

The background of the entire page is a photograph of three soldiers in camouflage uniforms and helmets. One soldier in the foreground is holding a rifle. Another soldier is in the middle ground, and a third is in the background, carrying a metal box. They appear to be on a boat or near a body of water. The ADF logo is overlaid on the top left.

adf

AFRICA DEFENSE FORUM

Threats Without Borders

Militaries Cooperate to Confront Transnational Terrorism

Terror Groups Weaponize Drones

DDR Offers a Path to Peace

PLUS

**A Conversation With Maj. Gen. Peter Muteti,
AUSSOM Deputy Force Commander**

VISIT US AT ADF-MAGAZINE.COM



features

8 Terrorism Takes Root

The past two decades have seen terror groups emerge and persist from Mali to Mozambique

14 'Unity is Strength'

A conversation with Maj. Gen. Peter Muteti, former deputy force commander of the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia

20 The Currency of Terror

Terrorists across the continent exploit old practices and new technology to fund operations

26 'Black Market PMCs' Fuel Conflict

Foreign groups are training, advising and arming continental terrorists

34 Drone Terror Rising

Terrorists are finding new ways to weaponize drones

40 Exiting the Fight

DDR programs can prevent a return to war, but they face obstacles

46 Franchises of Fear

A growing number of affiliates of Islamic State and al-Qaida made Africa the world's hot spot for terrorism

50 The Crime and Terrorism Nexus

Terrorists partner with organized criminal groups for profit and territorial access



departments

- 4 Viewpoint
- 5 African Perspective
- 6 Africa Today
- 32 African Heartbeat
- 56 Tools of the Trade
- 58 Future Force
- 60 Defense & Security
- 62 Keeping the Peace
- 64 Joining Hands
- 66 Flashback
- 67 Where Am I?



**Africa Defense Forum
is available online**

Visit us at adf-magazine.com



ON THE COVER

Kenya Navy Special Operations Squadron members perform a simulated amphibious landing during Joint Combined Exchange Training in Mombasa.

STAFF SGT. SABATINO DIMASCIO/
U.S. AIR FORCE

Transnational terror groups know how to find weak spots on the map. They look for regions that are isolated because countries do not cooperate militarily or share intelligence. They move along lightly guarded borders. They seek out people who feel underserved and forgotten by their government. They look for communities beset by cultural and political divisions. These are the ingredients necessary for terrorism to thrive, and the mixture is quite strong in the Sahel.

In recent years, the Sahel has been the global epicenter of terrorism, accounting for nearly half of the world's terror-related deaths. Military coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger were launched in the name of stopping violence but have done nothing to slow its expansion. Partnerships with foreign mercenaries have led only to more bloodshed and chaos. Now, terror groups affiliated with al-Qaida and the Islamic State group are pushing toward the West African coast.

The Sahel is not terrorism's only hot spot. Terrorist groups also operate in Somalia, the Lake Chad Basin, the Great Lakes region and Mozambique. In the past decade, terrorists in Africa killed 150,000 people.

The only way to stop these attacks is by securing the zones where terrorists operate freely. It can't be done by one nation alone. It will require continental and regional efforts to develop joint training and knowledge and intelligence exchanges.

In some cases, this is already happening. Senegal and Mauritania jointly patrol land and maritime borders. Côte d'Ivoire has opened its International Counter-Terrorism Academy to warfighters from across the continent. Coastal nations are looking for new ways to partner with their Sahelian neighbors despite political challenges.

This cooperation is vital, and time is of the essence. Transnational terror groups that have lost ground in the Middle East have moved to Africa, with similar ambitions of establishing a caliphate that crosses borders and destabilizes much of the continent. By working together, nations can deny terrorists the space and environment they need to launch attacks. Africa's security professionals and civilian leaders must seize the moment, recognize the shared mission and push back against the growing threat.

U.S. Africa Command Staff



An Ivoirian Soldier participates in counterterror training in Adiake, Côte d'Ivoire. As terrorist groups look to expand from the Sahel, coastal countries are bolstering their defenses and looking for new ways to partner with their neighbors. U.S. AIR FORCE



Transnational Terrorism

Volume 19, 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

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.

‘We Stand at a Digital Crossroads’



Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu of Ethiopia, executive secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), addressed the Regional Consultative Seminar on Harnessing Artificial Intelligence and Cybersecurity for Security, Cooperation, and Resilience in Nairobi, Kenya, on June 18, 2025. His remarks have been edited for length and clarity.



Ethiopia’s Federal Police Force uses an AI program that lets citizens report crimes directly to law enforcement. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Across our region, we face complex security challenges, and these range from transnational crime and terrorism to cybercrime and border management gaps. Nevertheless, even within these challenges lies the opportunity for innovation through artificial intelligence and cybersecurity solutions.

The future of regional security belongs to those who harness AI. I challenge us all to become active architects of our region’s digital security future.

Join me as we together imagine AI systems that help our law enforcement predict crime patterns, optimize resource deployment and detect threats in advance. Picture with me as AI-powered platforms improve border management and create safer, more connected communities.

Technology is already transforming security across our region. In Ethiopia, law enforcement agencies are implementing predictive policing algorithms to combat urban crime. Here in Kenya, AI-driven surveillance systems have reduced police response times by 40% and improved crime detection by 30%.

In Uganda, National Digital ID systems are enabling enhanced identity verification for security agencies. Beyond our region, Rwanda’s police force has become a regional model for AI-integrated community policing. In our own [IGAD] headquarters in the Republic of Djibouti, AI-powered port security systems are enhancing maritime safety across the Red Sea corridor.

In spite of these positive developments, we continue to face serious challenges. Cyberattacks account for 68% of successful breaches across our African continent. It is evident that criminal networks are increasingly targeting law enforcement

databases, while terrorist organizations are exploiting our weak digital defenses.

I say that if we act decisively, the IGAD region and the greater Horn of Africa can lead in responsible AI deployment for security. By 2035, AI could contribute \$180 billion to our regional gross domestic product while creating 2.5 million jobs, including critical cybersecurity roles.

However, projections show that we need 500,000 AI and cybersecurity professionals by 2030, and yet we are training fewer than 15,000 annually. In order to harness AI’s promise while guarding against its perils, I propose the following three principles for your consideration:



Harmonized security governance. We must establish regional AI ethics protocols for law enforcement, shared cybersecurity standards and cross-border incident response mechanisms. A regional AI strategy based on our member states’ data protection legislation provides models for balancing innovation with security.

Massive investment in security professionals. Let us launch the IGAD Digital Security Skills Initiative, training cybersecurity experts and establishing AI centers of excellence in each member state, with special focus on law enforcement applications.

Indigenous security innovation. I call upon us to create the IGAD AI Security Innovation Fund that shall support startups to address our unique regional challenges, ranging from border monitoring to anti-terrorism intelligence.

From this meeting, I further propose we adopt the “Nairobi Commitment,” which states that by 2030, every IGAD citizen benefits from AI-enhanced security while being protected from digital threats. This means governments allocating at least 2% of budgets to AI security infrastructure, the private sector committing to local talent development, and development partners providing technology transfer for our law enforcement agencies.

We stand at a digital crossroads. One path leads to AI amplifying our security capabilities, where every police officer accesses real-time intelligence, every border is monitored by smart systems and our citizens are protected by predictive security measures. The other path leads to digital colonialism, where our security data enriches distant corporations while cyber threats cripple our progress.

Together, we can transform AI challenges into opportunities and harness technology as a force for our collective security, human dignity and regional prosperity.



CYBERCRIME CRACKDOWN LEADS TO 1,200 ARRESTS ACROSS 18 COUNTRIES

ADF STAFF

Authorities arrested 1,209 cybercriminals and recovered \$97.4 million in a major crackdown involving investigators from 18 African countries, the United Kingdom and Interpol.

The operation, named Serengeti 2.0, ran from June to August 2025 and tackled high-impact cybercrimes such as business email compromise schemes, ransomware and other online scams, Interpol reported. Authorities identified about 88,000 victims of fraud and illegal cryptocurrency networks and dismantled 11,432 malicious infrastructures.

Before the operation, investigators participated in workshops that covered open-source intelligence tools and techniques, cryptocurrency investigations, and ransomware analysis, according to Interpol. This training is credited with contributing to the effectiveness and success of Serengeti 2.0.

“Each Interpol-coordinated operation builds on the last, deepening cooperation, increasing information sharing and developing investigative skills across member countries,” Valdecy Urquiza, secretary-general of Interpol, said in a statement. “With more contributions and shared expertise, the results keep growing in scale and impact. This global network is stronger than ever, delivering real outcomes and safeguarding victims.”

In a June 2025 report, Interpol said reports of online fraud in some African countries had spiked 3,000% in the previous year. Cybercrime now makes up more than 30% of all reported crime in West and East Africa.

In one bust, Angolan authorities shut down 25 cryptocurrency mining centers in which 60 Chinese operators were illegally validating digital currency transactions. Angolan authorities seized equipment worth an estimated \$37 million. Proceeds from the seizure will go toward improving electricity distribution in the Central African country, Interpol said.

In Côte d’Ivoire, officers dismantled a transnational inheritance scam — described as one of the oldest internet frauds — in which victims pay fees to claim fictitious fortunes, causing losses of about \$1.6 million. Ivorian authorities seized electronics, jewelry, cash, vehicles and documents.

Zambian investigators took apart a large fraud operation that lured people into an online cryptocurrency investment scheme. The scam bilked about \$300 million from about 65,000 victims. Authorities in Zambia also disrupted a suspected human trafficking network with help from the Immigration Department in Lusaka, confiscating 372 passports from seven countries.

Authorities from Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Côte D’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe participated in the operation.

Investigators with Angola’s Criminal Investigation Service dismantle and process computer equipment seized in Serengeti 2.0.

INTERPOL



ECOWAS Works to Establish Counterterrorism Brigade

ADF STAFF

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) plans to activate a 260,000-troop rapid deployment counterterrorism brigade to help fight terrorism in the subregion.

“This bold initiative has become necessary given the asymmetric security dynamics in our region,” said Abdel-Fatau Musah, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security. He spoke for Commission President Dr. Omar Touray at the inaugural African Chiefs of Defence Staff Summit in Abuja, Nigeria, in August 2025.

“We are conscious of the fact that this requires the necessary financial resources and capabilities to make it a reality. ECOWAS is therefore throwing the gauntlet to bilateral and multilateral partners to complement this daring regional effort,” Musah said.

The proposed \$2.5 billion-a-year effort would provide logistics and financial support to frontline states and complement the African Union’s standby force, according to Vanguard, a Nigerian newspaper.

ECOWAS would continue its commitment to raise its 5,000-man brigade under the African Union’s Peace and Security Architecture, according to an editorial in The Nation, a Nigerian newspaper.

The Sahel is considered the epicenter of terrorism, accounting for more than half of all terrorism-related deaths globally, according to the



Nigerian troops patrol after gunmen suspected of belonging to the Islamic State West Africa Province raided a village, killing a Soldier and three residents. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Global Terrorism Index, which reported that terror-related deaths in the region have increased tenfold since 2019.

The al-Qaida-affiliated Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP) terror groups have steadily expanded to the south and west. Héni Nsaibia, senior analyst for West Africa at the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project (ACLED), noted they are targeting border regions between Benin, Niger and Nigeria, where security forces are overstretched and civilians are increasingly exposed to violence.

“JNIM and ISSP’s investment in cross-border activities suggests that this border region is of growing importance for jihadist expansion,” Nsaibia wrote. “The groups have been exploiting the porous borders to entrench their presence and further their goals of establishing proto-states, but also to complicate military efforts to contain their areas of operation.”

Regional Terror Threat Stresses Need for Military Logistics

ADF STAFF

As terrorist groups continue to expand beyond the Sahel, countries throughout West Africa are emphasizing the importance of logistical cooperation to rapidly deploy and support troops.

The growing threat of al-Qaida and Islamic State group affiliates loomed over the 2025 West Africa Logistics Conference co-hosted by United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) and the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) in the capital, Monrovia, in August 2025.

More than 90 participants from 22 nations and organizations attended, including most West African countries and representatives from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

“This conference could not have come at a better time than today,” AFL Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Davidson Forleh said during the opening ceremony. “The common enemies that all of us face today in the world is terrorism. No one country can fight terrorism. There has to be togetherness. There must be a synergy of effort.”

The conference featured panel discussions, forums, and exchanges of best practices and lessons learned. Topics included regional logistics planning and coordination, defense transportation systems, interoperability among

ECOWAS and partner nations, supply chain resilience and sustainability, crisis response, humanitarian logistics, and public-private partnerships.

The primary concern of military logistics is how to source, stage, move and dispose of materiel throughout the continent. Logistics officials are responsible for a vast array of supplies. They oversee facility construction and upkeep. They feed, outfit, move and arm their Soldiers.

“We are here to ensure that all of us bring to bear our expertise when it comes to logistics,” Forleh said. “Without logistics, you’re not going to win a battle.”

AFRICOM’s logistics team led a discussion on the Assess, Advise, Advocate and Integrate Operational Assessment Model, called A3I. The model takes in self-reported logistics data from African partners, such as supply nodes, fuel points and airstrips.

The goal is to build a complete assessment of regional strengths and gaps in capability with specific, measurable and achievable goals, according to AFL Assistant Chief of Staff for Logistics Lt. Col. Saimo Kortu.

“We’re refining the product to fully map out all of our capacities, identify gaps and think about how those gaps can be bridged,” he said of A3I. “It’s a very useful tool that’s going to help enhance our capability.”



