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AFRICA DEFENSE FORUM

## STOPPING THE SPREAD

Militaries Work  
to Prevent  
Terror Groups  
From Gaining  
Ground

Extremist Groups  
Turn to Drones for  
Low-Cost Attacks

## PLUS

A Conversation With  
MINUSCA Force Commander Lt. Gen. Humphrey Nyone

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#### **ON THE COVER**

An Ivoirian Soldier  
rushes ahead during  
a counterterror drill at  
Exercise Flintlock in  
Abidjan. U.S. AIR FORCE

**T**errorism is a crime of opportunity. Global terror groups search out the world's most vulnerable areas and plant their flags there.

Countries with porous borders, ethnic strife, governmental neglect and a young, frustrated population are ripe for exploitation. Africa is not spared from this global phenomenon.

In Mozambique, the Sahel, Somalia and coastal West Africa, extremists are active and looking to expand. The Sahel now is the global epicenter of terrorism, accounting for 43% of the world's terrorism deaths in 2023. In 2007, that figure was only 1%.

Burkina Faso is in the eye of the Sahel's terror storm. More than half of the country is outside of government control, 2 million people are displaced and 3 million are hungry. An August 2024 massacre that left an estimated 600 people dead in the town of Barsalogho shocked a nation already reeling from wave after wave of violence. Humanitarian groups call it "the world's most neglected crisis."

So, what is the answer? After three decades of fighting terrorism on the continent, it has become clear that some strategies are effective and some require retooling.

Whole-of-society approaches that address the root causes of terrorism, such as the multipronged strategy employed in northern Côte d'Ivoire, have proved effective. There, the military has established border-area bases to deny terrorists a haven, but this is not just a military approach. Côte d'Ivoire has invested in job training programs and loans for small businesses. It has supported community dialogue to promote understanding and early-warning systems to identify threats. The goal is to create a stable and prosperous region that is inhospitable to terrorist groups.

This strategy is in stark contrast to military-led governments that use heavy-handed tactics and partner with unaccountable mercenaries. This approach not only cannot stop terrorism, but also exacerbates it. In each overthrown Sahelian country, promises of security have been followed by a rise in terrorist attacks and an increase in violence that targets civilians. These one-dimensional solutions cannot address a multidimensional problem such as terrorism.

As countries seek to establish counterterrorism plans, it is vital for them to work with partner nations across borders, share best practices and strengthen alliances. Sahel-based terrorist groups have pledged to expand their reach. They intend to occupy coastal territory and grow their ranks by recruiting disaffected young people. The countries that present a unified front and attack terrorism holistically have the best chance to stop its spread.

U.S. Africa Command Staff



## Countering Terrorism

### Volume 18, Quarter 1

U.S. AFRICA COMMAND



CONTACT US:

**U.S. AFRICA COMMAND**

Attn: J3/Africa Defense Forum  
Unit 29951

APO-AE 09751 USA

[ADF.Editor@ADF-Magazine.com](mailto:ADF.Editor@ADF-Magazine.com)

**HEADQUARTERS**  
**U.S. AFRICA COMMAND**

Attn: J3/Africa Defense Forum  
Geb 3315, Zimmer 53  
Plieninger Strasse 289  
70567 Stuttgart, Germany

ADF is a professional military magazine published quarterly by U.S. Africa Command to provide an international forum for African military personnel. The opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily represent the policies or points of view of either this command or any other U.S. government agency. Select articles are written by ADF staff, with credit for other content noted as needed. The secretary of defense has determined that publication of this magazine is necessary for conducting public business as required of the Department of Defense by law.

Kenya Defence Forces Soldiers train during the Justified Accord military exercise in Nanyuki, Kenya.

SGT. 1ST CLASS LERON RICHARDS/U.S. ARMY

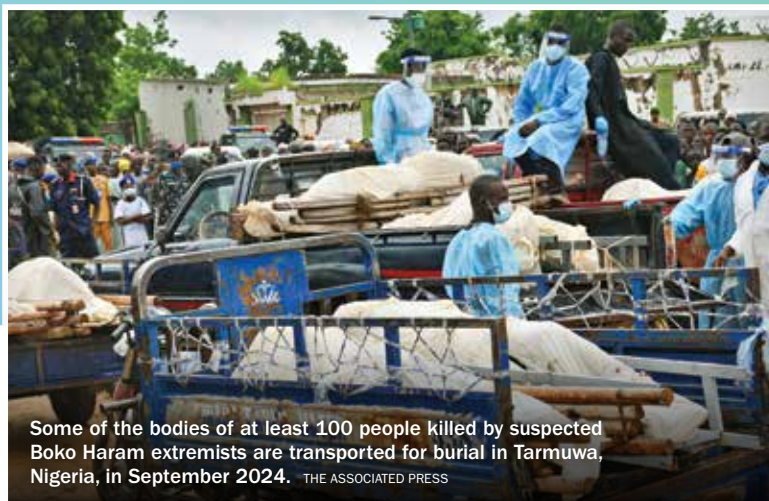




# A New Social Contract to Combat Terrorism



*Amina J. Mohammed of Nigeria is deputy secretary-general of the United Nations and chair of the U.N. Sustainable Development Group. She spoke on April 22, 2024, at the High-Level African Counter-Terrorism Meeting in Abuja, Nigeria. The theme was “Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Institution Building to Address the Evolving Threat of Terrorism in Africa.” Her comments have been edited for space and clarity.*



Some of the bodies of at least 100 people killed by suspected Boko Haram extremists are transported for burial in Tarmuwa, Nigeria, in September 2024. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Terrorism continues to pose a significant threat to global peace, stability and sustainable development.

Deaths from terrorism in the world rose to 8,352 in 2023, a 22% increase from the prior year and the highest level since 2017. The epicenter of terrorism has shifted from the Middle East and North Africa into Sub-Saharan Africa, concentrated largely in the Sahel.

The situation in Africa is dire, with some of the most violent terrorist groups operating in the Sahel. The region now accounts for almost half of all deaths from terrorism globally.

It can be said that terrorists are not born but created in environments of social exclusion, inequality and the relegation of human rights.

Allow me to share some reflections on how we can strengthen our response to terrorism:

First, we must address the root causes that lead to terrorism in the first place — absence of development with people at the center of policymaking. Terrorists find a welcome home with deeply disillusioned, excluded and desperate people. Farmer-herder crises are a tragic symptom. We must formulate

responses that address those conditions.

In doing so, we must pay attention to our women and girls, who bear the greatest impact of insecurity; the victims of terrorism who deserve our solidarity and who have a right to remedy and reparations; and to our youth and future generations. With our young people becoming the largest cohort of global demography, we must invest in their capabilities and aspirations.

Second, we need to work to rebuild the social contract across the region. The social contract — the bond between people and the authorities that govern them — has been frayed by decades of underinvestment, crises and corruption.

Rebuilding our social contract is essential for recovery. It means building strong democratic institutions and promoting people-centered governance, all grounded in human rights, and guaranteed access to basic services and inclusive development for all people.

We need to increase information sharing and collaboration among governments and security actors across our

borders. They deliver better for all their citizens when they pool resources. This is vital and critical to rebuilding our defenses against terrorism.

An issue that is often overlooked is the pain and suffering victims undergo during and after the carnage. Providing mental health and psychosocial support to the victims and survivors is essential to healing and overcoming the trauma, pain and suffering.

I recall the harrowing tale of the woman tragically fleeing from a Boko Haram attack with her baby. In her desperation, she made a choice no woman should ever have to make. She threw her baby into the river, hoping against hope that someone, somewhere, will offer refuge and safety for her innocent child. These scars are not ones that heal easily.

Therefore, in our efforts to provide mental health support, we must involve our community, and religious and traditional leaders, who play a vital role in creating safe spaces and fostering recovery.

Together, we can build a safer and more secure future for all Africans and the world.



## ECOWAS ENSURES GULF IS 'SAFE DOMAIN' WITH EXERCISE

ADF STAFF

**T**he Economic Community of West African States conducted Operation Safe Domain III, aimed at keeping the Gulf of Guinea free of piracy and trafficking.

The West African regional bloc, known as ECOWAS, includes 12 coastal countries among its 15 members. The third iteration of the maritime security training event ran August 5 to 9, 2024, in Cotonou, Benin.

The exercise included maritime and aerial surveillance, intervention training of operational units, surveys, and knowledge and research exchanges. The regional bloc's Multinational Maritime Coordination Center (MMCC) for Zone E led the event. Zone E consists of Benin, Nigeria and Togo.

"The exercise's objectives are threefold: to combat maritime crimes through equipment, training, and intelligence sharing; to promote information exchange and cooperation; and to create a secure environment for maritime commerce, thereby boosting trade and economic growth," MMCC Zone E Director and Nigerian Navy Commodore Aniedi Aniedu Ibok said in his opening address. "The mission of the center is to strengthen activities aimed at cooperation, coordination, pooling and interoperability of resources among Zone E member states."

The event is part of the ECOWAS integrated maritime strategy, which the bloc adopted in 2014 to address transnational maritime security challenges and their effects on economic development.

"Faced with the threats of piracy, armed robbery at sea and illicit maritime activities, ECOWAS has decided to mobilize its resources and coordinate its efforts to secure its maritime space," Ibok said. "These threats have significant implications for the economic stability and development of our blue economy."

"Our response through Safe Domain III reflects our unwavering commitment to neutralizing these threats and creating a secure maritime environment conducive to commerce and trade."

Nigerian Navy Capt. Idongesit Udoessien helmed one of four vessels participating in the exercise. As helicopters provided air support, the ships patrolled 105,746 square nautical miles.

"We have indeed displayed to the world that we can synergize our efforts at sub-regional levels to ensure maritime safety and security in order to ensure a thriving blue economy of the Zone E nations," he said, according to Nigerian news website This Day Live.

Ibok noted a significant reduction in maritime crime, from 49 reported piracy cases in 2018 to just two in 2023. He attributed this success to coordination by ECOWAS, member states and international partners.

ECOWAS announced that Operation Safe Domain IV is planned for March 2025.

**Trainees practice boarding during Operation Safe Domain III in August 2024.** ECOWAS



# — Nigerian Super Tucanos Reach — FLIGHT-HOUR MILESTONE

ADF STAFF

Just three years after the Nigerian Air Force took delivery of a dozen A-29 Super Tucanos, Airmen there have logged 10,000 flying hours on the single-engine light attack planes.

Air Marshal Hasan Abubakar, Nigeria's chief of air staff, noted the achievement at Kainji Air Force Base in August 2024, saying that it represents years of dedication, sacrifice and unwavering commitment to the Air Force's mission.

"Reaching 10,000 flight hours is no small feat as it symbolizes the countless hours of training, meticulous planning and flawless execution that have gone into every mission we have undertaken," Abubakar said, as reported by defenceWeb. Abubakar also noted that the flight-hour milestone was achieved without any major incident.

Nigeria received the 12 planes from the United States between July and September 2021. The \$500 million deal was part of the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program. The sale included spare parts to support several years of operations, contracted logistics support, munitions and a multi-year construction project to upgrade infrastructure at the Kainji base in Niger State.

The A-29 Super Tucano is designed for light air support, combat and reconnaissance. The durable design performs well in rugged terrain with unpaved runways and at forward operating bases.

Nigeria's Air Force wasted little time deploying the Tucanos against Boko Haram extremists. Airstrikes in August 2022 targeted three encampments in the Sambisa Forest region as part of Operation Hadin Kai. The Air Force also has used the planes against bandits and other violent actors.

"The world continues to change, and new threats emerge every day," Abubakar said. "Our commitment to excellence must remain steadfast and we must continue to adapt, innovate and evolve to stay ahead of our adversaries."

**Nigerian and U.S. officials discuss improvements to Kainji Air Force Base in April 2023, part of a plan to support A-29 Super Tucanos.** CHRIS GARDNER/U.S. ARMY



## COASTAL NATIONS MAKE MAJOR COCAINE SEIZURES

ADF STAFF

Guinea-Bissau, a West African nation once known as a "narco-state," intercepted 2.63 metric tons of cocaine just months after the United Nations reported that nearby Sahel states were emerging as significant drug trafficking routes.

Authorities in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger seized 1.47 metric tons of cocaine in 2022 compared to an average of 13 kilograms between 2013 and 2020, according to a 2024 report from the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

"The involvement of various armed groups in drug trafficking continues to undermine peace and stability in the region," Amado Philip de Andrés, UNODC regional representative in West and Central Africa, told The Associated Press. The report said the drug trade provides financial resources to armed groups in the Sahel, where extremist networks flourish after a series of regional coups.

In a major operation, Bissau-Guinean authorities confiscated 78 bales of cocaine in September 2024 when a Gulfstream IV plane from Venezuela landed at Osvaldo Vieira International Airport in the capital, Bissau. Police arrested the crew of five, composed of two Mexican nationals and one each from Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador.

Police conducted the raid, code-named "Operation Landing," with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre-Narcotics, Reuters reported.

Large drug busts have become more common in West Africa in recent years. Two separate operations netted 2.6 metric tons of cocaine in Guinea-Bissau in 2019. In April 2022, Cabo Verdean and U.S. authorities intercepted a Brazilian-flagged fishing ship smuggling 6 metric tons of cocaine.

In November and December 2023, the Senegalese Navy intercepted nearly 6.7 metric tons of cocaine in three separate incidents.

Smugglers often use West African nations as a transit stop between South America and Europe.

# THE GLOBAL EPICENTER OF TERROR

ADF STAFF

**A**frica is now the continent most affected by terrorism. Each day, an average of eight terror attacks results in 44 deaths. In certain parts of the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, the Horn of Africa and Mozambique, deadly violence is a near constant horror.

In particular, the Sahel has emerged as the global terrorism epicenter, accounting for 47% of all deaths from violent extremism. Terror groups have capitalized on the region's poor governance, ethnic divisions, coups and fractured regional security partnerships. Heavy-handed responses by military-led governments and a reliance on unaccountable mercenaries have done little to contain the problem and might be making it worse. Over the past 15 years, terror attacks in the Sahel grew 1,266%, and terror deaths rose 2,860%. Burkina Faso is the most affected country, with deaths rising to 1,907 in 2023, accounting for a quarter of all global terrorism deaths.

As leaders look for answers, there is increased recognition that it will take a whole-of-society effort that addresses the root causes and drivers of

extremism. These include poverty, land rights, ethnic grievances and poor governance.

In a speech to the High-Level African Counter-Terrorism Meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, African Union Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat called for a new approach to addressing the “destructive phenomenon [that] is ravaging human lives, infrastructure and institutions.”

“An innovative approach is crucial,” Faki told attendees. “It should include a new model of financing the fight against terrorism, greater involvement of African institutions and the civil society actors. Those national institutions and the civil society, youths and women, in particular, should be supported by all means to play their irreplaceable role in fighting against terrorism and violent extremism.”

Faki said the fight must be led and funded by African nations. He told his audience there is no time to waste: “The time for concrete actions is now. The time for results is now. The time for speeches is over.”

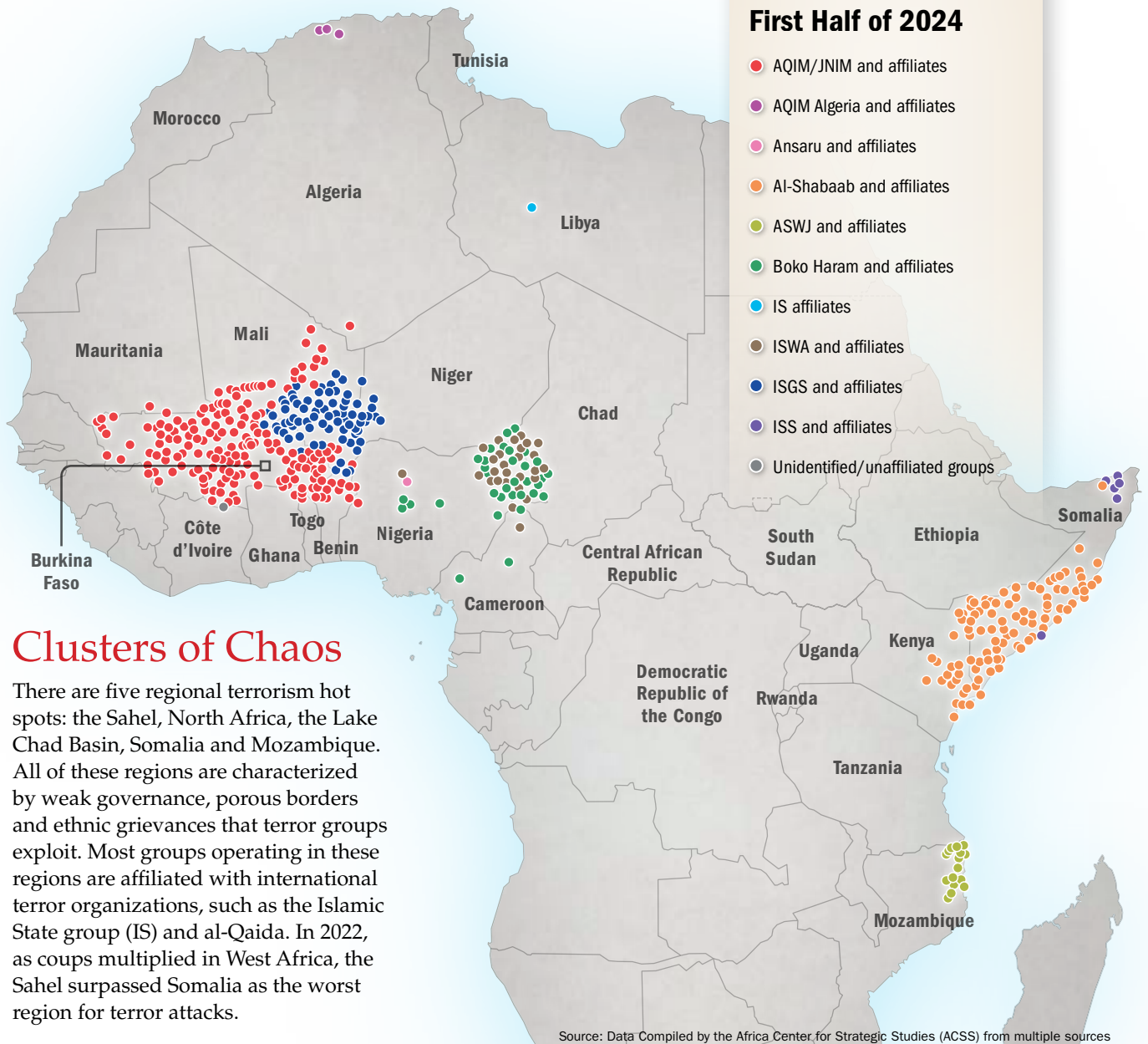
The graphics and maps on the following pages give a visual sense of the scope of terrorism in Africa, related trends and efforts to stop it.

