



Africa

Central Africa

➔ **Cameroon** Canadian-facilitated initiative to settle Anglophone conflict remained stalled as clashes between govt forces and separatists continued; jihadist violence spiked in Far North.

Anglophone separatists continued to look for more united anti-govt front. Five prominent separatist movements 5 March announced All Ambazonia Conference to take place 6-10 July “to achieve a defining path for the liberation of homeland”; move is part of Anglophone separatists’ efforts to pursue new, more united anti-govt approach since President Biya pulled out of Canadian-facilitated peace initiative in Jan.

Violence continued in Anglophone North West (NW) and South West (SW) regions. Armed separatists 1 March kidnapped two police officers near Lysoka village, Fako division (SW), releasing them two days later following mediation by local civil society. Gunfire reported 11-12 March in several towns as separatists imposed lockdown in Anglophone regions to disrupt 12 March indirect Senate elections and govt forces deployed to secure voting. Armed separatists 14 March attacked govt checkpoint in Muea neighbourhood of SW regional capital Buea, killing at least two officers; 15 March killed university lecturer at his home in NW regional capital Bamenda; 28 March shot down army helicopter in Ntumbaw village, Donga-Mantung division (NW), killing at least one soldier.

Jihadists stepped up violence against soldiers in Far North region. Army 13 March repelled Boko Haram (JAS faction) attack on Sanda Wadjiri village, Mayo-Sava division; 14 March killed three members of Boko Haram splinter group, Islamic State West Africa Province, in Gassama locality, Logone-et-Chari division. Suspected JAS militants 18-19 March launched several attacks on civilians in Mayo-Tsanaga division, killing unconfirmed number. Landmine explosion 21 March killed at least one soldier and injured several others between Amchidé and Kolofata towns (Mayo-Sava).

In other important developments. After 12 March indirect Senate elections, Constitutional Council 23 March rejected all appeals and confirmed ruling party won all 70 seats in upper house; Biya to appoint 30 more senators in April, cementing his political control.

➔ **Central African Republic** Violence remained pervasive as rebels continued deadly offensive against govt forces in hinterland; tussle for influence intensified between Russia and Western countries.

Rebels continued to step up attacks in hinterland. Suspected Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) rebels 15 March targeted army position in Wawa village, Ouaka prefecture, leaving at least three civilians dead; 17 March briefly intercepted Archbishop of Bangui Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalaïnga's convoy near Ouadda locality, Haute-Kotto prefecture. Unidentified gunmen 19 March attacked Chinese-operated mining site in Chingbolo village (Ouaka), killing nine Chinese nationals; CPC immediately denied attack and accused Russian paramilitary Wagner Group of responsibility. Clashes between army and CPC rebels 23 March left at least three soldiers dead near Kadjama village (Ouham prefecture). Meanwhile, humanitarian workers faced increased insecurity. Notably, Russian forces 5 March briefly detained humanitarian workers after intercepting their convoy in Ouaka's capital Bambari; 3R rebel group, CPC member, 10 March raided humanitarian convoy and stole their equipment near Bozoum town (Ouham-Pendé prefecture).

U.S. efforts to counter Russian influence came under spotlight. FM Sylvie Baïpo-Temon late Feb-early March denied rumours of negotiations between President Touadéra and U.S. for withdrawal of Wagner forces from country; statement came after French news outlet *Le Monde* 20 Feb alleged U.S. in Dec 2022 offered to train armed forces, increase humanitarian aid and boost support for UN mission in Central African Republic (CAR) in return for Wagner troops' departure. Meanwhile, former president and exiled CPC leader, François Bozizé, 3 March left neighbouring Chad for Guinea-Bissau following U.S.-sponsored negotiations; move could be Washington's first demonstration of good-will to CAR and could help ease tensions between Bangui and N'Djamena.

In other important developments. Unidentified gunmen overnight 5-6 March set storage yard of French-owned local brewery MOCAF on fire in capital Bangui; European source reportedly identified suspects appearing on video footages of attack as Wagner paramilitaries, while pro-Russian medias accused "mercenaries ... paid by France". Amid series of public-sector strikes, demonstration of schoolteachers 7 March turned violent in Bangui, with mobs reportedly attacking private school buildings. Sudan 9 March reopened border with CAR after two-month closure.

➡ **Chad Interim President Déby pardoned hundreds of rebels and opposition protesters in first peace gesture in months, but inclusive transition to civilian rule remained elusive; deadly herder-farmer violence erupted, and new armed group claimed attack in north.**

Hundreds of rebels, opposition protesters granted presidential pardon. N'Djamena's court of appeal 21 March sentenced over 400 members of Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) rebel group, notably group leader Mahamat Mahdi Ali, to life imprisonment over death in April 2021 of Chad's long-time leader Idriss Déby. Interim President Mahamat Déby around 25 March pardoned 380 of them, not including Mahamat Mahdi Ali and others who had been sentenced in absentia. Déby 27 March also pardoned 259 protesters jailed for alleged involvement in anti-govt demonstrations held 20 Oct 2022, which were brutally suppressed by security forces; several opposition supporters however remained behind bars.

International actors sought to revive dialogue between govt, rebels and opposition. Catholic organisation Sant'Egidio 6-8 March gathered representatives of 18 rebel groups that did not sign August 2022 Doha agreement with transitional authorities

(including FACT) in Italian capital Rome; rebels stated willingness to engage in inclusive negotiations with transitional authorities under “neutral and impartial” mediation. Meanwhile, Economic Community of Central African States delegation 7-11 March visited Chad, met with opposition and civil society representatives, including Wakit Tama coalition, as part of its facilitation of transition.