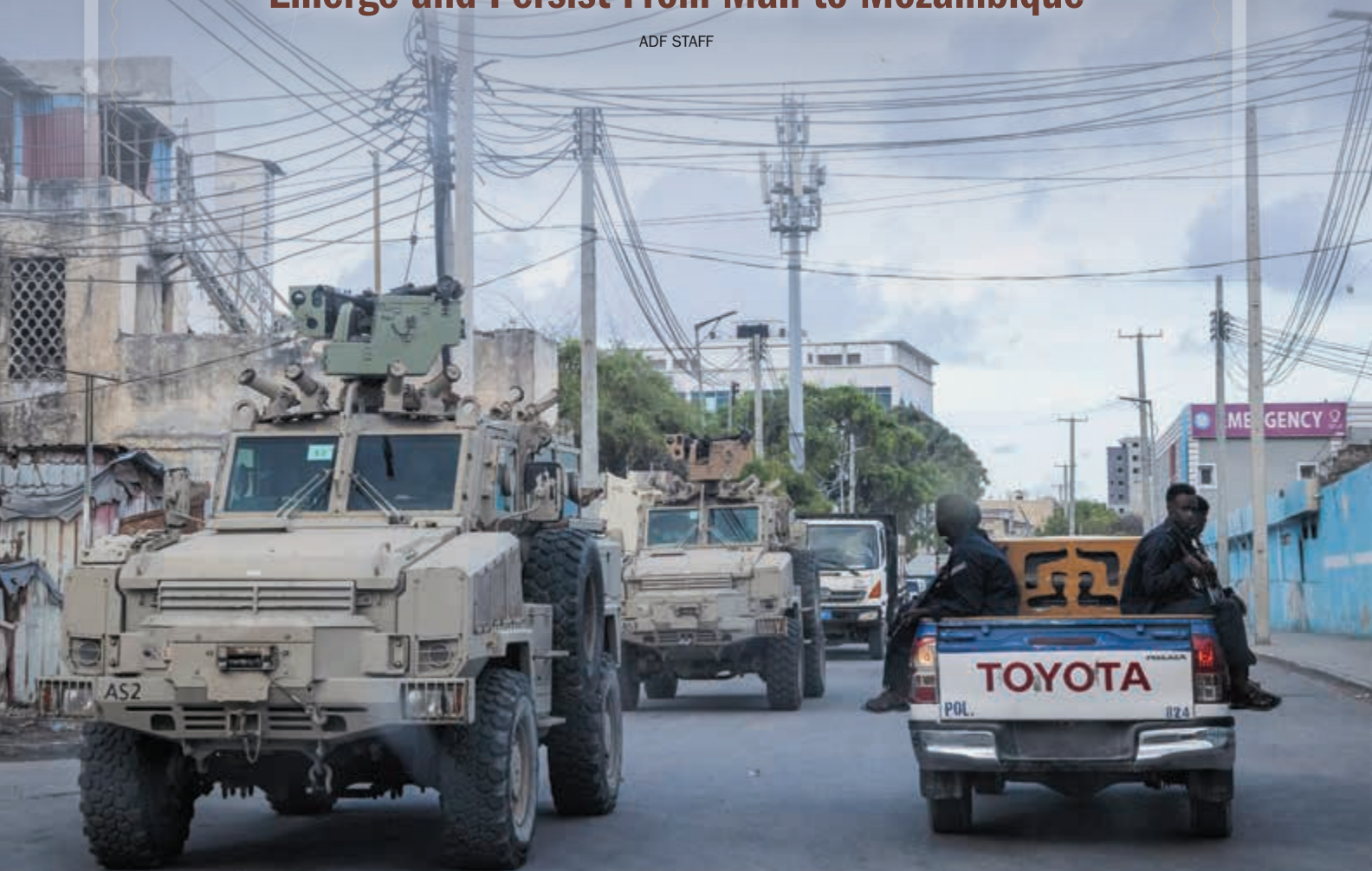
Armed Forces of Liberia Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Davidson Forleh speaks during the West Africa Logistics Conference in Monrovia in August 2025.

SGT. BRENTAN MEADOWS/U.S. ARMY

TERRORISM TAKES ROOT

**The Past Two Decades Have Seen Terror Groups
Emerge and Persist From Mali to Mozambique**

ADF STAFF



As of 2025 wound down, four African regions continued to endure terrorist threats: the Sahel, particularly Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger; the Lake Chad Basin, including northern Nigeria and Cameroon; Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province; and Somalia.

A toxic mix of al-Qaida and Islamic State group (IS) affiliates have emerged and spread in the past 15 years. Attacks in the Sahel have grown significantly with terrorists threatening — and sometimes crossing — borders into coastal nations such as Benin and Togo.

In East Africa, Somali and African Union-backed international forces battle brutal al-Shabaab terrorists. To the south, IS-affiliated terrorists have survived a three-year mission by the Southern African Development Community in Mozambique, which withdrew in July 2024. Rwandan troops remain.

Terrorists also have changed battlefield tactics. Some groups employ jihadist private military contractors seasoned in Iraq and Syria. They offer consulting, training and combat support to make money and spread toxic ideology. Terrorists also are increasingly using drones to match capabilities once reserved for national militaries. Funding for such technology flows from the various international networks and criminal connections terrorists maintain.



Above:
Puntland Defense Forces Soldiers watch fighting across the valley from a cave once used by Islamic State-Somalia Province fighters.

THE WASHINGTON POST
VIA GETTY IMAGES

Opposite page: African Union armored vehicles patrol central Mogadishu, Somalia, in April 2025. GETTY IMAGES

A Nigerian Soldier from the Multinational Joint Task Force searches for improvised explosive devices in Monguno, Nigeria. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



INSTABILITY BREEDS INSECURITY

Three Sahel nations — Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger — have had five coups, in less than three years. They also have seen a steady increase in terror attacks and the spread of terror groups, particularly Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and IS Sahel Province (ISSP). The coups largely were the result of the perception that civilian governments were failing to stem the rising tide of terrorism. Now, ruling juntas in each country are failing, and terrorists are taking control of key roads, advancing on capitals and threatening fuel shipments.

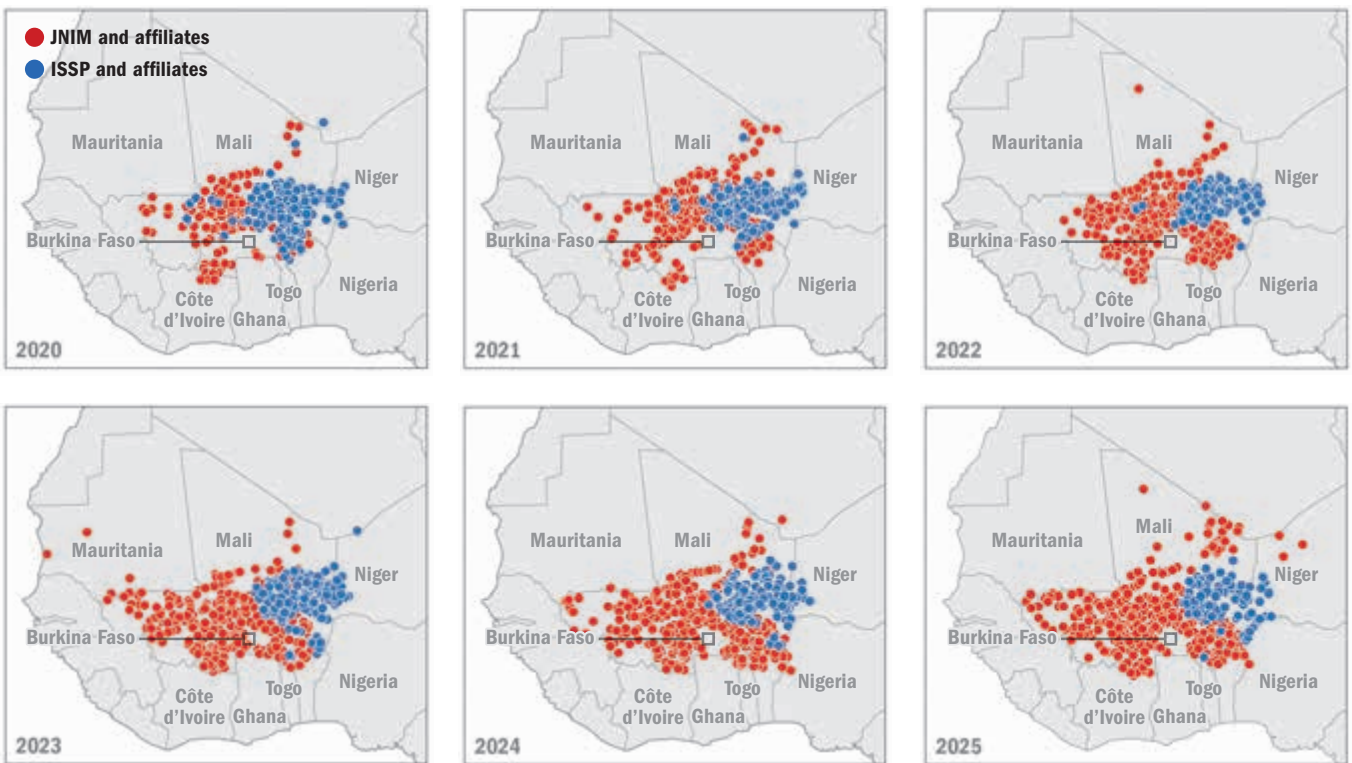
“If the insurgencies continue gaining strength at their current rate, they will be positioned to force the government out of population centers,” wrote Michael DeAngelo in May 2025 for the Foreign Policy Research Institute. “This would render these countries collapsed states and allow jihadist groups to establish an Islamist state.”

JNIM and ISSP Sahel attacks 2020 to 2025

As civilian governance has given way to military rule in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, terrorist attacks have steadily increased. The maps below show the proliferation of attacks by just two major groups.



Somali National Army Soldiers take a break at Hiiilweyne training institute at a military base north of Mogadishu. GETTY IMAGES



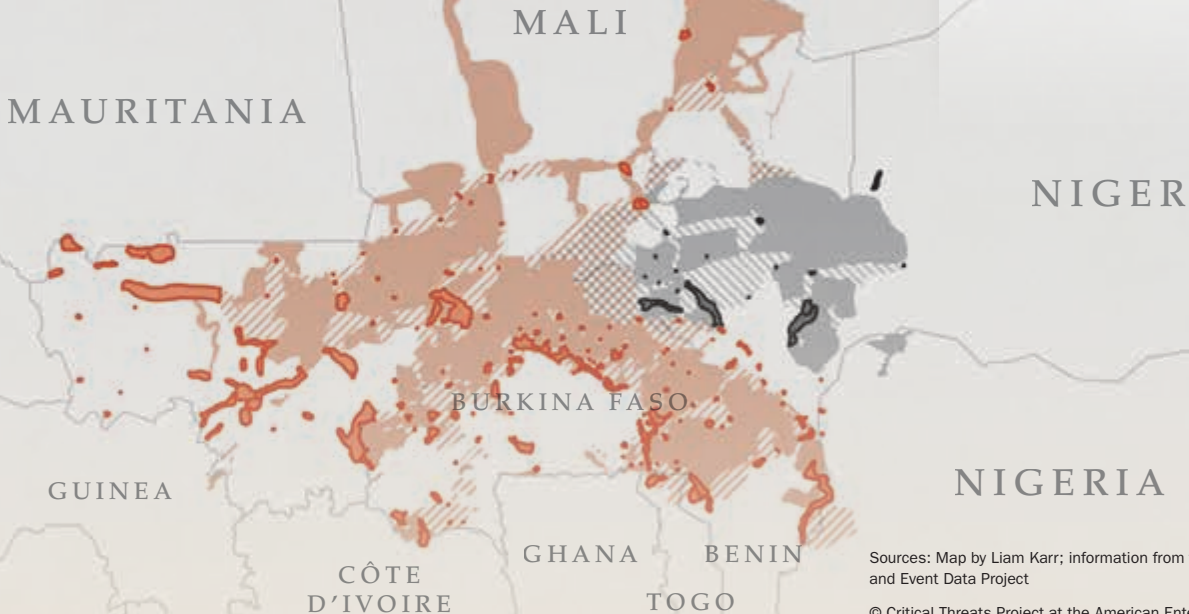
Note: Compiled by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Each map shows violent events involving the listed groups for the year ending June 30. Group designations should not be considered official. Affiliations may change due to the fluid nature of some groups.

Sources: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project, Centro Para Democracia e Direitos Humanos, Hiraal Institute, Humangle, International Crisis Group, Institute for Security Studies, MENASTREAM, the Washington Institute, and the United Nations

JNIM and ISSP Areas of Operations in the Sahel Through October 2024

This map shows how JNIM and ISSP forces have spread in the three junta-led countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

-  JNIM support zones
-  JNIM contested support zones
-  JNIM attack zones
-  ISSP support zones
-  ISSP contested support zones
-  ISSP attack zones



Sources: Map by Liam Karr; information from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project

© Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, October 31, 2024



Left: A Nigerian Soldier trains at the Multinational Joint Task Force base in Monguno, Borno State, Nigeria, in July 2025. Task force troops battle Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province terrorists.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Right: Displaced people board a pickup truck in Mocimboa da Praia in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES



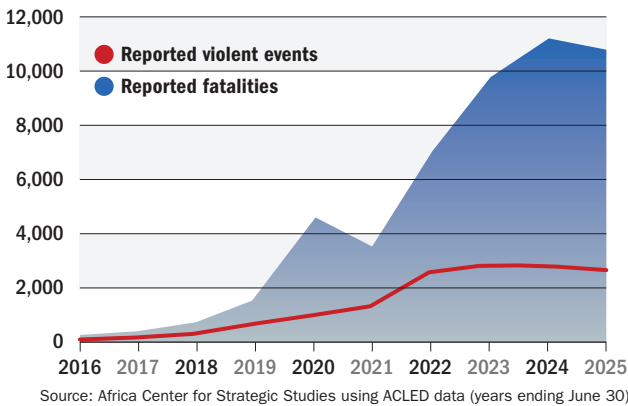
TERRORISM BY REGION

Below is a list of regions where terrorists are most active and what groups are active in each area.

The Sahel

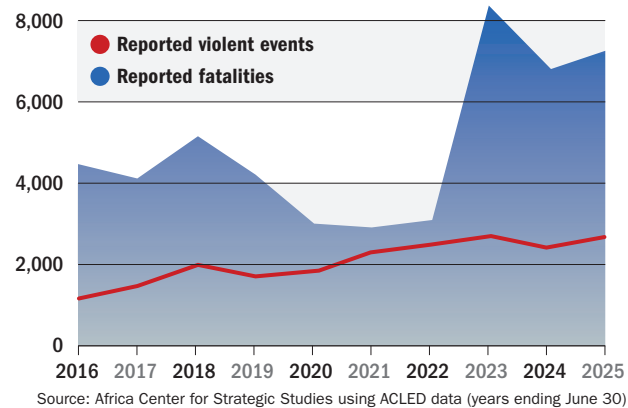
The deadliest and most active group in the Sahel is JNIM, a consortium of radical Islamist terror groups such as Ansar al-Dine, Macina Liberation Front and Katiba Hanifa. JNIM is affiliated with al-Qaida and operates throughout Burkina Faso and Mali. Its 6,000 to 7,000 fighters are blamed for 83% of all Sahel fatalities. They have increasingly threatened West African coastal nations.

The other major player in Sahel terrorism is ISSP. Its 2,000 to 3,000 fighters mostly are active in northern Burkina Faso and western Niger, according to an Africa Center for Strategic Studies report.



Somalia

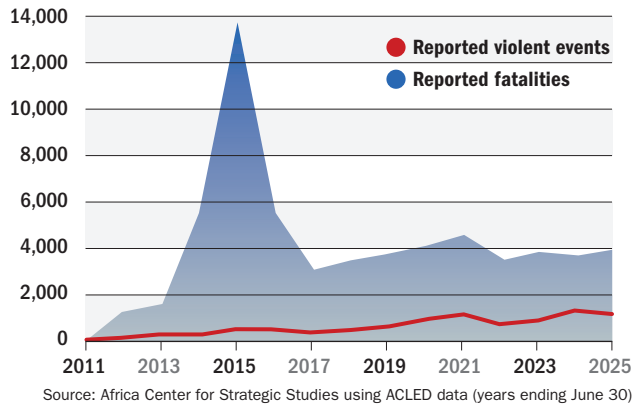
The Horn of Africa nation continues its multiyear struggle against al-Qaida-aligned al-Shabaab, which has 5,000 to 10,000 fighters. The 6,224 fatalities linked to al-Shabaab for the year ending June 30, 2025, are double that of the same period ending in 2022. IS-Somalia, which operates mainly out of the Puntland region in the north, also contributes to insecurity. It has about 1,000 fighters and is considered a global hub for IS administrative and financial operations.



