

AFRICA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from Africa

July 2026



- Ceuta Migrant Surge Rekindles Spain–Morocco Border Tensions
- Nigeria Expands Army Structure to Strengthen Response to Security Threats
- US Funding Stance Puts Somalia Peacekeeping Mission at Risk
- Kenya's Northeastern Border Faces Renewed Al-Shabaab Threat
- ECOWAS Summit Pushes Regional Security, Integration and Engagement with Sahel States

Ceuta Migrant Surge Rekindles Spain–Morocco Border Tensions

On 30 and 31 July 2026, Ceuta, the Spanish-administered territory on Morocco's northern coast, witnessed an unprecedented influx of migrants attempting to enter European territory. Tens of thousands [reportedly](#) entered the enclave by swimming or wading around maritime barriers, crossing in small boats or breaching sections of the fortified border. Most were young Moroccan men and adolescents, although women, families and migrants from other African countries were also among the arrivals.

Ceuta and Melilla, Spain's two autonomous cities on the African mainland, constitute the European Union's only land borders with Africa. Ceuta is separated from Morocco by fortified fencing, surveillance systems and a significant Spanish security presence. However, its proximity to the Moroccan town of Fnideq and its position along the Mediterranean coast make it one of the shortest, though highly dangerous, routes into European territory.

The rapid increase in arrivals placed considerable pressure on Ceuta's reception infrastructure. Facilities for migrants, particularly unaccompanied minors, were reportedly operating beyond capacity, forcing local authorities to seek urgent assistance from Madrid. Ceuta's regional president, Juan Jesús Vivas, called for the situation to be treated as a national emergency. Spain subsequently deployed additional police personnel and military

units to strengthen border management, conduct coastal surveillance and provide humanitarian assistance.

The crossings also raised serious [humanitarian](#) concerns. Dozens of migrants reportedly died from drowning, injuries and crowd-related incidents while attempting to enter the enclave. Those who successfully reached Ceuta faced uncertain legal and administrative procedures. Although Ceuta is part of Spain and the European Union, migrants entering the territory cannot automatically travel to mainland Spain or other European countries. They may instead be placed in temporary reception centres while their asylum or immigration claims are examined.

The immediate causes of the surge remain contested. Favourable weather and calmer summer seas may have facilitated the crossings, while rumours reportedly circulated in northern Morocco that the border had become easier to enter. More fundamentally, youth unemployment, limited economic opportunities, political instability and armed conflict continue to encourage people to undertake dangerous journeys towards Europe.

The episode has once again exposed the centrality of migration management in Spain–Morocco relations. Spain relies heavily on Moroccan authorities to prevent departures towards Ceuta and Melilla. Morocco, in turn, has periodically been accused of treating border enforcement as a source of diplomatic leverage. During the 2021 crisis, thousands entered Ceuta after

Moroccan border controls were relaxed amid political tensions between Rabat and Madrid.

While Spain and Morocco may restore immediate control over the border, security measures alone are unlikely to prevent future crises. Sustainable management will require continued bilateral cooperation, compliance with legal and humanitarian obligations, expanded legal migration channels and stronger economic opportunities in migrants' countries of origin. Ceuta therefore represents not merely a border-management challenge, but a wider test of Europe's migration policy and its relations with neighbouring African states.

Nigeria Expands Army Structure to Strengthen Response to Security Threats

Nigerian President Bola Tinubu has [approved](#) a major expansion of the Nigerian Army, increasing its structure from eight to 12 divisions and authorising the recruitment of 28,000 additional personnel. The decision is intended to strengthen the military's ability to respond to Nigeria's persistent security challenges while improving command, coordination and operational readiness across the country.

Under the new force structure, four additional army divisions will be established in Makurdi, Ilorin, Jalingo and Benin City. The expanded 12-division structure will retain headquarters in eight existing cities, while the new formations will cover parts of central, northeastern and

southern Nigeria. The restructuring is expected to decentralise command and enable a quicker military response to local security threats.

The expansion comes at a time when Nigeria is confronting several overlapping security challenges. The country continues to face a long-running Islamist insurgency in the northeast, while banditry and kidnapping remain major concerns in the northwest. Communal violence continues to affect parts of central Nigeria, while separatist agitation persists in the southeast. These challenges have placed sustained pressure on the country's armed forces and increased the demand for a stronger military presence in several regions.

