

# AFRICA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from Africa

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## Israel becomes first country to recognize Somaliland's sovereignty

Israel has become the first country to formally recognise Somaliland as an independent state, more than three decades after the region declared separation from Somalia. The move has triggered sharp international backlash, with Somalia condemning it as a violation of its sovereignty and countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, China and the African Union [voicing opposition](#). China warned against encouraging separatism for narrow interests. Somaliland's president hailed the decision as historic. At the United Nations Security Council, the United States defended Israel, arguing that similar recognition of a Palestinian state earlier this year had not drawn comparable outrage. Israel said the move was not hostile and left room for dialogue.

Israel has formalised full [diplomatic relations](#) with Somaliland after signing an agreement that includes the exchange of ambassadors and the opening of embassies, according to Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar. The move marks a historic breakthrough for Somaliland, which declared independence from Somalia in 1991 but had never been recognised by a UN member state. Somaliland governs itself as a de facto state in north-west Somalia, bordering Djibouti and Ethiopia. Israel described the decision as being in the spirit of the 2020 Abraham Accords, which normalised ties between Israel and several Arab states, framing the agreement as part of a broader push to expand diplomatic engagement in the region.

Israel's recognition of Somaliland has triggered sharp regional and international backlash and [exposed divisions](#) within the United States. Parts of the US administration fear that recognising Somaliland could jeopardise military cooperation with Somalia, where US troops support efforts against al-Shabaab. Somalia has condemned the move as a direct assault on its sovereignty, a position strongly backed by the African Union, which warned that undermining Somalia's territorial integrity could destabilise the continent. Egypt and Turkey also criticised Israel, calling the decision interference in Somalia's internal affairs.

Israel has defended the move as the outcome of a year of talks, arguing it serves strategic interests, particularly given Somaliland's proximity to Yemen and the conflict with the Houthis. Analysts point to Somaliland's strategic value, including a UAE-run military base in Berbera, as well as growing US interest amid concerns over China's influence in Djibouti. Somaliland's leadership remains confident that broader international recognition is only a matter of time.

The European Union, African Union and several regional powers have [urged](#) respect for Somalia's unity and calling for dialogue between Mogadishu and Somaliland. Egypt, Turkey, Djibouti and Nigeria all rejected the move, warning that recognising breakaway regions threatens regional and international stability. The African Union reaffirmed its commitment to Somalia's territorial integrity, while Nigeria urged other states not to follow Israel's lead. Although Somaliland has operated as a

relatively stable, self-governing entity since 1991, it remains unrecognised internationally. Somalia has long mobilised global opposition to any recognition, even as Somaliland hopes Israel's decision will encourage others to follow.

Despite its democratic credentials and strategic location on the Gulf of Aden, Somaliland remains diplomatically isolated, navigating political pressures, regional rivalries and shrinking civic space more than three decades after declaring independence.

### **Alliance of Sahel States inaugurates 5,000-strong joint force**

The Alliance of Sahel States (AES) consisting of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger bolstered their regional security through a unified military force consisting of 5000 personnel. This joint military force is aimed at countering Islamist insurgencies in the region. The force was inaugurated on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2025, during a ceremony held at the Bamako airbase. This move came a few days before the second AES summit.

The ceremony was headed by Mali's Transitional President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, General Assimi Goïta, currently serving as the outgoing chair of the AES. It marked the official transfer of the AES Unified Force banner, symbolising the long-promised move by Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to jointly defend their sovereignty. The newly operational force, known as FU AES, comprises around 5,000 troops contributed by the three countries. According to Nigerien Minister of National Defence, General Salifou Modi, the force aims to

[combine](#) air capabilities, shared intelligence and coordinated ground operations to counter armed groups that have increased insecurity across the Sahel for more than a decade. The violence is primarily fuelled by the Islamist groups linked to Al Qaeda and Islamic State has worsened since the military coups in these nations. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), as of December 2025, around 2.6 million people have been [displaced](#) within this region.

The operational strategy, drafted by military specialists from all three AES countries, rests on three core priorities—coordinated counter-terrorism efforts, stronger cross-border legal cooperation, and the protection of civilians. Niger's armed forces chief, General Moussa Salaoua Barmou, [explained](#) that future missions will rely on tightly coordinated manoeuvres to maximise their effectiveness. By aligning ground operations with shared intelligence, the force aims to prevent armed groups from using national borders as sanctuaries. This approach reflects a shift towards regionally driven security solutions, distancing the AES from Western-led frameworks such as the former G5 Sahel and Operation Barkhane. Officials say it builds on earlier joint operations, Yereko I and II, which reportedly weakened militant networks.

The sustainability of the 5,000-strong AES Unified Force is closely tied to growing cooperation with Russia. In April 2025, Moscow [agreed](#) to provide weapons, equipment, and specialised training suited to Sahel conditions. Russian Foreign

Minister Sergey Lavrov said experts would support the force's armament. This partnership builds on earlier deployments of Kremlin-linked Wagner Group elements, now operating under the Africa Corps banner, which first arrived in Mali in 2021 and later expanded to Burkina Faso and Niger.