Lake Chad Basin

Boko Haram and IS West Africa Province (ISWAP) are blamed for 18% of terror-related deaths on the continent. Although fatalities are down from the highs seen about

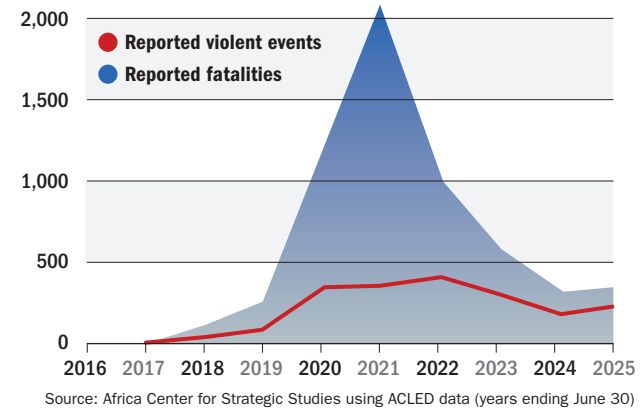
a decade ago, the 3,982 deaths in 2024-25 are 7% higher than the previous year. Nigeria alone saw an 18% spike in fatalities in that same span. Boko Haram has about 1,500 to 2,000 fighters. ISWAP has 4,000 to 7,000.



Mozambique

Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province is among the newest terrorist theaters on the continent. It has been more than eight years since terrorists there first made themselves known with attacks. The IS-linked group, which has 200 to 300 fighters, is called Ansar al-Sunnah — or al-Shabaab colloquially. Rwandan and Southern African Development Community troops soon deployed to address the threat. Thousands of Rwandan troops and police remain. The conflict largely feeds off local grievances, according to an October 2025 Institute for Security Studies report.

The 330 deaths in 2024-25 linked to the group are down 84% since the 2021 peak, but the threat persists.



HOW TERRORISTS FUND THEIR ACTIONS

Funding methods are as varied as the terrorist groups that employ them. They can range from small roadside extortion rackets to cryptocurrency schemes, fraud and money laundering operations.

For example, JNIM is known to exploit and engage in artisanal gold-mining operations, kidnapping for ransom, livestock theft, road and checkpoint extortion, taxation, and exploitation of illicit trafficking networks, according to a 2023 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project.

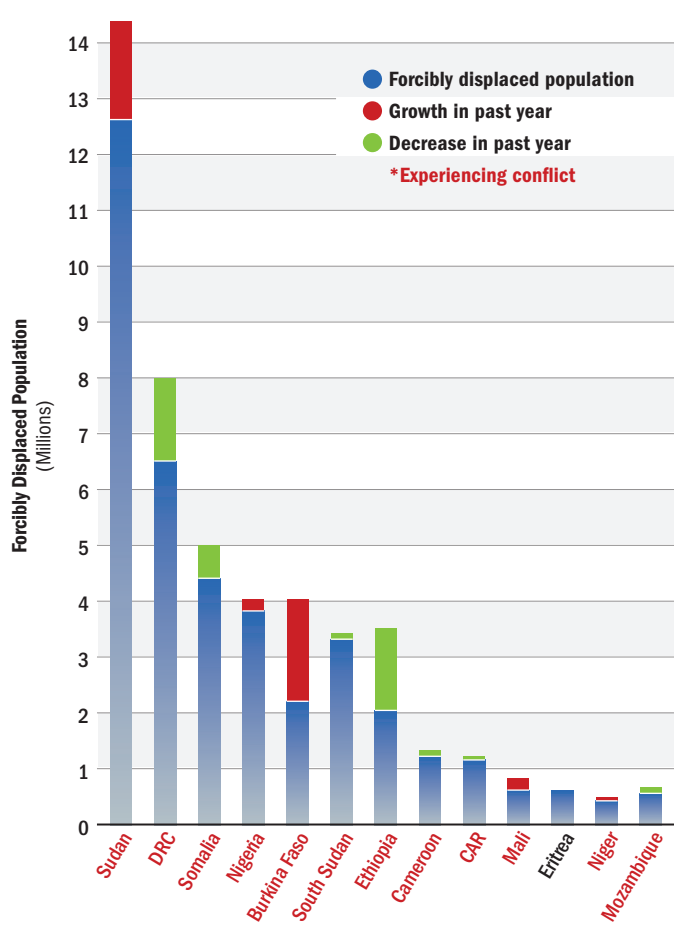


A Rwandan Soldier watches fishermen in Mocimboa da Praia, Cabo Delgado province, Mozambique. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



A Burkinabe woman who fled her village due to violence sits in a shelter at a displacement camp in Dori, Burkina Faso. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Changes in Forcibly Displaced Population in Africa



Sources: The Africa Center for Strategic Studies using data from UNHCR, IOM and IDMC (as of mid-2025)

Al-Shabaab is a top terrorist fundraiser. It raises millions annually through taxation at checkpoints and businesses in amounts that Critical Threats says rival official government revenues. The Global Initiative puts the group’s yearly revenue at more than \$100 million.

IS-Somalia generated at least \$100,000 monthly through extortion rackets in northern Somalia and Mogadishu in early 2023, the United Nations reported. By 2024, that amount was estimated at \$360,000 monthly due to extortion and taxation schemes. The group typically extorts money from imports, livestock, agriculture and local businesses.

Boko Haram has relied on kidnapping for ransom, but it also has exploited cryptocurrencies and other digital financial technology to raise money. Using these anonymous, unregulated platforms lets the group get money from local and international sources undetected.

HUMAN TOLL OF TERRORISM

The most devastating statistic about terrorism is the number of people killed or harmed in attacks. Terrorist groups are responsible for more than 150,000 deaths on the continent in the past decade, with more than 22,307 fatalities linked to these groups from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, according to an Africa Center for Strategic Studies report. That death toll represents a 60% increase from 2020 to 2022.

Nearly half of all fatalities from 2024 to 2025 were in the Sahel. Somalia accounted for about a third of fatalities in that period. The Sahel, Somalia and the Lake Chad Basin accounted for 99% of terrorist deaths.

Terrorism and related unrest also lead to people leaving their homes to escape violence and threats. As of mid-2025, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria were four of only five African nations that had seen increases in displaced people in the past year. Sudan, which was in the midst of a civil war, was the only other country to have an increase, according to the Africa Center. □

‘UNITY IS STRENGTH’



Maj. Gen. Peter Muteti arrives for a visit to Dhobley, Somalia, in 2023. ATMIS

A CONVERSATION WITH **MAJ. GEN. PETER MUTETI,**

**FORMER DEPUTY FORCE COMMANDER OF THE AFRICAN UNION
SUPPORT AND STABILIZATION MISSION IN SOMALIA**

Maj. Gen. Peter Muteti was named deputy force commander in charge of support and logistics for the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in 2023 and held the same position in the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) until December 2025. During a 39-year career in the Kenya Defence Forces he has served in leadership roles including as assistant chief of defence forces responsible for force development, operational effectiveness and policy development. After being commissioned in the Infantry Corps in 1988, he held command appointments and was deployed to security hot spots in Kenya's northern, northeastern and coastal regions. He served in peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone and Namibia and has received awards that include the Chief of the Burning Spear Presidential Award for service to the nation. He plans to retire from active duty in 2026. He spoke to ADF during Silent Warrior 2025, a security symposium in Nairobi. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

ADF: What has your time at AUSSOM taught you about the importance of interoperability among troop contributing countries (TCCs)?

Muteti: You cannot underestimate the value of interoperability. All the TCCs and the contingents come from different cultures, they are trained in different doctrinal underpinnings, and language can also be a barrier. The ultimate goal is delivering on the mission mandate and ensuring the success of the mission to enable the Somali Defense Force to assume its security responsibility. Operating among TCCs, really, what I have learned is you need a lot of patience, and unity is strength. Every one of the TCCs has their own uniqueness in terms of their background and culture, the way they live, and their national strategic interests, but at the end of the day I have realized that the biggest advantage we have is that most of the contingents operate independently within their own sector, and the communication occurs between themselves and the headquarters. In terms of integrating for joint operations with Somalis, there always has been a requirement for interpreters to know exactly how they operate.



Maj. Gen. Peter Muteti served as deputy force commander of the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia. STAFF SGT. TRENTON JANCZE/U.S. AIR FORCE

Their way of operation is different than the conventional mode that we have all been taught, so it requires an effort to ensure there is joint planning and everyone understands whether you speak in French, Amharic, English or Somali. It takes time to achieve joint operations effectiveness. Without that interoperability, it can be an issue.

ADF: You have said Somalia's Danab Special Operations Forces play an important role in counterterrorism operations. How have you seen them develop during your time in Somalia?

Muteti: I have now served in Somalia for three years, which is a little longer than any senior leader in our particular mission. During my time, I have witnessed a lot of operations conducted by the Somali Defense Force. The Danabs are quite a special force among the other elements of the Somali military. They are trained, mentored, supported logistically and also are supported in terms of intelligence sharing by the Americans. That is why the Danabs have become quite an elite force. They have operated as part of the Somali Defense Force and became so critical and vital in offensive operations that



Muteti speaks during a medal ceremony for Ugandan troops in Mogadishu, Somalia. FARDOSA HUSSEIN/ATMIS

“ IT IS SOMALIA’S AMBITION TO GENERATE TROOPS AND ENSURE THAT THEY CAN ASSUME SECURITY RESPONSIBILITY BY 2029 OR EVEN EARLIER.”

it became necessary for every operation to include an element of the Danabs. The only issue is that the Danab brigade comprises only 2,000 people, which is small compared to what needs to be done to defeat al-Shabaab. Even if they were deployed all over the country, they would be spread so thinly that their effectiveness would diminish. But they have done quite a lot in terms of shaping operations and assisting in the liberation of territories.

ADF: The traditional counterinsurgency strategy is “clear, hold and build.” You have mentioned that Somali forces have been able to clear al-Shabaab terrorists from certain regions, but the process of holding territory and building has been a challenge. What do you think is needed to complete this process and defeat al-Shabaab?

Muteti: Somalis have a culture of offensive operations. They are mobile. But once they do that, you find that they do not have the forces to hold territory and build. The build part is not Somali led; it requires support from international partners. But before the building can occur, there must be the clear and hold. And the hold element has been difficult. They have conducted offensive

operations, but then they have not unlocked the potential that there could be within their communities, within their community defense forces and the forces that belong to the federal member states. It might not be a requirement immediately for the Somali Defense Force to be large enough to conduct offensive operations as well as hold territory and so on. But there are many different forces in Somalia, and at the end of the day, what they might want to do is integrate them to ensure that they unlock that potential. If this happens, the clans can look beyond their militias and be able to cooperate and synergize with other forces so that they are able to hold territory once the offensive is done.

ADF: How can Somalia, AU and other international partners work to dismantle the networks that fund al-Shabaab?

Muteti: I think that one of the things that the federal government has done, to their credit, is to embrace a whole-of-government, multidimensional approach. Al-Shabaab can’t be defeated only by military means. And I think that has been highlighted in most of the United

“ I BELIEVE ALL THESE INSURGENCIES HAVE THEIR ROOT CAUSES. WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE, BECAUSE MANY OF THE INSURGENT GROUPS HAVE POLITICAL AMBITIONS AND, IN THOSE CASES, THEY CAN ONLY BE TERMINATED AT THE TABLE THROUGH DIALOGUE. ”

Nations Security Council resolutions. They recognize the need to use other means, be they political, economic or diplomatic. There is a lot of effort by the international partners, and there is close collaboration. Recently, they enacted legislation to freeze all funding to al-Shabaab. I do not know how effective it has been, but at least there is an effort to freeze the funding. If that has an impact, then at least we can isolate what is coming from without and, inside Somalia, use joint operations to limit al-Shabaab from collecting taxes. A good proportion of al-Shabaab's revenue comes from the taxes they are collecting either on the highways or levying on communities.

ADF: How close are the Somali National Army and other Somali security forces to being ready to take over full security responsibilities and allow for the departure of AUSSOM?

Muteti: The timeline for AUSSOM is from 2025 to 2029, so that gives the timeline during which the Somalis should be able to develop their own capability to assume security responsibility. I know politically they have made

strides and are engaging international partners, regional partners — they are active in every forum. Security-wise, it's all about implementing the Somali Security Development Plan, which includes steps for force generation and support from international partners. At the end of the day, it is Somalia's ambition to generate troops and ensure that they can assume security responsibility by 2029 or even earlier.

ADF: Outside Somalia, there are a number of stubborn insurgencies in places such as the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin and Mozambique. What do you think is needed to end these insurgencies? Is more regional cooperation required?

Muteti: There are hot spots here and there. I believe all these insurgencies have their root causes. We must understand what they are, because many of the insurgent

Somali National Army Soldiers adjust the sight of a mortar tube outside the town of Awdheegle in Somalia's Lower Shabelle region. AUSSOM



“

SECURITY IS THE BEDROCK OF SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. WITHOUT SECURITY YOU CANNOT REALLY BE TALKING ABOUT THE STRIDES YOU WANT TO MAKE IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT.”





Police officers serving in AUSSOM guard a street to boost security during Ramadan in Mogadishu in March 2025. FARDOSA HUSSEIN/AUSSOM

groups have political ambitions and, in those cases, they can only be terminated at the table through dialogue. We have to ensure that, on a regional level, there is more political commitment and dialogue. Just like al-Shabaab cannot be defeated only through military means, the same is true in the Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel and Mozambique.

ADF: You have had a career of service to your nation and to the broader continent in peacekeeping missions and other key roles. As you look back, what do you hope you accomplished during your career?

Muteti: When I joined, my oath was to the defense of our republic. That has driven my service over 39 years. Kenya is still secure, at least from external sources. We might not be so secure from terrorism because it is transboundary in nature, and it remains one of the pressing threats. As I look back, I find that yes, my contribution to the nation was not in vain. I have deployed variously and contributed to the development of leadership capabilities as a trainer and as a commander who developed the capabilities for troops to go out and prosecute operations. I have been out there as a peacekeeper, and I am proud to be associated with the peace in Sierra Leone. I also took part in the mission in Namibia, and I am happy today when I meet officers from Namibia and they look

back and say, “We are thankful for Kenya having contributed.” I am proud to see Kenya where it is in terms of security, and I am proud of what I may have contributed in Africa and the world.

ADF: What are the greatest security challenges still facing Kenya and the East African region, and what are your hopes for how these can be overcome?