Deadly intercommunal violence erupted in country’s centre. Moubi farmers and Arab herders 27 Feb-4 March clashed in and around Mangalmé locality, Guéra region, with at least 14 people dead. Fighting between herders and farmers from Boudouma, Boura and Mada communities 13 March left at least 12 people dead in Mamdi village, Lac region.

In other important developments. Previously unknown armed group claimed attack on army position in Wadi-Marou, Tibesti region, 26 March killed two soldiers. Constitutional drafting committee 9 March handed preliminary draft to transitional constitution PM Saleh Kebzabo. Several international media outlets from late Feb reported that U.S. warned Interim President Déby of Russian paramilitary Wagner Group’s plan to work with Chadian rebels to overthrow transitional govt.

Great Lakes

➔ **Burundi Security forces and ruling party affiliates continued to harass civil society, and Gitega deployed troops to DR Congo as part of East African Community regional force.**

Imbonerakure attacked opposition and civilians. Security forces 5-6 March detained at least 15 members of main opposition party National Congress for Freedom (CNL) after brawl with ruling party’s youth militia Imbonerakure in Bujumbura province. Suspected Imbonerakure 8-11 March allegedly repeatedly attacked home of CNL member Elysée Kabura in Giharo commune, Rutana province, forcing him to go into hiding; and overnight 11-12 March reportedly stabbed two civilians in Buringa village, Bubanza province. Meanwhile, NGOs Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch 14 March urged authorities to “immediately release” five human rights defenders detained since Feb on charges including undermining state security, denounced “worsening climate for independent civil society in Burundi”.

Burundian troops joined regional force in eastern DR Congo. Approximately 100 Burundian soldiers 5-16 March arrived in eastern DR Congo’s North Kivu province as part of East African Community (EAC) regional force to help stem advance of M23 rebellion. Burundian forces around 23 March reportedly took over several villages in Masisi territory after M23 withdrew in compliance with timetable adopted by EAC in Feb (see DR Congo). Meanwhile in DR Congo’s South Kivu province, where Burundian forces are deployed as part of bilateral agreement, Burundian rebel group National Liberation Forces 5-6 March reportedly ambushed Burundian soldiers in Uvira territory, with unknown casualties.

Diplomatic relations between Burundi and Rwanda continued to improve. High-level delegation 5 March travelled to Kigali, met with Rwandan President Kagame; officials likely discussed situation in eastern DR Congo and extradition from Rwanda

of individuals suspected of involvement in 2015 coup attempt against then-President Nkurunziza; deployment of Burundian troops to fight M23 in DR Congo could however hamper Burundi-Rwanda rapprochement (see Rwanda).

➡ **DR Congo** **Fighting between M23 rebels and govt forces continued in North Kivu province despite regional troop deployment; President Tshisekedi conducted major cabinet reshuffle ahead of elections.**

Regional powers boosted military presence in North Kivu amid M23 fighting. Angolan President Lourenço 3 March announced ceasefire between M23 and Congolese forces to take effect 7 March. Fighting 6-13 March however erupted notably around Sake town (Masisi territory). As ceasefire collapsed, Lourenço 11 March announced troop deployment to North Kivu, which Angola's parliament 18 March approved. Renewed fighting reported same day between Congolese troops and M23 in Bihambwe village near mining town of Rubaya (also Masisi). Burundian, Ugandan and South Sudanese forces in March arrived in North Kivu as part of East African Community (EAC) regional force to supervise planned pullback of M23 (see Burundi, Uganda). Rebels during month reportedly withdrew from some localities, including Mweso (Masisi), but 30 March still held strategic positions, missing EAC deadline for full withdrawal.

Other armed groups launched deadly attacks on civilians in east. In North Kivu's Beni territory, suspected Islamist militia Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) 8-9 March attacked Mukondi and Mausea villages, killing nearly 40 civilians; 12 and 14 March killed 36 civilians in Kirindera and Mabuku villages. ADF 18-19 March also launched first-ever attack in Lubero territory, killing at least nine civilians in Nguli village. In Ituri province, attacks by suspected CODECO militia in five villages of Mahagi territory 18 March reportedly left over 30 people dead, and CODECO 26 March executed 17 hostages in Djugu territory.

Cabinet reshuffle brought political heavyweights into govt. Months away from general elections due in Dec, Tshisekedi 23 March reshuffled govt, notably appointing his former Chief of Staff Vital Kamerhe as economy minister and former VP Jean-Pierre Bemba as defence minister.

Delays in election preparations sparked tensions. After Tshisekedi 4 March suggested that violence in eastern provinces could delay elections, opposition leader Martin Fayulu 6 March urged him to leave power by 23 Jan 2024, if need be to make way for caretaker govt. Electoral commission 15 March announced 15-day extension to 1 April of voter registration in electoral zone covering east, where millions of voters are facing disenfranchisement.

➡ **Rwanda** **Govt forces killed Congolese soldier along shared border; Kinshasa urged Paris to pursue sanctions against Rwanda in pursuit of durable M23 ceasefire in eastern DR Congo.**

Rwandan and Congolese troops exchanged fire along shared border. Kigali 3 March said military killed Congolese soldier after he allegedly crossed border into Rwanda's Rubavu district and shot at Rwandan soldiers; also said several other Congolese soldiers fired at Rwandan army position.