At the AES summit, hosted by Mali, in late December, Burkina Faso's leader, Captain Ibrahim Traoré, was appointed head of the bloc and plans were announced for a major joint military operation. The meeting underscored deepening integration among Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, following the launch of a shared AES passport and their withdrawal from ECOWAS, which they now accuse of hostility. As regional tensions grow, AES leaders have criticised Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire for opposing their political direction. Together, the three Sahel states are reshaping alliances and asserting a new vision of power and sovereignty in West Africa.

### **Coordinated Interpol cybercrime crackdown across Africa**

A month-long, INTERPOL-coordinated law enforcement operation has delivered one of the most significant crackdowns on cybercrime networks in Africa to date, underscoring both the scale of the threat and the growing capacity of African states to respond collectively. Operation Sentinel, conducted between 27 October and 27 November 2025, resulted in the arrest of 574 suspects across 19 countries and the recovery of approximately USD 3 million in illicit proceeds.

The operation targeted three rapidly growing forms of cybercrime—business email compromise (BEC), digital extortion, and ransomware—all flagged as critical threats in INTERPOL's [2025 Africa Cyber Threat Assessment Report](#). According to INTERPOL, the cases investigated during the operation were linked to financial losses exceeding USD 21 million, highlighting the economic toll cybercrime continues to impose on African states, businesses, and individuals.

Participating countries included Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, reflecting the increasingly continental scope of cyber threats and responses.

A key outcome of Operation Sentinel was the disruption of cybercriminal infrastructure. Authorities took down over 6,000 malicious links, dismantled dozens of fraudulent servers, and successfully decrypted six ransomware variants, significantly limiting the ability of cybercriminals to continue operations. The specific ransomware families were not publicly named.

Several country-level interventions stood out. In [Senegal](#), swift coordination between law enforcement and financial institutions prevented a major BEC attack targeting a petroleum company. Fraudsters had infiltrated internal email systems and impersonated senior executives to authorise a USD 7.9 million wire transfer. Rapid

account freezes stopped the transfer before funds could be withdrawn—an example of how early detection can avert catastrophic losses.

In [Ghana](#), authorities responded to a ransomware attack on a financial institution that had encrypted 100 terabytes of data and siphoned off approximately USD 120,000, severely disrupting services. Advanced malware analysis enabled investigators to identify the ransomware strain and develop a decryption tool, recovering nearly 30 terabytes of data. Multiple suspects linked to the attack were arrested.

Ghanaian law enforcement also dismantled a cross-border cyber-fraud network operating between Ghana and Nigeria, which defrauded more than 200 victims of over USD 400,000. The group used professionally designed websites and mobile applications to impersonate well-known fast-food brands, collecting payments for orders that were never delivered. The operation led to 10 arrests, the seizure of over 100 digital devices, and the shutdown of 30 fraudulent servers.

In Benin, authorities removed 43 malicious domains and shut down 4,318 social media accounts linked to scams and extortion schemes, resulting in 106 arrests. Meanwhile, Cameroon's rapid response to phishing-linked online vehicle sales scams led to emergency bank freezes within hours of victim reports, limiting financial damage.

INTERPOL's Director of Cybercrime, Neal Jetton, [warned](#) that cyber threats are accelerating across the continent, particularly against finance and energy

sectors, but stressed that Operation Sentinel demonstrated the effectiveness of coordinated responses. The initiative was supported by private-sector partners including Team Cymru, The Shadowserver Foundation, Trend Micro, TRM Labs, and Uppsala Security, which provided critical technical assistance in tracing IP addresses and freezing illicit assets.

Operation Sentinel forms part of the African Joint Operation against Cybercrime (AFJOC) framework, aimed at strengthening national cybercrime capabilities and disrupting transnational networks. The operation coincides with broader global efforts to tackle ransomware, including recent US Department of Justice prosecutions of Ukrainian nationals linked to the Nefilim ransomware group, illustrating the increasingly transnational nature of cybercrime and enforcement responses.

Together, these developments signal a growing willingness and ability among African states to confront cybercrime as a shared security challenge rather than an isolated national issue.

## **U.S. airstrikes in Nigeria against ISIS affiliates**

Nigeria has confirmed that US-supported air strikes were carried out against two Islamic State-affiliated camps in the Bauni forest of Sokoto State, following intelligence that foreign fighters were entering the country from the Sahel. The operation, conducted on Thursday with the authorisation of President Bola Tinubu, targeted militants linked to ISIS operating in the area. According to the [Ministry of](#)

Information, the strikes were launched from maritime platforms based in the Gulf of Guinea after a prolonged period of surveillance, intelligence analysis, and operational planning. Officials said the coordinated action aimed to disrupt cross-border militant networks and degrade extremist capabilities in north-western Nigeria.

US President Donald Trump said on Thursday that American forces had carried out air strikes against Islamic State militants in north-western Nigeria, acting at the request of the Nigerian government. Writing on Truth Social, Trump claimed the group had been targeting Christian communities in the region.