Muteti: Security is the bedrock of socioeconomic development. Without security you cannot really be talking about the strides you want to make in terms of economic growth and development. So, when I look at the region, I know it is troubled, particularly the Horn of Africa and Sudan. Broadly speaking, most of the problems appear to be related to democratic development. Kenya has made some strides in terms of democracy. We are able to accommodate each other, and the constitution is the country’s foundation. I would wish to see a region that is stable because the world is not going to wait for us as we continue to have insecurities and so on. I wish to see a region that is safe to live in, that is at peace with itself, that is competitive with the international world. That is the aspiration that future generations will be judging the current generation on. They will ask, “What did you do?” and “How did you prepare for the future?” So, when I look at the region, I would wish to see a stable Somalia, a stable Ethiopia, a stable Sudan, a stable South Sudan and a stable Kenya that can collaborate in socioeconomic development issues. □

Ugandan troops serving in AUSSOM participate in a ceremony at the Force Headquarters in Mogadishu. STEVEN CANDIA/AUSSOM

THE CURRENCY OF TERROR



**Terrorists Across the Continent
Exploit Old Practices and New Technology
to Fund Operations**

Islamic State group terrorists have burrowed into the Cal Miskaad mountains in Somalia's northern Puntland region. From those hovels, hewn from rocks and dirt, fighters have set up fortified camps to attack local security forces.

The rustic setting also belies the group's capacity for international terrorist financing and fundraising. An Islamic State group (IS) faction that once accepted money from Iraq and Syria now collects and disperses huge sums of money across the continent and beyond. Authorities have traced funds flowing from Somalia to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa and Uganda.

Money coming to South Africa has been forwarded to Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania and the United Arab Emirates, *The Washington Post* newspaper reported.

IS-Somalia transfers money, often through mobile devices, to support terrorism across Africa, U.S. Treasury Department officials announced in 2023. The branch raises most of its money by extorting "financial institutions, mobile money service providers, and other local businesses" in Puntland's Port of Bosaso area. It moves the money via cash transfers and launders it in businesses, banks and through person-to-person transfers known as hawala. IS-Somalia raised about \$2 million through extortion rackets, imports, livestock and agriculture in the first half of 2022.

IS-Somalia's financial tactics represent a sample of the methods that terrorist groups use across Africa. Extortion rackets, cattle rustling, illegal taxation, kidnapping for ransom, gold mine exploitation, cryptocurrency schemes and more fund attacks at home and action across the globe.

The tactics bolster terrorists in Somalia and Mozambique against multinational military action. In West Africa's Sahel, al-Qaida- and IS-aligned groups advance largely undeterred in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger while exploiting artisanal gold mining, cattle

markets and more in their desire to swarm into coastal nations. Boko Haram and IS West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the Lake Chad Basin share some tactics, if not the goals, of Sahel militants.

GOLD, CATTLE AND PEOPLE

The al-Qaida-linked Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which is spreading through Burkina Faso and Mali, leverages several funding sources to finance its operations.

Gold is one source. Artisanal mines dot the landscape in both countries, and their informal operations and lax oversight make them ripe for exploitation. In areas where JNIM is active, those mines generate more than \$30 billion a year, according to a May 2025 report in *The Conversation* by researchers Egodi Uchendu and Muhammed Sani Dangusau.

"The jihadists gain access to gold by controlling mining sites and transport routes to and from mines," they wrote. "They sometimes allow trusted allies, who include local armed groups, bandits and other criminal networks, to mine in exchange for a payout."

It's not clear how much money JNIM makes from mines, but a 2019 Reuters report indicated that mines in areas near attacks produced 727 kilograms of gold per year, valued at \$34 million. Since that time, JNIM's influence has spread considerably, and gold prices have more than tripled.

JNIM and IS Sahel Province (ISSP) also have tapped into regional cattle markets, raising a steady income to buy weapons and fund operations, according to the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. JNIM typically loots cattle when attacking villages or taxes herders in areas it controls. It funnels stolen livestock into market streams operating along the tri-border region of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, where the assets are laundered.



Al-Shabaab's taxation scheme robs people and businesses of income while funding the group's terrorism. REUTERS



Buyers and sellers meet at a livestock market in Bamako, Mali. Terrorist groups exploit these markets to sell stolen cattle.

NICOLAS REMENE VIA REUTERS CONNECT

AL-SHABAAB REMAINS FUNDRAISING GIANT

ADF STAFF

Despite years of military and territorial setbacks at the hands of African Union forces, Somalia's al-Shabaab remains resilient through its extensive fundraising capabilities, according to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

U.S. Treasury Department officials have estimated that the al-Qaida-linked terrorist group raises as much as \$100 million a year. That amount is more than a quarter of the \$369.4 million in Somali government revenues for 2024.

Al-Shabaab has used "a highly centralized system of extortion at ports of entry and roadways for nearly two decades, mostly in the territory it holds in the southern and south-central regions of the country," Wendy Williams, associate research fellow, wrote in an Africa Center report in 2023. "Its operatives maintain a registry of citizens' assets for the purpose of collecting an annual 2.5 percent 'zakat' tax." The terrorists enforce the process "through systematic intimidation and violence."

The group invests in land and small to medium-sized businesses outside areas it controls and has leveraged government influence through corruption and clan leaders. "Through these efforts of infiltration, co-option, and the use of violence, al Shabaab has effectively established the perception of omnipresence and intimidation typical of a mafia-like organization."

Most al-Shabaab transactions are cash-based or mobile money transfers. The government has devised mobile money regulations and targets taxation checkpoints militarily, but more needs to be done, Williams wrote. Namely, Somalia will need to further professionalize "entities responsible for financial, intelligence, and judicial functions, which are at the forefront of shutting down al Shabaab's financing and money laundering."

"Through a complex chain of intermediaries, stolen livestock is either sold on key regional livestock markets in the region or on small black markets, before being brought further south in large consumptions markets," the Global Initiative reports. Terrorists can steal cattle and sell them at discounts to Ghanaian and Ivoirian traders who then resell them at full market price. Gross profits can reach more than \$450 per head.

Sahel terrorists also use cattle in ways that don't involve money. "By embedding themselves within the livestock economy and protecting herder communities in areas where they hold significant influence, these groups also gain legitimacy, building grass-roots support," the initiative said.



Interpol and other authorities seized currency valued at more than \$500,000 in Angola during Operation Catalyst. INTERPOL

Kidnapping for ransom is prevalent in Nigeria. An August 27, 2025, report by SBM Intelligence, a Nigerian geopolitical research company, indicated that between July 2024 and June 2025, terrorists and criminals abducted at least 4,722 people in 997 incidents in Nigeria. Of those, 762 were killed, and kidnapers got about \$1.66 million in ransom payments.

The highest percentage of incidents was in the Northwest, where bandits run rampant. However, in the Northeast, where Boko Haram and ISWAP are most active, the ransom for one judge netted about \$500,000 for a Boko Haram-linked group. "Islamist groups' participation in the economy of abduction is growing, with proceeds feeding insurgency logistics," the report said.

"The macroeconomic and social consequences are severe," SBM Intelligence reported. "Insecurity depresses agricultural output, aggravates food inflation and displacement, and continues to disrupt schooling despite fewer mass school raids. Businesses relocate or curtail operations amid extortion risks."

In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, kidnapping for ransom steadily decreased between 2021 and 2024 before a rash of abductions targeted foreign nationals in early 2025, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project (ACLED). In early 2025, ISSP conducted or sponsored the abduction of six foreign nationals, including an

Austrian woman in Agadez, Niger, and four Moroccan truck drivers in Burkina Faso. “At present, this change seems to be driven by the group’s need for resources, given that foreigners command higher ransom fees than local abductees,” according to ACLED.

JNIM employs kidnapping as a strategic tool. After moving into a new area, JNIM uses abductions to intimidate locals and gather intelligence. Once the group is established there, kidnapping becomes a way to forcibly recruit young people and skilled workers such as doctors and nurses. Ransom demands remain but are not as prevalent as in past years.

“When JNIM first infiltrates a community, kidnappings spike in number,” according to a 2023 article for ENACT Observer by analyst Flore Berger. “The group targets anyone associated with or representing the authorities and any key influential local figures. The purpose of kidnappings at that point is to intimidate locals, gather data and decrease the number of people who could threaten its establishment in that area — either by having them leave the area or by winning them over.”

EXPLOITING TECHNOLOGY

As internet connectivity rises in Africa, terrorist groups have readily incorporated new technology for recruiting, spreading false information, and raising and transferring money.

Cryptocurrencies offer a new avenue for terrorists to transfer money, and some IS groups are among those using them. However, IS still relies heavily on more traditional cash couriers and hawala networks, according to a 2024 paper for the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point by Jessica Davis, a terrorism expert and president of Insight Threat Intelligence. “This diversification of methods demonstrates that the Islamic State is mechanism agnostic: The group and its supporters will use whatever fund transfer mechanism is fastest, cheapest, and least likely to be detected and disrupted.”

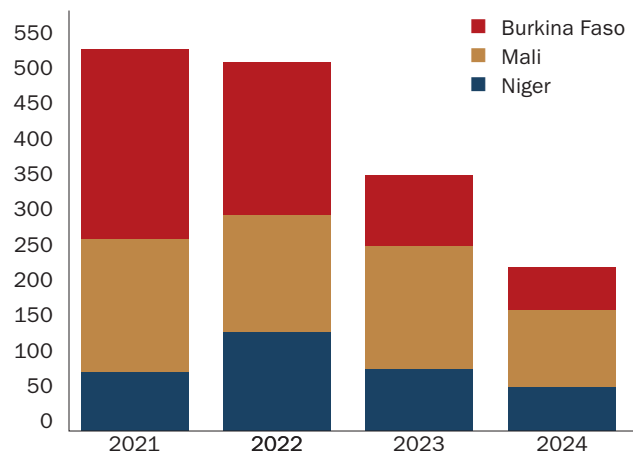
Cryptocurrency use varies among areas. IS groups in the DRC, Mozambique and Nigeria have used cryptocurrencies little, if at all. “For Nigeria, this is counterintuitive, as the country is ranked second in the world for cryptocurrency adoption,” Davis wrote. “Because of this, one would expect to see more use of cryptocurrency by ISWAP. However, since ISWAP is regionally concentrated and much of its revenue generation is done in cash (through taxation and extortion), it stands to reason that it has little use for cryptocurrency.”

Boko Haram, however, uses cryptocurrencies and other digital financial technology to its advantage, according to researcher Oge Samuel Okonkwo.

“Boko Haram leverages cryptocurrency’s decentralized nature to fund its low-cost but deadly operations, including weapons and logistics,” Okonkwo wrote for the website Medium in April 2025. Using anonymous, unregulated peer-to-peer platforms, Boko Haram can “receive funds from local and international sources undetected, underscoring the need for targeted interventions that preserve innovation while enhancing security.”

Kidnappings in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

Kidnappings declined steadily in the Sahel between 2021 and 2024.



Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project

Nigeria should update regulations on money laundering and terrorist financing, Okonkwo wrote. Blockchain analytics and peer-to-peer trade monitoring can help spot and block suspicious transactions. Because Boko Haram and its financing sources cross borders, Nigerian authorities will have to share intelligence with other Lake Chad Basin nations and international agencies, such as Interpol. To blunt the appeal of crypto schemes in informal economies, the government will have to invest in “education and financial inclusion” to reduce the use of unregulated platforms.

TIES TO CRIMINAL NETWORKS

Africa-based terrorist groups often operate in regions alongside criminal trafficking networks. Terrorists also indulge in practices common to criminal organizations, such as extortion rackets that impose taxes on movement and commerce. Somalia’s al-Qaida-aligned al-Shabaab is notorious for the money it raises — estimated at \$100 million annually — through these and other means.

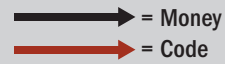
Tracking the multidimensional interplay between criminal networks and terrorists can be difficult. Traffickers can be local or international, and terrorist groups tend to opportunistically exploit funding and resources available to them. And trafficking is only one of many criminal enterprises in regions where terrorist groups hold sway.

Dr. Daisy C. Muibu, assistant professor of security studies at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, agrees that, generally, terrorists tend to opportunistically participate in various criminal markets. That participation can vary significantly from location to location depending on local dynamics and group influence.

In the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, it seems likely that terrorists initially took advantage of organized criminal organizations already active in the area through a

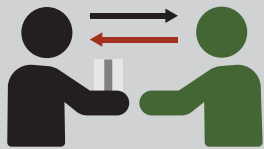
HAWALA: HOW DOES IT WORK?

Hawala, which means “trust” in Arabic, is an ancient money transfer system that began in eighth-century India. It’s a quick way to move money internationally, but it also lets terrorists send funds undetected. The process has four main steps:



STEP 1

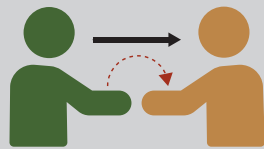
A sender gives money to a broker, called a hawaladar, who supplies the sender a code.



Sender Hawaladar A

STEP 2

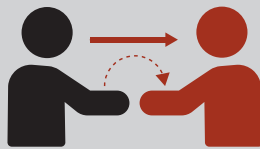
Hawaladar A tells a counterpart in the recipient’s location how much money he received.



Hawaladar A Hawaladar B

STEP 3

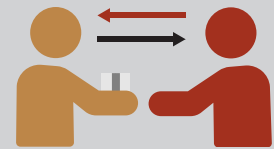
The sender shares his code with his intended recipient and says how much cash was handed in.



Sender Recipient

STEP 4

The recipient gives the code to hawaladar B, who hands over the cash, minus a fee. The two hawala agents settle their account separately.



Hawaladar B Recipient

Sometimes, the transaction can be completed in a few hours, which is faster than standard banking.

It helps people who don’t have bank access, but it leaves no electronic or paper trails. This makes it attractive to terrorists and criminals who want to keep transactions secret and free of regulatory safeguards.

Prominent terror groups such as al-Shabaab and Islamic State-Somalia have used hawala networks for fundraising. IS-Somalia financiers in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Europe and Somalia are believed to have laundered millions of dollars through a hawala app called Sifalo Pay in less than six months, according to the Horn Observer news website.

Sources: Financial Action Task Force, Interpol



Money exchange dealers engage in hawala, an informal remittance system.

MARCUS YAM/LOS ANGELES TIMES



“marriage of convenience” to support their actions early on, she said.

Likewise, terrorists in Mozambique leveraged criminal networks to “gain financial resources to function,” she said. “So, it’s depending on where you’re talking about, what type of criminal market you’re discussing and then, lastly, which organization you’re talking about.”

Addressing all these variables on a vast continent with so many terror groups that have varying motives is a huge challenge, Muibu said. Improving coordination among government entities, nations, and local groups and leaders will be key.

Afrifol and Interpol have worked well together and with individual nations, Muibu said.

From July to September 2025, Operation Catalyst targeted terrorism financing and related crimes, which resulted in 83 arrests. Of those, 21 were for terrorism-related crimes, 28 for money laundering and financial fraud, 16 linked to online scams, and 18 on charges of improperly using virtual assets.

Authorities in several countries screened 15,000 people and entities and uncovered \$260 million in official and virtual currencies with possible links to terrorism. Investigators had seized about \$600,000 as of October 2025.

“Tackling terrorist financing is particularly complex for law enforcement, as it often cuts across diverse criminal activities, including fraud, kidnapping for ransom, illicit trade, online scams, Ponzi schemes and the misuse of virtual assets,” according to Interpol. “These illegal activities can be linked to terrorism financing directly — when terrorist groups receive funds from such schemes — or indirectly, through money laundering or intermediary

Sahel terrorists often exploit artisanal gold mines such as this one in Burkina Faso. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

networks. These connections highlight how different forms of crime are increasingly intertwined, underscoring the need for a united and coordinated response.”