The recruitment of 28,000 additional personnel is expected to increase the Army's manpower and strengthen ongoing operations in different parts of the country. The additional divisions could also help reduce the burden on existing formations by allowing commanders to concentrate personnel and resources closer to areas experiencing insecurity.

The restructuring will be implemented in two phases. The 5th, 9th and 10th Divisions are expected to become operational by September 2026, while the 83rd Division, based in Benin City, is scheduled to become operational by December. Alongside the structural expansion, the Nigerian government has also approved increased investment in military equipment, operational readiness and troop welfare. The measures form part of a broader effort to modernise the armed forces and improve

their capacity to address evolving security threats.

The move marks a significant reorganisation of Nigeria's military architecture. Expanding the number of divisions could improve regional command and control, shorten response times and strengthen coordination between military units deployed across different security theatres. However, the effectiveness of the new structure will depend not only on the number of divisions and personnel but also on adequate equipment, logistics, intelligence capabilities and sustained support for troops.

For [Nigeria](#), where security threats vary considerably across regions, a more decentralised military structure could provide greater operational flexibility. The expansion therefore represents an attempt by the Tinubu administration to adapt the Army's organisation to the country's increasingly complex security environment while strengthening the state's overall capacity to respond to both existing and emerging threats.

US Funding Stance Puts Somalia Peacekeeping Mission at Risk

The future of the African Union's security mission in [Somalia](#) has come under renewed uncertainty following a decision by the United States to withdraw support for continued United Nations logistical assistance to the operation from 2027. The move could significantly affect the ability of the African Union Support and

Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) to maintain its current deployment and sustain operations against Al-Shabaab.

AUSSOM, which has nearly 12,000 uniformed personnel, plays an important role in supporting Somali security forces and protecting key population centres and government institutions. Its troops are drawn from several African countries, including Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia. The mission succeeded the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia and forms part of the longer international effort to gradually transfer responsibility for national security to Somali forces.

Despite being an African Union operation, AUSSOM depends considerably on the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) for its day-to-day functioning. UNSOS provides food, fuel, water, medical facilities, casualty evacuation, transport, communications, engineering and other essential logistical services. Current UN arrangements authorise such assistance for up to 11,826 AUSSOM personnel.

Washington informed the African Union in a diplomatic communication dated 1 July 2026 that it would not support the continuation of UNSOS assistance to the AU mission beyond the end of the year. While the United States is reportedly prepared to allow the UN Security Council to renew AUSSOM's mandate, it has indicated that it would oppose a renewal that commits UN resources to logistical or operational support.

The decision compounds an already difficult financial situation. AUSSOM's annual operational requirements have faced persistent funding shortages, while the approximately US\$500 million UNSOS framework has provided much of the logistical infrastructure necessary for the mission. Earlier proposals aimed at creating a more predictable UN-funded mechanism for the AU operation had also faced opposition from Washington.

The US has justified its position by arguing that years of substantial international assistance have not produced sufficient progress towards Somali ownership of national security. Washington has also pointed to divisions among Somalia's political leadership, arguing that internal disputes have weakened efforts against Al-Shabaab and Islamic State-linked militants. The United States has contributed nearly US\$2 billion to UNSOS and its predecessor arrangements, according to the State Department.

The development presents the African Union and Somalia's international partners with a difficult choice. Unless an alternative mechanism is created to finance and deliver the logistical functions currently performed by the UN, AUSSOM could struggle to sustain forces in the field. Such a reduction would come at a sensitive moment as Al-Shabaab continues to retain influence across parts of southern and central Somalia.

The African Union has repeatedly warned that predictable and sustainable financing

remains essential for preserving security gains in Somalia. Its Peace and Security Council has similarly called for a broader donor base and longer-term financial commitments to the mission. Washington's decision therefore raises wider questions not only about AUSSOM's future, but also about how African-led peace operations can be financed when international political support becomes increasingly uncertain.

Kenya's Northeastern Border Faces Renewed Al-Shabaab Threat

Five Kenyan security personnel were killed in Mandera County near the Somalia border in an attack attributed to [Al-Shabaab](#), highlighting the continued vulnerability of Kenya's northeastern frontier to cross-border militant activity.

The attack took place during a security patrol near the Lafey area, where personnel from Kenya's elite Special Operations Group and the National Police Service were operating along a route frequently targeted by militants. According to Kenyan authorities, the patrol came under attack before a reinforcement team responding to the incident was struck by a roadside explosive device. The blast destroyed an armoured vehicle, although the personnel inside reportedly survived.

