

AFRICA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from Africa

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Two UN Peacekeepers Killed in Ambush in South Sudan

Two United Nations [peacekeepers](#) were killed and seven others injured after unidentified gunmen ambushed a UN patrol in South Sudan's eastern Jonglei State, underscoring the deteriorating security environment in the conflict-affected country.

The patrol, operated by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), was travelling towards Pajut, a remote area in Jonglei, when it came under attack. The two peacekeepers killed in the incident were Ethiopian nationals. Among those injured were three UN peacekeepers, two members of the South Sudan National Police Service and two civilian staff.

Following the attack, UNMISS deployed a quick reaction force to secure the area and support the emergency response. Preliminary information indicated that the patrol appeared to have been deliberately targeted, although investigations into the incident are continuing.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres strongly condemned the attack and conveyed condolences to the families of the peacekeepers as well as to the government and people of Ethiopia. He also wished a speedy recovery to those injured. According to the UN, the latest deaths bring the number of peacekeepers killed in malicious acts since the beginning of the year to nine.

UNMISS chief Anita Kiki Gbeho described the violence against personnel serving the peace process in South Sudan as unacceptable. She called on South Sudanese authorities to conduct a prompt and thorough investigation and ensure that those responsible are held accountable. The UN has also stressed that deliberate attacks against peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law.

The incident comes amid growing concern over renewed violence and the fragility of South Sudan's peace process. The country gained independence from Sudan in 2011 following more than two decades of conflict but descended into civil war in 2013 after a political struggle between President Salva Kiir and his then deputy Riek Machar. Despite subsequent peace agreements, political tensions and localised violence continue to affect several parts of the country.

UNMISS, established shortly after South Sudan's independence, is mandated to protect civilians, facilitate humanitarian access, monitor human rights violations and assist the country's political transition and peace process.

The worsening security situation has also had serious implications for humanitarian operations. South Sudan remains one of the world's most dangerous environments for aid workers. At least 36 humanitarian workers have reportedly been killed since January, exceeding the 31 killed during the whole of 2025.

The broader humanitarian situation remains severe. Nearly eight million people, representing more than half of South Sudan's population, are facing crisis levels of hunger, while famine risks have been identified in several counties. A cholera outbreak has also claimed more than 1,700 lives.

Continued attacks on peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel threaten to further restrict access to vulnerable communities and deepen an already severe humanitarian crisis. UN officials have warned that renewed fighting could increase the risk of further atrocities unless violence is brought under control and the country's fragile political process is sustained.

Hichilema Wins Zambia Presidential Election

[Zambian](#) President Hakainde Hichilema has secured a second five-year term after winning around 60 per cent of the vote, defeating his principal challenger Brian Mundubile, who received about 38 per cent. The result prompted celebrations among supporters in the capital, Lusaka, who described the outcome as an endorsement of Hichilema's economic policies and leadership.

[Hichilema](#) first came to power in 2021 promising economic recovery, employment generation and improved governance after Zambia had become the first African country to default on its sovereign debt during the COVID-19 pandemic. During his first term, his government undertook

extensive debt restructuring, sought to restore investor confidence and introduced measures aimed at stabilising the economy. Inflation, which stood at around 24 per cent when he assumed office, subsequently declined to single-digit levels.

Despite improvements in macroeconomic indicators, significant economic challenges remain. High food prices, unemployment, power shortages and the broader cost-of-living crisis continue to affect ordinary Zambians. More than 70 per cent of Zambia's population reportedly lives on less than US\$3 a day, highlighting the gap between macroeconomic recovery and improvements in household welfare.

Zambia's mineral wealth is also expected to remain central to Hichilema's second term. The country is Africa's second-largest copper producer after the Democratic Republic of the Congo and possesses significant deposits of copper and cobalt that are increasingly important for electric vehicles, renewable energy technologies and other strategic industries. Hichilema has set an ambitious target of increasing annual copper production to three million tonnes by 2031.