Angola, Cameroon, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria and South Sudan participated with Interpol and Afrifol. In Angola, authorities arrested 25 people from various countries in a terrorist financing and money laundering operation. In Kenya, two people were accused of recruiting and radicalizing people with money traced to Tanzania and obtained through a cryptocurrency platform.

A fraudulent cryptocurrency investment operation cheated more than 100,000 people in 17 nations around the world out of an estimated \$562 million. Investigators found that some of that money possibly was used to finance terrorism.

“The success of Operation Catalyst lies in the synergy and convergence of efforts among national units combating financial crime, cybercrime, and terrorism,” Jalel Chelba, Afrifol executive director, said in a statement. “This joint endeavour, dedicated to disrupting the financing of terrorism across the African continent, illustrates how coordinated action between Member States, facilitated by AFRIPOL and INTERPOL, can effectively address complex and evolving security threats. Such cooperation stands as tangible proof that Africa’s law-enforcement community, when united, offers a decisive and appropriate response in the pursuit of a secure and stable Africa.” □

'BLACK MARKET PMCS' FUEL CONFLICT

ADF STAFF



Foreign Groups Are Training, Advising and Arming Continental Terrorists

African governments for decades have grappled with the destabilizing effects of private military companies (PMCs), mercenaries and paramilitary groups, which are paid to protect leaders or fight alongside government forces in conflict zones — often without regard for local populations.

Mercenaries such as Russia’s Africa Corps, formerly the Wagner Group, are accused of committing atrocities against civilians in the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, Mozambique and Sudan. These veteran troops fight and spread the Kremlin’s geopolitical agenda for pay. However, a new wrinkle in the continent’s war on terror is developing as seasoned, foreign terrorists are offering their services to insurgents, often for ideological reasons.

Aries D. Russell, of London-based Aries Intelligence, characterized these organizations, especially those trained in Iraq and Syria, as “black market PMCs.” They have rotated between terrorist conflicts in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel.

These groups are “organized, operational entities that offer military-style services — training, advising, tactical support — to jihadist groups, even if informally structured or loose in governance,” Russell told ADF. “While these groups are ideological and networked rather than profit-maximizing corporations in the Western sense, they do behave

like contractors or subcontractors in a militant ecosystem. They differ from conventional mercenaries in their ideological as well as transactional orientation. They do not always fight purely for pay.”

THE NEXUS OF AL-SHABAAB AND THE HOUTHIS

Ties between Yemen’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels and al-Shabaab, the terror group that controls areas in central and southern Somalia, exemplify this trend. In 2024, the Houthis agreed to supply al-Shabaab with weapons and technical assistance in return for ramping up piracy and kidnappings for ransom in the Gulf of Aden and off



Houthi rebel fighters hoist guns and rocket launchers during a celebration.

IMAGO/HAMZA ALI VIA REUTERS CONNECT

Somalia's coast, which are among the world's busiest shipping lanes.

The Houthis had increasingly attacked ships transiting the Red Sea in response to Israel's war against Hamas, which began in October 2023. This drew the attention of international counter-piracy naval resources deployed in the region and acted as a distraction, allowing Somali pirates to stage a comeback. In 2024, al-Shabaab reached a deal to provide protection to Somali pirates in exchange for 30% of all ransom proceeds and a cut of any loot. Chaos ensued.

After a six-year lull in major Somali pirate attacks, more than 20 attacks were recorded between November 2023 and April 2024, although the number dropped to three in the first half of 2025. Two Somali gang members said they were taking advantage of the Houthi distraction to get back into piracy.

"They took this chance because the international naval forces that operate off the coast of Somalia reduced their operations," a pirate financier who goes by the alias Ismail Isse told Reuters.

As Russell noted, the Houthis have received advanced military training in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, where they gained skills such as missile assembly and drone coordination. He wrote that they pass that knowledge on to al-Shabaab and the Islamic State in Somalia (ISSOM),

which primarily operates in mountainous areas in the country's semiautonomous Puntland region.

Al-Shabaab fighters also have traveled to Houthi-controlled ports in Yemen, where Hezbollah and Houthi instructors introduced them to drone deployment, missile coordination and asymmetric warfare techniques.

"This diffusion helps explain why Middle Eastern insurgent tactics are increasingly seen in Africa and elsewhere," Russell wrote.

The Houthis supply the terrorists with weaponized drones, surface-to-air missiles and other materiel that has been traced to Iranian stockpiles. Iran supplies these weapons, which violates a United Nations arms embargo on Yemen. In January 2025, ISSOM launched two drone strikes against security forces in Puntland. This was the group's first known use of the technology, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project.

"The adoption of this technology by one terrorist group means the ideas will proliferate in the region and be picked up by others, even if there are no direct ties between those groups," Taimur Khan, of Conflict Armament Research, told Somalia's Hiiraan Online news website.

Rebel fighters train in Syria. GETTY IMAGES





Somali National Army Soldiers raise their weapons at Awdheegle, one of several towns liberated from al-Qaida-linked militants. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

'NEW FRONTIER IN INSURGENT COLLABORATION'

The Houthis in July 2025 used long-range missiles, suicide drones, explosive-laden naval drones and fast-attack skiffs in a sophisticated attack on commercial shipping. According to Russell, the operation's complexity and coordination suggest that regional partners, including al-Shabaab, may have assisted with surveillance, targeting data or maritime strike coordination.

"This transactional exchange, combat skills traded for access or logistics, represents a new frontier in insurgent collaboration," Russell wrote. "What began as an Iranian investment in a Yemeni proxy is now influencing conflicts hundreds of miles away."

Al-Shabaab and the Houthis formed an alliance despite their differing religious and political positions. Al-Shabaab members follow Sunni Islam and are an al-Qaida affiliate. The Houthis are Shiites, as are Iranians. Analysts at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace warned that ties between the Houthis and al-Shabaab give Iran "strategic depth," while destabilizing East Africa, threatening Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. Smugglers across Somalia and northern Kenya also offer the Houthis greater

opportunities to ship arms out of the Indian Ocean or by land to the Gulf of Aden.

Russell said the jihadist PMC model could be replicated in Libya, around the Horn of Africa, across the Sahel and into West Africa.

"The market conditions exist: porous borders, entrenched jihadist demand, cheap COTS [commercial off-the-shelf] drones and monetizable training," he told ADF. "Expect growth wherever there's access to smuggling infrastructure and ideological or transactional alignment."

THE TURKISH-SYRIAN CONNECTION

Syrian fighters affiliated with the Syrian National Army (SNA), a coalition of armed opposition groups that works closely with Turkey in northern Syria, have in recent years been hired to fight and provide security in Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria. Some, but not all, of these fighters are jihadists. An SNA fighter using the pseudonym Deyri told the Middle East Eye (MEE) news outlet that the recruits operate in groups, rather than individually.

"The command is not in Syrian hands," Deyri told MEE. "Sometimes we sign up for the protection of Turkish businesses, sometimes for fighting the Islamic State, and sometimes for guarding mines or factories."

Most of these fighters allegedly are recruited by SADAT International Defense Consultancy, a private

Turkish military company, although SADAT denies this. According to MEE, the Syrians sign contracts for six months to one year and are paid \$1,500 monthly. Some of the fighters said they agreed to work as mercenaries in Africa because of high unemployment in northern Syria caused by the country's long-running civil war.

"The main reason I left is because life is hard in Syria," Omar, a young Syrian fighter in Niger, told Agence France-Presse. In northern Syria, "there are no job

opportunities besides joining an armed faction and earning no more than 1,500 Turkish lira (\$46) a month."

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and friends of mercenaries who have worked in Niger told the BBC that Syrians had ended up under Russian command fighting in the border areas between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

Life as a foreign fighter in the Sahel region is tough. Their phones are confiscated upon arrival. One Syrian fighter said they can contact their families once every two weeks, or less, and their communications must go through their Nigerien superiors.

According to the Nordic Monitor news website, Turkey has transported thousands of Syrian jihadist fighters to



Left: Smoke rises from a Greek oil tanker attacked by Houthi rebels on the Red Sea.

REUTERS

Rubble lines the streets after an al-Shabaab attack on a hotel in Mogadishu, Somalia.

GETTY IMAGES





Somali piracy suspects under arrest in India await transfer to police custody. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Libya to bolster Turkish-backed factions. MIT, Turkey's intelligence agency, handled the vetting and selection process for the fighters. Nordic said MIT has collaborated with jihadist groups in Syria since 2011.

'WORLD'S FIRST JIHADI PMC'

Russell traced the rise of black-market PMCs to Malhama Tactical, a Syria-based outfit founded by Uzbek veterans linked to al-Qaida affiliates. Known as "the world's first jihadi PMC," Malhama Tactical operates as a freelance jihadist special operations unit. Established in 2016, it has trained militants from Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and other insurgent factions, blending front-line experience with a sophisticated social media presence to advertise its services.

Known for being well trained and well equipped, Malhama Tactical set a precedent that was followed by units such as Muhojir Tactical, which consists mainly of Uzbekistani, Chechen and other Central Asian fighters; Yurtugh Tactical, a Uyghur-led jihadist PMC; and the jihadist group Albanian Tactical, all of which operate

in Syria. The newer groups professionalized Malhama Tactical's model, offering sniper and close-quarter battle instruction, and training on night operations, trauma medicine and drone warfare.

These groups train alongside one another, "creating a transnational network of jihadi special operations trainers," Russell wrote. "Their tactics now circulate not just on battlefields, but across digital ecosystems, Telegram, Instagram, and closed forums, where instructional videos double as propaganda and recruitment tools."

Jihadist mercenary units may soon become a regular feature of global conflict, offering "special forces" capabilities to extremist clients in future insurgencies, researcher Sean McFate wrote in a paper published by National Defense University Press.

Russell wrote that the current militant landscape increasingly "resembles a global syndicate," based on ideology, logistics, consulting and cross-border specialization that is fueled by jihadist PMCs.

"The result is a world where a bombing in Burkina Faso might mirror tactics refined in Idlib [Syria], or where a Somali drone technician replicates Houthi maritime targeting," he wrote. "This isn't random adaptation, it's the emergence of a combat knowledge economy, where fighters trade in doctrine, not just ideology." □



Mauritania Mixes Modern, Ancient Methods for Security

PHOTOS BY AFP/GETTY IMAGES



A Mauritanian National Guardsman demonstrates a thermal image from a camera attached to a drone outside Oualata in April 2025. These desert cavalrymen, known as Méharistes, plod across the Sahara on camels. In recent years, they have regained a central role in the nation's security strategy. Their patrols are crucial in a vast territory that shares 2,200 kilometers of a sparsely populated border with Mali, a nation for years plagued by terrorism and insurgency. The camels can move where even four-wheel-drive vehicles become immobilized. The guard had dwindled to about 50 people a few years ago due to a lack of resources. But since 2019, it has grown to about 150 men and a herd of 400 camels. They have helped the country defend its borders and serve as a key support system for isolated communities.



DRONE TERROR RISING

ADF STAFF

Terrorists Are Finding New Ways to Weaponize Drones

ADF ILLUSTRATION

When Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) extremists

launched four simultaneous deadly attacks against Nigerian military forces in late October 2025, armed drones played a key role.

The attacks on positions in the communities of Dikwa, Gajibo, Mafa and Katarko killed five Soldiers and burned a military base.

Ultimately, Nigerian Soldiers drove back the attacks, killing 50 ISWAP fighters. However, the assault illustrated how drones have become an integral part of terrorist operations in Africa.

Although African governments have spent millions of dollars buying military-grade drones such as Turkey's Bayraktar TB2 and

Akinci, terrorist groups have spent significantly less on commercially available quadcopter drones that can easily be outfitted with explosives, turning them into flying improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. The quadcopters are being used against government forces in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Somalia. Porous borders and family or ethnic connections across the region encourage the movement of the technology and technical know-how that underpin terrorist drone operations, experts say.

Drone attacks have accelerated rapidly since Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) launched its first kamikaze drone attack in 2023. In the interim, JNIM has made kamikaze drone attacks a key part of its battle strategy, launching dozens of them

against civilian and military targets in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

Morocco's Policy Center for the New South reported more than 30 drone attacks in the Sahel between September 2023 and June 2025. The majority of those — 82% — came between March and June of 2025. Among those was a JNIM attack on a Malian military base in Bouliekessi that killed more than 100 soldiers.

As terrorist groups increasingly rely on drones for kamikaze-style attacks on ground positions, they're also able to keep their own fighters out of direct combat with military forces. As a result, the drone-based strategies now taking shape across the Sahel might preview future battles, according to John Sunday Ojo, a research fellow at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs.



AFP/GETTY IMAGES

“Several recent attacks were successful because of the adoption of drones by ISWAP,” Ojo told ADF. “In that region, we are heading for a kind of environment where land combat will not be able to curtail the war on terror. It will be a kind of remote warfare where the terrorists don’t even need to struggle to achieve their aims.”

A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

Ukrainian troops have led the way in deploying armed and unarmed civilian-style drones against invading Russian forces.

“They’re scrappy in the same way as the people who are building these things in their garages in Ukraine,” analyst Niccola Milnes told ADF. Milnes was a co-author

of a study published by the Policy Center for the New South.

As Ukraine uses off-the-shelf drone technology to repel invading Russian forces, groups around the world are watching and may try to replicate their success, Don Rassler with the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point told ADF.

“The Ukraine conflict is a key learning laboratory,” Rassler said.

HOMEGROWN INNOVATIONS

In Somalia, Puntland authorities in 2024 intercepted five weaponized commercial drones sent from Houthi rebels in Yemen to terrorists in Somalia.

Al-Shabaab continues to use drones primarily for reconnaissance, but its rival in the north of

“
It will be a kind of remote warfare where the terrorists don’t even need to struggle to achieve their aims.”

— John Sunday Ojo,
research fellow at the Institute of
Security and Global Affairs

Antidrone technology is designed to jam the signal between drones and their operators. Jammers can be overcome by using so-called offline drones powered by AI and programmed to attack a specified target.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES



the country, Islamic State-Somalia Province, has deployed them in combat against regional forces.

“Islamic State-Somalia is one of the groups people are worried about,” analyst Clara Broekaert at The Soufan Center told ADF. “They have the resources; they’re becoming a hot spot for foreign fighters and they recruit for skills.”

The growing relationship between al-Shabaab and Yemen’s Houthi rebels also is concerning, Rassler said. Houthis have been working to extend the range on their own commercial kamikaze drones.

“The Houthis have been seeking out and experimenting with unique forms of technology, such as hydrogen fuel cells,” he said. “These are

warning signs of the places conflicts could go in the Sahel.”

In Mali, JNIM and the Front for the Liberation of Azawad (FLA) appear to be conducting a similar knowledge transfer. In mid-2024, Col. Hussein Ghulam moved from the FLA to JNIM and soon became connected to JNIM’s May 2025 drone strike in Dioura that killed 41 Malian soldiers.

