidate. Transitional President Gen Mahamat Déby 1 Jan appointed Succès Masra, founder of opposition party Les Transformateurs, as PM of transitional govt. Déby in following days asserted his authority, however. New govt formed 2 Jan kept key figures from previous govt while Masra secured only three ministries for his party. In likely bid to tighten control over Masra's actions, Déby 8 Jan appointed Les Transformateurs defector, Moustapha Masri, as deputy head of his civilian cabinet. Ruling party Patriotic Salvation Movement of late President Idriss Déby 13 Jan

nominated President Mahamat Déby as candidate for presidential election due to be held in Oct.

Security situation remained precarious. Military 12 Jan announced foiling planned “insurrection” and arresting 80 armed officers, including alleged coordinator of insurrectional movement, Lt. Kouroumta Levana Guelemi; development might be related to interethnic struggles within national army. Almost 900 fighters from rebel coalition Union of Democratic Forces for Democracy 2 Jan gathered in Faya-Largeau city (Borkou province) with their president, Mahamat Nouri, to disarm as per 2022 Doha agreement, but govt’s inability to fund disarmament program could lead to tensions and further instability. Meanwhile, intercommunal conflicts continued in country’s centre and south; notably, clash between herders and farmers 6 Jan left one dead and unknown number injured in Abtouyour department (Guéra province).

Cyberattack targeted Chad over stance on Sudan conflict. Pro-Sudanese armed forces hacking group, Anonymous Sudan, 10 Jan hit Chad’s internet infrastructure, causing hours-long internet blackout; group said attack was in retaliation for N’Djamena’s alleged support for paramilitary Rapid Support Force (RSF). Meanwhile, Chadian and Sudanese FMs 18 Jan met in Ugandan capital Kampala to discuss bilateral relations.

In another important development. Déby 24 Jan met with Russian President Putin in Russia’s capital Moscow.

Great Lakes

↓ **Burundi Diplomatic spat with Rwanda intensified with border closure, amid escalating rhetoric and reports of troop build-up along border; crisis is part of three-way tussle involving DR Congo.**

Burundi closed border with Rwanda amid escalating rhetoric. Interior Minister Martin Niteretse 11 Jan announced decision to suspend diplomatic relations and close all borders with Rwanda over Kigali’s alleged support for RED-Tabara rebels. Kigali immediately labelled move “unfortunate decision” that violates principles of East African Community (EAC) regional bloc, which 12 Jan called for “peaceful settlement” of dispute. SOS Médias Burundi 14 Jan reported arbitrary arrest of at least 38 Rwandan nationals in Mugina commune, and 58 others in Rugombo commune, both Cibitoke province, since 11 Jan; most of them were reportedly repatriated to Rwanda in following days. President Ndayishimiye 21 Jan said Rwandans are “prisoners of bad leaders”. Kigali next day denounced “inflammatory allegations aimed at sowing division among Rwandans”, and President Kagame 23 Jan vowed to “fight” to protect Rwanda. Gitega same day accused Rwanda of recruiting Burundian refugees in Rwanda to join RED-Tabara. In further sign of growing tension, SOS Médias Burundi 25 Jan reported increasing number of soldiers and ruling party youth wing (Imbonerakure) policing border with Rwanda (see Rwanda).

Authorities intensified clampdown on main opposition party. Interior ministry 17 Jan sent letter to main opposition party, National Council for Freedom (CNL) – whose activities are currently suspended due to govt-orchestrated internal dispute –

accusing it of collaborating with terrorist organisation and threatening “consequences”. Move came after CNL 2 Jan co-signed letter sent by platform of civil society and political groups to guarantors of 2003 Arusha agreement, urging them to support agreement’s continued application.

In another important development. Former PM Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni 2 Jan reportedly lodged appeal after being sentenced late 2023 to life imprisonment on several charges including attempting to overthrow govt and threatening president’s life.

➔ **DR Congo President Tshisekedi inaugurated for new term as his coalition swept legislative and provincial elections; eastern provinces saw fierce M23 conflict and attacks on civilians by other groups.**

Tshisekedi sworn in as his coalition scored big in elections. Constitutional Court 9 Jan confirmed Tshisekedi’s victory in presidential election with 73% of vote, rejecting two legal challenges to provisional results. Tshisekedi sworn in 20 Jan after Moïse Katumbi and Martin Fayulu, second and third respectively in presidential contest, 18 Jan condemned decision but declined to call protests on inauguration day, citing security risks. Fayulu 20 Jan turned down Tshisekedi’s offer of official opposition spokesman position. Electoral commission (CENI) 14, 22 Jan published legislative and provincial election results, giving Tshisekedi’s coalition comfortable majorities. Earlier in month, CENI 5 Jan cancelled legislative and provincial elections results in two constituencies citing irregularities and disqualified 82 candidates for legislative, provincial and municipal elections over suspected fraud.