The country's mineral resources have attracted growing interest from both China and the United States. Zambia has sought to maintain relations with competing international partners while retaining autonomy in its foreign economic policy. Hichilema's ability to balance these partnerships will be closely watched as

global competition for critical minerals intensifies.

However, the election campaign was shaped not only by economic issues but also by concerns over democracy, political freedoms and governance. Opposition figures accused the government of restricting political space and raised concerns over campaigning conditions and recent constitutional and electoral changes. Analysts also pointed to continuing concerns over freedom of expression, association and press freedom, although the election itself was broadly peaceful and monitored by domestic and international observers.

Hichilema's second term will therefore be judged largely on whether his government can translate macroeconomic stability and increased investment into tangible improvements in employment, incomes and living standards. At the same time, the administration will face pressure to strengthen democratic institutions, address corruption concerns and maintain public confidence in Zambia's political system.

46th SADC Summit Charts Regional Priorities

The Southern African Development Community ([SADC](#)) has placed regional security, industrialisation, critical minerals and deeper economic integration at the centre of its agenda following the 46th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Durban, South Africa, on 17 August 2026. The Summit was

chaired by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who was elected Chairperson of SADC, while Zambia was designated as the incoming chair. King Mswati III of Eswatini was elected Chairperson of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation.

Peace and security concerns featured prominently in the deliberations. The Summit reiterated SADC's solidarity with the Democratic Republic of Congo and reaffirmed support for coordinated regional and international efforts to restore peace and security, protect civilians, strengthen humanitarian and public health responses and promote inclusive dialogue. It also welcomed ongoing engagement in Madagascar through the SADC Panel of Elders and urged stakeholders to maintain calm and resolve grievances through dialogue, while supporting reforms aimed at restoring constitutional normalcy.

On Mozambique, SADC commended the government for its ongoing inclusive national dialogue and efforts to combat terrorism and maintain peace and security in parts of Cabo Delgado Province. The Summit also welcomed the inauguration of the SADC Regional Fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Coordination Centre in Maputo, which is tasked with combating illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing.

Economic transformation was another major focus. Leaders endorsed the theme, "Resilient, Sustainable, and Inclusive Industrialisation through Infrastructure

Development, Agricultural and Critical Minerals Transformation in Pursuit of a Just World.” The communiqué identified infrastructure, agriculture and critical minerals as key drivers of industrialisation and regional competitiveness.

The Summit also reviewed the implementation of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan 2020–2030 and identified several high-impact priorities, including industrialisation, regional value chains, agro-processing, critical minerals, the just energy transition, economic corridors and one-stop border posts. Member States were encouraged to leverage opportunities emerging from the changing global geopolitical and economic environment to deepen trade and investment and strengthen regional resilience.

In a further step towards regional integration, the Summit approved an agreement establishing the SADC Tourism UNIVISA and called for its signature by Member States. The initiative is expected to facilitate easier travel across the region, strengthen tourism and encourage investment.

Food security and climate resilience also received attention. Leaders urged Member States to remove non-tariff barriers affecting agricultural trade, harmonise standards and improve cross-border logistics. They also called for stronger preparedness for anticipated El Niño-induced climate shocks through early-

warning systems, irrigation development and climate-smart agriculture.

The Summit concluded by reaffirming the importance of regional integration, infrastructure development, value addition and collective resilience. Zambia will host the 47th SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government.

Somali Piracy Tests Maritime Security

Piracy off the Horn of Africa has [risen sharply](#) in 2026, reaching its highest level since 2013 and renewing concerns over maritime security along some of the world’s busiest shipping routes. According to an [AFP analysis](#) of International Maritime Organization data, at least 15 pirate attacks have been recorded since the start of the year, including eight in the Gulf of Aden since May.

The increase marks a significant reversal after more than a decade of relatively low pirate activity around Somalia. Only five attacks were recorded in 2025, but incidents have multiplied this year, particularly in the Gulf of Aden, the strategic waterway linking the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

One of the most serious incidents occurred on 21 April, when around 30 pirates armed with assault rifles and grenade launchers attacked the oil tanker Honour 25 north of Eyl in Puntland. The pirates took 17 crew members hostage and continued to control the vessel.