“While it is not possible to confirm direct coordination between the two groups, the timing and geographic overlap suggest potential for knowledge transfer or mutual observation,” Milnes wrote with Rida Lyammouri for the Policy Center for the New South.

JNIM and other African terror groups have received little to no

direct help from the core al-Qaida or Islamic State group organizations, which are facing substantial pressure from the governments in their home countries, according to analysts.

“It’s mostly homegrown,” Rassler said of African extremists’ drone innovations. “They don’t need to rely on Islamic State core for much guidance. They just need to go to YouTube or Instagram to mine data about what’s been going on in Ukraine.”

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence could make it even easier for extremists to weaponize off-the-shelf drones.

“This is where AI changes everything,” Milnes said. “You don’t need to be a tech expert. You use AI to teach you how to use AI.”



Primary school girls in Burkina Faso lie on the floor of their classroom during an emergency attack simulation. Thousands of schools in the country have been closed because of terrorist violence. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

“If these trends continue, further adaptations, such as greater onboard autonomy or expanded coordination, could emerge over time.”

— **Niccola Milnes** and **Rida Lyammouri**, in a study for the Policy Center for the New South titled “Countering JNIM’s Drone Proliferation in the Sahel”



A man watches as smoke billows after a drone strike on Port Sudan on May 6, 2025. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



In some recent attacks, terrorist groups have deployed AI-powered drones capable of locating and attacking their targets without a human operator. So-called offline drones can't be jammed or redirected in the way that operator-directed drones can, making them more difficult to counter.

"If these trends continue, further adaptations, such as greater onboard autonomy or expanded coordination, could emerge over time," Milnes and Lyammouri wrote.

One aspect of drone warfare has, so far, remained out of reach of extremists and militaries: swarms. Experts are concerned about the prospect that JNIM, ISWAP or other terrorist groups could one day launch a huge attack on a community or military outpost using dozens of self-directed, AI-coordinated drones.

"That's a watch-out area," Rassler said.

COST OF ASYMMETRY

For all their spending on marquee technology, such as Bayraktar TB2 drones, militaries across the Sahel have no specific operational mechanism to combat drones deployed by terrorist groups, according to Ojo.

"The cost asymmetry for drone warfare is incredibly high," Broekaert told ADF. "[Governments]

are pouring millions into systems that can be easily defeated."

For example, militaries that use jammers such as Lithuania's EDM4S SkyWiper antidrone system to disrupt the signal between drone and operator can be overcome by extremists using drones powered by offline AI systems.

Jamming technology also can be defeated by deploying drones with lengthy fiber-optic tethers — a technology that has become commonplace in Ukraine but remains untried in the Sahel or Somalia.

"That's a scary development that we need to continue to watch," Rassler said.

Ultimately, as terrorist groups step up their drone capabilities, they are outpacing the militaries tasked with reining them in, according to observers. Direct efforts by militaries to disrupt drones on the battlefield or to keep them out of civilian hands have had little effect, leaving militaries on the back foot.

The rapid evolution of technologies such as AI and 3D printing is likely to make it even harder for governments to keep up with terrorists' drone innovations.

"These groups are running circles around them [militaries] right now with pretty cheap, homegrown, easy-to-modify commercial drones," Milnes said. "And they're upscaling pretty quickly." □

EXITTING THE FLIGHT

**DDR Programs Can Prevent a
Return to War, but They Face Obstacles**

ADF STAFF | PHOTOS BY MINUSCA

ADF ILLUSTRATION

It was a rare moment of joy in the Central African Republic village of Sanguéré-Lim as fighters who once inspired terror stood in line to lay down their weapons.

The combatants from the Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation (3R) militia included teenage boys wearing football jerseys and grizzled men in knit caps. Upbeat music boomed on loudspeakers as a man hoisting a grenade launcher stood alongside a teen cupping two handfuls of bullets.

“Today, the armed groups have laid down their weapons and that changed everything,” Adama Yaouba, a resident of the village, told the United Nations. “Before, we never slept peacefully, always on our guard. But now I can sleep peacefully without worry. My children also feel safe and that’s what matters most to me.”

For a country that has been in conflict for more than a decade with 14 armed groups vying for control, the event was a reason to celebrate. It was part of a 2019 peace agreement and the latest achievement in a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process that has helped 5,540 combatants put down their weapons.

“Disarming armed groups promotes the protection of civilians,” said Wilfried Sawadogo of MINUSCA, the U.N. mission in the CAR. “It helps the population live in a secure and peaceful environment, enabling them to carry out economic and social activities.”

The program implemented by MINUSCA, the CAR government and others offers incentives and job training to fighters willing to return to civilian life. It provides a path to enlist in the armed forces for those who qualify. It helps communities accept ex-fighters returning home and offers counseling to address war’s mental trauma.

As the landscape of conflicts in Africa changes, DDR supporters believe it remains a vital strategy to restore



Members of the Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation militia arrive in Sanguéré-Lim, Central African Republic, in September 2025 to give up their weapons and join the country’s disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program.

peace. Critics, however, question whether it can succeed in increasingly fractured environments with no peace agreements and a wide variety of combatants operating in territory that crosses borders.

DDR strategies are changing to keep up, and experts know there is more to be done. Dr. Ibrahim Bangura is a DDR practitioner, instructor and researcher at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. He is the editor of the book “Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Africa.”

“Wars have evolved, and DDR itself has evolved,” Bangura told ADF. “DDR has to be adapted for the context it’s used in. It has to be context-specific, otherwise you miss.”

‘A Lost Generation’

It has been clear for centuries that combatants who have known nothing but war need support and guidance as they return to civilian life. In ancient Rome, demobilized

The Stages of DDR

Disarmament involves the collection, documentation, control and disposal of ammunition, small arms, explosives, light weapons and heavy weapons. It also includes programs for managing, storing and disposing of arms.

Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from the armed forces or other groups. In its first stage, it might include processing combatants in temporary centers or massing troops in camps, cantonment sites, barracks or assembly areas.

Reinsertion is the short-term transitional assistance of up to one year that is offered to ex-combatants to meet their immediate, basic needs. Once demobilized, fighters often are unable to earn a living while they complete vocational training. Reinsertion could include an allowance, clothes, medical services, food, employment, short-term education and training.

Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants gain civilian status and begin to sustain themselves through employment. Reintegration is a social process with an open time frame and takes place at the community level. It often requires long-term support.

Source: U.N. Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards



DDR ‘MEANS STABILITY AND LASTING PEACE’

**A Conversation with Pierre Ubalijoro,
director of the DDR section for the
U.N. Mission in the Central African Republic**

ADF STAFF

ADF: Once combatants lay down their arms, what are the next steps?

Ubalijoro: Some individuals, after being demobilized, are enrolled in World Bank-funded reintegration programs that include civic education during the first month, and then the next five months are vocational training in fields such as agriculture, carpentry and other income-generating activities. They also receive psychosocial support, medical screening and reintegration kits. Some eligible individuals may be integrated into the national security forces. As of mid-2025, we have supported the government to disarm and demobilize over 5,600 combatants.

ADF: What does it mean for civilians in the Central African Republic to see combatants leaving the battlefield?

Ubalijoro: It means a lot because once the combatants hand in the weapons, then there is space for economic recovery. That’s when other international partners with a development agenda start trickling in. This constitutes a form of relief. We as a mission support the communities with a project known as Community Violence Reduction [CVR], which enhances community resilience. We build schools, we drill boreholes and we do cash-for-work projects. We pave the way for other partners with substantial development resources to come and assist the communities to live a more peaceful life, uninterrupted by armed violence and extrajudicial killings.

ADF: In the CAR, there once were 14 active armed groups. How does that add to the complexity of a DDR program?

Ubalijoro: The DDR process in CAR is complicated by the fragmentation of armed groups. While 14 armed groups signed the APPR-RCA [Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African

Republic] Peace Framework in 2019, three of them later withdrew and formed what is known as the Coalition of Patriots for Change. The presence of nonsignatory factions still active in mining zones and transhumance corridors adds complexity. Despite these challenges, 11 out of the 14 original signatory groups have officially dissolved, and the return of UPC and 3R [armed groups] into the APPR framework has reinvigorated DDR efforts. In line with its mandate, MINUSCA [the U.N. mission in the Central African Republic] has increased support to CAR authorities to conduct disarmament and demobilization operations in many areas. Right now, we have around eight operations in the pipeline prior to the holding of the [December 2025] elections.

ADF: As a DDR program progresses, how do you determine whether it is successful?

Ubalijoro: It’s a process that is politically driven. Sometimes it can take a long time; sometimes it can be short, depending on the political will. Success is measured by the sustainable demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life or national institutions without relapse into violence. Key indicators include improved security of communities most affected by armed groups, reduced armed violence, socioeconomic integration and, most important, acceptance by host communities.

ADF: When you talk about host communities, naturally some civilians will be nervous and resistant to the return of ex-combatants. What can be done to aid this process?

Ubalijoro: It’s a complex process. CVR projects are essential because their aim is to foster acceptance. These projects include reconstruction of schools, health centers, boreholes as well as promoting dialogue

and joint economic activities. In the town of Sam-Ouandja, for instance, CVR projects have led to reduced arms circulation and resumption of farming. If you go there today, you can see that there is an era of renaissance and improved trade due to road repairs. These initiatives help communities see tangible benefits and reduce stigma toward returning ex-combatants.

ADF: Two-thirds of African countries have had a DDR process at some point in their history. Are there any instances from recent history you would point to in which DDR has been successful and played an important role in ending a conflict?

Ubalijoro: Several African countries have successfully implemented DDR programs. For instance, Liberia disarmed over 100,000 combatants post-civil war. Rwanda reintegrated child soldiers through what were called Kadogo Schools. Sierra Leone linked DDR to national reconciliation and youth employment. In CAR, the DDR program is following a similar path with thousands of combatants, successfully disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated, and now leading a meaningful life.

ADF: Looking ahead, what do you see as the possibilities of DDR in the CAR and what it could mean long term?

Ubalijoro: A successful DDR program would enable the CAR government not only to reclaim territorial control, but also to reduce violence and open trade and agriculture corridors, transhumance corridors. It would lay the foundation for economic recovery and decentralized governance. Moreover, with the MINUSCA mandate extended to November 2026, DDR is central to CAR’s peace and development strategy. In my view, a successful DDR program means stability and lasting peace for the CAR.

Young men look for their names as they take part in a community violence reduction program. The effort, which is part of the broader DDR work, offers vocational training and other support to strengthen communities with returning ex-fighters.

Soldiers were given farmland after leaders saw that many had become aimless and resorted to crime.

The U.N. warns that, without assistance, ex-combatants risk becoming a “lost generation” that is “suffering war trauma, becoming addicted to alcohol and drugs, and dependent on weapons and violence as the only means to make their way in the world.”

This is a key reason why more than half of civil wars that end in a negotiated truce soon return to war.

One of the first modern DDR efforts was in Colombia after a 10-year conflict known as La Violencia that ended in 1957. The program was only a limited success — about 3,500 people were demobilized while some armed groups refused to participate — but it offered a model that could be replicated.

Between 1953 and 2020 there were 149 DDR programs and processes across 54 nations. Countries used the programs after ceasefires or peace agreements and during active wars. They have tried to disarm militias, paramilitaries, terrorists, ethnically aligned armies and many other groups.

In 2005, the U.N. formalized its approach through an Interagency Working Group on DDR. The program has been a core component of interventions in conflict-plagued regions since then. The U.N. has regularly updated its guidance and now includes second- and third-generation DDR models that expand the scope of the programs to include a wider group of combatants and support to help the broader community accept reintegrated fighters.

Continentwide, two-thirds of countries have implemented DDR programs. There are some success stories.

A man participates in a community violence reduction program in the CAR.



New Challenges

DDR today is more challenging than ever. Its practitioners often face a complex landscape with multiple groups, no peace declarations and conflicts that spill across borders. Here are the biggest challenges to 21st-century DDR programs.

No Peace

Modern conflicts are less likely to be ended by a political settlement or peace agreement. A simmering state of hostility makes starting DDR difficult because combatants are unwilling to disarm if they feel a need to protect themselves.

Many Actors

DDR practitioners today deal with an array of involved parties. These include militias, terrorists, organized crime groups and “spoilers” who might not be party to the conflict or its peace agreement. All the groups have their own incentives and structures. The fractured nature of many conflicts makes it difficult to develop a program that will attract all armed groups and address their interests.

Regionalized Conflicts

Many conflicts today cross borders. Armed groups can include foreign and domestic supporters and allies. Some also are connected to international criminal rings.

Hostility From Communities

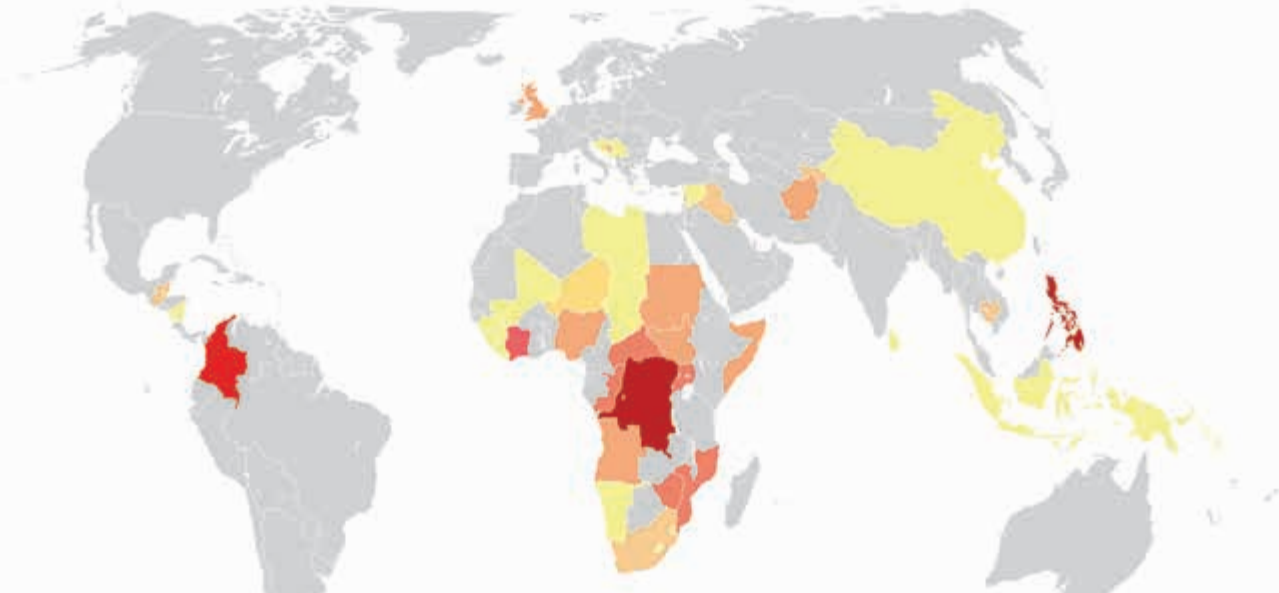
Civilians understandably are fearful of ex-fighters returning to their communities. They may resent fighters who receive benefits after they have committed atrocities. Ex-fighters in DDR programs typically choose between returning to their communities of origin or finding new communities where they will not be recognized. Both options carry challenges.