[Al-Shabaab](#) subsequently claimed responsibility for the operation through media channels affiliated with the group. The incident was one of the deadliest attacks recorded in the area in recent months and followed several security incidents in Mandera County during July.

Kenyan forces had earlier carried out an operation near the border in which 11 suspected militants were killed, while attacks were later reported in the villages of Fino and Arabia.

Mandera has remained particularly exposed because of its long and porous border with Somalia. A report submitted to Kenya's parliament in November identified the Lafey corridor as an important infiltration route used by militants moving between the two countries. Between September 2024 and August 2025, 61 terrorism-related incidents were recorded across Mandera, Wajir, Garissa and Lamu counties, with Mandera accounting for 38 cases.

Al-Shabaab has conducted repeated attacks inside Kenya since Nairobi deployed troops to Somalia in 2011. While the group's principal objective remains the overthrow of Somalia's federal government, cross-border operations have formed an important part of its broader strategy. Unlike in Somalia, where the organisation seeks territorial influence and administrative control, its attacks in Kenya are largely aimed at security forces, infrastructure and civilian targets.

The latest incident also illustrates the regional dimension of Somalia's continuing insurgency. Kenya has remained an important security partner of the Somali government and contributes personnel to the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). Al-Shabaab has repeatedly sought to raise the political and security costs for neighbouring

states participating in military operations against it.

The attack comes at a particularly sensitive time for regional counter-terrorism efforts. Countries contributing troops to AUSSOM are discussing the future of the mission amid growing uncertainty over its financing and logistical support. The United States has announced that it will no longer back continued UN logistical assistance for the mission from 2027, raising concerns about AUSSOM's ability to sustain operations.

The Mandera attack therefore underscores how developments inside Somalia continue to affect the security environment of neighbouring countries. Persistent militant mobility across the Kenya-Somalia border, combined with uncertainty surrounding international support for Somalia's stabilisation efforts, could place greater pressure on Kenyan security forces operating in the northeast.

ECOWAS Summit Pushes Regional Security, Integration and Engagement with Sahel States

Leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening regional integration, security cooperation and economic coordination amid persistent terrorism, political transitions and growing geopolitical pressures across West Africa. The decisions were adopted at the 69th Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government held in Lungi, Sierra Leone, on 19 July 2026.

A major focus of the summit was the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. ECOWAS leaders expressed concern over continuing terrorist attacks, kidnappings and other armed violence affecting communities and security forces across the region. The Authority welcomed progress towards activating the ECOWAS regional Counter-terrorism Force and urged member states to fulfil outstanding financial commitments needed to operationalise the initiative.

The summit also endorsed a revised roadmap for the ECOWAS Counterterrorism Brigade, with full operational capability expected by July 2027. Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria are expected to hold consultations on the location of the force's headquarters. At the same time, ECOWAS called for deeper engagement with Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which now constitute the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), to establish a pragmatic security cooperation mechanism aimed at containing the spread of terrorism across West Africa.

Despite political differences with the AES countries, ECOWAS emphasised the need to preserve regional mobility and economic links. The bloc reaffirmed the importance of its Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment, while noting that continued engagement with the AES should safeguard cross-border movement, trade and people-to-people relations. The mandate of ECOWAS Chief Negotiator Lansana

Kouyaté was extended until December 2026, while the Authority maintained that negotiations with Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger should proceed collectively rather than through separate bilateral arrangements.

Economic integration also featured prominently. ECOWAS reiterated its commitment to launch the ECO single currency in 2027, beginning with states that meet established convergence criteria. Leaders further called for stronger regional infrastructure investment in transport, energy, digital connectivity and water, and backed the African Atlantic Gas Pipeline as an important project for energy security and industrialisation.

On political governance, ECOWAS addressed ongoing transition and electoral processes, including developments in Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and other member states. Senegal was appointed facilitator for Guinea-Bissau's transition process. The summit also condemned xenophobic attacks against Africans in South Africa and called for stronger protection of West African nationals.

In institutional changes, Senegal's General Birame Diop was appointed President of the ECOWAS Commission for the 2026–2030 term. Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye was also elected Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government for a one-year term, placing Senegal at the centre of the bloc's efforts to navigate security challenges and preserve regional cohesion.