Another major incident involved the cargo ship MV Lutuf, which was seized off the Puntland coast on 17 August. Somalia later announced that Turkish naval forces, working with Somali forces, had freed the vessel after a 10-day pursuit, killing 14 pirates and destroying four boats. Puntland authorities disputed the account and alleged that the ship was released following a ransom payment. The conflicting claims have not been independently verified.

The resurgence has prompted maritime authorities to reassess the threat. The Joint Maritime Information Center raised its piracy threat assessment to “severe” following the surge in attacks during April and May. Nevertheless, current levels remain far below the peak of the Somali piracy crisis in 2011, when around 200 attacks were recorded in the region.

Several factors appear to be contributing to the renewed activity. Maritime officials have pointed to the diversion of naval forces towards other crises in the region, providing pirate groups with greater operational space. Economic pressures inside Somalia, including inflation, rising food and fuel costs and reduced international aid, have also intensified vulnerabilities onshore.

Illegal fishing remains another important underlying factor. Somalia reportedly loses around US\$300 million annually to illegal fishing, while coastal communities have long accused foreign trawlers of depleting

local fish stocks. Experts, however, note that modern piracy has evolved beyond such grievances into a more organised criminal enterprise focused largely on hijacking vessels for ransom.

Regional and international actors have begun strengthening maritime cooperation. The European Union has maintained access for Operation Atalanta, Saudi Arabia has established a Red Sea maritime task force, while Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Yemen have pursued greater intelligence-sharing. Experts caution that naval patrols alone may not be sufficient unless weak coastal governance and economic insecurity are also addressed.

Ethiopia’s Fragile Peace Comes Under Strain

Renewed military tensions in northern [Ethiopia](#) have raised fears that the country could slide back into a major conflict, with recent artillery exchanges, drone strikes and troop movements in and around Tigray increasing concerns over the fragile peace established after the 2020–2022 war.

For several months, the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) and Tigrayan forces have reportedly been positioned along the Tigray border amid worsening relations between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s federal government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). Both sides have accused each other of preparing for renewed hostilities. The previous conflict ended with the Pretoria

peace agreement, but clashes reportedly resumed in late 2025.

Tensions escalated further in August. On 1 August, the TPLF accused federal forces of attacking its positions near Shererina, close to the Sudanese border, with heavy artillery. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project confirmed incidents in the area. The TPLF subsequently reported drone strikes against its fighters in southern Tigray, with a local medical official saying at least four fighters were wounded.

The potential involvement of other armed actors has further complicated Ethiopia's security environment. Ethiopian authorities have accused the TPLF of building links with Eritrea and the Fano militia in neighbouring Amhara. These actors had previously fought alongside federal forces against the TPLF during the Tigray war, but subsequent tensions with Addis Ababa have altered regional alliances.

[Fano](#) itself has emerged as an increasingly significant challenge to the federal government. Its chairman, Zemene Kassie, has called for the removal of Abiy Ahmed's government and claimed that opposition forces from several Ethiopian regions are attempting to build a broader political and military coalition. Fighting between Fano and federal forces has spread across several zones in Amhara, although the extent of coordination between regional opposition groups remains contested.

The prospect of renewed fighting has also raised concerns about wider regional involvement. Sudan has accused Ethiopia of allowing the Rapid Support Forces to operate from Ethiopian territory, while longstanding tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt over the Nile and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam remain unresolved. Analysts have warned that any new Ethiopian conflict could draw in neighbouring states, particularly Sudan and Eritrea.

The African Union, which brokered the Pretoria agreement, has attempted to revive dialogue. Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, the AU special envoy for the Horn of Africa, visited Mekelle in June and reportedly initiated discussions concerning implementation of the peace agreement. However, continued clashes and shifting alliances suggest that Ethiopia's post-war settlement remains increasingly fragile.