M23 conflict persisted in North Kivu province. Pro-govt Wazalendo militia around 16 Jan clashed with M23 rebels on Karuba-Mushaki road in bid to capture Mushaki town (Masisi territory). After Wazalendo and army around 22 Jan launched offensive to take Mweso town (Masisi) from M23, bombing of civilian homes 25 Jan left at least nineteen dead. Fighting also reported in and around Sake town (Masisi), where bomb 27 Jan killed one civilian. Army drone strike 16 Jan killed two M23 commanders in Kitshanga town, which straddles Rutshuru and Masisi territories. Meanwhile, army 17 Jan claimed three Congolese soldiers killed or captured by Rwandan army previous day had crossed border “inadvertently” (see Rwanda).

Other armed groups continued to wreak havoc in eastern provinces. In Ituri province, Islamic State-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) 8 and 12 Jan killed seven people in Irumu territory; 14 Jan killed eight in Mambasa territory. Group 23-30 Jan killed 26 in attacks across Beni territory (North Kivu). CODECO association of ethnic Lendu militias attacked Djugu territory settlements (Ituri), with eight people killed 1-2 Jan and three others 4 Jan.

In another important development. Adam Chalwe, former leader of ex-president Joseph Kabila’s party, 6 Jan joined Alliance du Fleuve Congo, newly created politico-military group allied with M23.

↓ **Rwanda Three-way tussle with Burundi and DR Congo intensified as Gitega closed border with northern neighbour amid escalating rhetoric, while Rwandan army shot Congolese soldier dead.**

Burundi closed border with Rwanda as both sides escalated rhetoric. Burundian govt 11 Jan announced suspending relations and closing all borders with Rwanda over Kigali's alleged support for RED-Tabara rebels; Rwandan govt immediately labelled move "unfortunate decision" that violates principles of East African Community regional bloc, which 12 Jan called for "peaceful settlement" of dispute. Burundian President Ndayishimiye 21 Jan said Rwandans are "prisoners of bad leaders". Kigali next day denounced "inflammatory allegations aimed at sowing division among Rwandans", and President Kagame 23 Jan vowed to "fight" to protect Rwanda. Burundian govt same day accused Rwanda of recruiting Burundian refugees in Rwanda to join RED-Tabara, and late Jan reportedly increased number of soldiers and ruling party youth wing (Imbonerakure) policing border with Rwanda (see Burundi).

Tensions with DR Congo led to deadly border incident. Army 16 Jan announced capturing two Congolese soldiers after they crossed into Rwandan territory near Rubavu town, and shooting another dead as he tries to open fire on Rwandan forces; Congolese army next day claimed trio had crossed border "inadvertently" and said it had referred to Regional Joint Verification Mechanism for repatriation of soldier's body and release of other two. Congolese President Tshisekedi 30 Jan reiterated claims that M23 rebels are backed by Rwanda, referred to Kigali as "aggressor" which "occupies a portion of our territory" (see DR Congo).

➔ **Uganda Human rights violations and repression of dissent continued, while govt kept up operations against Islamic State-affiliated rebels.**

Civil society activists and opposition politicians remained under threat. Unidentified assailants 3 Jan stabbed prominent gay rights activist Steven Kabuye on outskirts of capital Kampala, leaving him in serious condition; fellow LGBTQ+ activists said homophobia and harassment have soared since draconian anti-LGBTQ law was enacted in May 2023. Police 18 Jan placed three opposition leaders under house arrest, including former presidential candidates Robert Kyagulanyi, alias 'Bobi Wine', and Kizza Besigye, ahead of planned protest demanding govt action to address deteriorating road conditions. In interview with French TV channel France 24 published 30 Jan, Wine called for "civil disobedience, a moral uprising, a revolution" against President Museveni.

Govt's campaign against Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) continued. Museveni 9 Jan called on Islamic State-affiliated ADF rebels based in DR Congo (DRC) to surrender, and military 20 Jan reported killing three ADF combatants and rescuing eight hostages in Irumu territory, Ituri province in eastern DRC.

In another important development. Museveni 5 Jan appointed three former govt-aligned legislators to leadership roles at electoral commission. Amid outcry from opposition, Museveni 17 Jan backtracked on two of these appointments prior to parliamentary confirmation hearings.

East and Southern Africa

↓ Comoros Post-election violence erupted as opposition contested President Assoumani's re-election.

Presidential election held 14 Jan despite boycott call by some opposition leaders accusing electoral commission of favouring ruling party. Electoral body 16 Jan declared incumbent President Azali Assoumani winner, giving him fourth five-year term. All five opposition candidates immediately cried foul, alleging ballot-stuffing and inconsistent results. Violent protests 17-18 Jan erupted in capital Moroni against Assoumani's re-election; clashes between demonstrators and security forces left one person dead and at least 25 injured. Interior ministry 17 Jan imposed countrywide night-time curfew. Supreme Court 24 Jan confirmed Assoumani's re-election.

➔ Kenya President Ruto threatened to defy courts, sparking fears of manipulation of judiciary, while sporadic attacks by Al-Shabaab, cattle-rustlers and criminal groups continued.