**Women weep after a series of suicide attacks in Maiduguri, Nigeria, targeted a wedding, a hospital and a funeral.** AFP/GETTY IMAGES





## Terror Attacks in the First Half of 2024

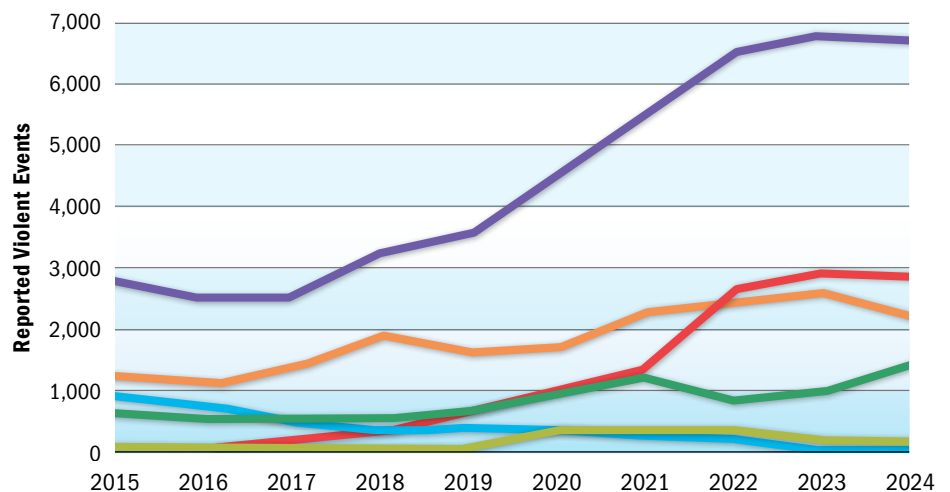


## Clusters of Chaos

There are five regional terrorism hot spots: the Sahel, North Africa, the Lake Chad Basin, Somalia and Mozambique. All of these regions are characterized by weak governance, porous borders and ethnic grievances that terror groups exploit. Most groups operating in these regions are affiliated with international terror organizations, such as the Islamic State group (IS) and al-Qaida. In 2022, as coups multiplied in West Africa, the Sahel surpassed Somalia as the worst region for terror attacks.

## Trends in Militant Islamist Group Activity in Africa by Region

- Lake Chad Basin
- Mozambique
- North Africa
- Sahel
- Somalia
- Total



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED); compiled by the ACSS



Aerial view of the shores of Cotonou, Benin

## Spreading to the Coast

In search of new revenue sources, recruits and territory, Sahel-based terrorists are pushing to expand operations to coastal West Africa. The terror group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin believes it can make inroads among disaffected communities in Benin, northern Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

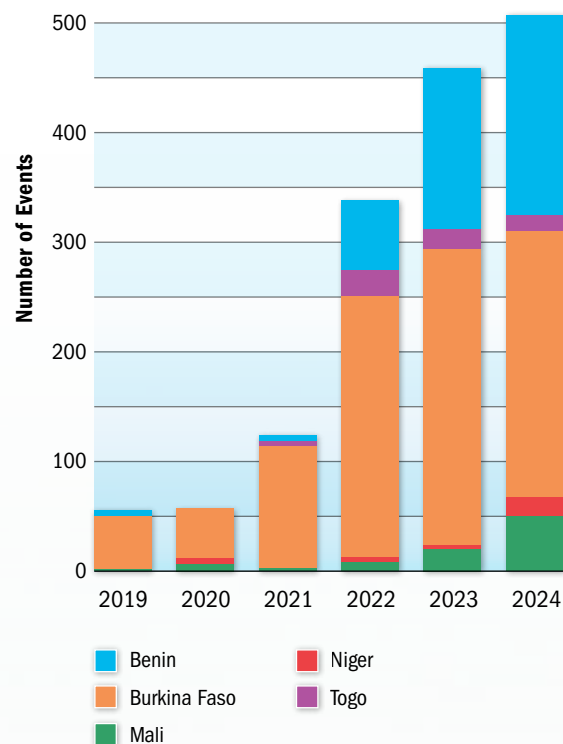
The number of violent events linked to militant Sahelian groups in and within 50 kilometers of coastal West African countries increased by more than 250% over the past two years, totaling more than 450 incidents.

Benin has been one of the coastal nations hardest hit by the violence, and its W National Park has become a haven for terror groups. The number of fatalities related to Islamist violence in Benin doubled to 173 in the past year, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies reported. The percentage of increased fatalities was similar in Togo, which recorded 69 deaths.

Coastal leaders are calling for unity and seeking outside help in the face of this growing threat.

"These conflicts are gradually wiping out years of progress and development for the populations," Ivoirian Vice President Tiemoko Meyliet Koné said during a speech at the United Nations General Assembly. "Beyond the Sahel, today all of West Africa is threatened with collapse. This evolution could spread beyond the African continent if no effective measures are taken."

### Militant Islamist Violence in and Within 50 km of Coastal Countries



Sources: ACSS, ACLED



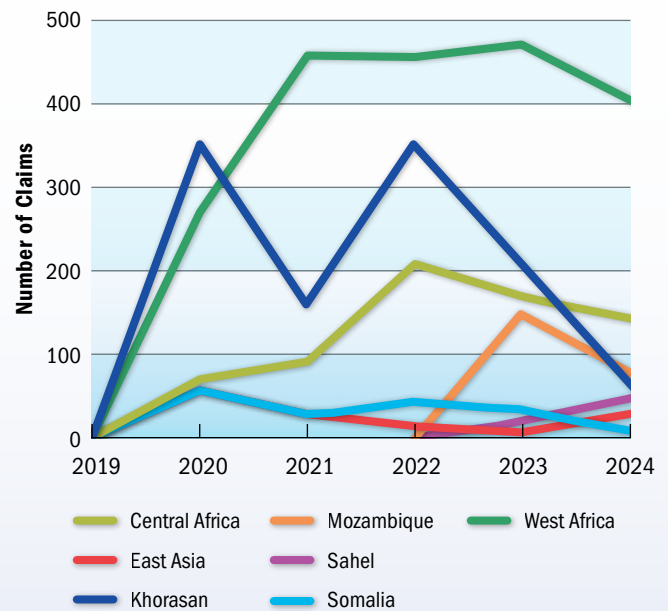
# The Islamic State Group Plants its Flag

As IS has lost territory in the Middle East in recent years, it has turned its attention to Africa. It now has affiliates in Mozambique, the Great Lakes region, Somalia, the Sahel and Nigeria. In the first half of 2024, IS claimed responsibility for 788 attacks globally. More than half — 536 — took place in Africa, killing 2,142 people.

Experts believe IS views Africa as the area of the world with the greatest potential to hold territory and launch destructive attacks. IS central is believed to be in regular contact with its affiliates and sends advisors and shares intelligence. In 2024, there were reports that the commander of IS-Somalia had been made the IS group's global leader. He later was targeted in an airstrike, but his whereabouts are unknown.

"For an organization like ISIS, sub-Saharan Africa is where you can have a lot of impact with minimal [investment of] resources," said Vincent Foucher, an expert on extremism with the French National Centre for Scientific Research. "This is one of the few places in the world where ISIS actually controls territory of many thousands of square kilometres. It's a frontier for them."

## IS Attack Claims by Region



Source: Washington Institute

Fighters from the Islamic State group in West Africa (ISWAP) display the group's flag in territory they control in the Lake Chad Basin region. AFP/GETTY IMAGES





A woman whose two sons were killed in a terror attack in Burkina Faso cries in a refugee camp in Côte d'Ivoire. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

- In West Africa, almost **25,000** civilians were killed by terrorism and political violence from the fourth quarter of 2021 to the second quarter of 2024. Civilians were **37%** of all victims.
- Terrorism and political violence displaced **6.1 million** people in West Africa in 2023.
- Terror responses led by military juntas tend to cause more civilian deaths than those led by civilian governments. In the year after its July 2023 coup, Nigerien defense and security forces killed **three times as many** civilians as the previous year, according to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data.
- Terrorist groups such as Boko Haram have specifically attacked health care facilities. Since the beginning of the insurgency, roughly **one-third** of the 700 health care facilities in Nigeria's Borno State were destroyed, with another one-third left unable to operate. This lack of care led to increases in child mortality and a resurgence of treatable diseases, such as cholera, the measles and hepatitis E.
- There were more than **270** attacks on schools in Burkina Faso in 2022 and 2023. These attacks included abductions, destruction of buildings, and threats against parents and teachers. By spring 2023, **6,100** schools in the country were closed due to insecurity.

## The Human Toll

Inevitably, the most vulnerable people pay the highest price in terror attacks that disrupt everything from school to energy to health services. Here is a snapshot of the devastating human toll caused by terrorism in Africa.

## Regional Responses

Armed forces have launched a number of military missions to address terror threats in Africa. They operate under the banner of the United Nations, African Union, regional economic communities or as ad hoc alliances of national militaries. As the threat evolves and high-profile missions close, African leaders and their international partners are discussing what the future holds for interventions. Topics of debate include how multinational interventions should be constructed and funded and under what mandates they should operate.



### ○ Multinational Joint Task Force

**Established:** 2015  
**Authorized force size:** 10,000

- **Troop-contributing countries:** Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria
- **Mission:** Defeat extremist groups, armed bandits and criminals in the Lake Chad Basin region.



### ○ Accra Initiative

**Established:** 2017  
**Authorized force size:** 10,000

- **Member countries:** Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo
- **Observer countries:** Mali and Niger
- **Mission:** Respond to the extremist violence in Sahelian states and prevent its spread to coastal states.





A victim of a suicide bombing is loaded into an ambulance in Maiduguri, Nigeria. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A primary school student walks past a classroom in Burkina Faso. Thousands of schools have been shut down due to extremist violence in the country. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



#### ○ Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission to the DRC

**Established:** 2023

**Force size:** Varying (included 2,900 South African troops in 2024)

- **Troop-contributing countries:** Malawi, South Africa and Tanzania
- **Mission:** Support the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to restore peace and security in the eastern part of the country. The SADC mission took over from an East African Community mission in 2024.



**SAMIM**  
SADC MISSION IN MOZAMBIQUE

#### ○ SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)

**Established:** 2021 (ended 2024)

**Authorized force size:** 2,000

- **Troop-contributing countries:** Angola, Botswana, the DRC, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. Rwanda has sent about 5,000 troops and operates separately but in partnership with SAMIM.
- **Mission:** Support Mozambique in combating terrorism in the Cabo Delgado region, restoring order and allowing displaced people to return home.



#### ○ AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia

**Established:** 2007 (as the African Union Mission in Somalia)

- **Troop-contributing countries:** Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda
- **Mission:** Defeat the insurgent group al-Shabaab and transfer full security control for the country to the Somali National Army and other Somali security forces.

# TERROR



# DRONES

ADF ILLUSTRATION



# THE SPREAD OF LOW-COST AERIAL WEAPONS LEVELS THE PLAYING FIELD AND ENABLES ATTACKS

ADF STAFF

**W**hen security forces in Puntland, Somalia, raided a vehicle convoy traveling south from Garowe, they confiscated a collection of drones capable of delivering explosives. The devices were similar to those used by Houthi rebels across the Red Sea in Yemen.

So-called kamikaze drones are, in essence, flying improvised explosive devices (IEDs). They are typically low-cost, commercially available quadcopters capable of carrying a single explosive — often a mortar shell — that can be either dropped on a target or flown directly into it. Their presence in Somalia has raised the fear of expanded drone use by terrorist groups. Until recently, the groups have used drones primarily for surveillance and for making propaganda videos.

“While still limited in comparison to other regions, there is increasing evidence of several groups seeking to weaponize commercially available drones to launch attacks in different countries in Africa,” Bárbara Morais

Figueiredo, a researcher with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, told ADF in an email.

The capture of the five weaponized drones in Puntland suggests African extremist groups are learning from their Middle East counterparts how to develop the technology, often through online or social media channels controlled by the Islamic State group (IS) or al-Qaida, according to Morais Figueiredo.

“Indeed, many of the groups known for using drones in Africa have ties to groups known for using drones in other regions, especially the Middle East, with ISIL [IS] as a prominent example,” she said.

**Soldiers serving in the African Union Mission in Somalia attend a demonstration of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) during a workshop on intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.**

FARDOSA HUSSEIN/AMISOM



“  
ANYBODY CAN WEAPONIZE A DRONE.  
WE ARE NOW LITERALLY LIVING IN THE  
TIME OF LIQUID WARFARE.  
”

~ Lindy Heinecken, a professor at Stellenbosch University, South Africa







**African terrorist groups are increasingly using low-cost drones as weapons instead of just for surveillance.** GETTY IMAGES

IS-aligned groups have recommended smartphone-based flight simulator apps that teach users how to fly quadcopter drones. Although much of the knowledge transfer has been indirect, growing instability in the Horn of Africa and Sahel is inviting more direct contact between Africa-based terror groups and foreign fighters more adept at using drones as tactical weapons.

“As some of these groups continue to grow and expand, especially in the central Sahel, the region’s attractiveness as a destination for foreign fighters could further increase,” Morais Figueiredo said.

There is evidence that terrorist groups, like the militias they are fighting, could develop their own specialized units dedicated solely to operating drones, she added.

“This certainly remains a possibility or potential trend to be monitored, as it would have an important impact both on the scope and number of attacks these groups are able to carry out with drones,” Morais Figueiredo said.

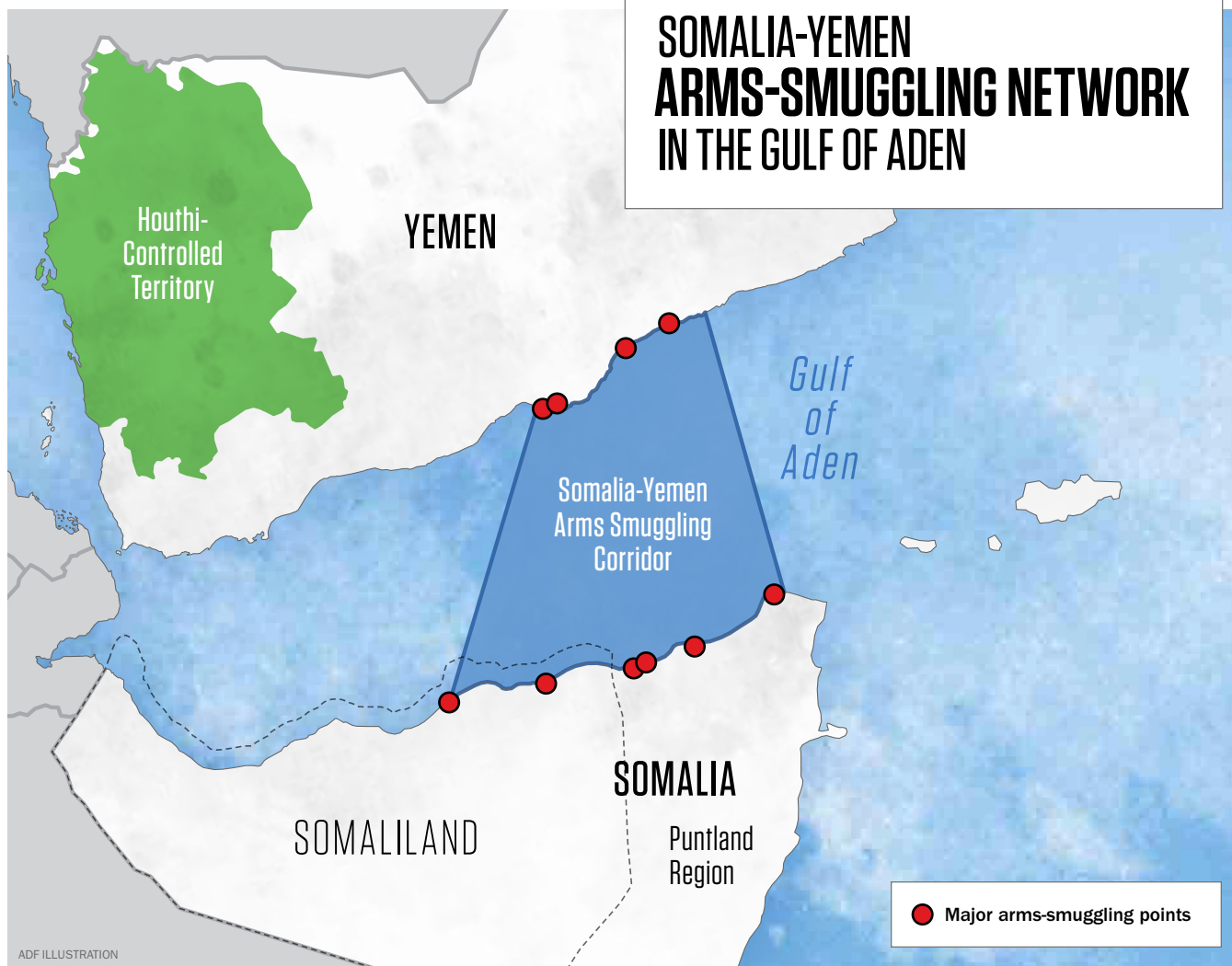
In the process, the expanding use of drones is giving terror groups a psychological advantage they didn’t have before, researcher Karen Allen with South Africa’s Institute for Security Studies (ISS) told Voice of America. “It has leveled the playing field between regular forces and irregular forces,” Allen said.

## CHANGING TECHNOLOGY, CHANGING USE

Drone technology has grown exponentially since Boko Haram became the first African terror group to use it in 2018, according to the Middle East Media Research Institute. The institute has tracked drone use across the Middle East, North Africa and West Africa since 2017. “More jihadi groups have gained access to drone technology, and those examined in 2017 have improved upon existing technology and increased its use,” institute researchers wrote in 2023.

**To counter the increasing use of weaponized drones by terrorists, experts say African nations will need to invest in signal jammers and other devices.** AFP/GETTY IMAGES

## SOMALIA-YEMEN ARMS-SMUGGLING NETWORK IN THE GULF OF ADEN



Source: Liam Karr, Institute for the Study of War; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime

**Security experts say Yemen's Houthi rebels are smuggling weaponized drones into Somalia to support al-Shabaab.**

In 2018, Boko Haram used drones for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). Drones' small profile and sophisticated cameras made them ideal for spying on military and security forces or for surveilling civilian targets. They worked well for making videos of battles that could be published on social media later as recruitment tools.

