

AFRICA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from Africa

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- Islamic State Attack on Niamey Airport, Niger
- IMF Forecasts Sub-Saharan Africa's Growth in 2026
- Somalia cancels all agreements with UAE
- Burkina Faso Junta Dissolves All Political Parties
- South Africa orders expulsion of Israeli envoy

Islamic State Attack on Niamey Airport, Niger

Islamic State (IS) has [claimed](#) responsibility for the attack on the international airport and the adjacent air force base in Niamey, according to the SITE Intelligence group. The attack which began shortly after midnight on 29th January involved motorcycle-riding militants who launched a “surprise and coordinated” strike using heavy weaponry and drones, according to statements released via IS in the Sahel’s propaganda arm, Amaq news agency.

A statement released by Niger’s defence ministry claimed that four military personnel were injured and 20 attackers were killed, with state television saying that a French national was among them. There had been 11 [arrests](#) over the attack at Diiori Hamani International Airport overnight from Wednesday to Thursday, in which sustained heavy gunfire and loud explosions were heard nearby. According to the Nigerien Government, the material losses [included](#) a stash of ammunition and several civilian airplanes were damaged.

According to Radio France Internationale there are [speculations](#) that the attackers were drawn to the uranium shipment that has been stuck at the Niger airport due to legal and diplomatic disputes with France. On the other hand the attackers could also be targeting the recently acquired Turkish drones. Nevertheless, Niger being a major uranium producer, the attacks had prompted the authorities to move uranium oxide concentrate, known as yellowcake, late last year from the Somair mine in Arlit

to the Niamey base after taking control of the mine from French nuclear group Orano. It is believed that the attacks did not affect uranium.

Niger has struggled to contain the deadly jihadist violence which has battered parts of Sahel region. It has lost more than 120 people in deadly strikes targeting the Tillabéri region, which are linked to regional IS affiliate groups. The situation in Sahel becomes more complicated as the countries neighbouring Niger—Burkina Faso and Mali—are also run by military juntas. In 2025, militants linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State intensified their operations across the Sahel, deepening instability in an already fragile region, including Niger, which had been the West’s main security partner until the 2023 military takeover.

Niger’s President General Abdourahamane Tiani has [accused](#) France, Benin, and Côte d’Ivoire of supporting the armed group behind the attack. He has further thanked Russia for the military support to fight insurgencies and threatened France that it would retaliate. In [response](#), Benin government’s spokesperson, Wilfried Leandre Hounbedji said, “He is the only one to believe that nonsense.”

Since taking power, Niger’s military leadership, alongside the juntas in Mali and Burkina Faso, has deliberately reoriented its foreign and security policy away from France and other Western partners, instead deepening military cooperation with Russia to confront insurgent threats. At the same time, these regimes have framed regional politics through a confrontational lens,

repeatedly accusing Benin and Côte d'Ivoire, both close to Paris, of serving as French intermediaries in efforts to contain or undermine the Sahelian juntas.

IMF Forecasts Sub-Saharan Africa's Growth in 2026

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has upgraded its growth forecasts for sub-Saharan African economies, now expecting growth of 4.6% this year, following a 4.4% expansion recorded last year. The World Economic Outlook published on 19 January 2026 [states](#) that "Growth is expected to accelerate in sub-Saharan Africa, from 4.4 percent in 2025 to 4.6 percent in 2026 and 2027, supported by macroeconomic stabilization and reform efforts in key economies."

Presenting its World Economic Outlook in October 2025, the IMF offered a more optimistic assessment of growth prospects in this sub-region, which includes most of Africa's Portuguese-speaking countries. The Fund projected economic expansion of 4.1 per cent in 2025 and 4.4 per cent in 2026, reflecting modest upward revisions of 0.2 percentage points for the current year and 0.1 points for the outer forecast period. According to the IMF, this improvement is underpinned by gradual gains in macroeconomic stabilisation and the implementation of policy reforms across several major sub-Saharan African economies. Revised country-level forecasts reinforce this trend. Nigeria, the region's largest economy, is now expected to grow by 4.4 per cent, up from an earlier estimate of 4.2 per cent, while South Africa's outlook has also edged higher, with growth revised to 1.4 per cent from 1.2 per cent,

signalling cautious but broad-based economic momentum.

The IMF expects global economic growth to hold steady, projecting expansion of 3.3 per cent in 2026 and 3.2 per cent in 2027. This includes a modest upward revision of 0.2 percentage points for 2026, while the outlook for 2027 remains unchanged from the October 2025 forecasts. The Fund [attributes](#) this resilience to the interplay of opposing trends. While shifts in trade policies continue to pose challenges, these are being counterbalanced by stronger technology-driven investment, particularly in artificial intelligence, with momentum concentrated in North America and Asia. The IMF also points to the supportive role of fiscal and monetary policies, generally favourable financial conditions, and the capacity of the private sector to adapt as key factors sustaining global growth.