Ruto's criticism of judiciary sparked concerns about independence of courts. President Ruto 2 Jan accused unnamed judges of "corruption" and working with opposition to impede govt's policies, suggesting govt could defy judges' orders; courts had put govt's plans to raise taxes for projects including universal health coverage and affordable housing on hold citing unconstitutionality. Bar association Law Society of Kenya 12 Jan held countrywide protests denouncing attempt to intimidate judges. Chief Justice Martha Koome and Ruto 22 Jan met in Nairobi in bid to prevent further escalation; opposition leader Raila Odinga called meeting "irresponsible" accusing executive of holding judiciary "hostage".

Al-Shabaab continued attacks near Somali border. Al-Shabaab 4 Jan attacked Kenyan military base in El-Waq town, just across border in Somalia's Gedo region. Roadside bomb 15 Jan injured five police officers in Lafey town, Mandera county. Suspected Al-Shabaab explosive device 18 Jan killed police officer and injured four others near Bula Hawa border crossing in Mandera county.

Deadly cattle rustling and banditry persisted. Unidentified assailants 5 Jan killed three people attempting to retrieve stolen livestock in Elgeyo-Marakwet county. Suspected banditry attacks in Baringo county 8 Jan left three people dead on road from Marigat town to Chemoe village, and around 13 Jan killed another two people in Natan village.

In other important developments. Court 26 Jan blocked govt plan to deploy police to Haiti to lead UN-backed multinational mission, saying it was "unconstitutional, illegal and invalid" due to lack of "reciprocal arrangement" between Kenya and Haiti; govt same day vowed to appeal decision. Ruto 30 Jan said he would sort "paperwork" to push ahead with deployment.

↓ Mozambique Jihadist attacks surged in northern Cabo Delgado province, undermining govt's claim of return to stability.

Islamic State-affiliated militants intensified attacks in Cabo Delgado. Islamic State Mozambique Province (ISMP) from late Dec until 20 Jan carried out at least fourteen

attacks, primarily in Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia and Muidumbe districts, leading to dozens of deaths and kidnappings. Notably, ISMP attack 5 Jan killed at least four people in Chimbanga village, Mocímboa da Praia. UN 22 Jan said attacks in Macomia and Muidumbe 26 Dec-17 Jan displaced 5,343 people amid reports of food shortages. ISMP 21 Jan reportedly occupied strategic Mucojo village in Macomia district, marking first significant settlement held by ISMP since it was expelled from Mbau town (Mocímboa da Praia) in Aug 2021; Mozambican troops abandoned their position after receiving threats from militants, amid reports suggesting deteriorating relations between Mucojo residents and military after troops mid Jan killed three civilians. ISMP explicitly linked series of attacks to Islamic State's central command's 4 Jan call for global offensive and 30 Jan said "preaching trip" was under way in northern Mozambique.

Attacks undermined govt's claim that ISMP no longer poses threat. Bishop of Pemba diocese 2 Jan warned of "attitude of complacency" over situation in Cabo Delgado, while Denis Hurley Peace Institute of Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference 17 Jan accused Rwandan and Mozambican troops of preventing people from fleeing Mocímboa da Praia. Surge in attacks also heightened concerns that withdrawal of Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), due to be completed by July, may be premature. Meanwhile international commission, announced late Nov by president of Islamic Council of Mozambique, in Jan began work to promote talks between govt and insurgents in Cabo Delgado.

Political fallout from contested municipal elections continued. Attorney General 9 Jan dismissed request from main opposition party RENAMO to suspend Constitutional Council ruling that validated results of Oct local elections. Divisions also emerged within RENAMO after spokesperson 4 Jan announced current leader Ossufo Momade will be candidate in presidential election due to be held in Oct; others in party wished to wait for vote at party congress.

➡ **Zimbabwe Opposition leader Nelson Chamisa left Citizens Coalition for Change, claiming party had been hijacked by ruling ZANU-PF; economic climate drove migration.**

Widening rift between rival factions of main opposition party led to its implosion. Self-proclaimed secretary-general of main opposition party Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), Sengezo Tshabangu – who triggered series of by-elections by recalling CCC elected officials – 15 Jan announced interim party leadership structure, challenging CCC president Nelson Chamisa's hold on party. High Court 19 Jan ruled recalled CCC MPs and municipal councillors could not be candidates in next by-elections for six parliamentary seats due to be held 3 Feb. Chamisa 22 Jan accused unnamed members of CCC of "selling out", and 25 Jan announced leaving "hijacked" party, reiterating Tshabangu's rise is part of ploy by ruling party ZANU-PF party to infiltrate and divide CCC, and ultimately regain two-thirds majority in parliament. Meanwhile, court 30 Jan gave former opposition MP Job Sikhala two-year suspended sentence for allegedly inciting violence, but released him on bail after almost 600 days in pre-trial detention.

Gloomy economic outlook drove migration. Hike in passport application fees, effective 1 Jan, sparked rush for passports with long queues reported late Dec outside

Harare's passport office. Govt's move is part of attempt to stem surge in migration amid lack of formal jobs and low prospects of economic recovery; govt data from 2022 reported 900,000 Zimbabwean emigrants, though number likely an undercount.