Boko Haram quickly became the model for other extremist groups. In 2020, Mozambique's Ansar al-Sunna began using drones to identify targets in Cabo Delgado province while Ahlu-Sunnah wal Ja'maa employed them in Moçimboa de Praia. Al-Shabaab soon followed suit, using drones to help plan attacks in Somalia and Kenya.

At the time, drones were hard to come by, so using them for ISR was preferable to deploying them as weapons platforms or in kamikaze attacks, according to analysts Keaton O.K. Bunker and John P. Sullivan.

"Drones used for ISR can be reused as long as they do not get destroyed by enemy action. Fully weaponized

drones are much more likely to get destroyed by opposition forces," Bunker and Sullivan wrote in *Small Weapons Journal*. "Further, ISR use helps to facilitate terrorist operations whereas single-use drone attacks have a much more minimal impact on terrorist operations as a 'one off' event."

That philosophy began to shift in 2022 and 2023 when Boko Haram's rival, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), began experimenting with using drones to deliver explosive payloads in the Lake Chad Basin.

ISWAP's interest in weaponized drones has grown out of its need to overcome losses of territory and fighters to the Nigerian military and Boko Haram, according to ISS researcher Malik Samuel. "These setbacks may be forcing ISWAP to adapt its strategy, as it has done before," Samuel wrote.

Meanwhile, as the Puntland convoy suggests, other terrorist groups are rapidly adopting drones as their weapons of choice. In April 2024, al-Qaida's Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin affiliate in Mali used commercially available quadcopters armed with hand grenades and mortar rounds to raid the camp of a government-allied dozo militia.





Violent extremists favor simple commercially available drones such as quadcopters that are easy to acquire and hard to shoot down. GETTY IMAGES

## 'PHENOMENAL CHANGE'

As commercially available drones become more common, governments across Africa are losing an advantage they once enjoyed. A drone-based arms race has equipped both sides with low-cost, highly effective air support.

Although governments' equipment may be more sophisticated — the popular Turkish-made Bayraktar drones are one example — terrorist groups' access to technology enables them to intimidate civilians and harass militaries with drones that are low-flying and hard to shoot down. With the addition of artificial intelligence, those same drones can operate independently or in swarms.

"They can come at any time, at any place, at incredibly high speeds, and you have no control," Lindy Heineken, a professor at South Africa's Stellenbosch University, told an audience at the African Aerospace and Defence trade show. "You may have air defenses, but you don't know where they will come in. It represents a phenomenal change in the nature of warfare."

The fact that commercial drones are, essentially, a civilian tool further complicates efforts to regulate them, according to Allen. She describes them as dual-use technology, comparable to mobile phones, which can be used to make calls but also to trigger roadside bombs. For that reason, Allen suggests, commercial drones might qualify for restrictions under the international Wassenaar Arrangement, designed to control the export of dual-use technology.

Heineken spelled out a more fundamental challenge governments face when countering terrorist drones:



Senior military officers serving under the African Union Mission in Somalia attend a UAV demonstration. FARDOSA HUSSEIN/AMISOM

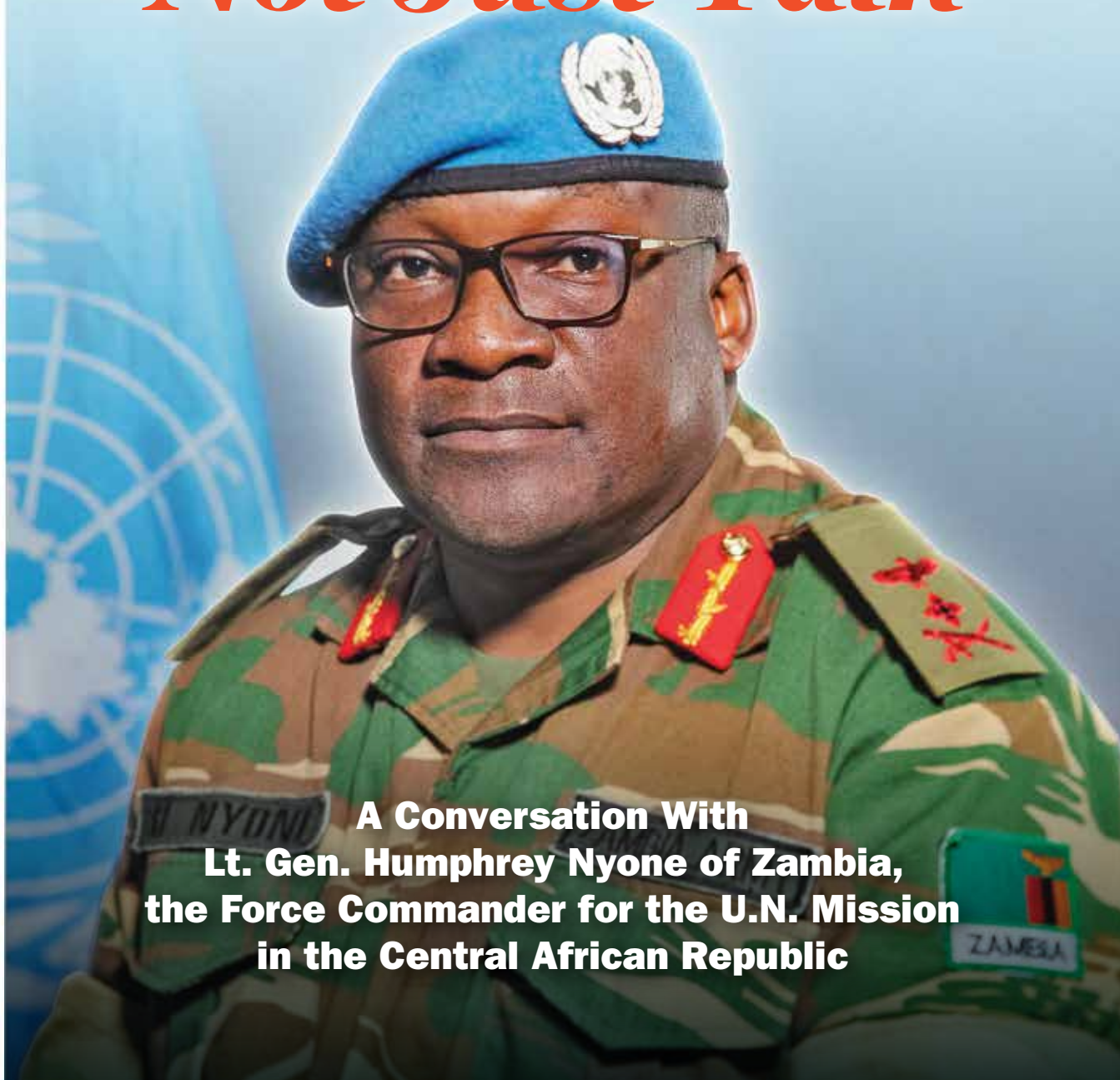
"Anybody can weaponize a drone," she said. "We are now literally living in the time of liquid warfare."

As African nations continue to fight terrorist groups, they must add antidrone technology to their arsenals, according to Allen. That could include signal jammers, which disrupt the radio link between drones and their operators, and high-energy lasers that can knock drones out of the sky by melting them in flight.

Staying ahead of rapidly advancing drone technology and the groups that use it will keep African governments on their toes moving forward, according to Morais Figueiredo.

"All in all, as drone technology becomes more affordable and continues to evolve and spread at a rapid pace in Africa, these trends are likely to further accelerate in coming years," Morais Figueiredo told ADF. "We are, therefore, likely to see more groups using drones more frequently and in increasingly diverse and sophisticated ways across the continent." □

# 'TANGIBLES *Not Just Talk*'



**A Conversation With  
Lt. Gen. Humphrey Nyone of Zambia,  
the Force Commander for the U.N. Mission  
in the Central African Republic**



Nyone arrives in Bangui, Central African Republic, in July 2023.



PHOTOS BY MINUSCA

*Lt. Gen. Humphrey Nyone has served in the Zambian military since 1994 and has held various roles, including commandant of the Defence Services Command and Staff College of Zambia, director-general for policy doctrine and strategy for the Zambia Army, and commander of the 1st Infantry Division. He previously served in United Nations peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone. He was appointed force commander for the U.N. Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in May 2023. He spoke to ADF by videoconference from Bangui. His remarks have been edited for space and clarity.*

**ADF:** *MINUSCA's mandate was extended through November 2025 even as other U.N. missions on the continent have been forced to end or have faced resistance from host countries. How can MINUSCA fulfill its mandate and maintain public support?*

**Nyone:** In peacekeeping, from my experience, most people will trust the mission if they see tangibles. Tangibles build public trust, and I think that is what we are doing in MINUSCA. From the time I joined, we really carried on with this trust.

So, what are we doing in this regard? Number one is the protection of civilians. Most of the areas where there were pockets of armed elements, we have established our footprint. And this is what people want to see.

Secondly, the special representative of the secretary-general [SRSG], Valentine Rugwabiza, using her good offices, has really revitalized the peace process. She is working hard because this was a process that was almost

dead for a couple of years. We see now that it is coming alive, and we can see progress.

The number three issue, one of the lingering problems in terms of the conflict, is the issue of transhumance [moving animals to grazing lands]. Most of the animals migrate from Sudan or countries around and are brought to Bangui for slaughter; it's business. But over the years they've been a target for attacks from the herders and also the armed groups. What the SRSG has done is to be able to sponsor some of these transhumance committees in most of the prefectures. Late last year we had a lot of transhumance conferences at the prefecture level, which the mission sponsored. Arising from that are some physical measures to support the internal security forces being led by the U.N. Police. They are working hand in hand with the CAR gendarmerie, the national police, and also we are behind this effort to ensure that we combat this particular aspect of transhumance.



There is also the issue of reconciliation. Social cohesion is a big issue in this country. The fault line was very vivid. The conflict was sectarian in nature. You can see the broken line separating people along religious lines or ethnic lines. There are a lot of efforts to bring this back together. This is being driven at the field level, where our heads of offices are overseeing local reconciliation programs to enhance social cohesion.

Lastly, we are operating in an environment where infrastructure does not exist. There was a total degradation of infrastructure. An example I can give is the road network. I will tell you that to traverse a distance of about 500 kilometers in this country, you will spend no less than four months. For air travel, most of the airfields were disused, so we had to rehabilitate them to be able to accommodate the air sector. We started using our engineering capabilities to build bridges, repair them, and we are doing a lot of grading of these roads. All this is to ensure that we create productivity, force mobility as well as movement of the local communities from Point A to Point B. This is what we've done because we believe peacekeeping is to build public trust. People must see tangibles, not just talk.

*ADF: What is MINUSCA's current strategy to protect civilians from harm, and how has this changed over the years? Do you have any evidence of recent success?*

**Nyone:** We know that protection of civilians is always a multidimensional endeavor. It's not only the force or the people in uniform; it's all the entities of the mission.

We have a strategy based on three tiers: The first tier is protection through dialogue and engagement. We are fostering the peace dialogue, and we are supporting the upcoming elections. Second is physical protection. This is where we play a critical role as a force. When I came on, this mission was scattered with a lot of temporary operating bases [TOBs]. These had become more like military fortresses. The force didn't have flexibility to be able to conduct patrols and dissuade the influence of these armed elements. We had to change our posture to be more mobile. We decided to close over 48 TOBs. We enhanced our early warning and enhanced our alert response, and we are going on more deterrence patrols. The third tier of our strategy is creating this protective environment. Mainly, this is being done by our colleagues in the humanitarian sector. We have a high influx of refugees, especially in the Vakaga, from the northeastern part of the country. They are coming in because of what is happening in Sudan, where there is renewed fighting. Every week we are receiving no less than 1,000 refugees. We now have 23,000 and when you look at the population of Birao, it's only 16,000, so you have a higher number of refugees than residents. This creates a problem in terms of resources. Our humanitarian colleagues are really pushing hard, and



MINUSCA peacekeepers protect CAR civilians as they walk along a rural road.



the force is behind them to provide security escorts and timely intervention.

*ADF: SRSG and Head of Mission Rugwabiza has called for a “proactive and preventative posture” of MINUSCA forces. What does this mean in terms of how your peacekeepers are positioned and how they respond to threats?*

**Nyone:** The force is a mix. We are coming from different troop-contributing countries, and the forces have different doctrines, different cultures, different mindsets and different postures because of their training. When they come here you need to have a unity of purpose. When the SRSG made the speech, what she meant was changing the operational concept of the force to be more inclined to operations that are linked to a proactive response and also deterrence. To achieve this, first we had to work on our early warning system. We had a lot of bumps that we had to resolve with the help of our colleagues from civil affairs, mission chief of staff and also our heads of office. The force can only respond effectively if the early warning system is robust. Without us being fed that required information, it becomes very difficult. We wanted a shift from being reactive to being more proactive. We also looked at the mindset and posture of our force. Some of the contingents were risk averse. We have worked on this, and that is why we can now go into areas which have been a bastion of the Union for Peace [rebel group]. We intervene in those areas even using airlift, inserted by helicopters. You can only do that with a robust force that is not risk averse, with a good posture that, in case something happens, they're ready to react.

*ADF: MINUSCA has worked to improve the road infrastructure of the CAR. U.N. engineers have built or rehabilitated more than 2,000 kilometers of roads, 131 bridges and 37 airstrips in the past two years. How important for sustainable peace is it to allow commerce to thrive in the country, and what role do peacekeepers play in protecting this?*

**Nyone:** At the inception of this mission, the concept of operational support was a lean concept, relying mostly on contractors. But as the mission expanded, we realized that we didn't have the infrastructure in place to support it. The roads couldn't support force mobility or the movement of the locals. The airstrips were not maintained and could not support air assets such as a C-130 [cargo plane], which could only land in two areas in the mission. The mission was not prepared. This country is almost 623,000 square kilometers and is crossed by rivers. It's vast. So how do you sustain troops? How do you ensure protection of civilians? How do you extend state authority? It became very difficult. What we did was utilize the capabilities that

we have at our disposal. We have five military engineering units. These units have both horizontal and vertical capabilities to construct buildings as well as roads, bridges and airstrips. The 2,000 kilometers of road they've rehabilitated is enabling food rations and other supplies to get to our troops in the deep field. The airfield capabilities mean C-130s are able to land there. It has made troop rotations easier. It also has allowed government representatives to go more places and visit the population. Humanitarian actors are using the same roads.



MINUSCA medical personnel provide free care to more than 350 people during an event in Bangui's PK5 neighborhood.

This country is sustained by a main road (MSR 1) that comes from the Port of Douala in Cameroon all the way to Bangui. Not long ago, the mission had problems. The road was shut by armed bandits. They literally blocked it for a couple of weeks. We could get no supplies from Douala. It took a lot of effort to expel those armed bandits and open that access. From then on, we dedicated two contingents that man that MSR. But we thought, 'How sure are we that we won't have another resupply problem?' So, we worked to open another road, MSR 4, that is coming from Kenya via South Sudan through Bambouti and Obo, so we can open that in case the other one is closed for whatever reason.

*ADF: Many Central Africans are still displaced. An estimated 465,000 people are internally displaced, and 675,000 are refugees in other countries. What can MINUSCA do to create the conditions needed for these people to return home? Are you concerned about more refugees and spillover violence coming from the war in Sudan?*

**Nyone:** I will start with the second portion. We are really concerned. The country is still stressed, and now you have an influx of refugees that completely chokes whatever resources are available. Secondly, there are the spillover



MINUSCA engineers have improved airfields and roads, increasing peacekeepers' ability to travel across the country.

effects. We want to make sure that war from different factions and different countries is not coming into the CAR. Otherwise, it changes the security dynamics and alters our stabilization efforts.

The internally displaced and the returnees — yes, we have a lot, but the statistics have drastically dropped. Most live among host communities. Most of them do not go to camps, but for those that do go to camps, the humanitarian agencies are there to provide water, food and medicine. Whenever there is movement, we provide the escort. We work hand in hand with our colleagues at the U.N. refugee agency.

*ADF: MINUSCA peacekeepers have faced the threat of IED attacks. The first documented attack came in 2020, and another*

*deadly attack happened at the beginning of 2024. The country also faces the threat of land mines and unexploded ordnance. How are your personnel combating this threat?*

**Nyone:** When this first happened, our fear was it would spread across the mission. But it is localized in Sector West, and the incidents are going down. Our first question was, where are the mines coming from, is there a land mine field being harvested? Second, where are the networks? Because once you plug the source, you can be more secure.

What did we do? Working hand in hand with our colleagues at U.N. Mine Action Service (UNMAS) we have done capacity building for our contingents. We asked to bring in the mine-resistant vehicles for contingents in Sector West. We also built a search and detect capability within these contingents. We requested an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) company, and U.N. Headquarters were quick to accelerate the deployment of the Cambodian EOD company.

Early in 2024, the SRSG sanctioned a pilot project. We realized that we had gaps in terms of awareness. Because the fatalities were not only the peacekeepers but most were the civilians who use the same roads. UNMAS spent a couple of months sensitizing the local population in Sector West, creating alert networks so that whenever there is a suspicious issue having to do with EOD, they will be able to alert us.

*ADF: So, you're trying to get locals to help stop these attacks?*

**Nyone:** I'll give you an example. When we had an incident in Nzakoundou in December 2023 [where 23 civilians were killed], I flew into the locality to assess the extent of the attack. We parked our helicopter about



A Cambodian explosive ordnance disposal unit serving in MINUSCA clears a road.



3 kilometers out, and we walked that distance into the village and then back. When I was coming back from the village, I met the Cameroonian patrol that we had activated. Civilians who had been hiding in the bushes saw us and started coming toward us, and we interacted with them for about an hour and assured them of our support. The patrol, on its way back on the same road, hit an IED and we lost a peacekeeper and five others were injured. Later, the locals told us that they saw two armed elements on horses who were planting that device. They saw them planting it, and then they left. We saw there was a gap in terms of alerts. We started this pilot project, and we are seeing a lot of positive results. We are receiving a lot of information from the locals.

*ADF: MINUSCA will help secure the country for upcoming legislative and presidential elections. What role will peacekeepers play in this process, and why it is important?*

**Nyone:** This mission is going to be measured in terms of its performance if this election goes well. We're not leaving anything to chance. An election is a contest between those that are jostling or vying for political leadership. What we should bear in mind is that the CAR last held local elections in 1988. Since that time, all local leadership positions such as mayor were presidential appointees. It was part and parcel of the [peace agreement signed in 2019] to hold these elections so the local population can elect their own leaders. MINUSCA will provide not only the technical, logistical and security support, but also to look at other marginalized groups, including women, to make sure they participate in these elections, not only by voting but also for those who aspire to leadership.