Lack of Funding and Political Will

DDR programs are costly and time-consuming. The typical lifespan of a program’s disarmament phase is one to two years, but it can stretch on for more than a decade. The DDR program in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, lasted 12 years. Lapses in funding or political will can undermine efforts. “In the traditional sense, DDR is a political arrangement,” said DDR expert Dr. Ibrahim Bangura. “Where there’s political will and interest it succeeds; where there’s no political will and interest it does not succeed.”

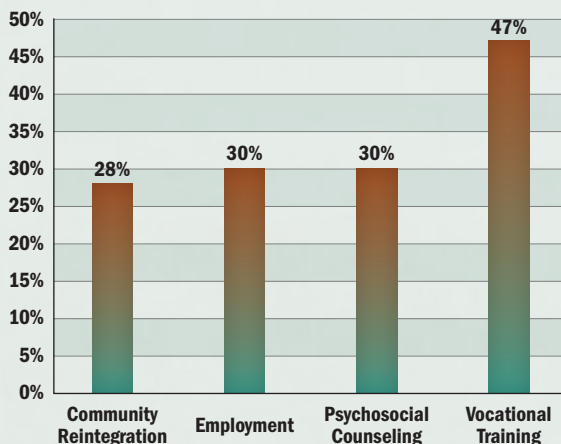
DDR Programs from 1953 to 2020

1 13



Source: DDR Program Dataset, Folke Bernadotte Academy

Most Common Services Offered in DDR Programs



Source: DDR Program Dataset, Folke Bernadotte Academy

Côte d'Ivoire disarmed and demobilized 69,505 combatants between 2012 and 2015. In Liberia, 101,495 combatants were demobilized from 2003 to 2008. Sierra Leone demobilized 71,043 ex-fighters in three phases stretching from 1998 to 2004.

But the continent also has seen some of DDR's greatest failures. A decade-long, seven-nation DDR program in the Great Lakes region cost \$500 million and disarmed 300,000 combatants only to see violence erupt to new heights in places like the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

For three decades Africa has been a "living laboratory," testing what works and what doesn't in DDR, wrote Anatole Ayissi of the U.N. Regional Office for Central Africa in Gabon. "The good news is that thinking on DDR in the UN and other institutions is not static," Ayissi wrote. "It is, in fact, almost constantly under scrutiny, with considerable attention given to reforming its practice to align with rapidly evolving conflict dynamics in Africa."

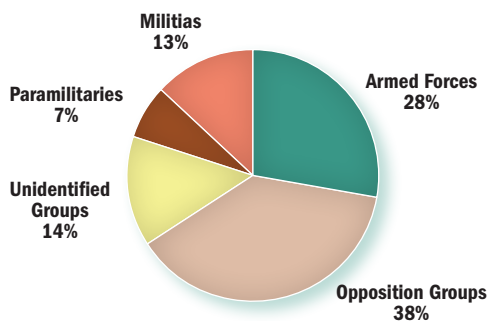
Innovative Approaches

DDR best practices are being updated in response to a challenging landscape. When successful, DDR is an interconnected, whole-of-society effort that includes the military, police, political leaders, humanitarian groups and economic actors. Experience shows that these programs tend to work best when they are part of a broader peace plan, implemented by a trusted third party and supported with sufficient funds for a long duration.

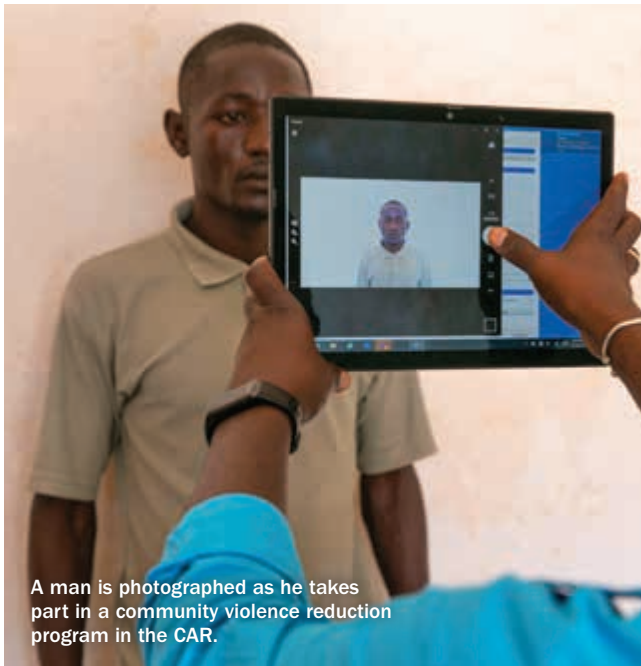
Bangura said the most successful programs are designed to meet the specific needs of the country in which they take place.

"There's no silver bullet," Bangura said. "It's just about adaptability and ensuring that whatever you do is context specific."

Types of Armed Groups that Participate in DDR



Source: DDR Program Dataset, Folke Bernadotte Academy



A man is photographed as he takes part in a community violence reduction program in the CAR.



The CAR's DDR program operates in a complex landscape that includes 14 armed groups.

Innovative approaches are being used in DDR programs to improve efficacy:

Community effort: One innovation is community violence reduction. This practice used in the CAR takes a communitywide approach to ending conflicts. Through programs such as short-term vocational training, teaching civic values and support for startup businesses, it tries to get the entire community to take ownership of DDR.

Bangura said quick-impact projects such as the construction of wells, schools or health clinics that improve life for all citizens can help them overcome fear or resentment of ex-combatants and embrace DDR long term. There also is a need for transitional justice so community members can see that ex-combatants are remorseful and have paid for their actions.

"These kind of things help, and also using social capital within communities helps," Bangura said. "Religious leaders, traditional and other leaders — if they take ownership of such projects, it's easier for you to succeed,

but if they feel marginalized and ostracized, they'll reject the combatants."

He also said advance work must be done to prepare communities before ex-combatants are reintegrated. Some community members revolt at the prospect of housing returning fighters and even threaten to pick up weapons themselves to settle scores. "You don't just send ex-combatants into communities; you have to do the groundwork way ahead," Bangura said.

Focus on healing: DDR programs should emphasize psychological and emotional treatment, Bangura said. One estimate found that 80% of people with conflict-related mental disorders do not receive treatment. These lingering wounds can play a major role in continuing the cycle of violence. "These are traumatized people, deeply wounded by war," he said. "So, they may have picked up arms, but they were also victims of society."

There is increased awareness that this must be a long process, especially with fighters who were part of ideological movements or who have carried guns since their youth. "The support is usually short term," Bangura said. "They go, they give them three months of training or six months of training, give them small cash and they say 'OK, goodbye' and within weeks you go back to zero."

An African model: There is a recognition that African nations will direct future DDR programs. The U.N. is decreasing its peacekeeping presence worldwide, and there appears to be less interest from international groups in supporting DDR programs. This might be an opportunity for African practitioners to craft programs that meet the unique needs and contexts of their countries, Bangura said.

"The more these countries come to understand that they can no longer afford to wait for the U.N., and they need to take ownership in terms of solving their problems, the better it will be for them," he said. "Homegrown solutions help to promote trust, healing and reconciliation." □



An ex-combatant in the northeast CAR makes clothing after receiving vocational training.

FRANCHISES OF FEAR

A Growing Number of Affiliates of Islamic State and al-Qaida Made Africa the World's Hot Spot for Terrorism

ADF STAFF

ADF ILLUSTRATION

The al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin carried out a sweeping coordinated attack on seven military locations in western Mali, including near the borders with Senegal and Mauritania, in mid-2025.

The terrorist group, better known as JNIM, was responsible for a surge in attacks at that time across several West African nations, especially Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The group has become a major force in regional instability and was used as justification for military coups in the three Sahel countries over the past five years.

JNIM is just one of Middle East-based al-Qaida's terrorist franchises in Africa and elsewhere. The rival Islamic State group, or IS, also is based in the Middle East and has franchised similar groups.

JNIM formed in March 2017 when four Mali-based terrorist groups merged and pledged their allegiance to al-Qaida. Authorities are hesitant to speculate about the number of fighters in JNIM's ranks, but they say it could be several thousand, according to the BBC.

Although such franchises have emerged from the Middle East, that region no longer is the terrorist safe haven it once was. Al-Qaida and IS once dominated the region, where at its peak IS had about 80,000 terrorists, including more than 42,000 foreign fighters from 120 countries, according to terrorism consultant Adrian Shtuni. Researchers estimate that only about 1,500 to 3,000 IS fighters remain in the Middle East, with pockets of fighters remaining in Syria and Iraq.

Since losing ground in the Middle East, the two terrorist networks have shifted their emphasis to Africa. Terrorism is viewed as the most significant threat to peace, security and sustainable development across the continent today, and Sub-Saharan Africa now accounts for nearly 60% of all terrorism-related deaths globally. The Sahel is "ground zero" for terrorist violence, with deaths exceeding 6,000 for three consecutive years.

Religious fanaticism, chronic political instability, local grievances, poverty and ineffective governance have

driven the creation of African franchises, experts say.

The rough terrain and distance from population centers allow for terrorist operations to flourish. Nigeria is plagued by groups that attack towns and villages, then retreat to the Sambisa Forest. Remote areas in the Sahara and Sahel, Lake Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province offer terrorist hiding places, the United Nations says. Some parts of Africa are virtually inaccessible during rainy seasons.

Some franchises begin as local insurgent groups that gain the attention of IS or al-Qaida. Groups join for the perceived prestige, training and resources the two organizations can offer. Loyalties among the extremist groups ebb and flow, with some groups changing sides because of such things as excess violence or a lack of support and money.

Al-Qaida and IS use a "decentralized franchise model" to gain followers and transform local grievances "into regional jihadist projects, more or less trading on brand legitimacy," Dr. Sergio Altuna, a senior research fellow for the Program on Extremism at The George Washington University, told ADF. "Local leaders say they receive this symbolic capital, a global name, a global brand."

Franchises for both organizations have considerable leeway in how they operate. Although they use the names of the parent organizations to give themselves legitimacy, affiliates adapt to local conditions, including ethnic politics and grievances. Without a central structure, they are less vulnerable to attack by counterinsurgency forces.

Research groups such as the Hoover Institution say al-Qaida and IS brands have practical and symbolic value to their affiliates. But individual groups have different objectives and strategies.

"Claims of allegiance to al-Qaida or IS hide the fact that insurgent groups in Sub-Saharan Africa are essentially local insurgencies, which receive little or no external

Puntland Maritime Police Forces patrol the coastline in the Red Sea for Islamic State group terrorists. REUTERS

support," reports a 2023 Armed Conflict Survey by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. "There is very little evidence that al-Qaida or IS has any capacity to provide meaningful support to these self-proclaimed franchises. These jihadist groups are, instead, largely self-financed."

Although the two groups use violence to topple governments and control society using a strict interpretation of Shariah, their methods and tactics can differ. Unlike IS, al-Qaida has emphasized a long-term insurgency with local alliances and safe havens, according to the Brookings Institution.



Nigerian police guard the entrance of an embassy in Lagos. Nigeria has warned embassies about terrorist attacks. REUTERS

FRAGMENTED GROUPS

As terrorist group franchises evolve, their agendas can change, according to the 2023 Armed Conflict Survey.

"Jihadist groups in the region have been evolving, becoming much more localized and intertwined with community and ethnic conflicts," editor Irene Mia wrote on the institute's website when the survey was published.



CURRENT GROUPS

Terrorist groups are difficult to track. Allegiances constantly shift, and groups regularly change their names and tactics. The U.N., terrorism research groups and such organizations as the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center believe these groups remain active on the continent:

- **Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)**

is based in Mali and is active across much of West Africa, including parts of Burkina Faso and Niger.

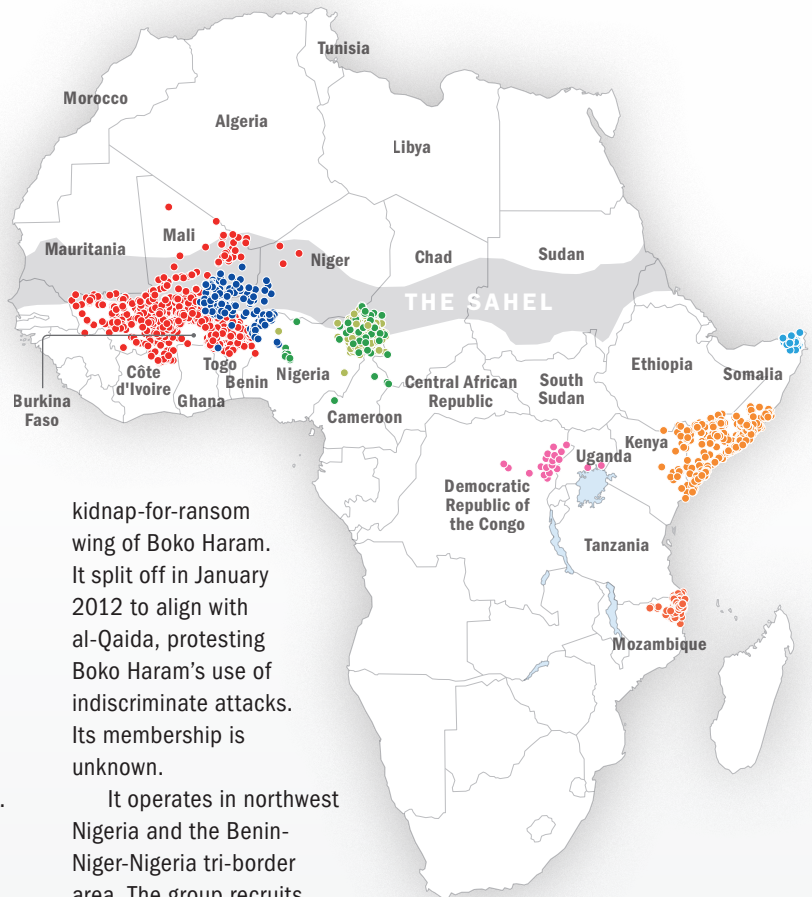
It exploits local grievances and differences to expand its support in the region. It pays for its operations by ransoming hostages, taxing locals, smuggling weapons, and extorting human and drug traffickers.

In late 2025, it made its first raids in Nigeria.

- **Al-Shabaab** pledged loyalty to al-Qaida in 2012. The group wants to overthrow the Somali government and expel foreign forces. As of 2025, the group is al-Qaida's wealthiest component.

It is estimated to have between 7,000 and 12,000 members. It has become particularly skilled at using radio broadcasts, websites and social media to disseminate its propaganda to local and global audiences. Al-Shabaab maintains a stronghold in southern Somalia and mainly conducts operations there, but sometimes also in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Ansaru, also known as al-Qaida in the Lands Beyond the Sahel, originally was intended to act as a special



kidnap-for-ransom wing of Boko Haram. It split off in January 2012 to align with al-Qaida, protesting Boko Haram's use of indiscriminate attacks. Its membership is unknown.