Horn of Africa

➔ Eritrea President Isaias met with Somali counterpart amid heightened tensions over Ethiopia-Somaliland memorandum of understanding.

Ethiopia and Somaliland 1 Jan signed memorandum of understanding that would allow Ethiopia to develop naval base along coast of Somaliland; Hargeisa said deal includes recognition of Somaliland's independence, though Addis Ababa's commitment to this step appears tentative (see Ethiopia, Somaliland). Announcement ratcheted up regional tensions. Mogadishu, which views Somaliland as part of Somalia's territory, 2 Jan called agreement an "act of aggression" and began rallying regional allies in order to exert pressure on Addis Ababa to halt deal (see Somalia). Notably, Somali President Mohamud 8 Jan met with President Isaias in capital Asmara. Mohamud next day claimed Isaias supported "the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Somalia"; Asmara issued no official statement but is widely expected to side with Mogadishu on issue amid deteriorating relations with Ethiopia.

➔ Ethiopia Govt struck deal with Somaliland to secure Red Sea access, ratcheting up regional tensions; violence in Amhara and Oromia persisted; and Tigray's humanitarian crisis mounted.

Tensions with Somalia spiked over Ethiopia-Somaliland deal. Ethiopia and Somaliland 1 Jan signed memorandum of understanding that would allow Ethiopia to develop naval base along Somaliland's coast; Hargeisa said deal includes recognition of Somaliland's independence, though Addis Ababa's commitment to this step appears tentative. Announcement fuelled regional tensions. Mogadishu, which views Somaliland as part of Somalia's territory, 2 Jan called agreement an "act of aggression" and rallied regional allies (see Somalia). African Union Peace and Security Council 17 Jan held emergency session, agreed to dispatch envoy to mediate. Regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) 18 Jan called extraordinary meeting, Ethiopia did not attend but in leaked letter dated 22 Jan requested IGAD summit to discuss issue. Despite backlash, ruling Prosperity Party 26 Jan pledged to press ahead with deal.

Violence in Amhara region persisted. Military continued battling Amhara nationalist militias known as Fano. Notably, Fano militants 3 Jan entered North Shewa Zone's administrative capital, Debre Berhan, assassinated head of zonal peace and security office before military next day ejected them. Fano 6 Jan attacked Gondar city, disrupting transport and business for two days. Ethiopian Air Force 12 Jan conducted drone strikes on Fano units near school in Merhabete Woreda (North Shewa Zone), killing two. State of emergency due to expire early Feb, even as military struggles to suppress rebellion.

Oromia insurgency continued. Insurgency in Oromia region pitting govt forces against Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) continued. Notably, security forces 12 Jan conducted drone strike in Horo Guduru Wollega Zone, killing four. OLA 28 Jan declared twenty-day ban on transport and business throughout region.

Humanitarian situation in Tigray region deteriorated further. Tigray interim administration's (IRA) emergency task force 10 Jan said about 4.5mn people are at risk of famine, wrought by war-related economic destruction, drought and inadequate relief efforts; IRA 29 Jan said region is on brink of humanitarian catastrophe not seen since "infamous" 1984-1985 famine. Meanwhile, internally displaced persons in regional capital Mekelle 24 Jan protested slow implementation of Pretoria peace agreement.

↓ **Somalia Mogadishu reacted furiously to Ethiopia-Somaliland port deal; absent de-escalation, diplomatic row could weaken anti-Al-Shabaab campaign and further undermine regional stability.**

Diplomatic row erupted over Ethiopia's sea access deal. Govt rejected Ethiopia-Somaliland agreement signed 1 Jan, which grants Ethiopia sea access for naval facility via Somaliland, and potentially paves way for Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland's independence (see Somaliland); Mogadishu 2 Jan denounced "act of aggression" violating Somalia's sovereignty and recalled ambassador to Ethiopia for consultations. Thousands 3 Jan protested against agreement in capital Mogadishu, and President Mohamud 6 Jan signed bill nullifying deal. Govt mobilised support among international partners, with AU, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, EU, U.S. and others reiterating support for Somalia's sovereignty. Mohamud also engaged regionally, travelling to Eritrea 8 Jan and to Qatar 22 Jan. Mogadishu 18 Jan rejected engagement with Ethiopia, saying "there is no space for mediation" until Addis Ababa retracts agreement.

Operations against Al-Shabaab militants continued at slow pace. In Mudug region of Galmudug state (centre), security forces and Al-Shabaab 6 Jan clashed in Jeeh-jeeh area, and militants 24 Jan temporarily overran pro-govt clan militia position in Caad district. Airstrikes targeting militants in central states of Galmudug and Hirshabelle, including in Galhareeri 25 Jan, Cali Heyle 27 Jan, and Buq Aqable same day, showed govt's reliance on international air support. Meanwhile, militants continued attacks, albeit at lower level; in Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab 11 Jan killed UN security guard in mortar attack targeting airport compound, and 16 Jan killed four people in suicide attack near Banadir regional administration. Suspected Al-Shabaab combatants 10 Jan also kidnapped several UN contractors after their helicopter crashed in Galmudug. Potential rupture in Somalia-Ethiopia relations would have significant consequences on security operations, given Somalia's cooperation with Ethiopia against Al-Shabaab.