We have a plan for securitization of elections. We've already done Phase 1 of the voter registration; we are going to Phase 2, and we are working hand in hand with the national forces, police and gendarmerie to ensure that these elections are not disrupted.

*ADF: It has been widely reported that Russian mercenaries continue to operate in the country and control access to certain mineral-producing regions. How do foreign mercenaries affect your mission? Do you have the ability to operate everywhere in the country?*

**Nyone:** We have our mandate and clear objectives. Yes, they are operating in this environment. It is a contested environment in the sense that we are not the only actors. We also have the Central African Armed Forces [FACA], and we have armed groups in the same space. It's a contested space, but our duty is to implement our

mandate in this contested space. Our security partner is the FACA, so we collaborate with them and not any other group. In this country or this mission there is no area that is devoid of our presence. We have a mandate to traverse the CAR, and we've done it. Even in the areas that are hard to reach or controlled by armed groups, we've made inroads.



Protecting civilians and rebuilding public trust are two of Nyone's main objectives as MINUSCA force commander.

*ADF: What are your goals for the remainder of your time as force commander?*

**Nyone:** My goal is to contribute to the lasting peace-keeping legacy of the mission. The best legacy we can leave is lasting peace. When I look at Sierra Leone today, I smile because of our achievements there. Also, when I look at Liberia and what other U.N. missions have done, you will see success. That is what I am looking forward to. Now, how can I contribute to this legacy of stability in this country so citizens can again live normal lives? One is to ensure that we support the strategic objectives of the SRSG, like the extension of state authority. It becomes very difficult to stabilize a country if armed groups are active in some areas. What we are doing is the best approach. Extend the state authority, ensure the government can operate in those areas, support the deployment of the FACA and the ability of the FACA to be able to own the security of the country. I think those are my goals. And if I am able to contribute to this, when I go back home, I'll look back and I'll be smiling because I can say, 'We did something.' □

# TERROR GROUPS ADAPT TO STAY LETHAL

By Echoing Local Grievances and Expanding Revenue Sources, Extremists Evade Counterterrorism Efforts

ADF STAFF | PHOTOS BY AFP/GETTY IMAGES

**A**frica has by far the youngest population among the continents, with about 40% of its population — nearly 600 million people — 15 or younger. It's the primary target audience for militant groups, and one of many reasons that experts say extremism in Africa has been so difficult to defeat.

"Terrorist groups are finding a vulnerable, impressionable population to target," Professor Barend Prinsloo told ADF. "Attacks on villages often involve the murder of older individuals, while young people are either physically taken captive or mentally indoctrinated. This massive, youthful demographic provides a virtually endless supply of recruits."

Prinsloo, program leader in international and national security at South Africa's North-West University, described terror groups as opportunistic organizations that exploit any societal grievances they can find.

In Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, an Islamic State group (IS) affiliate has gained traction by taking advantage of political neglect of the region. In the restive eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, multiple extremist groups have posed as "liberation fighters."

"In Somalia, al-Shabaab blends nationalistic ideas with its Islamist objectives," Prinsloo said. "And in West Africa, jihadist groups find support by rejecting foreign influence, especially from former colonial powers."

Caleb Weiss, an analyst for the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and the Bridgeway Foundation, said violent extremist groups are resilient because they belong to an ideological movement. Their leaders are

skilled at taking religious messages and directives intended for a global audience and adapting them to local contexts. Local grievances are easily co-opted to entice recruits.

"A lot of what jihadist groups do on the ground is essentially public relations campaigns, what they call da'wah (Arabic for invitation), which helps build public support and further ingrain themselves into local environments," Weiss told ADF. "Pure counterterrorism campaigns can rarely kill their way out of this problem as a result."

Prinsloo explained why a military-only approach to counterterrorism has struggled to win the hearts and minds of the people affected by terrorist groups.

"Terror groups rely on asymmetrical warfare, disregarding conventional rules of human rights, which causes terrorism in Africa to increasingly resemble a civil war," he said. "This dynamic amplifies the extremist ideology it began with, turning the conflict into a deeply personal, morally charged struggle for many of these young fighters."

## NEW ALLIANCES

Militant groups continue to evolve in how they are funded. Often their goals align with locals and groups involved in illicit trade and organized crime. All parties empower and enable each other to achieve their goals, Prinsloo said.

"Their motives often center on resources and funding — recruiting people, controlling commodities and, increasingly, holding territory while acting like a quasi government," he said. "In this space, transnational



organized crime syndicates become the suppliers and facilitators for these terror groups.”

African terrorist group financing sources have remained largely unchanged in recent years: illegal taxation, looting, extortion, front businesses, kidnappings for ransom and donations.

“Those are still incredibly commonplace,” Weiss said. “What has evolved is more the methods of laundering and moving money. Yes, the old tried-and-true hawala [money transfer] networks and mobile money accounts are still very active in moving the money, but stuff like cryptocurrencies has gained popularity.”

Aligning with bandit groups in central Nigeria has allowed a Boko Haram splinter group to remain relevant and operational. But kidnappings and attacks have revealed that financing is at the heart of the alliance. James Barnett, a Hudson Institute research fellow in Nigeria, said local people no longer can distinguish between bandits and terrorists.

“Given what is already known about the nature of banditry in Nigeria, it seems likely that the militant landscape along the Niger-Kaduna axis is somewhat fractured, involving multiple armed groups whose motivations might vary and whose alliances might shift,” Barnett wrote in an investigation for HumAngle, an Abuja-based online daily newspaper that focuses on insecurity.

## A NEW THREAT

After a regional workshop in Rwanda to counter terrorist activities on the internet, United Nations officials said that some terrorist groups have learned to exploit virtual space to their advantage. “With time, some have mastered it to create a sophisticated and sprawling online presence — to radicalize, recruit, ransom, and raise funds,” the U.N. said.

“Countering terrorist use of the internet is increasingly difficult as terrorists are migrating to more niche and hidden parts of the internet, making their activity harder to identify and disrupt,” said Charley Gleeson, open source intelligence analyst at Tech Against Terrorism, a global initiative. “Which is why it can only be done effectively with collaboration between the tech sector, governments, and civil society to ensure that human rights and democratic freedoms are upheld.”

Officials at the workshop said that regional cooperation will be necessary to fight cyberterrorism.

“The fight against the use of the internet for terrorist purposes could not be won by one single country,” said Isabel Kalinhangabo of the Rwanda Investigation Bureau.

Experts now warn that extremists are in the early stages of turning to cyberterrorism using computers and networks for political, ideological or other objectives. The extremists are employing advanced attacks to



A Nigerian counterterrorism unit assembles at the Independent National Electoral Commission in Port Harcourt in 2019 ahead of the country's general election.



# TERROR EXPANDS IN REGIONAL HOT SPOTS

**In recent years, five regions in Africa have been the focus of extremist violence, according to an August 2024 report by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS):**

**THE SAHEL:** The region with the fewest deaths 10 years ago has had the most over the past three years.

“The 11,200 deaths in the Sahel [through June 30] in 2024 — a tripling since 2021 — now represent over half of all reported fatalities across the continent,” the center reported. “Security force violence against civilians has consistently been found to propel recruitment by violent extremist groups. The Sahelian military juntas and their militia allies have killed more civilians (2,430) in the past year than militant Islamist groups (2,050).”

U.N. experts point to “a deficit in counterterrorism capabilities,” which al-Qaida and Islamic State group (IS) affiliates continue to exploit.

**SOMALIA:** Al-Shabaab has endured for two decades and has made this struggling country the second-most active battlefield on the continent for the past three years. The 6,590 reported fatalities in 2024 are more than double that of 2020, the center wrote. Al-Shabaab remains an overwhelming presence in Somalia, as the IS-Somalia group accounted for less than 1% of terrorism in Somalia and Kenya in 2024.

Despite significant losses from airstrikes and military operations, al-Shabaab remains resilient. It has an estimated 7,000 to 12,000 fighters and collects \$100 million a year, mostly from taxation in Mogadishu and southern Somalia, U.N. experts wrote.

**LAKE CHAD BASIN:** A decade ago, this region was the epicenter of terrorist violence in Africa with 67% of all deaths, or 13,670 annually, according to the ACSS. The basin comprises northeast Nigeria and the borderlands of Cameroon, Niger and Chad.

“Militant Islamist violence in the Lake Chad Basin has ebbed and flowed over the past decade,” the center said. “The past two years have

seen an increase in violent events after a period of decline. However, annual fatalities linked to these events have remained relatively consistent, typically ranging from 3,500 to 3,800 deaths.”

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reports that the extremist insurrection in the Lake Chad Basin is mostly centered on Nigeria. Ansaru, an al-Qaida-affiliated group, and the IS-West Africa Province are the two dominant groups in the region. Attacks increasingly involve several nonextremist militias that take part in banditry, kidnapping and cattle rustling. The IISS says these militias “are now more lethal than jihadist groups.”


**MOZAMBIQUE:** The northern Cabo Delgado province has watched in horror as a local insurgency that emerged in 2017 has evolved into the deadly IS-Mozambique group. Multinational military operations have degraded the group’s capabilities, but violent events and fatalities have rebounded.

“The projected 250 events and 460 fatalities by the end of 2024 would represent a near doubling in violence over the previous year,” the ACSS wrote.

The IISS reports that northern Mozambique saw a new outbreak of militant activities in rural areas in 2022, after a decrease in violence after 2021 interventions by Rwandan and Southern African troops, who managed to push out militants from major towns in Cabo Delgado.

**NORTH AFRICA:** From June 30, 2014, to June 30, 2015, there were 3,650 fatalities from terrorism in North Africa, second most on the continent. Now, this region has the fewest reported deaths of the five.

“This year marks the first year there were no violent events linked to militant Islamist groups in Egypt since 2010,” the ACSS wrote. “The United Nations believes ISL (Islamic State-Libya) and al-Qaida still have fighters in the southern part of the country, though they appear to be focused on profiting from the illicit economy.”



Deadly incidents of extremist violence continue to plague the Lake Chad Basin.





Al-Shabaab has terrorized Somalia with deadly attacks for two decades.

gain access to networks, where they can stay undetected to steal data. They use computer viruses, worms and malware to target IT systems, power grids, transportation systems and more. They use social engineering strategies and phishing campaigns to trick people into disclosing valuable information.

A 2024 study showed that developing nations, especially those in Africa, are being used as test beds for cyberattacks because of their relatively low levels of computer security. In 2023, the average number of weekly cyberattacks on African businesses grew 23% compared to previous years, the fastest increase worldwide, according to Interpol's 2024 African Cyberthreat Assessment. Ransomware and business email compromise topped the list of serious threats.

Digital illiteracy, aging infrastructure and a lack of security professionals all present challenges to preventing economic loss due to cybercrime, according to a 2024 report by Access Partnership and the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria.

"Africa faces the most significant impact from cyber threats compared to any other continent," said Nicole Isaac, vice president of global public policy for technology giant Cisco. The cybersecurity newsletter Dark Reading reported that she said nearly all financial leaders in Africa "consider cybercrime a significant threat along with macroeconomic conditions and political and social instability."

#### **DISTURBING DATA**

At a 2024 counterterrorism summit in Abuja, African Union Chairperson Mousa Mahamat highlighted some

sobering numbers — an average of eight incidents and 44 fatalities a day on the continent in 2023. There were more than 16,000 deaths, including more than 7,000 civilians and more than 4,000 security forces.

"Terrorism and violent extremism are the biggest evils of our time, spreading to all the five regions of Africa," he said.

Threats posed by violent extremist organizations on the continent are constantly evolving, as the two most prominent — al-Qaida and the IS — exploit "a deficit in counterterrorism capabilities," according to a 2024 report by a panel of U.N. experts. "The situation is becoming ever more complex with the conflation of ethnic and regional disputes with the agenda and operations of these groups," they wrote.

During the summit, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed called on countries in and around Africa's violent hot spots to work with the U.N. and other international organizations to address root causes of terrorism such as the lack of economic opportunities. She added that African governments must reestablish their "social contract" or connection with communities and people.

Professor Prinsloo is among the experts who believe opportunities for dialogue with extremist groups should be explored.

"Respectful, formal governmental engagement with certain terrorist groups may offer a pathway to reduce the personal grievances at the core of this violence, allowing us to focus more effectively on addressing the extremist ideology itself," he said. □

# At the Crossroads of CONFLICT

ADF STAFF

**T**he remote town of Birao, Central African Republic, sits close to the borders of Chad and Sudan. As a result, it has seen thousands of refugees fleeing Sudan's civil war cross the border.

"I left with just my children and the clothes on our backs. Our possessions, our home, we had to leave it all behind," a woman named Fatma told the United Nations Refugee Agency, recalling her journey from Nyala, in Sudan's South Darfur State, to Birao. Hundreds of thousands of people have crossed the borders in search of safety since the Sudanese civil war began in April 2023. Many have fled to Chad and Egypt. More than 16,000 have entered the CAR, which is not without

its own problems. Birao has seen conflict between rival ethnic groups for more than five years. More than 24,000 have fled the city for camps for displaced people, according to Acted, a private nonprofit humanitarian group. Serving amid this mix of conflict and upheaval is the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. More than 16,000 uniformed Soldiers and police officers serve in the mission, including more than 700 from the Zambian Defence Force. Zambia's contingent spent August 2024 patrolling around Birao, meeting civilians and business owners to build relationships. Zambia's forces have served in the mission since 2015.



CHAD

SUDAN

BIRAO •

SOUTH  
SUDAN

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

BANGUI ★

DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC OF  
THE CONGO







A child greets Zambian peacekeepers as they patrol outside Birao in August 2024. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



# Defusing *the* THREAT

Improvised  
Explosive Devices  
Prolong Conflicts  
and Destroy Lives.  
How Can They  
Be Stopped?

ADF STAFF

An Ethiopian Soldier  
sweeps a road for  
explosives in Baidoa,  
Somalia. ATMIS





In the nearly two decades since the African Union launched its mission to stabilize Somalia, one weapon has wrought the most damage. Again and again, the terror group al-Shabaab has used improvised explosive devices to shatter peace, spread fear and derail progress.

Terrorists plant the bombs, also known as IEDs, on main supply routes, in crowded markets and everywhere in between. The United Nations Mine Action Service called these homemade bombs a “\$20 problem requiring a million-dollar solution.”

In 2007, the first year of the AU mission, 57 IED attacks were recorded in Somalia. In 2023, 600 IED attacks resulted in 1,500 deaths. Early in the insurgency, it might take the terror group

a year to construct a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) capable of killing dozens. By 2023, al-Shabaab was detonating multiple VBIEDs a month.

“Al-Shabaab now considers IEDs as their main weapon of choice,” Col. Wilson Kabeera, commandant of the Uganda School of Combat Engineers, told ADF. “It has evolved over time.” Kabeera added that early bombs were simple 5-kilogram explosives triggered by a pressure plate while today’s IEDs can contain an explosive charge of 100 kilograms.

Somalia is not the only IED hot spot. Terrorists are using IEDs in Mozambique, across the Sahel and in the Lake Chad Basin. In Nigeria, IED attacks, mostly by Boko Haram, are the deadliest form of violence, accounting for 84% of civilians

**Between 2015 and 2022, IED attacks multiplied in East Africa as terror groups targeted civilians and military personnel.**



Source: Small Arms Survey

killed in terror attacks. In the second half of 2024, Nigerian extremist groups made headlines by returning to the tactic of suicide bombings. West Africa has seen a dramatic rise in IED attacks from four incidents in 2013 to 540 in 2021.

Experts believe it is incumbent on any military facing an insurgency to invest in counter-IED training and technology, especially since civilians are the overwhelming majority of victims.

“The hazard to civilians is pretty large,” said Sean Burke, counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) program manager at U.S. Africa Command. “So, the problem set is that if you’re trying to protect your population and establish or maintain a stable country, this is one of the hazards that definitely has to be addressed.”

### A Step Ahead of Adversaries

An IED typically is defined as any explosive that is not manufactured industrially or produced in a standard fashion. It is often made by manually assembling components that are diverted from their intended use.

The use of IEDs on the battlefield dates to the 16th century, when soldiers dug pits known as “fougasses” and filled them with explosives in order to light a fuse and detonate them when an enemy came near. Over the years, as industrial explosives such as TNT, nitroglycerin and black powder became widely available, the practice became more widespread. IEDs have been used in most conflicts since the 19th century. They are a favored tool of

insurgent groups globally engaged in asymmetric warfare.

IEDs typically include several basic components: a power source, a switch that arms the device, an initiator that lights it and an explosive agent. The general categories are:

- **A command IED**, in which the perpetrator controls the explosion.
- **A time-operated IED**, which is designed to explode at a given time and is set either through electrical or chemical means.
- **A victim-operated IED**, which is activated by a victim stepping on a pressure plate or breaking a trip wire.
- **A projected IED**, which is launched at the intended target.
- **A suicide IED**, which is detonated by attackers to kill themselves and others.

Kabeera said the devices used today are cheaper, deadlier and harder to detect. Many are radio-controlled and have an explosive charge designed to launch a shaped penetrator that can pierce vehicle armor. The trigger can be something as widely available as a motorcycle alarm or mobile phone.

The intent is to cause the maximum amount of carnage and panic. Some bombs used in Somalia are designed to activate when security forces pass a metal detector over

**“If you’re trying to protect your population and establish or maintain a stable country, this is one of the hazards that definitely has to be addressed.”**

*~ Sean Burke, counter-improvised explosive device program manager at U.S. Africa Command*

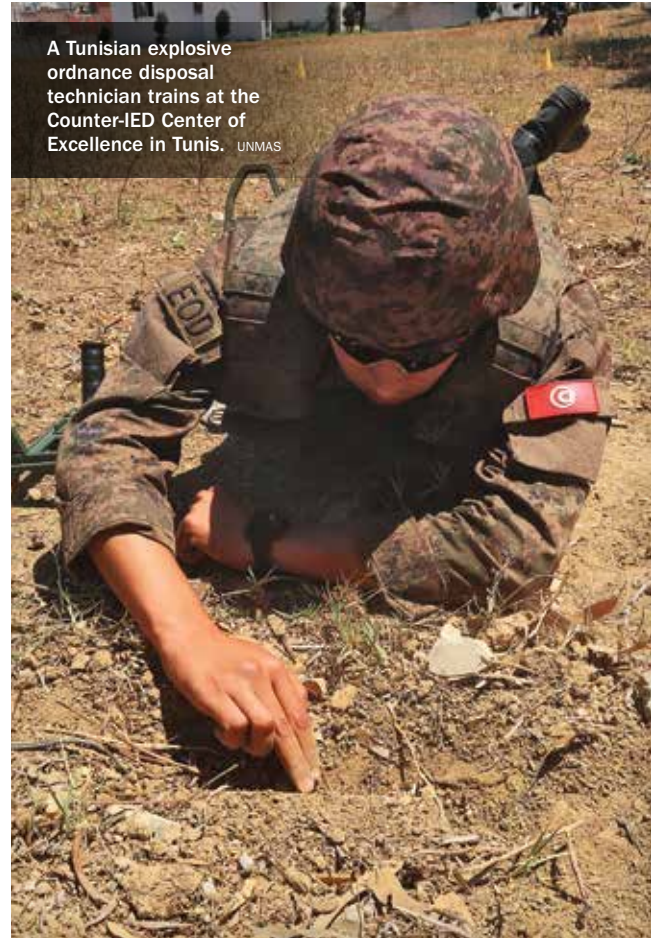




An Ethiopian Soldier checks the road for potential explosives during a drill in Baidoa, Somalia. ATMIS



A Tunisian explosive ordnance disposal technician trains at the Counter-IED Center of Excellence in Tunis. UNMAS



them. In other cases, secondary IEDs are strategically placed to target medical personnel and first responders after an initial blast.

