



CrisisWatch 2024 – March Trends and April Alerts

Africa

Central Africa

➔ **Cameroon Anglophone conflict persisted while jailed separatist leaders appealed for Nigerian help; political tensions bubbled ahead of 2025 elections.**

Low-level violence persisted in Anglophone regions. Separatist groups continued to enforce weekly “Monday ghost town” strikes and engage in skirmishes with govt troops, resulting in casualties on both sides. Notably, separatist militia 15 March ambushed govt forces patrol in Wainama village, Bui division (North West region), causing unconfirmed number of casualties. Meanwhile, jailed Anglophone separatist leaders turned to Nigeria for help, as prominent figure Sisiku Ayuk Tabe and nine others 2 March petitioned Nigeria’s National Assembly to support their release; petitioners were extradited from Nigeria in Jan 2018 and following year Cameroonian military tribunal sentenced them to life imprisonment; in 2019 court in Nigerian capital Abuja ruled arrest and deportation illegal, although then-Nigerian President Buhari took no action. Petition highlighted links between Anglophone conflict and Nigeria, as Nigerian Biafra separatists 5-8 March claimed to have attacked Cameroonian soldiers in Bakassi Peninsula.

Far North violence decreased slightly although sporadic incidents persisted. Soldiers 4 March successfully repelled Boko Haram attack in Kolofata commune, Mayo Sava department, and 11 March killed two suspected jihadists caught stealing food from farm in Nguetchewe town, Mayo Tsanaga department.

Political positioning continued ahead of 2025 presidential election. Ruling party tightened grip on political landscape while opposition factions contemplated united front for polls; but plans over potential coalition threatened after govt 12 March banned two emerging opposition groupings, Alliance Politique pour le Changement (APC) and Alliance pour une Transition Politique (APT), accusing them of clandestine activities and prohibiting them from further political actions. Trial of seventeen individuals, including former foreign intelligence chief Léopold Maxime Eko Eko and pro-govt business mogul Amougou Belinga, charged with Jan 2023 abduction, torture and murder of whistleblowing journalist Martinez Zogo began 25 March; case, which has so far been marked by administrative interference reflecting broader power struggles within govt, will likely be key political issue in lead-up to 2025 elections.

➡ **Central African Republic Political tensions rose over arrest of opposition leader; army clashed with rebels in north east while self-defence group resisted disarmament.**

Opposition faced further govt crackdown ahead of 2025 elections. Police 3 March arrested Crépin Mbolli-Goumba – lawyer and key figure in opposition coalition Republican Bloc for the Defence of the Constitution (BRDC) – at airport of capital Bangui and detained him for 72 hours on charges of contempt of court over his Feb accusations of judiciary corruption. After BRDC condemned arrest and lawyers called for court boycott, security forces 6 March released Mbolli-Goumba pending trial; court 27 March sentenced him to one-year suspended prison sentence and fine; arrest raised further concerns over govt’s attempts to limit opposition in lead-up to 2025 presidential elections.

Army clashes with rebels continued in north east. Clash between military and 3R fighters near Yaloké town 4 March killed soldier and civilian, leading to intercommunal unrest in local community with two mosques attacked. Coalition of Patriots for Change rebels 7 March attacked Ndah town, forcing army withdrawal until Russian paramilitary Wagner group intervened with airstrikes. Wagner supported military through increased deployment in north east amid speculation that U.S. private security company Bancroft has presence in region’s rural areas.

Tensions persisted in south east as self-defence militia refused to disarm. After late Feb violent clashes between Unity for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) rebels and Azandé Ani Kpi Gbé (AAKG) ethnic self-defence militia in several villages in Haut-Mbomou prefecture that caused at least ten casualties, Defence Minister Rameaux Claude Bireaux 5 March visited regional capital Obo to persuade AAKG to disarm; group, however, demanded UPC lay down weapons first. Next day, Wagner mercenaries arrived in Obo and exchange of fire 14 March between AAKG and govt soldiers in city raised concerns over potential escalation of clashes.

In other important developments. Amid deepening of Russian influence, President Touadéra 1 March finished three-day visit to Serbian capital Belgrade, an ally of Moscow, culminating in three cooperation agreements covering diplomacy, defence, and mining. Wagner mercenaries 27 March conducted police checkpoints in Bangui.

➡ **Chad Aftermath of death of staunch govt opponent continued to roil internal politics; opposition struggled to mobilise for May presidential elections.**

Tensions remained high after death of President’s cousin Yaya Dillo. Conflicting reports about Dillo, who led Socialist Party without Borders (PSF) and died in security forces shooting late Feb at party headquarters in capital N’Djamena, sparked speculation about his demise and divisions within ruling elite. Govt 1 March insisted Dillo was killed while resisting lawful arrest but opposition same day labelled killing an execution; authorities 1 March reportedly demolished PSF headquarters, potentially eliminating evidence, and although PM Masra 4 March pledged international investigation, much remained unclear.

Democratic opposition struggled to build political weight against Déby. Ahead of 6 May presidential vote, Constitutional Council 24 March approved ten candidates, and excluded ten others including prominent opponents of military-led govt, notably

Nassour Ibrahim Neguy Coursami and Rakhis Ahmat Saleh over “irregularities” in their applications; transitional President Mahamad Déby and recently-appointed PM Masra both cleared to run for office. Earlier, opposition struggled to mobilise behind one figure with some parties supporting Coursami’s candidacy and others that of influential former PM Padacké.