Puntland election cycle concluded peacefully with President Deni's re-election. Puntland President Said Deni 8 Jan won second five-year term in indirect election; opposition largely accepted result despite alleging manipulation in selection of MPs who took part in vote; legislators representing Dhulbahante community participated in elections after SSC-Khatumo (self-declared administration for Dhulbahante in territory also claimed by Somaliland) vowed not to in Dec. Vote concluded peacefully, offering parties opportunity to move on from divisive episode.

↓ **Somaliland In move that could revive election-related dispute, President Bihi refused to sign electoral laws; govt announced plan to give landlocked Ethiopia commercial and military access to sea, sparking domestic opposition and ratcheting up regional tensions.**

Electoral tensions re-emerged. President Bihi 22 Jan returned recently-approved electoral laws back to House of Elders over alleged procedural flaws, instead of signing them into law. Move re-ignited tensions and suspicions among opposition that Bihi does not want to hold presidential election by year's end. Notably, opposition party Waddani same day vowed to "respond strongly and take swift action".

Deal with Addis Ababa sparked diplomatic crisis. Govt and Ethiopia 1 Jan signed Memorandum of Understanding for Addis Ababa to lease 20km stretch of Somaliland's coastline to establish naval base and commercial maritime services; Hargeisa claimed Ethiopia would in return acknowledge Somaliland as sovereign state, which would make Addis Ababa first capital to recognise its independence from Somalia, while Ethiopia said it would conduct "in depth-assessment" of its position on the matter. Somaliland and Ethiopia's army chiefs 9 Jan met in Addis Ababa to discuss military cooperation. Deal, which came days after Bihi and Somalia President Mohamud agreed to resume Somalia-Somaliland dialogue, caused international consternation. Notably, Mogadishu 2 Jan denounced "act of aggression", vowed to defend Somalia's territorial integrity by "any legal means" (see Somalia).

Domestic opposition to deal also emerged, auguring difficult implementation. Opposition called for more transparency over agreement, with Waddani party in days after announcement pointing to significant discrepancies between Ethiopia and Somaliland's accounts of deal. Communities in western Somaliland (where naval base may be located), who hold historical grievances over perceived marginalisation by Isaaq (Somaliland's largest clan), 6 Jan held demonstrations against potential transfer of land to Ethiopia. Police 6 Jan detained three journalists holding debate about agreement at TV station in capital Hargeisa. Meanwhile, defence minister 7 Jan resigned in protest at agreement, saying Ethiopia remained "number one enemy" and having Ethiopian troops stationed in Somaliland would be inappropriate.

In another important development. Lull in fighting between govt and Dhulbahante clan militias in Sool region persisted.

➡ **South Sudan Calls to postpone elections rose, intercommunal violence escalated in Warrap state and Abyei administrative area, as well as Jonglei state, and Sudan's war drew closer to South Sudan.**

Calls to delay 2024 elections rose amid lack of preparedness. More voices called for extension of transitional govt's mandate due to inadequate time to organise credible elections. Notably, South Sudan Opposition Alliance MP David De Dau 2 Jan proposed five-year extension. During meeting with UN envoy Nicholas Haysom, opposition leader Riek Machar 11 Jan maintained that his party Sudan People's Liberation Army-in Opposition (SPLA-IO) will participate in polls only if key prerequisites, including census, constitution and unification of forces, are in place.

President Kiir expelled Nuer leader as violence escalated in Abyei. Fighting between Twik Dinka from Warrap state and Ngok Dinka from disputed Abyei region continued to escalate. President Kiir 10-11 Jan met local officials amid mounting pressure, 16 Jan ordered expulsion of Nuer spiritual leader Gai Maciek from Warrap for aggravating violence; Maciek refused to leave, 18 Jan attacked cattle camp in Mayom county, killing fifteen and stealing 800 cattle. Twik youth and Maciek's forces 27-28 Jan carried out attacks in Abyei, killing over 50, including two UN peacekeepers.

Jonglei saw stepped-up intercommunal violence; army and opposition clashed in Unity. In breach of Jonglei State's 2021 peace agreement, armed Murle youth from Greater Pibor Administrative Area 4 Jan attacked Dinka cattle camp in Duk county, killing 24 Dinka and stealing 7,000 cattle; gunmen 15 Jan killed Duk county chief in Poktap town. With Dinka mobilising for possible revenge attack, peace dialogue among Murle, Dinka and Nuer communities is at risk. Meanwhile, army-SPLA-IO skirmishes in Unity State 29 Jan injured at least two.

Alleged alliance between rebel general and Sudan's paramilitary raised concern. Advances by Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) brought war closer to border with South Sudan (see Sudan). Unity State commander William Manyang Mayak 10 Jan claimed rebel general Stephen Buay and hundreds of Nuer fighters had allied with RSF and were planning attacks on oilfields, prompting army to deploy along border; Buay 30 Jan denied claims.