AGOA Gets a Lifeline: U.S. House Backs Extension to 2028

On 12 January, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill to [extend](#) the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) until 31 December 2028, signalling renewed congressional support for a cornerstone of U.S.–Africa trade relations. Established in 2000, AGOA provides qualifying sub-Saharan African countries with preferential access to the American market by allowing thousands of products to enter the U.S. duty free.

If the legislation is cleared by the Senate, it would reinstate duty-free access for a wide range of exports and authorise refunds for tariffs paid on eligible imports after 30 September 2025, when previous

preferences lapsed. This retroactive provision could offer immediate financial relief to exporters and U.S. importers affected by the interruption.

The proposed [extension](#) comes at a critical moment for many African economies, which have faced mounting trade pressures in recent years. Under the Trump administration, higher U.S. tariffs were imposed on several countries and product categories, in some cases climbing to as much as 50 per cent. By restoring predictable and preferential market access, the renewed AGOA framework could help stabilise export revenues, encourage investment, and support broader economic growth across the region, while reaffirming Washington's strategic economic engagement with Africa.

Somalia cancels all agreements with UAE

The Somali Federal Government (SFG) has cancelled all agreements with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 12th January 2026, ejecting UAE from military bases and major infrastructure as tensions soar in the Red Sea. Somalia has cited the reasons for this move as UAE undermining the country's unity and sovereignty.

The announcement appears to be linked to the recent recognition by Israel to Somaliland, a self-declared independent region in northwestern Somalia that broke away in 1991 but lacks international recognition. Somalia [believes](#) that UAE facilitated this recognition by Israel. On the other hand, Mogadishu had also launched an investigation after the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen stated that the UAE had

[spirited](#) a separatist leader out of Yemen via Somalia. Somalia said at the time that if the allegation were proved true it would represent a serious violation of its sovereignty.

The UAE has long invested in Somaliland's Berbera port, and the development has intensified concerns in Mogadishu about foreign involvement in domestic affairs. The centrepiece of this strategy is a \$442 million investment by Dubai-based logistics company DP World to develop and operate the Port of Berbera in Somaliland.

In an interview with the BBC, Omar Mahmoud, a senior researcher at the International Crisis Group think-tank, [stated](#) that SFG faces serious limitations in enforcing its decision to cancel port agreements with the UAE, largely due to its weak authority over semi-autonomous and breakaway regions. According to analyst Mahmoud, Mogadishu has little control over Somaliland, which declared independence, or over Puntland and Jubaland, both of which operate with significant autonomy. The federal government has a minimal presence in these regions and remains embroiled in political disputes with local administrations over power-sharing within Somalia's federal structure.

Reflecting this fragmentation, DP World, the Dubai-based logistics firm, has dismissed the federal government's announcement and confirmed that its operations at Berbera port in Somaliland will continue uninterrupted. The company stated that it remains focused on port operations and regional trade benefits,

while political and diplomatic issues should be addressed by relevant authorities. Somaliland, for its part, reiterated that all agreements with the UAE are legal and binding. Jubaland declared the federal decision invalid, and Puntland criticised it as violating constitutional principles.

Despite these challenges, Mahmoud argues that Somalia retains some leverage. Mogadishu controls national airspace and can apply diplomatic pressure, potentially mobilising allies such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia to support its stance. However, Mahmoud believes relations between Somalia and the UAE are unlikely to improve soon, as mutual trust has significantly eroded and would require sustained diplomatic effort to rebuild.

Burkina Faso Junta Dissolves All Political Parties

Burkina Faso's military junta has dissolved all the political parties in the country and scrapped the laws governing them, according to a decree approved by the government on 29 January 2026. The junta has seized all the parties' assets in a major for democracy in the West African nation. The government, led by Capt. Ibrahim Traore, has accused the parties of failing to comply with guidelines.

This move by Traore has been criticised for suppressing dissent and the latest to tighten military control in Burkina Faso. Traore seized power in September 2022, after overthrowing the democratically elected President Roch Marc Kabore. During this time, Traore promised to put an end to the violence by armed groups and also assured Economic Community of West African

States (ECOWAS) bloc that his government would hold elections by 2024.

However, after seizing power, Traore's administration suspended activities of the political parties and even postponed the elections to 2029 after holding a national conference, which was boycotted by several political parties. In July 2025, Traore's government dissolved the Independent National Electoral Commission, saying the agency was too expensive.