Security in hinterland remained stable, but sporadic violence persisted. Unidentified gunmen 1 March attacked community radio journalist’s home near Mangalmé town (Guera region), killing journalist and two family members. Inter-communal clashes remained prominent; tensions in Djourf Al-Ahmar department (Ouaddaï region) escalated as Mouro and Birgit communities 17 March clashed as part of decades-long tensions, with govt reporting 42 civilians killed during unrest. Meanwhile, govt 25 March announced explosive device killed seven soldiers near Lake Chad in west, saying they suspected Boko Haram jihadists from Nigeria.

In another important development. In wake of Déby’s Jan visit to Russia, France attempted re-engagement with govt; French President Emmanuel Macron’s envoy Jean-Marie Bockel 7 March reassured Déby about continued presence of French troops, with force crucial for regime stability but unpopular with some political actors and civil society groups.

➔ **Gabon Regional body for Central African states lifted sanctions and re-admitted govt while national dialogue preparations continued.**

Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) bloc readmitted govt. Body 9 March decided to lift sanctions on govt and said Libreville could rejoin after its membership was suspended Sept 2023 following previous month’s coup that removed President Ali Bongo.

Preparations for national dialogue grew amid conflicting views about its nature. In 8 March decree, transitional President Gen. Nguema announced 2-30 April convening of “inclusive” national dialogue in capital Libreville, as part of preparation for new Constitution. However, opposition raised concerns over issues with representation at dialogue and asked for postponement.

Great Lakes

➔ **Burundi Main opposition party faced disarray amid contention over leadership and govt-instigated fragmentation; reports emerged of ruling party youth wing receiving further military training.**

Govt-sponsored efforts ousted leader of main opposition party. Opposition fell into disarray as faction of National Congress for Freedom (CNL) removed party head Agathon Rwasa, with govt recognising parallel leadership. Interior Minister Martin Niteretse denied Rwasa permission for 2 March extraordinary congress, instead allowing ten govt-backed CNL dissidents to convene one in Ngozi province 10 March while Rwasa was not in country. Delegates chose Nestor Girukwishaka, senior executive allegedly close to ruling party, as new CNL head, while Niteretse 18 March officially recognised him as party’s President. Police, intelligence services and ruling-party youth wing Imbonerakure barred pro-Rwasa MPs from attending meeting, with human rights group Ligue Iteka reporting 42 CNL members arrested during

day. CNL described congress as “masquerade” while Rwaswa said govt had worked with “political mercenaries” from party as ploy to sideline him ahead of 2025 legislative elections; govt interference left CNL adrift with two separate leaderships under Girukwishaka and Rwaswa.

Imbonerakure continued to bolster force with alleged paramilitary training. Locals 6 March reported Imbonerakure members, predominantly from western provinces, undertook military-style training in Cibitoke province, with reports of gunshots and armed parades. Defence ministry said exercises were military training for soldiers but local sources suggested events were paramilitary drills for ruling party youth wing.

In another important development. Police 17 March discovered decapitated body in Bukinanyana commune in Cibitoke province and arrested four Imbonerakure members as suspects.

➔ **DR Congo Ongoing clashes spread northward in North Kivu as ruling party head accused former President Kabila of supporting insurgents; Angola continued DRC-Rwanda diplomatic efforts.**

Clashes between govt-allied forces and M23 rebels in North Kivu continued. As front froze west of provincial capital Goma despite sporadic mortar exchanges, M23 6 March expanded assault northward; rebels posed increasing threat to Lubero town and seized control of several others including Nyanzale 6 March, despite resistance from pro-govt Wazalendo militia groups. Fighting triggered further displacement with UN official 13 March saying violence had displaced 250,000 in one month. Strategic town Sake (25km north west of Goma) remained under Wazalendo and army control, although largely deserted; military blamed Rwandan troops for 16 March mortar shell that wounded eight UN peacekeepers in Sake town. Meanwhile, after 28 March meeting in Rutshuru in which several people linked to political movement of former President Kabila appeared alongside Corneille Nangaa, head of pro-M23 politico-military group Congo River Alliance, ruling party chief Augustin Kabaya accused Kabila of supporting insurgents, claiming former president had fled country.

Angola attempted to induce DRC-Rwanda de-escalation of crisis. Angolan President Joao Lourenço 11 March hosted Rwandan President Paul Kagame in Angola’s capital Luanda to discuss crisis, mirroring Congolese counterpart President Tshisekedi’s Feb trip to Angola; later, FMs from all three countries 21 March convened in Luanda, reportedly attempting to organise future summit between Kagame and Tshisekedi.

Other armed groups continued to take heavy toll on civilians in Ituri and North Kivu. In Ituri, clashes between CODECO militia, which claims to defend interests of Lendu ethnic group, and ZAIRE militia from rival Hema people 5 March claimed seven lives in Djugu territory. In North Kivu, according to military authorities Islamic State-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces militants 23-24 March killed at least thirteen civilians in twin attacks on Sayo district of Beni city, setting houses ablaze.