➔ **Sudan Paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) advanced south into Sennar, White and Blue Nile states, and began consolidating power in Darfur region; RSF leader's diplomatic tour continued.**

RSF advanced south and began consolidating power in Darfur. Following RSF's Dec advance toward central-eastern Sudan and subsequent capture of Gezira state capital, army early Jan began arming civilians in Gezira; RSF 18 Jan threatened to continue offensives into eastern Gedarif, Kassala and Port Sudan states if civilian recruitment continues. In south, RSF early Jan surrounded Sennar city, Sennar state, and advanced toward White and Blue Nile states, triggering formation of new militias that support army. Meanwhile, RSF stepped up efforts to form civil administration and security structures in parts of Darfur region it controls. Notably, in West Darfur state it appointed new governor and pursued peace deals with local actors; in North Darfur state, it worked to de-escalate tensions with Darfuri armed groups, most of whom are Juba Peace Agreement signatories, and forged alliances to bolster security presence in state capital El Fasher.

Fighting fuelled ethnic conflict in Kordofan region. In South Kordofan state, RSF 8 Jan attacked army position around Dilling town, leading to skirmishes with rebel group Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (al-Hilu) due to group's ethnic affiliation with army; confrontation turned into ethnic-based conflict between non-Arab Nubian SPLM-N (al-Hilu) and RSF-affiliated Misseriya and Hawazma Arab militias. In West Kordofan state's Babanusa town, RSF-army clashes 22-24 Jan reportedly killed and injured dozens.

Army stepped up offensives. Army renewed aerial offensives in capital Khartoum, as well as South Darfur and Gezira states; 27 Jan launched ground attacks in Khartoum's north and south east amid offensive in sister city Omdurman.

Addressing troops in Kassala state, Burhan 30 Jan announced shift in strategy, directing army and allies to launch full-scale offensive against RSF.

RSF leader continued diplomatic engagement. RSF leader Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo “Hemedti” continued regional tour, 18 Jan attended Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) summit in Uganda, prompting army 20 Jan to suspend Sudan’s membership in setback for IGAD mediation effort. Hemedti 2 Jan signed declaration with civilian coalition TAQADDUM, agreeing to ceasefire talks with army; army leader 5 Jan rejected declaration.

Sahel

↓ **Burkina Faso Ouagadougou announced withdrawal from West African regional bloc alongside Mali and Niger, dealing blow to regional integration; authorities claimed foiling coup attempt and Russian troop deployment continued.**

Junta announced leaving ECOWAS, defying pressure to restore constitutional rule. Junta leaders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger 28 Jan announced leaving ECOWAS, denouncing “inhumane” sanctions imposed by regional bloc following coups. ECOWAS immediately said three countries were “important members of the Community” and bloc “remains committed to finding a negotiated solution to the political impasse”; also said it had not yet received formal withdrawal notification.

Deployment of Russian troops accelerated. Contingent of about 100 Russian military personnel 24 Jan reportedly arrived in capital Ouagadougou in what appeared to be initial phase of 300-member force deployment.

Authorities continued to silence dissent amid report of coup plot. Authorities 18 Jan announced foiling coup attempt scheduled to take place 14 Jan, accused network of military officers, as well civilians and activists, of conspiring to destabilise institutions. Meanwhile, silencing of dissent continued. Notably, men in civilian clothes 24 Jan arrested lawyer and political activist Guy-Hervé Kam in capital Ouagadougou on undisclosed charges; his political movement accused transitional authorities of orchestrating “kidnapping”.

Govt forces and civilian auxiliaries continued to clash with jihadist militants. In Centre-North region, al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) militants 3 Jan attacked military base in Gabou town, Sanmatenga province, killing seventeen members of state-sponsored civilian militia (VDPs). In Sahel region, army 21 Jan reportedly killed prominent leader of Islamic State Sahel Province, Harouna Oulel, near Oueldi village, Oudalan province. NGO Human Rights Watch 25 Jan accused security forces of killing at least 60 civilians in drone strikes between Aug and Nov 2023, said attacks may amount to war crimes. Transitional President Capt. Traoré 5 and 10 Jan shared details about previously announced tax hikes on salaries and govt bonuses and benefit increases for VDPs; new taxes illustrate Ouagadougou’s financial difficulties, while prospect of better conditions for VDPs may backfire if authorities fail to fulfil promises.

↓ Mali Bamako announced withdrawal from West African regional bloc alongside Burkina Faso and Niger, dealing blow to regional integration; junta also ended 2015 Algiers Accord with separatist rebels.

Junta announced leaving ECOWAS, defying pressure to restore constitutional rule. Junta leaders of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger 28 Jan announced leaving ECOWAS, denouncing “inhumane” sanctions imposed by regional bloc following coups. ECOWAS immediately said three countries were “important members of the Community” and bloc “remains committed to finding a negotiated solution to the political impasse”; also said it had not yet received formal withdrawal notification.