Congolese president discussed sanctions on Rwanda with French counterpart. Congolese President Tshisekedi 4 March pressured visiting French President Macron to pursue sanctions against Rwanda for its military support to M23 rebels; Macron said “there may be sanctions” following ongoing peace negotiation efforts if Rwanda and other actors “do not respect their commitments”. France’s UN Ambassador Nicolas de Rivière 7 March also said “incursions by the regular Rwandan army in North Kivu” are “clearly established” and “unacceptable”.

Diplomatic tensions between Burundi and Rwanda continued to ease. High-level Burundian delegation 5 March met with President Kagame in capital Kigali; officials reportedly discussed situation in eastern DR Congo and extradition from Rwanda of several individuals suspected of involvement in 2015 coup attempt against then-Burundian President Nkurunziza. Governors of Rwanda’s Western and Southern provinces 17 March met with governor of Burundi’s Citiboke province in Rwanda’s Kamembe town to discuss reopening of Ruhwa and Bweyeye border crossings (see Burundi).

➔ **Uganda President Museveni faced mounting pressure amid series of corruption scandals involving govt officials; Ugandan troops joined regional force in eastern DR Congo.**

Corruption allegations continued to cripple Museveni’s cabinet. Parliamentary committee investigating alleged mismanagement of National Social Security Fund 1 March recommended “immediate” resignation of Gender, Labour and Social Development Minister Betty Amongi for abuse of office; parliament 9 March adopted recommendation. During cabinet meeting, Museveni 6 March reportedly requested explanations on allegations, which emerged in Feb, that several ministers and other officials diverted govt-funded relief items destined for residents of Karamoja region; police 13 March announced criminal probe, while ruling party’s de facto ally Democratic Party next day called for dismissal of govt officials involved in scandal. In possible attempt to divert public attention, parliament 21 March nearly unanimously passed bill entrenching criminalisation of same-sex conduct. UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk and U.S. Sec State Anthony Blinken next day condemned discriminatory bill undermining human rights.

Museveni’s son announced bid for leadership in 2026. Museveni’s son Lt-Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba 15 March said on Twitter that he was “tired of waiting” for old guard to retire and “will stand for the presidency in 2026”; later deleted posts. Kainerugaba 27 March said he “will be retiring” from army “this year”; armed forces personnel are barred from engaging in politics.

Troops arrived in eastern DR Congo as part of regional force. About 1,000 Ugandan soldiers 31 March arrived in North Kivu province’s Bunagana town as part of East African Community regional force to supervise planned pull-back of M23 rebels; troops due to deploy to several locations in Rutshuru territory. Ugandan troops also remained active elsewhere in North Kivu as part of bilateral agreement: joint DR Congo-Uganda operation 25 March reportedly killed 22 members of Islamic State-affiliated militia Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), while Ugandan military raid 29 March killed senior ADF commander.

East and Southern Africa

↓ Kenya Anti-govt demonstrations turned deadly as violent confrontations erupted between protesters and security forces; amid record drought, deadly cattle raids continued in north.

Several dead amid violence during opposition protests. Opposition Azimio la Umoja coalition leader and runner-up in 2022 presidential election, Raila Odinga, 9 March announced countrywide protests against 2022 presidential election results and high cost of living. Demonstrations 20 March led to violent confrontations; security forces shot one protester dead in third-largest city Kisumu, tear-gassed Odinga's convoy in capital Nairobi, and arrested over 200 people across country, including at least four opposition lawmakers. Renewed demonstrations 27 March turned violent again as security forces reportedly shot one protester dead in Kisumu, while violence in Kibera, Nairobi's largest informal settlement, reportedly left two people dead; unidentified individuals same day stormed former President Kenyatta's land in northern Nairobi. Thousands 30 March joined new opposition-led protests, with some protesters throwing stones while police responded with tear gas in Nairobi; offices of President Ruto's party United Democratic Alliance were set on fire in Siaya town; police said one officer killed during protests.

President Ruto continued to consolidate power despite criticism. Odinga 12 March asked Ruto to dissolve newly formed panel selecting incoming electoral commissioners, accusing it of bias in favour of ruling Kenya Kwanza coalition. In controversial move, Ruto 16 March brought number of Chief Administration Secretary (CAS) positions within govt from 23 to 50; 22 March appointed new CAS, including allies who lost out in last elections; High Court 24 March however stopped CAS from assuming office pending lawsuit by Law Society of Kenya and local NGO Katiba Institute.

Amid historic drought, violence over cattle and land resources continued in north. Suspected cattle raiders 1 March killed three people in Kargi area, Marsabit county; 4 March killed four in Lolmolog village, Samburu county; 7 March shot two people dead in Elgeyo-Marakwet county; 11 March attacked Lorogon village, Turkana county, reportedly leaving at least four people injured.

➔ Mozambique As heavy rains and floods hindered Islamist insurgents' attacks and military operations, militants continued to engage with locals in attempt to win hearts and minds.

Rainy season slowed insurgent attacks and military operations. Heavy rains and floods in March rendered many roads unusable, with traffic effectively cut off between population centres of Mocímboa da Praia, Mueda, Muidumbe, and Palma. Among few reported security incidents, serious clash 13 March erupted Xitaxi village, Muidumbe district, leaving four Islamic State Mozambique Province (ISMP) insurgents killed and two Mozambican soldiers injured; insurgents 21 March abducted two fishermen in Quiterajo locality, Macomia district. Local militia Força Local continued to support troops from Mozambique and Southern African Development Community Mission to Mozambique (SAMIM) in fighting ISMP. Seven insurgents 1 March surrendered to Força Local in Ngangolo village (Nangade district); clashes between insurgents and Força Local 4 and 14 March left several

people dead in Mitope village (Mocímboa da Praia district); Força Local 6 March captured at least three insurgents in Mandava village and 24 March exchanged gunfire with insurgents around villages of Namacule and Mandava (Muidumbe district), with unknown casualties.