In other important developments. Constitutional Court 12 March passed verdicts on electoral disputes from Dec parliamentary election, invalidating over 40 results, and

predominantly benefiting pro-Tshisekedi ruling coalition. Govt 13 March announced resumption of executions citing need to combat perceived treachery and treason amid M23 conflict, spurring international condemnation.

➔ **Rwanda Authorities expressed concerns over military intervention of southern African regional body in eastern DR Congo (DRC).**

In letter to AU Chair, FM Biruta 3 March expressed reservations about AU support to southern African bloc (SADC) mission in DRC, alleging force's collaboration with DRC forces and anti-Rwanda armed groups carried risk of exacerbating conflict; Biruta urged political process rather than military intervention; AU next day, however, endorsed SADC mission. Meanwhile, in 25 March interview, President Kagame addressed accusations of Rwandan military presence in eastern DRC, citing factors including anti-Kigali Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) as potential reasons for such presence, without directly acknowledging or denying existence of Rwandan troops in region. While stating readiness for dialogue over future of eastern DRC, Kagame criticised Congolese authorities and also South Africa (who contribute troops to SADC mission) for collaborating with FDLR. Earlier, Kagame 11 March visited Angolan capital Luanda to discuss DRC crisis amid Angolan diplomatic efforts (see DR Congo).

➔ **Uganda Political manoeuvring intensified ahead of 2026 general elections, with appointment of President Museveni's son as army chief.**

Inter-govt tensions over succession continued. President Museveni 21 March appointed son, Lt-Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, as head of military, in move widely seen as grooming him for succession but also stalling Muhoozi's informal campaign for presidency in 2026, when Museveni is expected to seek re-election. In lead up to appointment, Muhoozi continued campaigning efforts for newly formed Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU) as part of his presidential ambitions, including in Masaka district 15 March.

Authorities warned that Allied Democratic Force remained threat. Military 18 March heightened alertness after receiving intelligence that suspected Islamic-State-affiliated Allied Democratic Force fighters had entered country from DR Congo, warning against large gatherings in churches, bars and other public places.

In other important developments. Viral social media campaign exposed corruption within parliament; under banner #UgandaParliamentExhibition, leaks from gov't's financial system made public on social media sparked outrage from late Feb through March; disclosures revealed mass corruption among parliamentarians across political spectrum including misuse of public funds on personal projects, wastage on foreign travel and excessive spending on partisan political activities. Meanwhile, court 12 March dismissed LGBTQ+ rights advocacy group Sexual Minorities Uganda's petition seeking gov't registration amid ongoing tensions around anti-LGBTQ+ laws.

East and Southern Africa

➔ Kenya Al-Shabaab continued to drive insecurity, while police deployment to Haiti faced setbacks.

Al-Shabaab militants remained threat, particularly along porous Somalia border. Group of Al-Shabaab insurgents 2 March crossed border and attempted to establish temporary camp in Fafi area of Garissa county; security forces subsequently killed five and arrested four group members. Bomb at hotel 25 March killed at least two police officers and civilian in Mandera town. Meanwhile, court 7 March sentenced two Somali men, arrested in 2018 in possession of explosives and accused of planning to bomb key sites in capital Nairobi, to 25 years in prison.

Nairobi-led multinational mission to Haiti faced delays. Escalation in Haiti (see Haiti) caused setback to govt's deployment of 1,000 Kenyan police to lead UN-backed mission. After acting Haitian PM Ariel Henry resigned, Foreign Ministry Principal Secretary Korir Sing'Oei 12 March announced govt would wait until new administration is in place before deploying police; President Ruto next day, however, indicated Nairobi would still lead mission. Earlier, govt 1 March signed reciprocity agreement with Haiti in order to counter Jan-announced objection by Nairobi High Court.

Political tensions continued, including accusations govt curtailing freedoms. Busia County Senator Okiya Omtatah 22 March said "goons" attacked his vehicle with stones after he left court, but he escaped unharmed; senator had been prominent in holding govt accountable, including over housing levy; earlier, Ruto 19 March signed amended housing bill (that includes new tax) into law, bypassing court's late Jan decision to suspend measures as unconstitutional amid continued executive-judiciary tensions. Meanwhile, Interior Cabinet Secretary Kithure Kindiki 18 March said police would arrest anyone heckling political leaders, raising concerns over restrictions on political rights and free speech.

➔ Mozambique Jihadist attacks continued in northern Cabo Delgado province, although slowed mid-month; Oct general election preparations progressed haltingly.

Islamic State-affiliated militants focused on Ibo and Quissanga districts. Islamic State Mozambique Province (ISMP) continued to target security forces and civilians in Cabo Delgado province with dozens of attacks between late Feb and 6 March; militants also appeared to be systemically looting areas and re-supplying its base in Mucojo town, Macomia district, including taking food and goods from Quissanga town 2 March; next day, insurgents attacked nearby Quirimba island, Ibo district, leaving nine soldiers dead. ISMP fighters involved in Feb assault on southern Chiúre district returned north early March; free movement of militants highlighted weakness of security forces, whose blanket orders to evacuate some areas worsened humanitarian situation and angered locals. UN 8 March reported over 110,000 displaced since uptick in militant operations began late Dec. Attacks subsequently slowed mid-month amid fasting for religious month of Ramadan that began 11 March. Heavy rains which limited security operations may also have curbed militants' movements; end of religious holiday on 10 April and of rainy season could see levels of violence rise again in coming weeks. Meanwhile, govt 13 March said it

had identified new leadership in ISMP, mainly based in Macomia and Quissanga districts. Earlier, President Nyusi 3 March announced Algeria pledged support in anti-terror fight in Cabo Delgado.