Bamako terminated 2015 Algiers peace agreement, launched own peace initiative. Amid resumption of hostilities in northern Mali in recent months, coalition of 2015 Algiers Accord signatory armed groups, Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP), 2 Jan rejected junta-proposed inter-Malian dialogue for peace and reconciliation, denouncing manoeuvre to definitively invalidate Algiers accord and sideline international mediation. Diplomatic spat with Algiers over Algeria’s mediation role persisted despite Algerian ambassador returning to Bamako 5 Jan and Malian ambassador returning to Algeria 7 Jan. Junta 25 Jan declared “immediate termination” of Algiers Accord, accusing Algeria of interfering in its affairs, and next day issued decree establishing committee to organise national peace and reconciliation dialogue.

State violence against civilians continued amid conflict with jihadist groups. In north, air force 5 Jan carried out drone strike against civilian vehicles in Almoustarat area, Gao region, killing three; govt forces and Russian paramilitary Wagner Group 9 Jan burned several encampments for internally displaced persons in Tabagart village, Timbuktu region, and reportedly killed ten people after abducting them. In centre, army and Wagner group 2 Jan reportedly killed at least ten civilians on outskirts of Touara village, Ségou region. Explosive device likely planted by al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) militants 5 Jan killed five civilians in Ogossagou village, Mopti region.

In another important development. FM Abdoulaye Diop 12 Jan said withdrawal of UN mission (MINUSMA) was nearly complete with 95% peacekeepers gone and all assets transferred to state.

↓ Niger Niamey announced withdrawal from West African regional bloc alongside Burkina Faso and Mali, dealing blow to regional integration; Niamey strengthened ties with Russia.

Junta announced leaving ECOWAS, defying pressure to restore constitutional rule. Junta leaders of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso 28 Jan announced leaving ECOWAS, denouncing “inhumane” sanctions; move defies pressure to restore constitutional rule and deals blow to regional integration. ECOWAS immediately said three countries were “important members of the Community” and bloc “remains committed to finding a negotiated solution to the political impasse”; also said it had not yet received formal withdrawal notification. Earlier in month, ECOWAS mediation led by Togo 8 Jan obtained release of deposed President Bazoum’s son, Salem Bazoum. ECOWAS delegation visit originally scheduled for 10 Jan and

postponed to 25 Jan at Niamey's request did not take place, as ECOWAS delegation reported "technical issues".

Authorities kept severing ties with France and strengthening relations with Russia. France 2 Jan confirmed permanent closure of its embassy in Niamey citing "serious impediments making it impossible to carry out its missions". Authorities 26 Jan reportedly sent home fifteen European training mission (EUCAP) staff and 26-27 Jan prevented their head of mission and at least five French nationals from entering country. After signature of military cooperation agreements with Russia in Dec, PM Zeine 16 Jan led delegation to Russian capital Moscow; both countries announced plans to enhance military cooperation.

Insecurity persisted in Tillabery region (south west). In Gotheye department, air force 5 Jan launched airstrikes on Garé Garé gold miners camp, Tiawa village, reportedly killing at least 30 jihadist militants and at least fifteen civilians; NGO Center for Civilians in Conflict 11 Jan called for "full, impartial, and transparent investigation", reminded armed forces of their obligation to "never target civilians". In Kollo department, suspected jihadist militants 11 Jan attacked gendarmerie post in Laoudou village, south of Niamey, killing two gendarmes and five civilians.

West Africa

➔ Benin Jihadist violence persisted and opposition warned President Talon against seeking third term in 2026 election.

Jihadist attacks persisted in north. Suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) insurgents 1 Jan clashed with military in Tissoua locality, Alibori department, leading to death of five militants. Local sources also reported movement on 9 Jan of JNIM militants near Park W, Alibori.

Tensions started to build ahead of 2026 general elections. Former president and leader of opposition party Les Démocrates Thomas Boni Yayi 1 Jan warned President Talon against attempting unconstitutional third term in 2026 and accused ruling party of planning to change constitution; govt denied claim. Constitutional Court 4 Jan called on National Assembly to amend electoral calendar for 2026 general elections, and MP from ruling coalition 26 Jan submitted constitutional amendment bill to parliament to revise electoral calendar. Les Démocrates and three other opposition parties 29 Jan held consultations in commercial capital, Cotonou, stated opposition to constitutional reform.

➔ Côte d'Ivoire Main opposition party laid out plans for return to power in 2025, and govt affirmed American and Chinese diplomatic ties.

New PDCI leader promoted participatory and inclusive decision-making. Former Credit Suisse CEO, Tidjane Thiam, inaugurated 24 Jan as president of main opposition party Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI); Thiam mapped out party's strategy to return to power in 2025, vowing to promote participatory decision-making to strengthen PDCI's internal democracy, while calling for reform of Independent Electoral Commission. After launching membership campaign, party early Jan reportedly recruited nearly 4,000 new members.

Relations remained strong with Washington. During visit to Côte d'Ivoire, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 23 Jan praised govt's approach to security, notably making sure security forces understand "the needs, the concerns of communities", as model for other countries. Earlier, *Wall Street Journal* newspaper 3 Jan reported U.S. diplomats met with Ivorian officials to discuss possibility of setting up reconnaissance drone base in Côte d'Ivoire.