Militants continued to engage more peacefully with Cabo Delgado's population. In apparent bid to gain popular support and ensure durable presence, ISMP insurgents attempted to establish cordial relations with locals and purchased supplies 6-12 March in Marere area (Mocímboa da Praia), 13 and 24 March in Pangane, Mucojo, Rueia and Ningaia villages (Macomia).

TotalEnergies likely to resume operations in coming months. Major contractor on French energy company TotalEnergies-led liquefied natural gas (LNG) project, Saipem, late Feb said it expects that work will restart in July. Recruitment agencies in capital Maputo in Feb also reportedly began contacting former TotalEnergies staff about returning to work. Amid fears that resumption of \$20bn project could focus attention of security forces to the detriment of other districts and civilians in Cabo Delgado, report by local NGO Observatorio do Meio Rural 6 March highlighted attempts at economic recovery in Cabo Delgado have disproportionately favoured inland Christians and Makondes, while coastal Muslims and Mwanis continue to face neglect.

➡ **Tanzania Relations between opposition and ruling party continued to improve.**

Former lawmaker from main opposition party Chadema, Godbless Lema, 1 March returned from two-year exile in Canada. President Suluhu Hassan 8 March pledged to restore competitive politics and review constitution in address at Chadema gathering celebrating International Women's Day. U.S. VP Kamala Harris 29-31 March visited Tanzania, praised Hassan's steps to strengthen democracy.

➡ **Zimbabwe Ahead of general elections due this summer, courts dismissed legal challenges to electoral process and paved the way for high-profile trial of opposition leader.**

Courts dismissed cases over electronic voters' roll, constituency delimitation report. Harare High Court 7 March dismissed main opposition party Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) legislator Allan Markham's case demanding release of electronic voters' roll to the public ahead of general elections due in July or August; Markham later in month filed appeal at Supreme Court. Civil society group Team Pachedu in March repeatedly warned of possible mayhem in next elections due to irregularities in electoral commission's constituency delimitation report, notably erroneous demarcation of wards. Constitutional Court 20 March dismissed application by ruling party Zanu-PF member Tonderai Chidawa to nullify constituency delimitation report. Political party Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) late March also filed Constitutional Court application seeking postponement of elections by six months to make time for revision of delimitation report. Voter registration concluded 26 March.

Ruling party held chaotic primary elections. Zanu-PF 25 March held primaries to select members who will represent party in upcoming general elections; voting extended to 26 March as some candidates' names were missing from registers, while

ballots were not delivered in some areas. In run-up to vote, skirmishes between supporters of rival candidates 20 March left several Zanu-PF activists injured in Chegutu West constituency, Mashonaland West province.

Prominent opposition lawmaker remained behind bars. Court in capital Harare 16 March refused to dismiss case against prominent CCC lawmaker, Job Sikhala, paving the way for high-profile trial in run-up to general elections; Sikhala has been held in custody since June 2022 on accusations of inciting public violence.

Horn of Africa

➡ **Eritrea** **U.S. accused Ethiopian, Eritrean and Tigray forces of war crimes in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict, Asmara worked to forge new alliances, and UN condemned Eritrea's "dire" human rights situation.**

U.S. accused Eritrea of crimes against humanity in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict. Following two-day trip to Ethiopia, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 20 March announced U.S. had determined that members of Ethiopian federal, Eritrean, Amhara and Tigray forces committed war crimes in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict, and that members of Ethiopian federal, Eritrean and Amhara forces committed crimes against humanity (see Ethiopia); Asmara next day dismissed "unsubstantiated and defamatory accusations".

Asmara continued to seek new alliances. President Isaias 28 Feb-1 March visited Saudi Arabia, 1 March held talks with Saudi Crown Prince and PM Mohammed bin Salman on "spectrum" of bilateral issues. Isaias 13 March received vice chair of Sudan's Transitional Sovereign Council, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti", in capital Asmara. Somali President Mohamud 13-14 March visited Eritrea for third time since coming to power in May 2022. Stepped-up diplomatic efforts signalled Isaias' resolve to prevent Eritrea's isolation following Tigray peace deal in Ethiopia.

UN spotlighted "dire" human rights situation. UN human rights body 6 March accused Eritrea of committing serious human rights abuses against citizens with "complete impunity", including military servitude, forced conscriptions, forced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture and killings.

⬆ **Ethiopia** **Tigray's peace process made significant headway as federal and Tigray took further steps to strengthen relations; prospects for peace talks in Oromia improved.**

Authorities removed TPLF's terrorist designation and dropped charges against its leaders. At conference in Tigray regional capital Mekelle, Tigray leaders 1-4 March agreed on composition of Interim Regional Administration (IRA), still to be formed; three opposition parties boycotted conference, accusing Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) of monopolising power. TPLF 17 March selected peace deal's chief negotiator, Getachew Reda, to head IRA; PM Abiy 23 March formally appointed Reda to head IRA, who next day said he would prioritise Tigray's economic recovery and restoring lost territory. Federal parliament 22 March removed TPLF's terrorist designation, marking major step toward consolidating peace since delisting is in effect a prerequisite for IRA's formation. Federal govt 30 March dropped criminal charges against TPLF political and military leaders. Following two-day trip to

Ethiopia 15-16 March, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 20 March announced U.S. had determined that all sides committed “war crimes” during Tigray conflict and that federal, Eritrean and Amhara forces committed crimes against humanity; federal govt next day warned U.S. against “divisive approach”.