Preparation for Oct polls faced challenges. Electoral commission 15 March began registering voters, open until 28 April; insecurity and technical glitches delayed process in some areas including parts of Cabo Delgado, while reports emerged that officials were prioritising voters from ruling FRELIMO party; meanwhile, pro-govt Naparama militia members 8 March beat to death three election officials in Chiúre after mistaking them for insurgents. Both FRELIMO and main opposition RENAMO continued to struggle to designate respective presidential candidates.

➡ **South Africa Political tensions increased ahead of May general elections, with continued electoral violence in KwaZulu-Natal province.**

Ahead of May elections, tensions ran particular high between ruling African National Congress (ANC) and former President Zuma's newly formed uMkhonto weSizwe party (MKP), predominately in key battleground KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province. Amid inflammatory statements and rhetoric, electoral violence continued to plague build-up to polls; notably, in KZN capital Durban, unidentified gunmen 2 March killed MKP organiser in Umlazi township, while ANC accused MKP of being responsible for aggravating strike by municipal workers in eThekweni municipality; industrial action ran late Feb to mid-March and caused unrest and destruction of infrastructure, while on-duty municipal worker died after strikers allegedly attacked her. Also, ANC members 16 March clashed with members of opposition Inkhata Freedom Party (IFP) during cultural ceremony in KwaNongoma town, injuring sixteen. Election commission 28 March announced Zuma barred from being candidate in election due to 2021 conviction for defying court order, further raising political tensions. Amid polling suggesting ANC may get under 50% of vote nationally for first time since transition from apartheid system to democracy in 1994, deputy secretary general of party Nomvula Mokonyane 13 March said ANC not in talks over coalition.

➡ **Zimbabwe Govt crackdown continued with mass evictions and discussion of law restricting civil society; relations with U.S. strained amid adjustment of sanctions.**

Repression continued including removals of those living on state-owned land. Govt kept up campaign to remove people living in "illegal" dwellings on state-owned land, with police arresting thousands of settlers since measures began mid-Jan, drawing opposition from civil society as well as some in ruling ZANU-PF party; criminal actors took advantage of situation, with local NGO 11 March reporting gang had attempted to violently enforce evictions in village with gold mining opportunities in Insiza district, Matabeleland South province, leading to clashes with villagers. Meanwhile, parliament 1 March began process to pass controversial Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Bill that critics argue will be used to control civil society organisations.

Washington lifted broad sanctions and imposed targeted ones. U.S. treasury 4 March removed broad program of sanctions, imposed new penalties against eleven people, including President Mnangagwa and his wife, and three companies for corruption and human rights abuses under Global Magnitsky measures;

spokesperson for Mnangagwa – who became first sitting head of state to be sanctioned under program that blocks access to U.S. visas, property and services – 6 March condemned “illegal coercive measures”. In sign of worsening tensions, U.S. aid chief Samantha Power 8 March decried “unacceptable” intimidation following alleged Feb harassment, detainment and deportation of U.S. aid staff in capital Harare; govt accused workers of interfering and violating sovereignty.

Horn of Africa

➔ **Eritrea Asmara rejected UN human rights official’s accusation it maintains troops in Ethiopia’s Tigray region, and President Isaias Afwerki hosted his Somali counterpart amid deepening bilateral ties.**

Govt denied maintaining troop presence in Ethiopia. Ministry of Information 15 March rejected late Feb statement from UN Assistant Sec-Gen for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris to Human Rights Council, in which she accused Asmara of maintaining troops in Tigray, where they have committed human rights violations; Asmara accused official of “parroting” disinformation of Tigray People’s Liberation Front (ruling party in Ethiopia’s Tigray region) and denied maintaining troop presence in Tigray.

Eritrea and Somalia strengthened relations. Somali President Mohamud 17-18 March visited capital Asmara in second trip to country since Ethiopia 1 Jan signed Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland to build naval port. He and President Isaias Afwerki 17 March discussed issues including bilateral relations, counterterrorism and regional affairs as pair sought to deepen ties, possibly to counter Ethiopia’s regional ambitions.

➔ **Ethiopia Hostilities in Amhara intensified, insurgency continued in Oromia region, and tensions simmered between govt and Tigray leaders over slow implementation of peace process.**

Army struggled to contain Amhara nationalist militias amid worsening insecurity. Fighting between federal forces and Amhara nationalist militias known as Fano reached major towns for first time since hostilities intensified in Aug 2023; notably, Fano 29 Feb-1 March attacked regional capital Bahir Dar. Fano members 3 March killed four security officers, including Shewa Robit town’s police commander and head of Peace and Security Office, in North Shewa Zone. Fano 5 March confirmed kidnapping 270 youths from South Ethiopia People’s Region allegedly affiliated with govt forces. Conflict spilled into Oromia, raising fears of interethnic conflict; notably, Fano 7 March reportedly killed at least nine civilians in Oromia’s Dera woreda, North Shewa Zone. Clashes between Oromo and Amhara ethnic militias 9-21 March in Amhara’s Oromo Special Zone and North Shewa Zone killed 27. Deteriorating security crippled economic activity.

Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) made gains as govt shifted attention to Amhara. Govt-insurgent clashes continued in Oromia region. OLA 4 March reportedly made gains in Gelana district, West Guji Zone, forcing hundreds to flee to South Ethiopia People’s Region. In significant shift, govt reportedly planned to redeploy troops from Oromia to Amhara, suggesting it views latter conflict as more pressing.

Situation in Tigray region remained fragile amid halting progress on peace deal. Govt and Tigray regional leaders 11 March expressed commitment to 2022 Pretoria peace agreement during deal's first Strategic Review, held under AU auspices in capital Addis Ababa. Region's ruling party Tigray People's Liberation Front 13 March raised concern about growing trust deficit, however, due to slow implementation of deal, including resolution of disputed territories and removal of Eritrean and Amhara troops from region. Tigray Interim Administration 25 March accused Amhara of incorporating "Tigray land" (referring to disputed territories) "into its educational curriculum and regional map" and called for its reversal. Clashes same day occurred in Amhara-controlled Raya Alamata town, South Tigray Zone; Amhara and Tigray authorities traded blame for violence.

↓ **Somalia Political tensions rose as Puntland suspended recognition of Mogadishu-based central gov't over contentious constitutional review; Al-Shabaab made territorial gains.**

Puntland withdrew recognition of federal gov't over constitutional review process. After parliament 30 March passed first four chapters of draft constitution, Puntland state gov't 31 March revoked "recognition and confidence in" federal gov't institutions; in sign of rising political temperature, Puntland cabinet said it would have power of "independent state" until dispute resolved and new federal system approved through referendum. Earlier, tensions mounted as President Mohamud promoted updated constitution despite lead opposition figures accusing him of seeking to boost his chances at 2026 election; notably, former federal Presidents Sheikh Sharif and Farmajo and current Puntland President Said Deni 22-23 March met in Puntland capital Garowe to discuss opposing proposed changes.

Al-Shabaab took over towns in centre, political dispute turned deadly in Hirshabelle. In Mudug region (centre), group 9-14 March gained control of Amara, Bacadweyne, Caad, Shabellow and Xinlabi towns with no fighting; military abandoned positions after clan militias withdrew from area amid dispute with federal gov't, highlighting ongoing challenge of organising anti-militant operations. Militants 14-15 March also launched attack on hotel in downtown Mogadishu, leading to ten-hour siege with three soldiers and five insurgents reportedly killed. Meanwhile, clashes between Hirshabelle state gov't forces and those calling for separate Hiraan state (one of two regions that make up Hirshabelle) 13 March killed at least six in Beledweyne city; violence came after Hirshabelle-appointed governor of Hiraan region tried to enter city.

Tensions with Ethiopia appeared to publicly ease. Although no major breakthrough reached, Mogadishu and Addis Ababa pursued dialogue to address tensions over Jan-announced Ethiopia-Somaliland port deal. After Kenyan President William Ruto late Feb separately hosted both President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and his Ethiopian counterpart PM Abiy Ahmed, technical teams from Mogadishu and Addis Ababa early March travelled to Kenya's capital Nairobi for shuttle discussions.

In other important developments. Gov't 4 March officially joined East African Community (EAC) regional body. Increase in piracy incidents off Somali coast in Indian Ocean raised concerns of resurgence in attacks on vessels in region.

↑ Somaliland Signing of electoral law ended uncertainty around Nov 2024 party and presidential elections and removed source of tension between govt and opponents.

Approval of bill paves way for vote, opposition welcomed move. President Bihi 9 March signed electoral bill and other related measures into law, ending months of tensions and speculation that polls due to be held Nov 2024 would be delayed. Main opposition party Waddani welcomed developments and Waddani candidate Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi Irro 21 March met Bihi and cabinet members, as sides prepare to move forward with elections where vote for political parties and presidency will be held concurrently.

Troop movements continued but calm remained along Sool region frontline. Govt troops and Dhulbahante clan militias conducted movements along frontline in Sool region; lull in fighting between sides however held.

In another important development. Technical committee aiming to finalise Jan-announced Ethiopia-Somaliland Memorandum of Understanding over sea access and diplomatic recognition conducted meetings with stakeholders, including in coastal areas, at Berbera port and with opposition parties.

➡ South Sudan Disruptions in oil exports harmed economy, raising risk of currency collapse and political turmoil in lead-up to planned December polls; localised clashes persisted.

Lack of oil revenue hurt economy and could fuel political turmoil. Authorities remained unable to restart oil exports following damage in Feb to main oil pipeline, which carries 65-75% of country's crude to market through Sudan; repairing pipeline could prove near impossible due to fighting in Sudan. Disruption of oil production led to collapse of South Sudanese pound against USD from 1100 in early Feb to 2000 by 25 March. Central Bank and Ministry of Finance 29 March announced measures to stabilise exchange market. Economic meltdown and collapse of President Kiir's patronage system could follow if production is not restored and govt is unable to find lender to bail it out.