In another important development. Govt 17 Jan also reaffirmed long-standing strategic partnership with China, as Chinese FM Wang Yi publicly thanked Abidjan for "firm support" on Taiwan issue.

➡ **Guinea Military govt granted pardon to alleged coup plotters, while international community voiced concern over media repression.**

Military officers pardoned of alleged coup attempt. Govt 2 Jan released video detailing coup attempt allegedly undertaken by two senior military officers at unclear date several months ago, which govt did not report at the time; pair admitted to attempting to overthrow transitional President Col. Doumbouya but were granted presidential pardon without official trial, amid lack of clarity over incident.

Uncertainty around constitutional referendum persisted. Govt 23 Jan announced Doumbouya elevated to rank of general amid continuing doubts over domestic political future after he used 31 Dec New Year's address to announce plans to hold constitutional referendum in 2024 as part of transition to civilian rule. Announcement came hours after deposed President Condé 31 Dec released video stating his intention to return to country and "re-establish democracy and constitutional order".

International community voiced concern over repressive govt tactics. After Dec crackdown on critical media, diplomats representing country's most important partners in Conakry (including U.S., EU and China) 10 Jan expressed dissatisfaction with military govt's restrictions on internet, social media and press; in response, govt in following days cited national security concerns and need to capture revenue generated by social media, while saying restrictions would end "very soon". Media regulator, High Authority of Communication (HAC), 17 Jan suspended website *Dépêche Guinée* for nine months, and prohibited publishing director Abdoul Latif Diallo from "creating or providing his services to a news organisation" for six months. NGO Committee to Protect Journalists 31 Jan urged authorities to "immediately roll back the wave of censorship efforts unleashed on the press in recent months".

➡ **Nigeria Islamic State affiliate claimed rare attack outside Lake Chad Basin; tide of kidnappings for ransom continued in and around Federal Capital Territory.**

Rare jihadist attack reported in central Nigeria amid continued violence in North East. Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) claimed first attack outside Lake Chad Basin since April 2022 with 2 Jan killing of four Christians in Nasarawa state's Karu area, about 15km from federal capital Abuja; group vowed to attack non-Muslims anywhere to avenge Palestinians killed in Gaza. Meanwhile in north-eastern Borno state, Boko Haram 1 Jan killed twelve people in Gartamawa village, Chibok area, and 8 Jan attacked Gajiram town in Nganzai area, burning six people

to death; two commercial vehicles 9 Jan ran over landmines along Ngala-Dikwa road in Ngala area, with eight people dead. In neighbouring Yobe state, suspected jihadist militants 5 Jan killed several people and set church ablaze in Kwari village, Geidam area.

Surge in kidnappings for ransom continued in and around Abuja. FCT's Commissioner for Public Complaints, Dalhatu Ezekiel, 15 Jan urged federal govt to declare state of emergency in Federal Capital Territory (FCT) amid spate of kidnappings for ransom, including 2 Jan abduction of man and his six daughters in Bwari area. Similar attacks also took place in adjoining states. Notably in Kaduna state, armed groups 2-7 Jan killed at least 21 people and kidnapped 143 others in three villages of Kauru area and near Katari town in Kachia area, along Abuja-Kaduna highway. Gunmen 16 Jan also abducted seventeen residents of Tafa area, Niger state.

Criminal groups continued attacks and abductions in North West. In Katsina state, armed group 14 Jan stormed military camp in Nahuta town, Batsari area, forcing troops to flee; toll unknown. In Zamfara state, kidnappings for ransom 9-10 Jan targeted state's finance ministry official and senior university lecturer in state capital Gusau.

North Central saw several incidents of herder-farmer violence. Notably, gunmen 22-23 Jan killed at least 50 villagers in Plateau state, prompting 24-hour curfew and calls for authorities to curb herder-farmer violence. Suspected herders 31 Jan raided village in Agatu area, Benue state, killing at least nine people and kidnapping others.

➡ **Senegal Top opposition leaders suffered major setbacks in presidential bids.**

Supreme Court 5 Jan upheld defamation conviction against opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and Constitutional Council hours later rejected his presidential candidate application. Constitutional Council 20 Jan released final list of twenty candidates for presidential election due in Feb, not including Ousmane Sonko and other opposition heavyweight Karim Wade, son of former president Abdoulaye Wade. Sonko 28 Jan endorsed Bassirou Diomaye Faye, imprisoned secretary-general of Sonko's dissolved PASTEF party, as replacement candidate and called for his release.

➡ **Sierra Leone Fallout from alleged coup attempt continued.**

Govt 2 Jan announced treason charges against twelve people for suspected involvement in alleged coup attempt in Nov 2023, and next day said former President Ernest Bai Koroma had also been charged with treason. Govt 8 Jan indicted 27 military personnel and sacked 48 others in connection with incident. Court 17 Jan granted Bai Koroma permission to travel abroad for medical treatment.