Abiy announced committee to negotiate with Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). Conflict between OLA and security forces continued in Oromia region throughout March, with fighting occurring in West and East Wollega Zones, North and East Shewa Zones, and Kamashi and Metekel Zones in Benishangul-Gumuz region. Yet Abiy 28 March renewed hope for peace talks by announcing formation of committee to negotiate with OLA, which same day reported that there are “positive signs peace talks... will take place”.

Oromo-Amhara tensions deepened. In sign of rising tensions between Oromia and Amhara regions, Oromia authorities late Feb-early March restricted transport from Amhara region to federal capital Addis Ababa, which is located in Oromia but is self-governing; Amhara President Yilikal Kefale 6 March declared blockade “unconstitutional”. Addis Ababa’s Oromo Mayor Adanech Abebe 14 March accused individuals of “flocking to the capital from some regional states with the intention of overthrowing the legally elected government”, implying regional authorities enforced blockade amid security concerns; National Movement of Amhara party same day condemned remark as “genocidal incitement”.

➔ **Somalia Govt continued preparations for expansion of military operations against Al-Shabaab further south.**

President Mohamud announced second phase of offensive against Al-Shabaab. National Security Adviser Hussein Sheikh Ali 1 March said Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti will deploy troops to Somalia within two months to assist efforts against Al-Shabaab. Mohamud 26 March announced official start of second phase of anti-Al-Shabaab offensive, concentrating on southern Jubaland and South West states. Govt’s efforts to reduce Al-Shabaab’s footprint in central Somalia continued at slower pace. Notably, govt forces 25 March reportedly cleared Run Nirgood district, Middle Shabelle region (Hirshabelle state), and 29 March secured several villages in El Dheere district, Galguduud region (Galmudug state).

Al-Shabaab launched multiple attacks, demonstrating continued resistance. In Jubaland, militants 7 March briefly took control of Janay Abdalle military base in Lower Juba region, using vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIEDs); 14 March launched VBIED attack targeting govt officials in Bardheere town, Gedo region, leaving several dead and injuring Gedo Governor Ahmed Bulle Gared; 29 March launched complex attack and allegedly overran army base in Kismayo district, Lower Juba. In Hirshabelle, Al-Shabaab 21 March launched suicide VBIED attack targeting local fighter base in Adan Yabal district, Middle Shabelle region, and 29 March stormed Bardhere military base, Hiraan region.

National Consultative Council took place in absence of Puntland leader. President Mohamud and federal state leaders 16 March gathered in Baidoa city for National Consultative Council (NCC) meeting marred by absence of Puntland state leader Said Deni (who suspended ties with Mogadishu in Jan). Leaders notably agreed to discuss, at next NCC in May, electoral model and timelines for next elections; all states aside from Puntland have added one year to their term, and both houses of

federal parliament early March appointed committees to examine motion supporting constitutional amendment for one-year term extension of MPs and president, which opposition strongly opposes.

Drought continued to drive hunger, displacement. UN and Somali govt report released 20 March estimated that 135 people currently die each day in Somalia due to drought, with 18,100 to 34,000 drought-related deaths in first six months of 2023.

➡ **Somaliland Ethiopian-led consultations failed to end fighting between govt forces and local clan militias in Las Anod town; conflict ratcheted up political tensions.**

Conflict between Somaliland govt and Dhulbahante militias persisted. Las Anod mayor 2 March said violence in town had killed over 200 people on all sides since early Feb. Dhulbahante clan militias from late Feb pushed Somaliland forces to positions further outside Las Anod in Sool region, leading to drop in mortar shelling of town. In attempt to mediate between parties, delegation from Ethiopia early March visited both Somalia's Garowe city to discuss with Dhulbahante elders and Somaliland's capital Hargeisa to meet with Somaliland govt officials. Efforts floundered, however, as Dhulbahante continued to insist Somaliland withdraw its forces to areas outside of their clan homeland, which President Bihi rejected. Renewed fighting reported 18 and 25 March in Las Anod amid reports suggesting both sides are working on securing additional forces.

Las Anod crisis ratcheted up tensions in Hargeisa. Increasing number of politicians distanced themselves from Bihi's military approach to Las Anod crisis. Notably, two Dhulbahante clan members, Abdirisq Ibrahim Mohamed "Attash" (founder of Waberi political association and former telecommunications minister) and Saleban Essa Ahmed "Xaglatoosiye" (head of another nascent political association), around 7 March announced their withdrawal from Somaliland politics and called for Somaliland forces to leave Las Anod. Vice chairman of Waddani opposition party, Ahmed Omar Haji Hamarje, 12 March accused Bihi of using Las Anod conflict to delay elections originally scheduled for Nov 2022. Somaliland's VP Abdirahman Abdilahi Ismail mid-March accused House Speaker Abdirisq Khalif, who has long voiced opposition to govt's approach to Las Anod crisis, of having "crossed the line" by allegedly supporting secessionism.