Array of actors warned about lack of preparedness for polls and risk of violence. Deputy Chairman of Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In Opposition (SPLM-IO), Nathaniel Oyet Perino, 1 March said conditions for credible elections, slated for Dec, were not in place. UN head of peacekeeping operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, 5 March warned of "potential for violence with disastrous consequences" if polls not managed carefully, concluded country is "not ready for elections". Minister of Presidential Affairs 19 March said Kiir rejected extension of transitional period and vowed elections would take place. Coalition of Opposition Parties 25 March filed petition demanding revocation of \$50,000 registration fee for parties registering candidates, move they say is designed to restrict opposition participation.

Intercommunal violence continued. Armed attackers 5 March killed UN Mission in South Sudan staff member in Abiemnhom county, Ruweng Administrative Area. Armed youth suspected of allegiance to Nuer spiritual leader Gai Machiek 9 March reportedly killed nine Misseriya and stole over 300 cattle in Kuerchiedieng village, Unity state. Armed youth suspected to be from Anyuak community 19 March killed

fifteen, including Boma County commissioner, in Nyat village, Greater Pibor Administrative Area.

➔ **Sudan Sudanese army (SAF) made significant gains against paramilitary forces (RSF) and fighting reignited in North Darfur, amid rising risk of famine.**

RSF lost ground amid SAF offensive. SAF recaptured much of Omdurman city from RSF, with its forces 12 March taking control of national radio and television headquarters. Offensive 17 March reached Signal Corps in Bahri city, which risks becoming next epicentre of fighting; SAF could also attempt to retake capital Khartoum, increasing danger of protracted urban warfare. SAF launched multi-pronged offensive into RSF-controlled El Gezira state; paramilitary holds state capital Wad Madani, critical for maintaining its positions in Khartoum. Sudan Liberation Movement under Darfur governor Minni Minawi 24 March announced group was joining SAF to expel RSF from Khartoum and El Gezira. Meanwhile, violence 15 March broke out in North Darfur's capital El Fasher, with SAF conducting airstrikes on RSF positions; fighting could engulf state in conflict, drawing in armed groups from Darfur that have so far remained neutral.

Various diplomatic efforts continued, albeit without clear results. AU High-Level Panel for Sudan 6 March met separately with members of former President Bashir's National Congress Party (NCP) and Forces for Freedom and Change-Democratic Bloc in Egyptian capital Cairo. Panel next day separately met RSF and civilian coalition Taqaddum in Ethiopia; both criticised panel's talks with NCP, indicating challenge of bridging Sudan's polarised political landscape. UN Security Council 8 March urged cessation of hostilities during Muslim holy month Ramadan; RSF next day welcomed call, but SAF 10 March ruled out truce unless RSF leaves civilian locations. U.S. Special Envoy Tom Perriello 11 March embarked on regional tour, 26 March said he hoped for restart of talks around 18 April, though RSF and SAF remained sceptical about U.S. mediation. Rumours circulated of secret RSF-SAF meetings in Cairo, which RSF denied. Regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development 26 March appointed Special Envoy for Sudan.

Humanitarian agencies warned of looming hunger crisis. World Food Program head 6 March warned conflict risks triggering "world's largest hunger crisis", with "over 25 million people across Sudan, South Sudan and Chad trapped in a spiral of deteriorating food security". Integrated Food Security Phase Classification 29 March called for immediate action "to prevent famine".

Sahel

➔ **Burkina Faso Jihadist-related attacks and counter-insurgency operations continued to exact high toll on civilians; govt used forced enrolment to silence opponents and signed security agreement with Mali and Niger.**

High-level violence persisted, with at least 100 civilians reported killed in one day. Following late Feb surge of violence that saw hundreds of civilians killed by jihadist fighters and reportedly state security forces, further conflict reported: special police

and al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) militants 8 March clashed in Piela commune, Gnagna province (East region), resulting in four insurgent deaths, while same day drone strikes killed around ten Islamic State Sahel Province militants near Touka-Bayel village, Seno province (Sahel region). Next day, JNIM attacked Tessoague village, Koulpelogo province (Centre-East region), killing at least 27 including two civilian auxiliaries (VDPs). JNIM militants 26 March attacked govt forces in Sanaba town (Boucle du Mouhoun region), leading to deaths of at least eleven soldiers and twenty insurgents. Meanwhile, reports emerged that suspected soldiers 16 March allegedly killed at least 100 civilians in several villages in Kompienga province (East region) during apparent attempt to relieve area from JNIM blockades in place since 2022; observers suggested attacks may have been retaliation for locals' alleged support to militants and Feb series of jihadist killings.

Govt continued repressive measures against civil society. Concerns grew over authorities forcing opponents to join VDPs following late Feb abduction of Rasmane Zinaba and Bassirou Badjo, activists and members of Balai Citoyen civil group, amid suspicions govt obliged them to enrol with civilian auxiliaries; UN 5 March condemned continued “enforced disappearances” and “forced mobilisation.” Govt 7 March released former FM Ouédraogo, who reported military keepers had told him to spread word about consequences of criticising military authorities; next day Daouda Diallo, another civil society actor forced into VDP enrolment in Dec 2023, also released.