C-IED specialists must constantly race to stay a step ahead of adversaries in terms of technology and tactics.

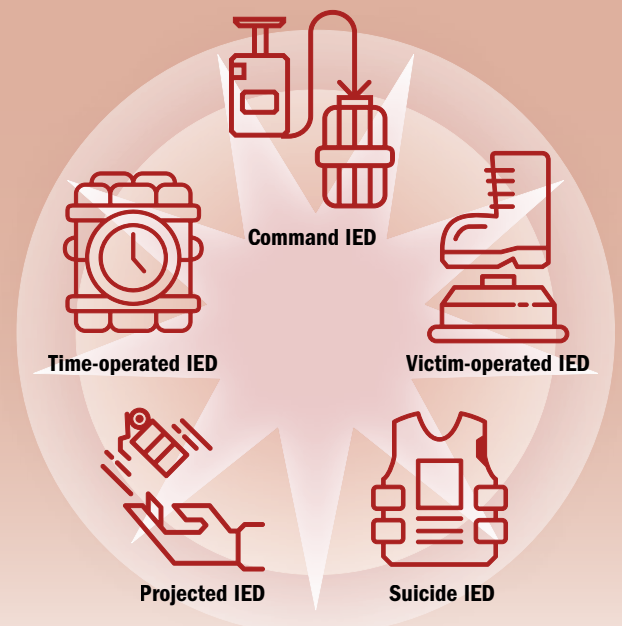
“Training and retraining should endure all through the operation to offset the human tendency of complacency,” Kabeera said. “Through sensitization, trainings, refreshers and threat awareness to both the C-IED operators and the infantry troops, everybody is situationally aware and knows what to do.”

Uganda has pushed to improve its training. All Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF) Soldiers deployed to Somalia take courses on IED and ordnance disposal, awareness courses on explosive hazards, and how to search routes for IEDs. There are refresher courses throughout the deployment. The UPDF also is training experts in post-blast investigation, combat trauma care and electronic countermeasures, among other things.

On the battlefield, Kabeera said, troops have adopted an approach that incorporates intelligence gathered from civilians and aerial surveillance. There are IED briefings to troops before any operation, and strategies to protect liberated areas from IED attacks.

◀ Ugandan explosive ordnance disposal technicians use a robot during a drill in Somalia. ATMIS

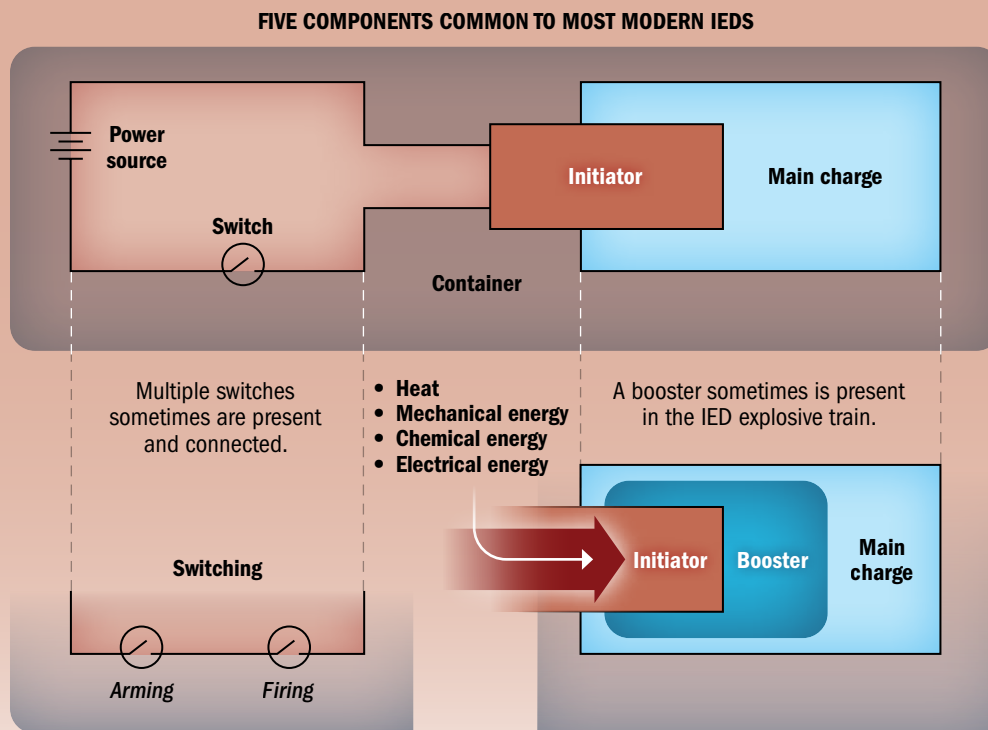
## Improvised Explosive Device Types



Source: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

## Composition of an IED

An IED typically consists of five components: a container, switch, initiator, explosive charge and power source. Terror groups have increased the complexity of these devices in recent years, making them harder to detect and defeat.



Source: UNMAS and Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization Counter-Terrorism Centre of Excellence

“The progress being made by UPDF has been very effective, however, not sufficient to mitigate and defeat the terror groups on its own capability without partner involvement,” Kabeera said. “More support from Allies and Partners is required, and mentoring using subject matter experts to UPDF personnel to avoid skill fade is essential. However, the UPDF C-IED approach has armed our teams with the correct attributes to defeat IEDs.”

### A Continental Push

Across Africa, militaries are investing in C-IED training with advanced curricula, new facilities and technology. The U.S. and other partners, including France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, have tried to standardize training by using modules solely from the U.N. IED-defeat curriculum, which allows for continuity of training between partners.

**Tunisia** has emerged as a continental leader and is making progress toward having Africa’s first U.N.-certified C-IED Center of Excellence. The center in Tunis is fully staffed by experts and capable of teaching the full suite of C-IED and explosive ordnance disposal courses.

**Kenya** is building a C-IED training center in Embakasi at its Humanitarian Peace Support School, which already offers courses to military students from across the continent. In August 2024, Kenya hosted the 6th Counter Improvised Explosive Device Conference.

**Senegal** is expanding C-IED training at its Demining Training Center in Bargny and is building a new military engineering school at the same location. In 2023, Senegalese deminers became the first to complete the U.N.

Ugandan Soldiers prepare to detonate an explosive found buried in a road in Somalia. ATMIS





Kenya Defence Forces  
Soldiers destroy an improvised  
explosive device in a controlled  
detonation in Somalia. ATMIS



Intermediate Improvised Explosive Device Defeat course with the assistance of U.S. Army instructors.

Advocates hope the rise of local expertise will allow teams of African instructors to export C-IED knowledge across the continent and that new African facilities will allow greater access to training.

"They're starting to share the burden of training," Burke said. "So that's the significance of it. It shows that our African partners have the expertise."

### Dismantling the Networks

The most difficult aspect of C-IED work is interrupting the supply chain that allows extremist groups to produce the devices. "Attack the network" training is difficult because many components used in simple IEDs also have civilian applications. Items such as electrical initiators, detonating cords, cellphones and explosive precursors such as ammonium nitrate are needed for construction, farming and other commerce. However, experts say, targeting the IED supply chains, bombmakers, financiers and workshops is the only way to stop the problem.

"If you don't actually try to get after the bad guys and the suppliers and the financiers of all of the folks that are required to support those kind of operations, then it's a Whac-A-Mole game, and you're never going to get in front of it," Burke said.

In Somalia, certain explosive materials, precursors and items such as detonators are monitored and require special importation permits. But importation limits

have had little effect. One assessment found that about 60% of explosives used in al-Shabaab attacks near the Kenyan border had been obtained through capturing unexploded ordnance such as artillery shells or theft of military ammunition.

"Al-Shabaab operatives do not need to go abroad for basic IED materials, most of which are sourced locally. In addition to unexploded ordnances that litter the country after a quarter century of conflict, al-Shabaab gets IED main charges from its enemies," Daisy Muibu and Benjamin Nickels wrote for the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. "Through seizure and purchase of materiel available in Somalia, al-Shabaab has all the pieces it needs for IEDs."

C-IED practitioners say they need forensics training to trace the source of explosive components and better stockpile management and accounting to make sure military munitions do not fall into enemy hands. There also is a need for regional partnerships to track suspicious importations or movement of goods across borders.

"A holistic approach is needed and, to be effective, the approach should cover a broad geographic region," researchers with the Small Arms Survey wrote in a report on the trafficking of explosive device components in West Africa. "Without a synchronized and common approach at the regional level, traffickers will simply identify new clandestine sources and take advantage of weak and inconsistent laws and regulations to procure the materials they seek. There are a few downsides to a regional approach and many potential benefits." □



# THE POLICE AND THE PEOPLE

**STRONG COMMUNITY-ORIENTED  
POLICING CAN BE VITAL IN THE FIGHT  
AGAINST EXTREMISM**

ADF STAFF | PHOTOS BY ATMIS

In the yearslong war against violent extremism across Africa, countries have tried a range of approaches. Multinational United Nations peacekeeping missions have toiled in the Sahel and elsewhere for years, with mixed results.





Newly recruited Somali police officers demonstrate crowd control skills during a ceremony to mark completion of their training in Kismayo.

Similarly, African Union and other regional forces have worked tirelessly to bring peace and stability to places such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, northern Mozambique and Somalia.

Each effort provides a frustrating mixture of successes and failures, advances and retreats. The limitations of military forces are clear: They can bring to bear lethal force and guarantee a degree of protection for the civilians and the governments they protect. But they can't stay forever. Often, they can't even stay in one place for an extended time as they pursue violent extremists to their hideouts.

Police forces, on the other hand, have more permanent national and local ties. Their charge is to protect the people at all times. They also investigate crimes, arrest perpetrators and gather evidence, starting the process that eventually leads to prosecution. Their effectiveness at all of this can be informed by a time-tested process known as community-oriented policing.

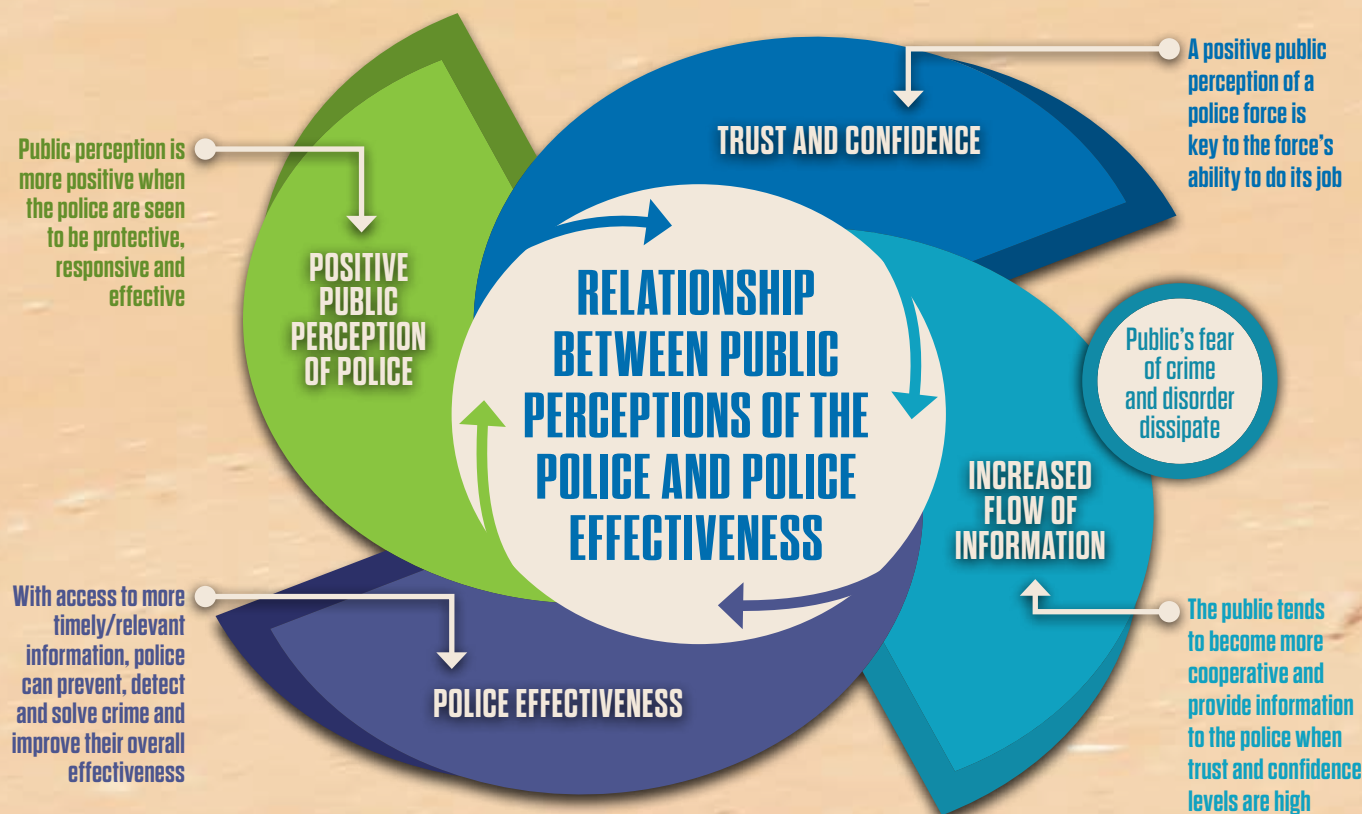
"Community policing sits at the nexus between state security actors, local communities and civil society," Dr. Anouar Boukhars, professor of counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), said in a virtual academic program on the subject in 2020. "Effective community policing cannot be imposed simply as a strategy or a tactic for countering violent extremism ... it's an ethos that must be infused into the culture and practice of security actors."

Different types of community policing have been tried across the continent, including in Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania to name but a few. The approach was valuable in Kenya after four al-Shabaab gunmen killed 148 people and wounded nearly 80 others at Garissa University on April 3, 2015.

Kenya has a community policing model called "Nyumba Kumi," which is Swahili for "10 households." In this system, household clusters work together to keep watch and report suspicious matters to police. Mohamud Saleh, who was appointed the new regional coordinator after the Garissa attack, successfully leveraged the system to build trust and improve security in a region suspicious of police.

Saleh set up a direct line so the public could reach his office, according to Saferworld, a global peace and security organization based in London. He also established direct lines to police quick response units to access information for action. If an attack occurred, authorities would hold a public forum known as a barasa to identify underlying issues before responding with force.

The system replaced "a forceful approach with one that is based on trust and accountability that builds relationships with local communities to gain intelligence," Saferworld reported. Stronger bonds between police and civilians can avoid grievances that drive some people to extremism.



Source: United Nations





## ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY POLICING

Community-oriented policing can look different based on location and context, but it typically includes some variation of five core principles: problem-solving, empowerment, partnership, service delivery and accountability.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland adopted those five principles, which were adapted from the model developed by the South African Police Service after apartheid ended, according to a paper by Neil Jarman, a research fellow at Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The approach reorients police work from a reactive to a proactive posture while empowering civilians to participate in addressing security issues.

Meressa Kahsu Dessu, a senior researcher with the South Africa-based Institute for Security Studies, highlighted the principles in a June 2024 blog post for the Wilson Center. "These elements guide the police officers to establish and build partnerships with local populations based on mutual understanding, trust, and respect," he wrote. "They engage regularly with local residents, community groups, business owners, and other local stakeholders."

For community-oriented policing to be successful, it must be driven by local communities and include all elements of society, such as women, young people and others, Phyllis Muema, executive director of the Kenya Community Support Centre, said in the ACSS virtual program. "Our principles of community policing are ideally founded on the principle that policing is by consent, not by coercion," she said. "It must be

something that is driven by the local communities."

## POLICING IN PEACEKEEPING

A 2014 United Nations Security Council resolution recognized the importance and effectiveness of community-oriented policing, and that emphasis is prominent in the U.N.'s guidelines for how police should operate in peacekeeping and political missions.

U.N. missions are supposed to assign police officers to "manageable patrol areas" so that civilians can get to know them by name. Police contingents should include female officers and consult community members about their needs and design programs accordingly, the guidelines state. A "consultative committee" in each patrol area should include "carefully vetted" men and women who are representative of the community and whose interests will not undermine mission success. Committees need to meet at least once a month. Police officers should share crime information with the committees and the media in a timely way.

The African Union also has recognized the importance of community-oriented policing. Officials serving in the recently concluded AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) emphasized the model in training throughout 2024. In August, more than 100 Somali Police Force (SPF) officers finished a month of community policing training.

Officers attend the closing ceremony of a community policing training session for Somali Police Force personnel and community members in Mogadishu.





Senior ATMIS and Somali Police Force officers lay bricks at a groundbreaking ceremony for the Darussalam police station.

ATMIS and SPF officials organized the training, which focused on the core components of community policing, its legal framework, and the protection and support of children, among other things.

"Somalia's security landscape is complex, and therefore it is important to have a tailored approach to community policing," Sivuyile Bam, deputy head of ATMIS, said in a news release. "We must continue to listen to the concerns of the communities, understand their needs and work together to address them."

ATMIS Police Commissioner Hillary Sao Kanu of Sierra Leone said her officers and the SPF had jointly conducted 18 capacity-building training events across the country benefiting 352 Somali police officers, including 162 women, since January 2024. "Today's event is therefore significant to our collective efforts to improve on safety, trust and cooperation between the police and



the communities that we serve in Somalia," she said at an August 31, 2024, graduation ceremony.