Nigerian authorities said the operation involved the use of 16 GPS-guided precision weapons launched from MQ-9 Reaper drones. The strikes reportedly destroyed militant camps being used by foreign Islamic State fighters who had crossed into Nigeria from the Sahel and were working alongside local extremist cells.

According to the government, intelligence assessments showed the sites were central to planning large-scale attacks inside Nigeria. Officials described the operation as the result of detailed surveillance and close cooperation with international partners, aimed at preventing further violence and disrupting cross-border terrorist networks before they could strike civilian populations.

According to DW news reports, there is uncertainty over the number of “civilian casualties” or the “terrorist casualties”. The

lack of information on terrorist casualties is attributed to the fact that the camps are situated in areas with limited access and the military’s silence could be strategic. On the other hand the Nigerian Government emphasized that the “foreign Islamic State” elements were working with local affiliates and were using the targeted camps to plan large-scale attacks inside Nigeria. The government further stressed that “the ongoing operations are geared towards securing the state and ensuring the protection of lives and property”.

Nigeria faces a complex militant landscape, with around six ideologically driven armed groups linked to either ISIL (ISIS) or al-Qaeda. These groups operate mainly in the country’s predominantly Muslim northeast and northwest, but have targeted both Christian and Muslim communities, highlighting the indiscriminate nature of their violence.

The recent air strikes are believed to have targeted Lakurawa, a relatively new faction whose structure and leadership remain poorly understood. The most infamous of these groups is Boko Haram, based in Borno State. It gained global attention in 2014 after abducting 300 schoolgirls from Chibok under the leadership of Ibrahim Shekau. Boko Haram was at its most active between 2012 and 2015, attacking military bases and civilians across Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, and expanding into neighbouring Cameroon, Niger and Chad. Using suicide bombings and mass kidnappings, the group killed at least 30,000 people and displaced millions before being weakened by internal splits and sustained military pressure.

Taken together, the strikes signal Nigeria's growing reliance on intelligence-led, externally supported counterterrorism to contain Sahelian spillover. However, uncertainty over casualties and militant resilience underscores the limits of air power without sustained governance, regional cooperation, and protection of civilians in affected regions.

### **Eritrea withdraws from IGAD**

Eritrea has withdrawn from the Eastern African bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) established to promote stability and ensure food security in East Africa. Alongside Eritrea, IGAD includes Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, and Djibouti. Eritrea's Foreign Ministry has cited the reason for withdrawal as, "IGAD has strayed away from its founding principles and failed to contribute to regional stability. It further stated that the bloc was "becoming a tool against countries like itself". The withdrawal comes amid a fierce war of words between Eritrea and neighbouring Ethiopia, leading to fears of renewed armed conflict. The [government](#) in Asmara, has long accused IGAD of siding with Ethiopia in regional disputes. In its response, IGAD has [accused](#) Asmara of not participating in its "meetings, programmes, or activities."

Ethiopia's renewed push for Red Sea access has reopened old wounds in the Horn of Africa. Since 2023, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's public demands, including [remarks](#) questioning Ethiopia's recognition of Eritrea's independence, have angered Asmara and revived long-

standing mistrust. Eritrea formally broke away in 1993, leaving Ethiopia landlocked, and relations have swung between hostility and fragile peace. Although Abiy won the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for ending a bitter border conflict with President Isaias Afewerki, the legacy of that war and years of regional rivalry endure. Disputes within Igad, accusations of external interference, and unresolved border tensions continue to undermine regional cooperation and stability.

Eritrea's decision to step away from IGAD reflects deep-rooted regional rivalries rather than a sudden diplomatic break. Despite the 2018 peace deal, relations with Ethiopia remain fragile and competitive, and the fact that IGAD is headed by a former Ethiopian foreign minister has reinforced Asmara's belief that the bloc favours Addis Ababa. The war in Sudan has further sharpened these divisions. While many IGAD members are seen as sympathetic to the Rapid Support Forces, Eritrea's traditional alignment with Egypt, a key backer of Sudan's army and a rival of Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), places it on the opposite side of regional fault lines. Eritrea's exit also fits a longer pattern. It previously suspended IGAD membership in 2007 and, under President Isaias Afwerki's security-first and inward-looking approach, has often kept multilateral engagement to a minimum.

IGAD [expressed](#) regret over Eritrea's decision to withdraw, noting that it was taken without submitting concrete proposals or engaging in discussions on

possible institutional or policy reforms. The organisation emphasised that it has consistently kept channels for dialogue open through its established consultative mechanisms and remains willing to address member states' concerns through these forums. IGAD said its Secretariat would continue reaching out to the Eritrean government and urged Asmara to reconsider its decision and return to the organisation in good faith. Rejoining, it argued, would help advance shared regional goals of peace, stability, and development. The bloc reaffirmed its commitment to its core mandate of promoting regional cooperation, constructive dialogue, and collective action, stressing that these principles are essential to addressing the complex political, security, and development challenges facing the Horn of Africa and to improving outcomes for the region's people.