➡ **South Sudan Tensions between President Kiir and VP Machar escalated after Kiir fired ministers, violence persisted, and UN extended mission mandate.**

Kiir fired defence and interior ministers, triggering political crisis. In hugely provocative move aimed at undercutting VP Machar, President Kiir 3 March sacked Defence Minister Angelina Teny, Machar's wife, and Interior Minister Mahmoud Solomon; Kiir same day removed defence ministry from Machar's portfolio, replacing it with interior ministry. Opposition next day condemned move, saying it violated 2018 peace agreement. Kiir and Machar 10 March held meeting in capital Juba that ended in deadlock. In another breach of peace deal, Kiir 29 March appointed member of his own party, Chol Thon Balok, as defence minister. Still, immediate return to major conflict remains unlikely. Meanwhile, Rome peace talks between govt and holdout opposition groups 20 March resumed, but sides failed to agree on agenda and 24 March adjourned talks until May.

Kiir moved to consolidate control over political base and security forces. Kiir 3 March reorganised cabinet in Warrap state, removing leaders close to potential rival Akol Koor Kuch, director of Internal Bureau of the National Security Services; 8 March fired FM and Warrap politician Mayiik Ayii Deng. Kiir 13 March reconfigured South Sudan People's Defence Forces leadership to ward off threats to his rule, elevating commanders close to his inner circle with ties to Sudan's military regime.

Violence persisted in several states. In Jonglei state, unknown gunmen 16 March killed at least 15 civilians at Thiep fishing site between Ulang and Akobo counties. In Western Bahr al-Ghazal state, leftover mortar shell 16 March exploded, killing at least ten in Jur River county. In Jonglei state, unknown assailants 17 March ambushed over 100 humanitarian trucks, killing two. In Upper Nile state, unknown assailant 26 March detonated hand grenade, killing one in Malakal town.

UN extended mission mandate. UN Special Envoy for South Sudan Nicholas Haysom 6 March called 2023 "make or break" year for South Sudan with "fast-closing window of opportunity" to create conditions for 2024 elections. Security Council 15 March renewed mandate of UN Mission in South Sudan for one year, with increased emphasis on civilian protection.

➔ **Sudan Civilians announced ambitious timeline for transition to civilian rule, "Phase II" negotiations continued at slow pace, and tensions between military leaders reached worrying heights.**

Civilian leaders announced ambitious timeline for transition. Civilian groups that signed Dec 2022 Framework Agreement, as well as military and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), 19 March convened in capital Khartoum, along with Trilateral Mechanism led by UN Mission in Sudan, African Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development. Civilian leaders announced ambitious timeline to sign final agreement on political transition by 1 April, adopt transitional constitution 6 April and form civilian transitional govt 11 April; they also formed 11-member committee composed of nine pro-democracy leaders, one army representative and one RSF representative to draft final agreement on political transition by 27 March, but committee missed deadline, indicating (along with other signs, such as stalled "Phase II" negotiations, see below) that political impasse could drag on.

"Phase II" negotiations dragged on. "Phase II" consultations among civilian groups on outstanding issues, including transitional justice and security sector reform, continued. Notably, Trilateral Mechanism 11-18 March organised workshops on transitional justice in South Kordofan state, Darfur region and Khartoum. Key stakeholders who reject Framework Agreement, including FFC-Democratic Bloc, Democratic Unionist Party and traditional leaders such as Beja chief Sayed Tirik, continued to boycott process, hampering progress.

Tensions between Burhan and Hemedti spiked. Longstanding tensions between army chief and de facto head of state Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Sovereign Council deputy and RSF leader Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti" escalated, fanning fears of civil war as leaders early March mobilised respective forces in and around Khartoum. Hemedti 7 March criticised military leaders for clinging to power, deepening crisis. Burhan and Hemedti 11 March met in Khartoum, agreeing to de-escalate tensions and establish joint committee to oversee security throughout country.

In other important developments. Sudan 9 March opened border with Central African Republic after two-month closure. According to UN humanitarian agency, tribal clashes 23 March erupted in West Darfur state, killing six and forcing 30,000 to flee to neighbouring Chad.

Sahel

➔ **Burkina Faso** As levels of jihadist violence remained high across country, civil society accused govt forces of serious abuses on civilians.

Jihadist violence remained widespread, taking heavy toll on civilians. In North region, suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) militants 2 March killed 12 civilians in Aorema village (Yatenga province); 13 March allegedly killed 16 civilians in Hargo village (Loroum province). In neighbouring Sahel region, suspected Islamic State Sahel Province (IS-Sahel) 4 March killed at least ten civilians in Bani town (Seno province). In Centre-North region, govt forces 12 March killed at least 20 suspected JNIM militants who attacked food convoy and military escort between Kongoussi and Bourzanga towns (Bam province); and attack by unidentified jihadists 22 March left four soldiers, ten civilians auxiliaries (VDPs) and around 20 jihadists dead in Zorkoum locality (Sanmatenga province). In Boucle du Mouhoun region (west), suspected JNIM ambush on govt forces and VDPs 4 March left 20 militants, 11 govt and allied forces and one civilian dead in Zaba village (Nayala province). In Centre-East region, suspected JNIM fighters 13 March attacked Toabin village (Boulgou province), killing around ten civilians and forcing villagers to flee. Authorities imposed 30-day state of emergency in 22 provinces from 30 March.

Army faced new allegations of abuses on civilians. Armed forces 9 March said operations to recapture territory lost to jihadists in North, Centre-North and East regions in recent days left 112 militants and 11 soldiers dead. Allegations of civilian deaths however cast doubt on official toll. Notably, local NGO Collective against Impunity and Stigmatisation of Communities (CISC) 10 March alleged armed forces and VDPs 8 March killed at least 20 villagers in ethnic Fulani village of Toessin-Foulbè (Bam province, Centre-North). Local human rights organisations including CISC accused authorities of arbitrarily arresting and forcibly recruiting civil society representatives into volunteer forces, notably Boukaré Ouédraogo on 22 March.