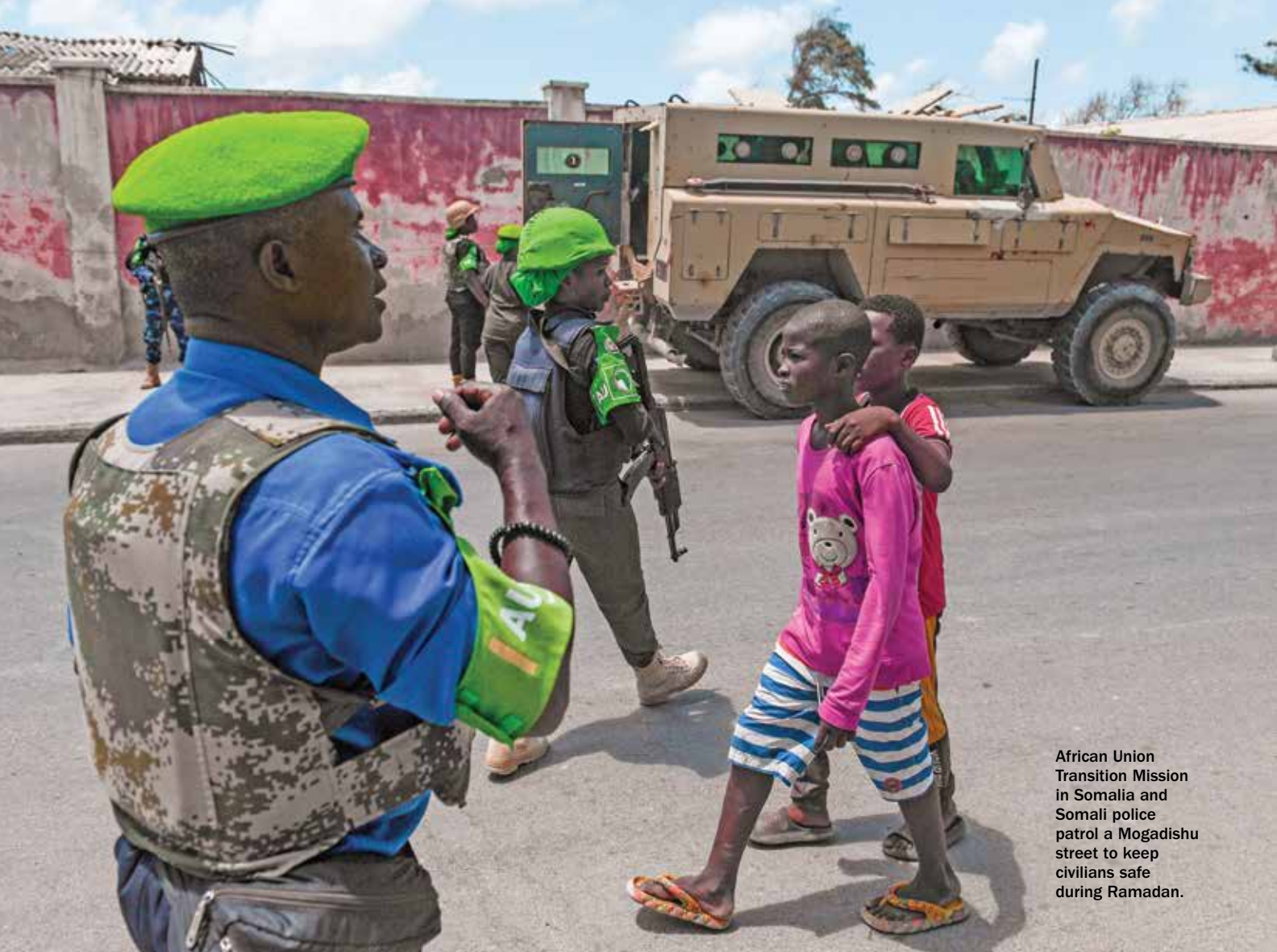
Just a few days later, officials began construction of a new police station in Somalia's Darussalam district. The station is intended to help Somali police officers fight crime while strengthening community relations in the area.

"Policing is a shared responsibility, and ATMIS police component is here to support our SPF counterparts to bring policing to the doorsteps of community members and help protect their human rights," Samuel Asiedu Okanta, mission police training and development coordinator, said in a news release. "This facility will help to prevent crime and enhance policing services in this community."

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ATMIS Police Commissioner Hillary Sao Kanu of Sierra Leone speaks at the close of training for community policing and crime prevention for Somali Police Force personnel.





African Union Transition Mission in Somalia and Somali police patrol a Mogadishu street to keep civilians safe during Ramadan.

In October 2024, ATMIS trained 12 SPF officers and 24 community leaders in Dhobley on police station management, community policing, human trafficking and crime prevention. Mission Sector 2 commander Brig. Seif Salim Rashid of Kenya said bringing together police and civilian leaders would provide more effective security. Dhobley District Commissioner Hassan Abdi Hashi agreed.

“Community members and law enforcement can build a stronger, more resilient community by working together to address safety and security challenges,” Hashi said, according to a news release. “By sharing the lessons learned from this training, we can empower our communities and create a ripple effect of positive change.”

Unlike ATMIS, not all counterterrorism missions allocate adequate resources for a police component. Such has been the case with the Multinational Joint Task Force, which targets Boko Haram and Islamic State group extremists in the Lake Chad Basin. A 2023 report for the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs indicated that although troops have successfully

cleared areas and restored stability, the mission’s lack of police capability has kept it from protecting and holding cleared areas to sustain stability operations.

This forces “the military to remain present in some areas once security has been restored to conduct policing tasks and ensure the safe entry and performance of stabilization and humanitarian activities,” the report states. “However, the military does not have sufficient capacity to operate at this level as it causes the exhaustion of its already limited resources that could be used in further offensive operations elsewhere.”

The AU and its member states need to prioritize community-oriented policing in peace operations, Meressa wrote for the Wilson Center. “Community members are best positioned to recognize suspicious activities in their communities — including radicalization and extremism activities — and to inform the police officers promptly,” Meressa wrote. “Through such stronger community policing partnerships, the police can proactively detect suspicious activities, solve crime and violence problems, and build communities’ resilience to violent extremism.” □



# A STUBBORN INSURGENCY

SOMALIA MARCHES TOWARD SECURITY SELF-SUFFICIENCY,  
BUT AL-SHABAAB REMAINS DANGEROUS AND RESILIENT

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ADF STAFF

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Mogadishu's business district buzzes with activity in 2022. AMISOM





Relatives carry a woman killed during an August 3, 2024, attack at Mogadishu's Lido Beach. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

**T**ourism, nightlife and new businesses have returned around Mogadishu's Lido Beach and throughout the city. But one Friday night in August 2024, as music blared and hundreds relaxed along the beach, a suicide bomber detonated his vest. Several gun-wielding extremists opened fire on the crowd.

"On the streets nearby, people were fleeing an all-too-familiar threat," said a report from Channel 4 News. "Al-Qaida-affiliated al-Shabaab said they carried out this attack, as they have so many others over nearly two decades. Somali police said three of the attackers were killed along with the suicide bomber and one taken into custody. A Soldier also was killed in the gun battle."

When it was over, 37 people had been killed and 212 injured. It was the deadliest al-Shabaab attack since two vehicle bombs killed 121 people and injured 333 in October 2022.

The attacks are a reminder that despite years of foreign military intervention and capacity building, al-Shabaab can emerge from the shadows and inflict significant damage.

#### AL-SHABAAB FLEXES POWER

Samira Gaid, senior Horn of Africa analyst at the consultancy Balqis Insights in Nairobi, told Deutsche Welle that the August 2024 attack was al-Shabaab's way

of "reannouncing their return to the city, reannouncing their existence."

The group, which formed in 2006 as a nationalist movement in response to an Ethiopian invasion, eventually evolved into a terrorist insurgency and al-Qaida's East Africa affiliate. AU forces pushed the group out of Mogadishu in 2011, so it focused on high-profile terror attacks and on ambushing security forces.

Al-Shabaab extorts taxes throughout the countryside, making the group al-Qaida's most profitable affiliate. "Their governance model is not just the taxes, but they do have schools where they indoctrinate students from a very young age," Gaid said. "But the most important thing is how they are able to take into account the grievances that exist within Somali society that led to the state collapse 30 years ago."

Al-Shabaab also is the largest and strongest al-Qaida affiliate with between 7,000 and 12,000 fighters.

In 2007, the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) deployed to protect and defend the country's nascent institutions from al-Shabaab while also helping the Somali National Army and police forces handle



People gather at Mogadishu's Lido Beach in August 2024 to mourn the 37 people killed in an al-Shabaab bomb and gun attack. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

**// IN ANY GIVEN WEEK, AROUND 20 TO 25% OF THE CONTENT WE FIND ON THE INTERNET HAS LIKELY BEEN CREATED BY AL-SHABAB. IT'S ESSENTIALLY THE LARGEST SINGLE PRODUCER OF TERRORIST MATERIAL ON THE INTERNET."** — Adam Hadley, executive director of Tech Against Terrorism

security. AMISOM gave way to the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in April 2022. It ended in December 2024.

After Somali authorities requested a delay in the ATMIS drawdown, the AU Peace and Security Council approved the AU Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). It focuses on post-conflict reconstruction, development and peacebuilding, the council stated. The four-year mission started January 1, 2025, and runs through the end of 2028.

Multinational and national security forces can help keep al-Shabaab at bay. But authorities will have to address the roots of the terrorist group's resilience, namely its propaganda and communications expertise, its financial prowess, and its use of foreign fighters.

### SKILLED MESSENGERS

Al-Shabaab's extensive communications campaign is a cornerstone of its effectiveness. The group uses social media, radio and a website called Shahada News Agency, its official Arabic-language media outlet.

Shahada in July 2024 indicated that it would publish reports that include all Islamic countries, not just Somalia and East Africa, to show "the acceleration and intertwining of events and the universality of the conflict," according to the Middle East Media Research Institute. The same day, the propaganda arm launched X and Facebook accounts.

The Somali government works to blunt the proliferation and effectiveness of al-Shabaab's propaganda. In October 2022, the government officially prohibited



“dissemination of extremism ideology messages both from official media broadcasts and social media,” according to a news release. It further noted that it had suspended more than 40 social media pages. Somalia’s National Intelligence and Security Agency has monitored platforms and informed tech companies so they could remove the content.

“It was a difficult task when we started, it needed knowledge, skills and a lot of work,” Deputy Information Minister Abdirahman Yusuf al-Adala told Voice of America (VOA) in March 2024. “We trained people with the necessary skills, special offices have been set up, equipment has been made available, and legislation has been passed by the parliament. More than a year later, we are in a good position, we believe we have achieved many of our targets.”

The government said it had shut down 20 WhatsApp groups and 16 websites believed to be affiliated with al-Shabaab. Even so, the extremists constantly create new social media accounts and adjust domain names. The group also breaks through by virtue of the volume of material it produces and disseminates.

“In any given week, around 20 to 25% of the content we find on the internet has likely been created by al-Shabab,” Adam Hadley, executive director of the London-based Tech Against Terrorism, told VOA. “It’s essentially the largest single producer of terrorist material on the internet.”

## FINANCIAL PROWESS

Al-Shabaab is notorious for the wealth it generates through illicit trade, extortion and taxation. Some estimate its yearly intake at up to \$150 million. Most money comes from taxing civilians, farmers and businesses. Other funding comes from road tolls and trading charcoal, sugar and fishing, according to The Africa Report. The extremists back the revenue flows with threats of violence.

Government authorities have closed down hundreds of accounts, and western allies have targeted money laundering networks in East Africa, Europe and the Middle East. But al-Shabaab front companies have bought interests in some banks and demand that officials release frozen money.

“Banks have frozen the money in the banking accounts, but banks are allowing them to take out money more easily as they don’t want them to leave the bank,” Matt Bryden, a Canadian political analyst and former worker for United Nations organizations in the region, told The Africa Report. “They have talked to the leader of the bank, and he doesn’t want to lose his business. They are putting pressure on bank managers to release the funds.”

## FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Ironically, an extremist group that formed in reaction to an incursion of foreign forces now reportedly relies on East African fighters to boost its own ranks. Al-Shabaab

# VIOLENCE IN SOMALIA

**S**omalia accounts for about a third of militant Islamist-related deaths in Africa, second only to the Sahel.

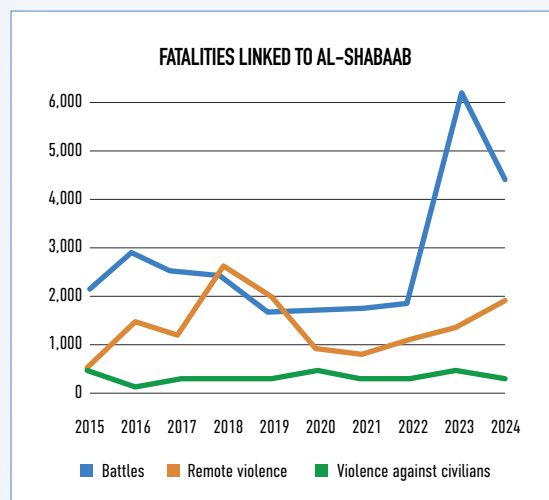
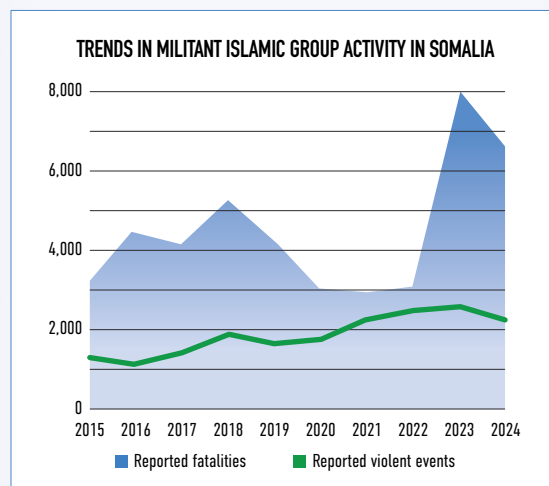
The 6,590 reported deaths in 2024 are more than twice the 2020 total.

This increase in fatalities is due in large part to a government offensive launched in 2022 and al-Shabaab counterattacks. These battles have diminished over the past year.

Virtually all reported events and fatalities are linked to al-Shabaab. The Islamic State in Somalia accounts for less than 1% of this activity in Somalia and Kenya.

Drones and suicide bombings, which constitute “remote violence,” have increased in recent years. There were 640 incidents in a one-year span. Fatalities linked to al-Shabaab’s use of remote violence have more than doubled since 2020 to 1,950.

Source: Africa Center for Strategic Studies using data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (years ending June 30)



has been producing messages in Swahili since at least 2010 to attract recruits, according to the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point in New York.

A confidential AU assessment claimed that as ATMIS continued its drawdown, al-Shabaab “created a pan-East African force” with fighters from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, according to a June 2024 report in The EastAfrican newspaper.

Many of these fighters come from Kenya, which has a significant Somali population and a number of disaffected Muslim citizens eager to improve their economic standing. Three from Nairobi’s Pumwani slum spoke to PBS in 2016. One man, using the pseudonym Abdul, said Kenyans who had fought with al-Shabaab radicalized him in prison.

“They started talking, how their business was good,” Abdul told PBS. “Their business was al-Shabaab.” He got \$500 to join and \$100 a week after that.

Robert Ochola worked at the grassroots level to counter radical teaching. “It’s a battle,” he told PBS. “It’s a battle of hearts and minds, and it depends on who will offer these people you are fighting for more.

“When you have nothing, you don’t have anything to lose. When you’ve dropped out of school, probably

in primary school, you know, your mind is somehow, it’s closed in a box. And then in comes somebody who feeds and fills up your mind with some radical things.”

### SOMALIA’S WAY FORWARD

Despite the ebbs and flows of the battle against al-Shabaab, Somalia and its international partners continue to score meaningful victories. In October 2024, the Somali National Army and local forces conducted an operation in the Mudug region’s Qeycad area in which 30 militants were killed, according to news website HornLife.com. Two commanders, Mohamed Bashir Muse and Madey Fodey, were captured, according to reports. Forty al-Shabaab fighters also were wounded in the two-day battle.

Somali Soldiers conducted the operation with help from Galmudug State forces and local clan militias. Many gains against al-Shabaab have come through leveraging clans’ discontent with the extremists. This has worked especially well in the central part of the country, according to a 2023 International Crisis Group report. Al-Shabaab alienated many communities with its “persistent, onerous demands for money and recruits” and with the violence it dispenses for refusing to comply.

Somali Soldiers have provided clan militias ammunition, food and medical evacuations, and the volunteer fighters, known as macawisley for the sarongs

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A Ugandan police officer serving with AMISOM cleans her gun. The multinational African Union mission deployed in Somalia from 2007 to 2022. AMISOM

Ethiopian troops leave Maxaas Forward Operating Base after ATMIS handed it over to Somali forces in August 2024. AMISOM







they wear, help Soldiers navigate the local terrain and its people. This, combined with ATMIS support, U.S. airstrikes and other foreign assistance, has been a force multiplier against extremists.

However, not all clans have been as helpful, and al-Shabaab has demonstrated an ability to inflict damage through suicide car bombs and other tactics in areas it has lost, the Crisis Group reports. The group also has adapted its approach to local populations by “offering more carrots than sticks” and weaving a commitment to the public good into its rhetoric.

“The federal government’s collaboration with the macawisley likely prompted Al-Shabaab’s shift in tone,” according to the Crisis Group. “In the past, the group has been more willing to offer concessions to clans when it feels weak, only to roll them back later when it is in a stronger position.”

The challenge for Somalia’s government is to find a way to hold on to liberated areas. When government forces, aided by clan-based militias, drive extremists from an area, they risk losing gains without a plan to maintain a presence while also fulfilling service

**Security forces patrol near Mogadishu’s Hayat Hotel after al-Shabaab militants destroyed it in a 30-hour siege in August 2022, killing 21 civilians.** AFP/GETTY IMAGES

commitments, according to the Crisis Group. Failing to do so gives al-Shabaab an opportunity to return.

AUSSOM started its work in January 2025. Rosalind Nyawira, a Kenyan security expert and former director of Kenya’s National Counter Terrorism Centre, said it’s good that a new mission is in place to fill security gaps.

“We will have to wait and assess any success because the enemy they’ll be dealing with also has a way of adjusting — adjusting to security deployments, adjusting to strategies,” Nyawira told the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point in September 2024. “The good thing is that, at least when there’s another mission taking over, there isn’t a vacuum; any vacuum would give terrorists more space to operate. Hopefully, with a good strategy, they can hold ground and be successful. We all hope that it will work well.” □

The background of the entire image is a dark, textured brown. In the center, there is a silhouette of a person wearing a hood and holding a rifle. This silhouette is positioned over a map of the African continent, which is rendered in a lighter, orange-brown color. The map is irregularly shaped, with some areas appearing torn or cut out, creating a jagged edge around the central figure. The overall mood is somber and threatening.