Security agreement announced with Mali and Niger. Alliance of Sahel States 6 March announced creation of joint counterterrorism force to combat regional jihadist insurgency and address shared security needs.

➔ **Mali Govt-sponsored inter-Malian dialogue took initial steps amid ongoing stifling of civic and political rights; jihadist and other armed violence continued.**

Initial phase of dialogue approved, albeit without main rebel and jihadist groups. Piloting Committee 4 March submitted terms of reference for Inter-Malian dialogue process to transitional President Col. Goïta, following approval from representatives from capital Bamako, regions and diaspora; participants agreed on five thematic committees covering peace and reconciliation, security, economic development, geopolitical issues and political reforms. Several key actors remained outside process including main rebel and jihadist groups; govt 8 March imposed initial six-months long financial sanctions on two leaders associated with al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), and four from Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP), coalition of armed groups from 2015 Algiers Accord.

Concerns rose over restrictions on civil and political freedoms. Govt 6 March dissolved influential group Coordination of Movements, Associations and Sympathizers (CMAS) – led by well-known figure and vocal govt critic Imam Mahmoud Dicko – and 13 March shut down Association of Malian Students. National Human Rights Commission 6 March expressed concerns about “serious threats” to political freedoms, especially freedom of association; UN human rights body 13 March also condemned moves. Meanwhile, over 80 political parties and civil

society groups 31 March called for end to transition and organisation of presidential elections as soon as possible.

Violence by jihadist and other armed groups remained high. Notably, Islamic State Sahel Province militants 6 March attacked army base in Labbezanga, Gao region, leaving at least four attackers dead; JNIM shelling targeted airports in Gao city 16 March and Timbuktu city two days later, causing injuries and material damage. Alliance of Sahel States 6 March announced creation of joint counterterrorism force to combat regional jihadist insurgency and address shared security needs. Meanwhile, Dozo militia 8 March reportedly abducted and killed around 30 Fulani near Kingolola village, Segou region.

In other important developments. Hundreds 16 March protested high cost of living and insecurity in Ménaka city. Officials 19 March visited Russia's capital Moscow for discussions on security cooperation and expanding partnership in commerce, transportation, and more.

► **Niger Govt severed military accords with U.S. and moved closer to Sahelian partners; jihadist violence continued.**

Niamey distanced itself militarily from Washington. After U.S. diplomatic delegation 12 March visited capital Niamey and met PM Zeine and others, authorities 16 March “denounced with immediate effect” its military accords with Washington; govt accused delegation of disrespect of diplomatic protocol and intention to limit Niamey's sovereignty in choice of international partners; uncertainty grew over whether 1,000 U.S. military personnel, many based at Agadez military base, will remain in country; govt and U.S. ambassador 27 March discussed future plan for “disengagement” of U.S. forces. Earlier, Alliance of Sahelian States 6 March announced creation of joint counterterrorism force to combat regional jihadist insurgency and address shared security needs.

Jihadist-related violence persisted in Tillabery. In Tillabery region (south west), Islamic State Sahel Province militants 3 March attacked convoy of trucks near Koutougou Haoussa village, killing around seven people and burning seven vehicles; militants 19 March ambushed military position near Teguey town killing 23 soldiers and wounding seventeen, with some 30 assailants killed. In Diffa region (south east), military 13 March killed ten alleged Islamic State West Africa Province militants in airstrike near Assaga village.

In important regional developments. After West African regional bloc ECOWAS lifted sanctions on govt in Feb, land borders between Niger and Nigeria re-opened 22 March; border with Benin, however, remained closed, although 2,000km-long Niger-Benin pipeline began transporting crude oil from Niger's Agadem field to Benin in early March.

West Africa

➔ **Benin** Jihadist violence continued in north, while political tensions remained high over constitutional and electoral reforms.

Jihadist insurgency persisted. Suspected al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) insurgents continued to carry out attacks in northern Alibori, Atacora and Borgou regions. In Karimama commune in Alibori, JNIM 6 March allegedly planted explosive device that killed two civilians in Chutes de Koudou village while police 15 March killed two suspected militants in Karimama town. In Borgou, police 21 March killed three alleged JNIM militants in Angaradebou village, Tchaourou commune.

Tensions between opposition and President Talon's govt continued. Opposition legislators in National Assembly 1-2 March blocked passage of draft revisions to Constitution submitted by ruling party amid persistent concerns that Talon will attempt to run for third term, despite President's claims he will not. Parliament 5 March modified Electoral Code placing tougher conditions on running for presidency, leading to opposition and civil society criticism.

In other important regional developments. Land border between Benin and Niger remained closed despite West African regional bloc ECOWAS lifting sanctions on latter in Feb; however, 2,000km-long Niger-Benin pipeline began transporting crude oil from Niger's Agadem field to Benin in early March while officials from both countries 3-9 March met in Benin to discuss containers with goods for Niger blocked at Cotonou port due to fines.

➔ **Côte d'Ivoire** Jostling continued ahead of 2025 presidential election with announcement of first candidacies.