Burkina Faso also withdrew from ECOWAS along with Mali and Niger to form the Alliance of Sahel States. This is a new economic and military alliance which was formed last year. These nations also withdrew from the International Criminal Court.

Emile Zerbo, Interior Minister of Burkina Faso [stated](#) that the system had been "promoting division among the citizens and weakening the social fabric". Zerbo said, adding that a draft law would be sent to the Transitional Legislative Assembly "as soon as possible". According to Zerbo, the decision is a part of a broader [effort](#) to "rebuild the state" after the widespread "abuses" and "dysfunction" in the country's multiparty system.

Prior to the coup, the country has more than 100 registered political parties, with 15 being represented in the parliament after the 2020 general elections. The dissolution of the parties is seen as harmful to the democratic of Burkina Faso with of the civil society group members stating in an [interview](#) with BBC that "The regime has been pushing the idea that democracy is

useless or harmful for Burkina. [Traoré] may be settling in for the long run but given the country's history, no leader is ever fully secure. Another coup is never far from the horizon." While largely against the decision to dissolve the parties, many on social media have also expressed support to Junta's decision.

Despite his authoritarian image, Burkina Faso's leader Ibrahim Traoré has built significant popularity through pan-Africanist rhetoric and opposition to Western influence, mirroring a broader coup-driven trend across West Africa. Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger have restricted political space while pivoting away from France toward Russian security support. Yet this strategic shift has not stabilised the region. Armed groups linked to al-Qaeda and Islamic State now control around 60 percent of Burkina Faso, and violence has sharply escalated across the Sahel. Civilian deaths have tripled since Traoré's rise, with jihadist groups and state forces alike accused of mass atrocities. Similar insecurity persists in Mali and Niger, underscoring the limits of militarised governance and external security realignments.

South Africa orders expulsion of Israeli envoy

South Africa ordered Israel's deputy ambassador to leave the country within 72hrs on 30 January, accusing him of undermining relations between the countries with social media posts that insulted South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and violating diplomatic protocols.

South Africa's foreign ministry [announced](#) that it had designated Ariel Seidman, the Israeli Embassy's chargé d'affaires, as persona non grata, effectively ordering his expulsion from the country. Seidman was Israel's highest-ranking diplomatic representative in South Africa following the recall of its ambassador in 2023. In swift retaliation, Israel's foreign ministry posted on X that it would expel senior South African diplomat Shaun Edward Byneveldt, instructing him to depart Israel within 72 hours.

South Africa-Israel relations have been frosty since South Africa, a long-time supporter of Palestine, [accused](#) Israel of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza in a case at the United Nations' top court. South Africa withdrew its ambassador to Israel in 2018, [accusing](#) Israel of an indiscriminate deadly attack on civilians in Gaza. Israel recalled its ambassador to South Africa in 2023 after South Africa took Israel to the International Court of Justice.

Seidman assumed the role of chargé d'affaires at Israel's embassy in South Africa last year, with responsibilities that also cover Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius and Namibia. Since his appointment, his reported close association with Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo, a controversial South African monarch and nephew of Nelson Mandela—has drawn criticism from President Ramaphosa's government.

Byneveldt is South Africa's ambassador to the State of Palestine, working out of an office in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, according to a South African

government website. Chrispin Phiri, [spokesperson](#) for South Africa's foreign affairs ministry, said "Israel's obstructionism forces a farcical arrangement where [Byneveldt] is accredited through the very state that occupies his host country".

United Nations experts and leading international human rights organisations have accused Israel of committing genocide in Gaza, where Israeli military operations have killed at least 71,660 people since October 2023 and pushed the territory into a deep humanitarian emergency. These allegations have [resonated](#) strongly in South Africa, where activists have long criticised Israel's policies toward Palestinians, arguing they amount to apartheid reminiscent of South Africa's own past. Israeli officials have reacted sharply to such claims, but the UN's human rights chief reinforced these concerns earlier this month, stating that Israel enforces an especially harsh system of racial discrimination and segregation comparable to historical apartheid regimes.

Against this backdrop, South Africa's opposition Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) welcomed the government's decision on Friday to declare Israel's senior envoy persona non grata. The party framed the move as a moral stand, accusing Israel of consistently violating UN resolutions, disregarding international court rulings, and carrying out attacks on diplomats, journalists, aid workers and civilians in Palestine and elsewhere. In a strongly worded statement, the EFF described Israel as a state that relies on coercion and provocation rather than dialogue and

respect. The party called on South Africa to maintain a firm, principled stance by going further, cutting all diplomatic and economic relations with Israel in solidarity with Palestinians.