# EXTREMISM

## SPREADS FROM THE SAHEL



# REGIONAL INITIATIVES ARE THE KEY TO STOPPING THE EXPANSION

ADF STAFF

**A**s 2024 ended, Sahel security remained dire. Terror attacks led by an affiliate of the Islamic State (IS) group were a near daily occurrence, and the region accounted for nearly half of all global terrorism deaths. At least 2.8 million people were forced to flee their homes, including 2.1 million in Burkina Faso alone. Extremist groups expanded control of territory inside the military-led countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and were threatening coastal states.

West African leaders called for a shared response to the crisis.

“The magnitude and complexity of the problem are alarming and require concerted action,” Dr. Michael Imran Kanu, permanent representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, said during a Security Council briefing on the terrorism threat. “A coordinated approach to this transnational threat cannot be overemphasized.”

The challenges shared by West African countries highlight the need for regional strategies to address immediate security concerns and underlying socioeconomic issues. The overall increase in terrorism incidents has been dramatic, rising by more than 2,000% over the past 15 years. Food insecurity, poverty, ethnic tensions and weak governments are among the causes. Millions of young people face uncertain futures with few opportunities for jobs and other economic benefits. They have become vulnerable targets for terrorists’ recruiting.

Extremists seek to capitalize on ethnic tensions such as conflict over land between nomadic Fulani herders and sedentary farmers. By exacerbating these tensions and fanning the flames of anger among young people, terrorists grow their ranks.

“Terrorist groups are showing flexibility to adapt,” said Amar Bendjama, Algeria’s ambassador to the U.N. He added that extremist groups are determined to harness social, economic and political instability for their gain. “These phenomena create a fertile breeding ground to recruit new followers into their ranks.”

The rise of organizations such as Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin and splinter groups of IS has intensified violence across the region. These groups not only have targeted government forces but also civilians, leading to widespread humanitarian crises. Terror tactics include



A herder watches over cattle in the Paikon Kore community in Gwagwalada, Nigeria. The country struggles with intercommunal or ethnic violence, and herder-farmer disputes are common. Terrorists have used the situation to their advantage. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

suicide bombings, abductions, torture, rape, forced marriages, recruitment of child combatants and attacks against government infrastructure, schools, traditional leaders and religious leaders.

## **JUNTA ALLIANCE**

The junta governments of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger formed the Alliance of Sahel States in July 2024 to distance themselves from long-standing security partners. The alliance opted for cooperation with non-Western entities such as Russia's mercenary Wagner Group for military support. The military governments of the alliance have failed to curb the terrorism threat. Critics say juntas generally do not prioritize stability or good governance. In each country, they say, the juntas are increasingly resorting to repression to hold on to power.

In late 2024, the three nations in the alliance withdrew from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which offered six months of dialogue to change their minds. In the aftermath of the split, ECOWAS has been widely praised for trying to get the three

countries to hold free elections and return to democracies.

The decision by Niger's junta to suspend military cooperation with the U.S. is changing security dynamics throughout the region. Dimensions for Strategic Studies reports that the alliance countries have "procured large quantities of weapons from non-traditional sources — Russia, Turkey, Iran and China — in the name of 'diversifying partnerships.'"

As terrorist groups expand, there is an increasing risk of violence spilling over into urban regions previously considered secure. The Liptako-Gourma area, a tri-border region between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, has become a hot spot for attacks that could easily spread into coastal territories.

Instability in the Sahel has not remained contained within its borders. It now directly threatens coastal West African nations, specifically Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. Terrorists value the coastal countries for their ports, which provide access to moneymaking crimes such as weapons dealing, oil bunkering, piracy, and drug and human smuggling.

Riot police in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, disperse protesters who demanded better counterterrorism measures. AFP/GETTY IMAGES





Coastal countries are working to strengthen their defenses against terrorist encroachment. Côte d'Ivoire, with one of West Africa's most vibrant economies, has become a counterterrorism leader. It has established a national initiative to fight money laundering and terrorism financing. It has built army bases and developed counterterrorism units along its northern borders with Burkina Faso and Mali. In January 2022, then-Prime Minister Patrick Achi launched a program to keep terrorists from recruiting young people from border regions. By the end of that year, the program had worked with about 23,000 young people. The program develops apprenticeships and other employment opportunities.

Ghana also has worked to keep terrorists out by seeking more assistance from international partners, such as

a \$22 million support package from the European Union. Ghana has joined conflict prevention initiatives such as the U.S. Global Fragility Act, which establishes funding for anti-terrorism programs. Ghana has deployed more than 1,000 members of its elite special forces and hundreds of security officials to its northern border region while significantly restructuring the country's security forces.

### REGIONAL INITIATIVES

In an attempt to address the spread of terrorism, prevent terrorist attacks and clamp down on organized crime, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo established the **Accra Initiative** in 2017. It is a collaborative security mechanism anchored on three pillars: information

Members of Mali's military junta wave to supporters. The junta has since battled waves of terrorist attacks.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS







Military commanders inspect guns and ammunition recovered from Boko Haram terrorists in Yobe State, Nigeria. The insurgency has spilled over into Cameroon, Chad and Niger. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

and intelligence sharing, training of security and intelligence personnel, and conducting joint cross-border military operations. The Institute for Security Studies says that initiative meetings are held at two levels — heads of security and intelligence services, and government ministers in charge of security.

“Given its membership, the Accra Initiative represents the most logical body to coordinate greater regional security cooperation in coastal West Africa,” the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) notes. “The Accra Initiative’s context-specific design aims to foster greater coordination by bringing together a coalition of the willing as a form of cooperation broker. The initiative serves as an intermediary between a set of countries that are geographically close, share regional security objectives, and need to construct collective mobilization.”

Another regional anti-terrorism institution is the **Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)**, which consists mostly of military units from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. It is headquartered in N’Djamena,

Chad, with a mandate to end the Boko Haram insurgency. As of 2024, it had 10,000 troops from its member countries. It is tasked with protecting civilians from violent attacks, establishing stabilization programs for Lake Chad Basin communities, and establishing humanitarian operations and assistance to affected areas.

The MNJTF’s mandate involves a two-phase process. “First, it conducts kinetic action against Boko Haram and its offshoots including counterterrorism operations, clearance campaigns, patrols, abductee search and rescue operations, and messaging campaigns to encourage defections,” according to an ACSS report. “Second, the MNJTF provides a coordination platform to address drivers of violent extremism in the region through its Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Lake Chad Region.”

**ECOWAS** came into existence 50 years ago as a regional political and economic union of the original 15 member countries. Its aim was to raise living standards and promote economic development throughout the





# A HOLISTIC RESPONSE TO TERRORISM

The United Nations has established six key areas for regional cooperation in addressing Sahel-based terrorism:

- **Strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation** to maintain the region's peace, security and socioeconomic development.
- **Pursuing programs for sustainable development** to improve people's living conditions, and especially to ensure the social and economic integration of young people.
- **Combating terrorism and crime** by winning the support of local populations.
- **Developing an integrated anti-terrorism approach** by governments, regional organizations and the international community.
- **Bolstering judicial cooperation** and the monitoring of illicit financial flows.
- **Improving coordination** among the military high commands of Sahel countries.

region. Since then, it has evolved into what the ACSS describes as “the preeminent regional cooperation framework in West Africa due to the political will of its members, strong legal framework, and long-term experience in peace and security.” The Council on Foreign Relations describes it as “without question the most successful model of regional cooperation in Africa.”

ECOWAS’ historic 1976 protocol lets citizens move freely among member countries.

“The protocol on the free movement of persons, goods and services permits citizens the right of abode in any member state and has been an ECOWAS calling card over the years,” said Ambassador Abdel-Fatau Musah, ECOWAS commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security. “It is a major achievement that people in West Africa do not have to think about a visa when they cross borders within the region.”

Although not technically an anti-terrorist organization, the **Yaoundé Code of Conduct** is a maritime security agreement signed in 2013 by 25 countries around

the Gulf of Guinea to combat piracy, armed robbery against ships, and other maritime crimes in the West and Central African region. It created a zonal security architecture to respond collectively to maritime threats in the area stretching from Senegal to Angola. The Yaoundé Architecture coordinates and shares information among its participating countries.

The code has since encouraged member countries to make technological improvements in radar and surveillance capability to prevent terrorism, crime and piracy.

“Countries in the Gulf now have increased awareness of vessel activity in their waters and are able to make more informed responses in emergencies, like piracy or armed robbery and oil theft,” wrote maritime security expert Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood in an article for *The Conversation*. “Without the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and the new tech that it has introduced, the sharing of information, capture of evidence and cooperation between countries would not have been possible.” □

# Cameroon Acquires Turkish MPT-76 Assault Rifles

ADF STAFF

The Cameroon Army is equipping its special forces with Turkish-made MPT-76 assault rifles.

Developed in the late 2000s for the Turkish military, the MPT-76 is often likened to the AR-15 rifle and shares visual similarities with the German HK-417, according to The Defense Post.

The rifle is chambered for NATO-standard 7.62x51mm ammunition. The first prototypes were built in 2008 using smaller ammunition but were poorly received by Turkish Soldiers. It



was redesigned for NATO ammo. It has a 20-round magazine and fires 650 rounds per minute.

The MPT-76 comes in three barrel lengths, but the version used by Cameroon is equipped with a 40-centimeter barrel.

The Defense Post reports that the Turkish rifles also are used by Azerbaijan, Senegal and Somalia.

The weapons are to be used in Cameroon's North West and South West regions, where a separatist insurgency has been roiling since 2017. Several armed groups want to create a state called Ambazonia out of Cameroon's English-speaking regions. The conflict has killed more than 6,000 people and displaced 765,000.

## Tunisian Navy Adds to Patrol Fleet

ADF STAFF

Tunisia is on track to buy an undisclosed number of 20-meter Archangel patrol boats from the United States at an estimated total cost of \$110 million. The purchase will include GPS, navigation and communications systems, and training.

"The proposed sale will better equip Tunisia to contribute to shared security objectives, promote regional stability, and build interoperability with the United States and Western partners," the U.S. State Department announced. It added that the Tunisian Navy uses such boats for "search and rescue, maritime law enforcement, and other maritime-related operations to ensure security in the country and region."

Tunisia bought similar Archangels in 2015. The U.S.-based SAFE Boats International vessels are equipped with dual 1,600-horsepower diesel engines, shock-absorbing seating and climate control. Their range is up to 400 nautical miles.

Because of its experience with its Archangel boats, the Tunisian Navy will easily integrate the new boats once they are approved, reports Overt Defense. The boats are intended for use near shore and in inland waterways. Analysts told Breaking Defense that such boats are particularly useful for antismuggling and light security patrols. The country has 1,148 kilometers of coastline.



A Tunisian Navy 20-meter Archangel patrol boat cruises near the naval base in Bizerte. U.S. EMBASSY IN TUNISIA

Tunisia's status as a regional maritime force began to change dramatically in 2009, when it received \$14.5 million in military financing from the U.S. for 10 small 8-meter response boats and five medium 13-meter response boats, along with spare parts, training and support. Response boats typically are used in counternarcotics operations, search and rescue, trafficking interdiction, and environmental response.





## Nigerian Company Introduces Armored Vehicle

ADF STAFF

**N**igeria's Proforce has introduced a new armored vehicle, the PF Hulk, designed for military troop and equipment transportation.

The company said the mine-resistant, ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicle can withstand an 8-kilogram antitank mine under any wheel and under the center, and armor-piercing rounds and high-explosive shells. It can carry up to 10 people and supports the installation of weapon systems and other special equipment. It also can tow trailered systems. It has a range of 1,000 kilometers.

The Hulk is the latest on a growing list of Proforce armored vehicles. In July 2022, the company unveiled the lightweight PF Fury vehicle, which it said is made for Nigerian infantry and special operations uses.

On the larger end of the scale, Proforce's flagship MRAP vehicle is its Ara. Proforce also has introduced its PF Viper armored personnel carrier, originally unveiled in 2021 as a lighter, faster and more maneuverable version of the Ara, defenceWeb reports. The company's flagship armored personnel carrier is its PF2, which has been exported to Rwanda, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, where it is used for United Nations peacekeeping missions.

At home, the Nigerian Police Force has acquired a number of PF2s, including vehicles used in Rivers and Lagos states.

# Angola Receives First C295 From Airbus

DEFENCEWEB

**T**he Angolan Air Force has taken delivery of the first of three new C295 transports from Airbus, with the aircraft arriving in Luanda.

The C295 came from the Airbus manufacturing facility in Seville, Spain, arriving in the Angolan capital in July 2024. It is configured as a transport plane. The remaining two will be configured for maritime surveillance. Plans to acquire the planes have been in the works for six years.

"The two C295s configured as Maritime Surveillance Aircraft will play a key role for Search and Rescue, control of illegal fishing and borders, support in case of natural disasters and intelligence-gathering missions, among others," Airbus said.

The Airbus C295 is a medium tactical transport aircraft designed and initially manufactured by the Spanish aerospace company CASA, which is now part of the European multinational Airbus Defence and Space division. The C295 is 24.5 meters long with a 25.8-meter wingspan. It is significantly smaller than other transport planes on the market, but its range of 4,300 kilometers is longer than competitors.

A growing number of African countries have acquired the C295. Algeria has six, Burkina Faso has one, Côte d'Ivoire has one, Egypt has 24, Equatorial Guinea has two on order, Gabon has one, Ghana has three, Mali has two, and Senegal has one and one more on order. In total, 10 countries, including one undisclosed customer, operate or have ordered 44 aircraft in Africa, and these have reached more than 100,000 flight hours since 2005.

The company cited a good example of "resiliency and outstanding performance of the C295 in African territory" during an international peacekeeping mission that the Senegalese Air Force performed in Mali in September 2023, with 28 troop rotations in 14 days, with a total of 200 flight hours — 16 hours per day.

Airbus said it provides C295 operators material support, including repairs and spare parts, technical support with a field service representative, a navigation database, and technical publications updates.

An Airbus C295 comes in for a landing.





# Nigerian Cybercrime Center Named Best in Africa

ADF STAFF

Interpol's Cybercrime Directorate in Singapore ranked the Nigeria Police Force - National Cybercrime Center first among 54 African countries in 2024. Among other achievements, the center recovered \$5.6 million in stolen funds, arrested 751 people suspected of cybercrime and seized 785 devices used in attacks.

Nigeria is the most cybercrime-affected country in Africa and has launched programs to combat crimes such as identity theft, SIM card-related crime and ransomware. The country has acted to modernize its laws to keep up with new crimes.

"We cannot succeed in the fight against cybercrime in isolation," said Mohammed Isah, head of Interpol's Cybercrime Operation Desk, during 2024 Cybersecurity Week. "Either from the law enforcement side, from private sector or other relevant stakeholders. We have to work together."

Nigeria created the center in 2017 as the police hub for addressing cybercrime. In 2021, the country launched a National Public Key Infrastructure, which

allows secure data exchanges by authenticating users. In response to data theft, the National Information Technology Data Agency set up a data breach investigation team and has opened digital forensic laboratories.

But Nigeria continues to face a daunting challenge. It records more than 2,560 cyberattacks weekly, according to the Nigerian Central Securities System. In 2019, a survey found that 86% of companies reported that their public cloud infrastructure had been hit by a cyberattack, the second-highest among 26 countries surveyed.

The center believes it is making an impact through arrests and relentless pressure on gangs. One operation coordinated with Interpol in 2024 targeted Nigeria's Black Axe gang and resulted in 300 arrests, \$3 million in assets seized and 720 blocked bank accounts in multiple countries.

"I can tell you clearly that the cyber criminals are not finding it easy with us," said Commissioner of Police Uche Henry, director of the center. "They know that when it comes to fighting cybercrime, we don't compromise at all. We give the fight our best, and we will continue to put in our best to make sure that we bring whosoever that decides to go into cybercrime to justice."



A new headquarters for the Nigeria Police Force - National Cybercrime Center opened in Abuja in 2024. NPF-NCCC





## LIBERIA AIMS TO BRING INTERNET TO ALL WITH STARLINK DEAL

ADF STAFF

**LIBERIA** signed a deal with SpaceX's Starlink that it hopes will expand internet access across the country. The licensing agreement launched in November 2024 with promises to bring satellite-based internet services to homes in even the most remote corners of Liberia.

**Above: A Starlink residential satellite dish and router**

STARLINK LIBERIA

"For the first time in our country's history, we are making universal internet access a reality," said Liberian Telecommunications Authority Acting Chairperson Abdullah Kamara. "This agreement will allow Starlink to deliver high-speed internet to every village, town and community, no matter how remote. It is a proud moment."

When complete, the service could boost internet coverage from 60% to nearly 100%, authority officials said.

Starlink operates in 10 other African countries. The company uses a network of low-earth satellites connected to ground stations to provide broadband internet service without requiring a traditional modem.

"This is a game-changer for our country," Kamara said. "We are moving toward universal connectivity, and that will unlock countless opportunities for Liberians."

The authority issued a one-year provisional license to Starlink. The cost for users has not been established, but Starlink is required to work with local internet service providers in Liberia as part of the deal.

Only 30% of Liberia's 5.3 million people have access to reliable internet services, according to the authority website. The country hopes the one-year deal will prove its worth and become a long-term partnership.

## GHANA ARMED FORCES CHIEF PREACHES VIGILANCE AGAINST CYBERTHREATS

ADF STAFF

**As Ghana prepared** for presidential elections, Chief of Defence Staff Lt. Gen. Thomas Oppong-Peprah warned of misinformation and propaganda campaigns designed to sow division in the country.

Speaking at the opening of Cyber Awareness Month in October 2024, he stressed "the need to build the capacity of citizens to detect, prevent the proliferation of cyber threats."

He also pledged that the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) would play a support role in keeping the country safe as the December 2024 elections approached. "The Ghana Armed Forces is ready to support civil authorities and other security agencies to ensure Ghana remains a beacon of democracy in Africa," Oppong-Peprah said.



**Lt. Gen. Thomas Oppong-Peprah speaks during a Cyber Awareness Month event at Burma Camp in Accra.** GHANA ARMED FORCES

As part of the awareness month, the GAF collaborated with the Cyber Security Authority and Ministry of Communication and Digitization to produce a National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy Document.