Opposition party African People's Party-Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI) 9 March announced former President Laurent Gbagbo as candidate for 2025 presidency polls, despite his ineligibility due to 2018 criminal conviction for looting Central Bank of West African States during 2010-2011 post-electoral crisis. Main opposition party Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) leader Tidjane Thiam 11 March confirmed good relations with Gbagbo. Meanwhile Philippe Legré, member of ruling party Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace's (RHDP) executive board and governor of Bas-Sassandra region, 16 March said President Ouattara would be RHDP candidate for 2025 election.

➔ **Guinea** Junta announced formation of new govt amid questions over regime stability and future of transition.

New administration composed of technocratic and junta-friendly ministers. Junta 13 March announced 29-member cabinet following Feb dissolution of govt amid internal power struggles. Junta-allied Defence, Security and Foreign Ministers among fourteen who kept posts from previous administration; both former PM Goumou and former Justice Minister Charles Wright, whose tensions with one another may have contributed to Feb dissolution of govt, lost posts. Meanwhile, PM Bah 25 March said elections "cannot effectively be held" in 2024; civil society remained concerned transitional govt would continue past proposed Dec 2024 end

date due to lengthy process of finalising Constitution and organising elections; first draft of new Constitution, promised for March, yet to be circulated.

Popular pushback continued against lack of services and repression. Electricity blackouts led to demonstrations and unrest, with police allegedly killing two youths during protests related to power cuts in Kindia city 12 March and another in capital Conakry 14 March; in response to lack of supply, President Doumbouya 16 March sacked several senior electricity officials. Meanwhile, in apparent attempt to pursue conciliatory tone, Bah 6 March met with journalists and subsequently said he would consult with Doumbouya about lifting media constraints, with govt having removed internet restrictions in Feb.

➡ **Nigeria Series of mass abductions by bandits and jihadists underlined widespread insecurity; violence also continued in South East and Niger Delta, while deepening economic crisis heightened social tensions.**

Criminal groups kidnapped hundreds and killed dozens in North West and North Central. In Kaduna state, gunmen 7 March abducted scores of students and a staff member from schools in Kuriga town, Chikun area, demanding 1bn Naira (roughly \$650,000) for their return; govt 24 March said all 137 students rescued alive from neighbouring Zamfara state, but staff member died in captivity. In Kaduna state, daily reports of bandit attacks 8-17 March saw at least 190 abducted and unconfirmed number killed, mostly in Kajuru and Birnin Gwari areas; in Niger State, armed group 21 March killed 29 people in attack on local market in Rafi area.

Jihadist-related insecurity continued in North East. In Borno state, UN 6 March reported jihadists 29 Feb kidnapped over 200 internally displaced people near Gamboru Ngala town; local sources said between 113 and 319 were abducted amid conflicting reports over whether Boko Haram or Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) were responsible. Military continued operations against jihadists reporting hundreds killed, while reports also emerged that former fighters had threatened to rejoin insurgency.

Violence continued in South East and flared in Niger Delta. Security forces continued operations against Biafran separatists in South East. Notably, troops 7 March killed twenty members of Indigenous People of Biafra armed wing Eastern Security Network, destroying major camp at Mother Valley in Orsu area, Imo state. In Niger Delta, clashes between communities over land dispute in Bomadi area of Delta state killed sixteen soldiers on peace mission 14 March, causing widespread outrage.

↑ **Senegal Presidential elections held peacefully, paving way for victory of opposition leader.**

Elections held peacefully, Bassirou Diomaye Faye set to become new president. Presidential poll held 24 March with both ruling party and opposition candidates competing after delay from original 25 Feb date had sparked constitutional crisis; election day ran peacefully across country. Electoral commission 25 March said Faye, candidate for opposition PASTEF party, won polls and Constitutional Court 29 March confirmed results; Faye took 54.3% of the vote, beating eighteen others including ruling coalition candidate Amadou Ba who took 35.8%, avoiding need for run-off and completing remarkable victory for figure little known several years ago

and released from prison earlier in March (see below). Opposition supporters 25 March and in following days celebrated results in capital Dakar.

Popular support rallied behind Faye after several key figures released from prison. National Assembly 6 March passed amnesty law for people arrested between Feb 2021 and Feb 2024 for political crimes or participation in protests. Those released included Faye and most popular opposition figure Ousmane Sonko, whose 14 March release was welcomed by thousands of supporters in Dakar; Sonko, barred from running as candidate due to May 2023 conviction for defamation, pledged support for Faye's candidacy. Meanwhile, Supreme Court 15 March rejected disqualified candidate of Senegalese Democratic Party Karim Wade's attempt to delay March election, while Wade subsequently endorsed Faye before polling day.

➔ **Togo Govt extended state of emergency in northern region amid continued jihadist violence; legislature passed new Constitution, causing political tensions.**

National Assembly 12 March renewed emergency security measures in Savanes region in north, first imposed in June 2022 and extended twice before, for further twelve months amid continued violence in area; notably, Al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) 6 March killed eight civilians in Nagouni commune. Ahead of 20 April legislative elections, parliament 25 March passed bill adopting new Constitution, shifting political system to one where lawmakers will choose president for single six-year term, replacing direct presidential election for two five-year terms. Opposition and civil society denounced moves as power grab by current President Gnassingbé and called for protests; Gnassingbé 29 March asked National Assembly to submit law to second reading due to "interest aroused" by bill.