Ouagadougou took new steps against French media. Authorities 27 March suspended France 24 broadcasts after news channel interviewed head of al-Qaeda in North Africa; 31 March summoned correspondents from French dailies *Le Monde* and *Libération*, gave them 24 hours to leave.

➔ **Mali** Authorities postponed constitutional referendum, missing first deadline on timetable to return to constitutional rule; jihadist violence and army operations took heavy toll on civilians.

Bamako postponed constitutional referendum, cracked down on critics. Transitional govt 10 March announced constitutional referendum originally due 19 March would be “slightly” delayed, notably to install subdivisions of election management body in all regions, as recommended during 2021 national dialogue;

however reaffirmed commitment to holding presidential election in Feb 2024 as agreed with regional body ECOWAS. Meanwhile, security forces 13 March arrested radio and television host and civil society activist Ras Bath two days after he described death in custody of former PM Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga in 2022 as “assassination”; 15 March detained influencer “Rose Vie Chère” on charges including “inciting rebellion” days after she denounced “failure” of interim authorities.

Govt accused northern armed groups of degrading Algiers peace agreement. In letter to Algeria dated 24 Feb and leaked 1 March, Malian authorities denounced “flagrant violations” of 2015 Algiers peace agreement by signatory armed groups, notably coalition of former rebel groups Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), accusing them of collaborating with jihadist groups. CMA did not officially respond to allegations.

Jihadist violence persisted in north. In Ménaka region, Islamic State Sahel Province (IS-Sahel) and al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) 1 March clashed near Agare Mbaou locality; each group claimed killing dozens of rivals. In Gao region, presumed JNIM elements 9 March killed eight civilians near Wabaria village; IS-Sahel 14 March launched attacks in Anchawadi commune, leaving eight civilians and four pro-govt militiamen dead. Over 400 vehicles belonging to signatory armed groups 7 March reportedly gathered near Anefis town, Kidal region, likely in preparation for operations against IS-Sahel.

Abuses against civilians continued amid military operations in centre. In Mopti region, Malian and Russian paramilitary Wagner Group forces 6 March reportedly killed five civilians and arrested at least a dozen during operation in Sossobe-Togoro village; Malian air force 7 March carried out airstrikes allegedly targeting ethnic Fulani hamlets between Kilimpo and Koko villages, reportedly leaving a dozen civilians dead.

➡ **Niger** **Security forces conducted large-scale counter-insurgency operations, and Niamey continued to strengthen security cooperation with regional and international partners.**

Govt forces stepped up operations against jihadists in Diffa, Tillabery regions. In Diffa region (south east), armed forces around 11 March reportedly killed about 30 suspected Boko Haram (JAS faction) combatants near Nigerian border in Diffa department, and arrested 960 militants and family members; week of 13-19 March reportedly killed around 20 and arrested 83 suspected combatants of Boko Haram splinter group Islamic State West Africa Province in N’Guigmi department. Also in Diffa, suspected JAS elements 11 March killed nine civilians abducted two days prior near Toumour village (Bosso department). In Tillabery region (south west), presumed Islamic State Sahel Province (IS-Sahel) 1 March killed one civilian in Ayorou commune (Tillabery department); al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims 4 March attacked police station in Makalondi village (Torodi department), killing one civilian; govt 24 March reported that combined air-ground operation previous week killed 79 jihadist militants (likely IS-Sahel) in Banibangou area and across border in Mali’s Hamakat area.

Authorities pursued regional and international diplomacy. In sign of possible rapprochement between Niamey and Bamako, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Salifou Mody 9 March met with Malian Interim President Col. Goïta in Mali’s capital

Bamako; Gen. Mody reportedly asked Mali to allow Nigerien forces to pursue jihadists into Mali. Niger's National Security Council same day announced closure of land border with Mali's Ménaka region in attempt to hamper cross-border militancy. President Bazoum 13 March travelled to Benin and 20 March to Togo to discuss security and economic cooperation with his counterparts. Meanwhile, in first-ever visit to Niger by top U.S. diplomat, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 16 March met with Bazoum in capital Niamey.

West Africa

➔ Benin Sporadic jihadist violence continued in north while govt met with allies to discuss security cooperation.

Suspected jihadist violence persisted along borders with Burkina Faso and Niger. In Atakora department, army 5-6 March intervened to repel suspected jihadist attack in Nouari village, Matéri commune; incident reportedly left one civilian killed and another injured. In Alibori department, suspected jihadists overnight 14-15 March killed one civilian in Mamassy-Peulh village, Karimama commune, near border with Niger. Security forces overnight 28-29 March reportedly ambushed suspected jihadists in Kandi commune (also Alibori), with ensuing clashes leaving three militants and one soldier dead. Authorities 7 March extended curfew already in place in Matéri and Coby communes since Feb to seven other communes in Alibori and Atakora departments.

Govt discussed cooperation with allies to contain jihadist threat. Paris-based news outlet Africa Intelligence 2 March reported that negotiations to deploy Rwandan contingent in Benin have been put on hold. U.S. Under Sec State for Arms Control and International Security, Bonnie Jenkins, 7-9 March met with high-ranking govt and military officials in capital Cotonou to discuss strengthening capacity of Beninese armed forces. President Talon 13 March met with Nigerien President Bazoum in Cotonou; counterparts reportedly discussed joint security issues (see Niger).