Ghana's Minister of Communications and Digitalisation Ursula Owusu-Ekuful said the country was combating a surge in deepfake videos, YouTube channels spreading misinformation and harmful encrypted messages shared on Telegram designed to affect the election. She said "70% of online misinformation is spread by just 10% of social media accounts."

Owusu-Ekuful urged the National Communications Authority, the Ghana Police Service and the Attorney General's Office to prosecute misinformation cases under the country's Electronic Communications Act and the Criminal Code.

Dr. Albert Antwi-Boasiako, director-general of Ghana's Cyber Security Authority, said that, above all, protecting democracy requires the public to educate itself to avoid being misled.

"We must engage actively in improving our digital literacy and promoting healthy online habits as we navigate through the myriads of information to make electoral decisions," he said. "Each citizen regardless of his or her political orientation should be educated to recognize false and malicious information."

Antwi-Boasiako urged citizens to use fact-checking tools to verify information they find online and encouraged businesses to invest in cybersecurity and train employees on data protection. He said only about 35% to 40% of Ghanaians have basic cyber awareness.

"Awareness creation is the best mechanism for preventing [cyber-crime]," he told journalists after the October event. "It is increasing, but I think there is more work to be done."



## Senegal's Medical Team

# FIRST IN AFRICA TO EARN WHO CERTIFICATION

ADF STAFF

**S**enegal's emergency medical team became the first in Africa to receive World Health Organization certification for its ability to respond to health crises.

The recognition means the team can deploy to emergencies globally within 72 hours of being activated and set up a 30-bed hospital that can provide medical and surgical care for up to 2,500 patients per month. It is a milestone that "significantly boosts" Africa's emergency response capacity, the WHO reported.

Senegal's Type 2 Emergency Medical Team (EMT), made up of military health professionals and under the direction of the Army, underwent a rigorous, six-year process to earn the certification. This culminated in a three-day simulated mass casualty

event attended by WHO officials at Captain Mbaye Diagne Tactical Training Center in Thiès in October 2024. Before the event, the team had trained to set up the hospital in 72 hours, but it completed the task in less than 48 hours.

"This certification showcases Senegal's unwavering commitment to improving its capacity to manage health crises and protect populations, both domestically and internationally," said Birame Diop, Senegalese minister of the Armed Forces.

The team has deployed to crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Representatives from five other countries attended the certification exercise to observe and draw inspiration. Some said they hope to see Senegal's success replicated across the region.

"We are here as observers, as facilitators, as evaluators, but equally to be inspired by the Senegalese model," said Capt. Sylla Salifou Marietou of Guinea's EMT. "We consider it to be the top model to allow us to come to the aid of other countries in the case of need and for our internal plan."

With the certification, Senegal's EMT became the 49th certified team globally with 130 others still working to earn certification.

"This milestone contributes significantly to the region's growing expertise in addressing public health emergencies," said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO regional director for Africa. "EMTs are crucial in enhancing the capacity of national health systems, providing rapid lifesaving action in times of crisis."

Senegal's Emergency Medical Team trains for WHO certification. WHO





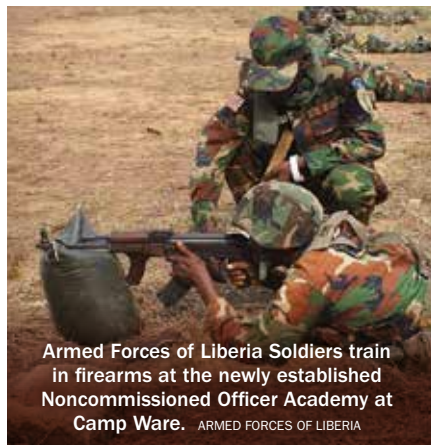
## Liberia Launches NCO Academy To Support Military Professionalism

ADF STAFF

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) is expanding its domestic military training capability by establishing a Noncommissioned Officer Academy.

In December 2024, 40 students completed a nine-week pilot course at the AFL's Armed Forces Training Center at Camp Ware. Each branch of the AFL was represented, and three female NCOs were among the graduates.

"I cannot overemphasize the importance of professional education in the military," the AFL's Command Sgt. Maj. Plazian B. Kuoh, senior enlisted advisor at the Armed Forces Training Center, told ADF. "It is the function and responsibility of every commander to lead, develop and achieve. To achieve such, you need institutions like the NCO Academy."



Armed Forces of Liberia Soldiers train in firearms at the newly established Noncommissioned Officer Academy at Camp Ware. ARMED FORCES OF LIBERIA

AFL Command Sgt. Maj. William F. Tabolo, who participated in the inaugural course, said it is the first of many to come and credited Liberia's partnership with the Michigan National Guard for helping launch the academy.

The national guard training team "supported us in the process [of establishing the academy], starting with validating instructors before the course, up to monitoring the course during its conduct and conducting an after action review with the students and instructors," Tabolo said.

NCOs play a crucial role in the military. They hone the effectiveness and readiness of a unit by training and leading Soldiers and teams. They also enforce the military's established policies and develop working relationships with commissioned officers.

"I believe NCOs can play an important role in offering Soldiers career training and improving professionalism, because they have the exact experience and understand the applicable teaching methodology," Kuoh said.

The pilot course focused on readiness, training and program management, communications, and operations.

## AU MOVES TO STOP SPREAD OF MERCENARIES

ADF STAFF

The number of mercenaries operating in African countries has grown in recent years, led by Russia's former Wagner Group. In response, the African Union is working to curb the destructive impact of foreign fighters and provide oversight through a 40-article draft convention and policy brief on mercenary involvement.

The convention, which would be an update of one enacted in 1977, could include provisions for monitoring human rights abuses committed by mercenaries and tougher penalties for countries that employ foreign fighters.

"We must take a stand to eradicate this scourge and ensure it respects our sovereignty," said Pupurai Togarepi, a parliamentarian from Zimbabwe, during a June 2024 Pan-African Parliament debate on revising the convention on mercenary activity.

A representative from Libya stressed the need to focus on international mercenaries who play the most destructive role on the continent. "African nations must unite to render these groups powerless and protect our people," Salem Masoud Gnan said during the debate.

Efforts to control mercenaries date to 1977 with the Organization of African Unity Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa. That convention warned of the "grave threat which the activities of mercenaries present to the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and harmonious development" of African countries. In December 2023, the AU's Peace and Security Council called for a review of that convention due to rising numbers of mercenaries.

Russia has played an outsized role in exporting mercenaries to Africa. At the height of the conflict in Libya, there were an estimated



A Russian mercenary stands guard in the Central African Republic. The African Union is looking for ways to control mercenaries and foreign fighters. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

20,000 foreign fighters in the country, including many from Russia. The Wagner Group deployed an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 fighters to countries such as the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali and Sudan. Published reports have stated that Russia's Africa Corps, the successor of the Wagner Group, intends to increase its force size to 20,000 fighters.

Observers warn of the destructive potential of these mercenaries. "During the Cold War, African governments were typically cautious of mercenaries and foreign fighters. However, African ruling elites now actively invite and utilise them to consolidate power and combat terrorism, marking a shift from past practices," wrote the authors of an Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation policy brief. "This practice essentially outsources security sovereignty to foreign fighters, lacking accountability and offering plausible deniability."





# U.N.: Shrinking Peacekeeping Missions ENDANGER WOMEN

UNITED NATIONS

Senior United Nations officials are warning of the consequences of not protecting women and their rights in conflict zones, amid recent decisions to close or shrink peacekeeping and special political missions.

Sima Bahous, executive director of U.N. Women, which champions gender equality worldwide, told ambassadors at an August 2024 Security Council meeting that some governments are cutting defense despite an uptick in conflict and insecurity.

"It is counterintuitive that, in the face of unprecedented levels of conflict and violence, the number of deployed

peacekeeping personnel has dropped by almost half from 121,000 in 2016 to approximately 71,000 in 2024," Bahous said. She highlighted growing violence against women and girls, adding that wars are being fought with clear disregard for their lives and rights.

U.N. officials noted Mali, where the U.N. peacekeeping mission MINUSMA closed in December 2023 at the insistence of transitional military authorities. Before its accelerated departure, the country had witnessed "transformative" progress that enhanced women's political participation, officials said.

Officials also voiced concerns over the recent departures of missions from key hot spots that have led to security vacuums and increased vulnerability for women and girls. The drawdowns have diminished the U.N.'s capacity to support national partners in addressing conflict-related sexual violence in areas such as investigation, reporting and assistance to survivors.

"We fear a future of increasing atrocities against women, their ever-greater marginalization from decision-making and ultimately a failure of the international community," Bahous said. "That prospect should be, and I am confident is, unacceptable for all of us."



Women sell goods at the Monday market in front of the Great Mosque of Djenné in Mali. The United Nations says that countries such as Mali are losing ground in protecting women.

Left: A woman carries a fishing net in Mali's Ségou region. AFP/GETTY IMAGES





## AU: Standby Force Must Adapt to Protect

DEFENCEWEB

**An** African Union official said the African Standby Force needs to evolve as the continent's security landscape changes.

In a September 2024 webinar, Dr. Alhadji Sarjoh Bah, director, Conflict Management-AU-Peace and Security Department, said the force has made significant strides in its 20-year existence. He said it has contributed to peace support operations across the continent, "often under challenging circumstances, with notable examples of deployment in crises such as Somalia, Sudan and the Central African Republic, among others." These missions, he said, demonstrated the AU's capacity to act "decisively in defence of peace, security and democratic principles."

Bah said the security force "must continue to evolve" in the light of a constantly changing continental security landscape. He named three specific concerns — the rise of nonstate actors, the increasing effects of climate change on conflict and the need for more comprehensive approaches to address the root causes of instability.

He said threats such as asymmetric warfare, terrorism, pandemics and climate-induced disasters demand that the force adapt and innovate to remain relevant and effective. He said the force would need to enhance its ability to address unconventional threats, cyber threats and pandemics while remaining responsive to traditional conflicts.

A Mozambican Soldier rests during exercises as part of the African Union's African Standby Force.

REUTERS

## MILITARY ASSISTANCE MISSION OPERATIONAL IN MOZAMBIQUE

DEFENCEWEB

**T**he European Union Training Mission in Mozambique taught Mozambican personnel tactical air control, including air-ground cooperation, before ending with an August 2024 graduation and giving way to a new mission.

On September 1, 2024, the EU Military Assistance Mission in Mozambique (EUMAM) started. It falls under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, which lets the bloc act on security challenges worldwide in support of partner countries when asked.

EUMAM will provide comprehensive military training and advisory support to Mozambican forces. The mission is to help Armed Forces for the Defense of Mozambique (FADM) quick reaction forces achieve a sustainable operational cycle in accordance with international humanitarian law no later than June 2026. The sustainable operational cycle covers preparation, deployment and support as a "significant contribution to a safe and secure environment for the people of Cabo Delgado."

In the previous mission, the EU trained 11 FADM quick reaction forces and certified 100 Mozambican instructors. The new mission will improve FADM counterterrorism capacity, support civilian protection and promote human rights, and comply with international humanitarian law. Trained Mozambican commandos and marines already are on the ground.



Mozambican commandos participate in a simulated raid near Moamba in August 2024. TECH. SGT. CHRISTOPHER DYER/U.S. AIR FORCE





# Sea Power Conference Produces Cooperation Goals

DEFENCEWEB

Fifteen African countries, including host South Africa, wrapped up business at a Sea Power for Africa Symposium by endorsing nine key outcomes for the future of maritime cooperation.

The symposium in Cape Town, the fifth of its kind, ended in late October 2024 with a pledge of unity. Military Africa reported that the symposium delved into four primary themes:

- **Maritime security:** Addressing sea power and maritime threats.
- **Blue justice:** Extending the rule of law and protecting human rights.
- **Blue economy:** Defending and policing maritime economic interests.
- **Oceans health:** Building policing and coast guard capacities.

Topping the key outcomes list was strengthened regional collaboration, explained as a need to break down barriers to internaval cooperation, share maritime domain awareness information and conduct regular joint maritime exercises. Another was accelerating implementation of the African Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050 by way of joint maritime patrols, “reinforcing information sharing between maritime domain awareness centres,” and starting to make the

**The Nigerian Navy Special Boat Service conducts counter piracy training in the Gulf of Guinea.** AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Combined Exclusive Maritime Zone of Africa a reality.

The Institute for Security Studies reports that establishing the Combined Exclusive Maritime Zone for Africa is an objective of Africa’s Integrated Maritime Strategy. The intention is to create “a common maritime space to facilitate geostrategic, economic, political, social and security benefits and minimise transnational threats.”

Other outcomes adopted included:

- Supporting the African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development, known as the Lomé Charter.
- Prioritizing engagement between African navies and African defense industries in naval acquisitions.
- Calling for Future Sea Power for Africa conferences to be held every two years with Nigeria to host in 2026.

Countries represented at the symposium were Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Togo.





## Kenyans, Nepalese Train in DRC

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE-KENYA

**K**enyan and Nepalese quick reaction forces successfully concluded a joint training exercise in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) conducted the October 2024 training, which was to improve the troops' preparedness to respond swiftly and effectively to armed group threats in the region, in line with the mission's mandate to protect civilians and promote stability.

The exercise involved intensive training for air insertion and reinforcement missions. It covered a wide range of operational skills, such as ground orientation, foot and vehicle patrolling, radio communication, map reading, and navigation. The forces also trained in tactical combat casualty care, close target reconnaissance, raids, ambushes and rappelling — skills essential for rapid tactical deployments.

Amid increased security patrols aimed at protecting civilians from hostile forces, the joint training enhanced the forces' ability to coordinate and respond swiftly to emergencies.

Lt. Col. Simon Seda, commander of the Kenya Quick Reaction Force, emphasized the importance of the collaboration.

"This training strengthens our ability to rapidly deploy and execute missions in challenging environments," he said. "The coordination between Kenyan and Nepalese forces enables us to respond seamlessly to any distress calls in our area of operation."

This training session was part of a series of inter-contingent exercises under MONUSCO, aimed at countering the threat posed by armed groups in the eastern DRC.

**Kenyan forces train in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.**

KENYA MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

## India, South Africa Commit to Rescue Pact

DEFENCEWEB

**I**ndia and South Africa have agreed to additional naval cooperation that includes submarine rescue. The two countries have signed an implementing agreement, further evidence of what is termed "a shared commitment to maritime safety and mutual support."

If needed, the Indian Navy will deploy one of its two deep submergence rescue vehicles (DSRV) in times of crisis. The agreement comes after Milan, a major Indian Navy exercise, in Visakhapatnam, headquarters of its Eastern Naval Command. During the exercise, India demonstrated the rescue craft and reportedly offered its services to friendly countries in an extension of Indian defense diplomacy.

A report filed after the Milan demonstration said that its submarine rescue starts with locating the "distressed or sunk" underwater craft, followed by rescuing survivors. Personnel trapped in submarines have three exits — using the escape hatch, escaping from torpedo tubes or rescue by a DSRV.

The specialist rescue vessels can be ship mounted or air transportable. India has both capabilities. They reportedly can operate at depths of up to 650 meters.

The DSRVs operated by the Indian Navy are jointly designed and built by the Hindustan Shipyard Visakhapatnam, which spearheaded the development with core technology supplied by a company in Aberdeen, Scotland.

In 2021, an Indian DSRV was part of rescue operations of the ill-fated Indonesian Navy submarine Nanggala-402, which sank north of Bali. All 53 crew members died after what was termed an "implosion" aboard. Submarine debris was discovered three days into a major search 10 nautical miles from the point of last contact.

The addition of the Indian DSRV capability gives the South African Navy a deep-water rescue capability it did not previously have, with only the tower escape safety system available to submariners.

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**The Indian Navy uses these submersibles to conduct deep sea rescue operations and has signed an agreement with South Africa to assist if needed.** JFD







# QUEEN ACHIVANJILA

## Protector of Her People

ADF STAFF

**D**etails of the life of Queen Achivanjila, who ruled the Makua people in what is now Mozambique during the late 19th century, have been passed down from generation to generation. The history lacks some details, but it is clear that the queen faced formidable obstacles.

Her kingdom is now known as Niassa, a sparsely populated province in northern Mozambique. She is believed to have ruled from about 1865 until about 1870, when Portugal was the colonial power in her land. She had to negotiate a political path of keeping the Portuguese at bay while convincing her people that she had the upper hand.

Oral tradition states that she came to power after defying her husband, the king, to rescue villagers he had sold as slaves to Dutch traders. Today in Cape Town, South Africa, there is a neighborhood with descendants of slaves rescued by the queen.

She rose to power within a traditional matrilineal structure in which social status and inheritance are passed down through women. As ruler of her kingdom, she had to steer through the patriarchal colonial system favored by the Portuguese and some neighboring kingdoms. She almost certainly had to engage diplomatically with the Portuguese, giving the impression that she was an ally.

She ruled as Christianity and Islam spread in the region, which would have threatened her people's customs and belief systems. She came to rely on the powerful women in her kingdom, who had access to

land, political power and were involved in military affairs. It is largely accepted that Achivanjila expanded trade networks within her kingdom and encouraged the development of relationships with coastal merchants, which guaranteed her people a measure of prosperity. She also was believed to be a skilled military strategist, successfully defending her realm against rival kingdoms.

Her legacy, however, rests with her treatment of slaves, in which she used her knowledge of traditional medicine to help people who were being taken to the coast for the slave trade and saved many from death. She organized an army to protect her borders, which also helped prevent slave raids.

Although largely ceremonial, the title "Queen of Niassa" survives to this day, as one of Africa's last female-led monarchies. The title's prestige is such that when Queen Abibi Achivanjila V died in April 2023 at age 96, then-Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi marked her passing with: "We were unable to prevent our revered common friend, the Queen of Niassa, from passing into eternity during Easter celebrations and in the middle of Ramadan."

Survivors included six children, 32 grandchildren and 46 great-grandchildren. Her successor, Bibi Achivanjila VI, continues the lineage and traditions of her predecessor. Niassa province continued to honor its rich cultural history and monarchy tradition by hosting the first Queen Achivanjila Festival in April 2024.



# CLUES

- 1 It covers 42 hectares and was an example of urban development at the frontiers of the Roman Empire.
- 2 The site shows evidence of several civilizations across 1,000 years of occupation.
- 3 A substantial amount of artistic material, such as mosaics, marble and bronze statues, and hundreds of inscriptions have been found at the location.
- 4 This was the capital of the Mauretanian kingdom during the reigns of Juba II and Ptolemy.







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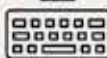
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Headquarters, U.S. Africa Command  
ATTN: J3/Africa Defense Forum Staff  
Unit 29951  
APO AE 09751 USA

Headquarters, U.S. Africa Command  
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Kelley Kaserne  
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