➔ Côte d'Ivoire Political tensions flared between President Ouattara and former President Gbagbo; govt donated military equipment to Burkina Faso to help contain jihadist advance.

Legal proceedings against opposition militants rekindled political tensions. Court in economic capital Abidjan 9 March sentenced 26 supporters of Laurent Gbagbo's African People's Party-Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI) to two years in prison for "disturbing public order"; militants were detained late Feb during gathering in Abidjan to protest investigation targeting PPA-CI Sec Gen Damana Pickass. PPA-CI 10 March condemned "arbitrary decision", which was "likely to jeopardize the national reconciliation process". Appeal court in Abidjan 22 March commuted sentence to suspended prison terms, resulting in all 26 supporters' release few days later.

Henri-Konan Bédié's party held extraordinary congress amid internal rifts. During extraordinary congress in Abidjan, Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) 30 March named historical leader, former President Bédié, as sole candidate for PDCI presidency at next party congress in June. Bédié same day urged party members to

unite to win 2025 presidential election, amid calls from within party for 88-year-old leader to withdraw and series of defections of PDCI officials to ruling party. In presence of Gbagbo, Bédié also suggested that alliances could be forged with other parties.

Govt boosted cooperation with Burkina Faso to contain jihadist expansion. Govt around 18 March donated around \$3.5mn worth of military equipment to neighbouring Burkina Faso. French news outlet *Jeune Afrique* 20 March reported Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire were planning to hold joint military operation along shared border, which reopened in Feb after years-long closure due to Covid-19. Meanwhile, army 1-15 March took part in U.S. annual counter-terrorism training for African forces staged in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

➔ **Guinea Religious figures launched new mediation initiative between interim govt and opposition; relations with ECOWAS remained tense.**

Govt and opposition engaged in fragile talks as part of new mediation initiative. Govt's General Secretary for Religious Affairs Karamo Diawara, Grand Imam of Conakry Mamadou Saliou Camara and other religious figures 5-6 March met with representatives of *Forces Vives de Guinée* (FVG) – large opposition coalition including outlawed National Front for the Defence of the Constitution, former President Condé's Rally of the Guinean People and Cellou Dalein Diallo's Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea – as part of new effort to foster dialogue with transitional govt. FVG 8 March postponed anti-govt demonstration planned for 9 March to “give negotiations a chance”. Authorities 11 March briefly detained two FVG members, including prominent civil society activist Abdoul Sacko, in capital Conakry on undisclosed charges. FVG 13 March met with PM Bernard Goumou and requested end of legal proceedings against Sacko as pre-condition for negotiations. Authorities next day ended legal proceedings against Sacko, prompting FVG to suspend demonstration scheduled for 20 March. FVG around 25 March designated six representatives to discuss prerequisites for dialogue with govt.

Govt at loggerheads with ECOWAS over detention of former ministers. Paris-based news outlet Africa Intelligence 17 March revealed series of communications 28 Feb-13 March between West African regional bloc ECOWAS's court of justice and Conakry over continued detention of three Condé-era ministers, including former PM Ibrahima Kassory Fofana, who were arrested in April 2022 for alleged financial fraud; regional court reportedly requested defence case statement outlining officials' situation. All three former ministers 15 March refused to appear before Economic and Financial Offences Court in Conakry, denouncing “targeted and repressive witch hunt”; court postponed audience to 20 March, then to April.

➔ **Nigeria Opposition turned to court to challenge election of ruling party's Bola Tinubu as president, while violent incidents marred governorship elections; jihadist, criminal and separatist violence continued.**

Tinubu won presidency with record-low votes, violence marred governorship elections. Electoral Commission 1 March declared ruling All Progressive Congress's Bola Tinubu winner of presidential election with 36% of votes, followed by Peoples Democratic Party's Atiku Abubakar (28%) and Labour Party's Peter Obi (24%). Obi

20 March and Abubakar next day challenged result at presidential election petition tribunal. If confirmed, Tinubu would be Nigeria's first president to take office with less than 50% of votes cast and after losing main political and economic centres, Abuja, Lagos and Kano. Meanwhile, violent incidents during governorship elections, 18 March left at least 29 people dead; thugs attacked polling stations and destroyed election material, in some cases stopping people from casting votes, especially in Lagos and Rivers states.

Jihadists remained active in North East. In Borno state, suspected Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) 8 March attacked Mukdolo village, Ngala area, killing around 29 fishermen. Military said troops 9-23 March killed 35 jihadists and freed 200 captives, while 1,506 jihadists and their families surrendered in Borno. Meanwhile, ISWAP around 1 March reportedly killed scores of rival Boko Haram (BH) fighters in Konduga area.

Criminal and other attacks continued in North West and North Central. In Zamfara state, police 10 March rescued 14 abducted people in Munhaye forest, Tsafe area. In Kaduna state, unidentified gunmen 11-14 March killed at least 37 people in two separate attacks in Zangon Kataf area. In Niger state, unidentified gunmen 14 March abducted about 60 people in Paikoro area, later killing at least five; military around 30 March launched air and ground operation against suspected cattle raiders in Mariga area, with unknown casualties.

Biafra agitation and other violence continued at lower intensity in South East. In Anambra, Enugu and Imo states, unidentified gunmen 4-27 March attacked police and civil defence corps, killing at least six. Security forces 9-30 March killed at least 15 and arrested 32 suspected members of outlawed separatist group, Indigenous People of Biafra/Eastern Security Network in South East.