It operates in northwest Nigeria and the Benin-Niger-Nigeria tri-border area. The group recruits from local populations by providing services and protection in areas underserved by national governments.

- **Boko Haram** wants to establish an Islamist state in Nigeria free from Western-style education and influence. Since its founding in 2002, Boko Haram has been associated at times with al-Qaida and

Map data from the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, showing violent events involving the listed groups, July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025, and ACLED showing other attacks. JNIM attacks also include attacks attributed to related terror groups.



A man walks past destroyed motorcycles after an attack by Islamic State group-affiliated terrorists in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in September 2025. REUTERS

“Their international ties to the Islamic State and al-Qaida have weakened, and connections between insurgent groups now appear to be limited to intra-regional collaborations.”

Despite the differences and rivalries between IS and al-Qaida, both want to establish governments with “an unwavering religious regime, and everything modern and liberal is forbidden,” said Dr. David Doukhan in a 2025 report titled “The Birth of a Jihadist State is Closer than ever in West Africa.”

Doukhan said that in West Africa, the organizations are not content with the areas they already control but are “heading towards the Gulf of Guinea countries.”

The Global Coalition Against Daesh formed in 2014 to take on the IS and its affiliates. The 85-country coalition, the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) says, has significantly weakened the IS in Iraq and Syria and has now turned its attention to the terrorism groups in Africa. It calls the groups an “evolving threat.”

IS, but it is not affiliated with either group, researchers believe.

It operates primarily in northeast Nigeria and also stages raids in Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Since 2021, Boko Haram has lost many of its fighters and some territory to a rival IS group, but it continues its assaults in the Lake Chad region. It has about 1,500 members.

- **IS-Central Africa (IS-CA)** began as an antigovernment insurgency group in Uganda and became a branch of IS in 2019. It is one of the most lethal terrorist groups in Africa, having killed thousands of civilians. IS touts the branch's attacks in its propaganda.

It operates primarily in the North Kivu and Ituri provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and also conducts attacks in Uganda. It is believed to have 1,000 to 1,500 members.

IS-Libya is one of several terrorist groups that emerged in the aftermath of Libya's two civil wars, seeking to establish an anti-Western caliphate. The group has conducted attacks, kidnappings and executions against a wide range of targets in North Africa. It also has tried to expand IS into other African countries.

It once had as many as 6,000 members, most of them having served as foreign fighters in Syria. It now reportedly has about 100 to 500 fighters operating in decentralized guerrilla-style desert brigades and networked cells. Some researchers say the organization has been inactive for some time.

- **IS-Mozambique**, or Ansar al-Sunna, wants to overthrow the Mozambican government and expel foreign influences. Altuna said the group started "just like an Islamist insurgency, not linked to any global jihadist organization" but became big enough to get "somehow accepted under the wing of the caliphate." IS publicly recognized the branch in 2019 and

provides it with technical assistance and financial support, and boosts its attacks in its propaganda.

It has about 300 fighters and operates primarily in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. Since 2021, it has threatened liquid natural gas projects in the region, causing some companies to cease operations.

- **IS Sahel Province** operates primarily in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. It originally was associated with an al-Qaida-aligned group and broke away in 2015 to pledge allegiance to IS, which acknowledged it as a branch in 2022. It has significantly expanded its territorial control into some rural areas, including the Liptako-Gourma tri-border region of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

Shtuni says it has 2,000 to 3,000 fighters. "By comparison, the strength of this affiliate was estimated at 425 combatants in late 2018," he said.

- **IS-Somalia** supports global IS operations by raising money, recruiting fighters internationally and plotting attacks outside Africa. It was formed by al-Shabaab defectors. It pledged allegiance to IS in 2015 and gained its recognition as a branch in 2018.

It is one of the most profitable IS branches, earning millions of dollars each year from extortion. With 700 to 1,500 fighters, it operates primarily in the Golis Mountains of the Bari region in Somalia's semiautonomous Puntland State.

- **IS West Africa Province (ISWAP)** is one of the largest and most lethal IS branches. It controls broad swaths of territory and has killed or displaced thousands of people in Nigeria and neighboring countries. The branch formed in 2015 after splitting from Boko Haram. It collaborates with IS Sahel Province.

With an estimated 4,000 to 7,000 fighters, it operates primarily in northeastern Nigeria, with pockets throughout the Lake Chad region on the border of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

People wait for government officials in Darul Jamal, Nigeria, after a Boko Haram attack. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS


The coalition says there are five established approaches to anti-terrorism drives:

1. Defeating and destroying IS through military action.
2. Taking on the groups' financing and economic infrastructures.
3. Preventing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters across borders.
4. Supporting stabilization and the restoration of essential public services.
5. Countering the groups' propaganda.

"With the unprecedented spread of violent jihadism on the African continent, the Coalition is right to make Africa its new priority," the ICCT reported in 2022. "But importantly, the Coalition's efforts to degrade the Islamic State in Africa



cannot be rinse-and-repeat of its previous activities in other parts of the world. The goals, capabilities, and patterns of violence of the Islamic State's affiliates in Africa present new challenges that must give rise to new strategic outlooks." □



THE
CRIME
AND
TERRORISM
NEXUS

TERRORISTS PARTNER WITH ORGANIZED CRIMINAL GROUPS FOR PROFIT AND TERRITORIAL ACCESS

ADF STAFF

In what has been described as a first-of-its-kind operation targeting how crime finances terrorism, authorities working with Interpol and Afripol arrested 83 people across six African countries.

Officials designed Operation Catalyst, disclosed in late 2025, to identify and disrupt financial networks connected to terrorism. Interpol made 21 arrests on terrorism-related crimes, 28 arrests for financial fraud and money laundering, 16 for

cyber-related scams, and 18 for illegal use of cryptocurrencies.

Interpol noted that tracking terrorist financing is a particularly complex task involving crimes such as fraud, kidnapping for ransom, illegal commerce, online scams, Ponzi schemes and misuse of crypto assets.

“These illegal activities can be linked to terrorism financing directly — when terrorist groups receive funds from such schemes — or indirectly, through money laundering

Trenches surround Monguno, Nigeria, to protect against Boko Haram terrorist incursions. The Nigerian Army operates 12 checkpoints in Monguno.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES



or intermediary networks,” Interpol reported. “These connections highlight how different forms of crime are increasingly intertwined.”

Researchers have studied the links between terrorism and organized crime for years. In principle, they would appear to have no common goals. Terrorist groups typically claim ideological, religious and political reasoning to justify their attacks. Organized crime groups traffic drugs, kidnap people, and run extortion and smuggling operations to make money, with no underlying ideology. But authorities and scholars say that African terrorists and criminals work together in a nexus.

Stability, a United Kingdom-based journal, says the nexus of crime and terrorism comes in three stages: coexisting, with the two groups operating in the same space but with limited interaction; cooperation, when they collaborate through aligned interests; and convergence, when the two groups merge.

The crime-terror nexus can evolve to the point that the two groups begin to use each other’s methods, workers and travel routes, according to a 2025 report in the International Journal of Police Science by Dr. John Sullivan and Dr. Irina Chindea.

The study shows that over time, the relationships between terrorists and criminals have shifted from simple coexistence to active cooperation, with shared tactics,

financing and networks. Countries are finding that their intelligence-gathering strategies no longer fit into traditional categories of crime or terrorism.

The United Nations tracks links between organized crime and terrorism through the U.N. Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute. Established in 1968, the institute’s original purpose was to research crime prevention and criminal justice. “Across Africa, a growing threat looms: the intricate links between organized crime and terrorism,” the institute noted. “The nefarious interconnections between these phenomena jeopardize peace, security, and socio-economic development, undermining political stability and community resilience.”

In countries across Africa, extremists are taking over unprotected remote rural areas, extorting taxes in exchange for protection and basic services such as road and food access. These terrorists have learned to work with criminals to get what they want.

The cooperation between terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and organized criminals in Africa “tends to be

Displaced Boko Haram victims at a camp in Maiduguri, Nigeria, attend a safety training workshop on how to identify improvised explosive devices. REUTERS



pragmatic and asymmetric, and it definitely takes different shapes,” Dr. Sergio Altuna, a senior research fellow for the Program on Extremism at The George Washington University, told ADF.

“Boko Haram and JNIM are the main two terrorist organizations present,” he said. “They both employ rural control tactics, meaning they replace the government in places where the government has no legitimacy or no presence. We’re talking about great areas of territory.”

Altuna said such terrorists impose taxes and protection fees in areas that are remote and largely ungoverned.

The extremists and criminals have developed “a growing capacity for cross-border economic disruption, which includes kidnappings for direct funding,” Altuna said.

The result of this terror-crime nexus is no substitute for actual governance, he said. “It is not a legitimate representative of the population; it is religiously illegitimate, and also incapable of providing the most basic needs of the population, including, of course, fuel, and allowing for the schools or for the public system to fail to function normally.”

The Center for Strategic and International Studies classifies cartels and other criminal groups as transnational criminal organizations, or TCOs. The center classifies political and religious extremists as foreign terrorist organizations, or FTOs.

“The primary difference between FTOs and TCOs is that FTOs, by definition, pursue political objectives, while TCOs are ideologically more agnostic and primarily profit motivated,” the center said in an October 2025 report. It noted that in some parts of the world over the past 20 years, the “operational realities” of terrorist and transnational criminal organizations have blurred “to the point of indistinction.”

The U.N. says criminals and terrorists learn from each other. Terrorists use organized crime groups as a source of money and capitalize on the criminal experience of the people they recruit. Organized crime groups can adopt terrorist techniques, tactics and supply chains.

“Extreme violence is one of the mechanisms of weakening the state and setting the stage to empower the various criminal networks,” report Sullivan and Chindea. They say the day-to-day activities of some terrorist groups “closely resemble activities that are commonly associated with organized crime.” Terrorists are known to kidnap people; trade in artifacts; smuggle weapons; take over banks, factories and other

A relative mourns victims of a Boko Haram terrorist attack in Babban Gide, Nigeria. About 150 terrorists armed with rifles and rocket grenades attacked on motorcycles. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



structures; extort and intimidate; and take part in prostitution and human trafficking.

The roots of the nexus include the interaction of criminal and terrorist networks within prisons, the Journal report shows. Criminals are drawn to terrorist narratives as a justification for crime and can find terrorist skills useful. The stigma of past terrorism can complicate societal reintegration and make crime an alternative course for ex-prisoners, the authors wrote.

DRUG ABUSE GROWS

As in other parts of the world, the Sahel's problems with governance, security and poverty have made it susceptible to drug abuse. Disillusioned young people have turned to low-cost drugs such as tramadol and other synthetic opioids, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) reported. The drugs are a revenue stream for organized crime while making young people vulnerable to recruitment by criminal networks.

In turn, terrorists such as Boko Haram and JNIM tax drug smuggling routes to fund their activities. With terrorists and criminal networks sharing the drug smuggling routes, the line between ideological and profit-driven motives all but disappears.

The Atlantic Council warns that the drug distribution links between organized crime and terrorists can cause "narco-terrorism on a scale hitherto unheard of and the entrenchment of partnerships between drug smugglers and increasingly well-funded terrorist groups." The council noted that even when terrorist groups are not directly managing the drug trade, "they stand to benefit from the routes and from facilitating drug smugglers' operations in the territories they control."

Another ugly consequence of the terrorism-crime nexus is the proliferation of guns throughout Africa. Terrorism depends on guns, so the intersection of the two groups would be almost inevitable. Terrorists have gone from being users of weapons to becoming actual partners in selling them. Small arms and light weapons have become "a lucrative trafficking commodity underlining the nexus between terrorism and transnational organized crime," according to the Global Counterterrorism Forum. Terrorists and arms dealers in Africa benefit from porous

borders and a limited police presence to smuggle arms across borders.

Adedeji Ebo, a U.N. deputy disarmament chief, said that despite steps to strengthen arms controls, more than a billion firearms are in circulation globally, sustaining conflict, terrorism and criminal networks across multiple regions. "Weapons diverted from national stockpiles — or at any point throughout the supply chain — could end up in the hands of non-State armed groups."

"The illicit trade and misuse of small arms and light weapons fuels armed violence, terrorism and organized crime," he said, as reported by the U.N. in November 2025. An Interpol database contains more than 2 million records of lost, stolen and trafficked weapons, supporting multinational operations "that have seized thousands of firearms and dismantled networks tied to terrorism, trafficking and illegal mining," the U.N. reported.



Ghana's National Intelligence Bureau and Narcotics Control Commission destroy seized cocaine worth millions of dollars in Accra in June 2025. REUTERS

RESOURCES, NOT LAWS

The Sahel's organized crime and terrorism crisis is not a result of poor laws or legislation; it is the region's limited ability to enforce its own rules, the ISS reported. "Vast ungoverned spaces, socioeconomic conditions that breed corruption, and protracted insecurity enable illicit economies to thrive."

The African Union's Nouakchott Process of 2013 established a cooperation mechanism to improve intelligence sharing and security cooperation in the Sahel and other regions to counter terrorism and transnational organized crime. The process includes Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal, and various AU

structures, regional economic communities and the U.N.

The ISS says reviving the Nouakchott Process could be useful, but only if the AU enforces it. Success, the institute said, hinges on "overcoming mistrust, sharing intelligence, implementing joint border patrols and targeting criminal and extremist enclaves."

To encourage international police cooperation, Interpol is merging the fights against terrorism and organized crime. In a 2025 summary of law enforcement recommendations, Interpol included "strengthening border controls with regional and international partners to disrupt the movement of illicit goods, smuggled persons, and terrorist suspects."



The U.N. Security Council plays a critical role in supporting AU counterterrorism initiatives. U.N. Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said terrorists are trying to expand their influence in more parts of the continent, such as Togo and Côte d'Ivoire.

“Let us make no mistake,” she said during a U.N. meeting in early 2025. “At this rate, in West Africa, the future is at stake. The marginalization of youth, coupled with soaring unemployment, has left an entire generation vulnerable to extremist groups. If we don’t act, we risk losing this generation to the horrors of terrorism, their futures stolen before they even have a chance to begin.”

Modern security threats include “criminal cartels, gangs, mafias, insurgents, and terrorists” operating on a global scale with distinct local characteristics, Sullivan and

Chindea said in their 2025 report. Gathering and sharing information is a cornerstone of stopping the terrorism-crime nexus. Such information must be distributed among a range of global actors, including metropolitan police, national police and intelligence agencies; health authorities for biological events; and civil defense agencies, including fire and medical services.

They concluded that counterterrorism intelligence needs to be expanded to include efforts to “address transnational organized crime and gangs in order to effectively address intelligence support for the crime-terror nexus.” □

Nigerian Soldiers assemble assault rifles during training at Monguno in Borno state. Nigeria has seen a recent surge in attacks on military bases by terrorists.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Kenya Puts Armored Vehicles Into Service



Springback armored personnel carrier NATIONAL POLICE SERVICE

ADF STAFF

Kenya's inventory of armored vehicles continues to grow with its acquisition of new Springback armored personnel carriers from South Africa and M1117 armored security vehicles from the United States.

Interior Cabinet Secretary Onesimus Kipchumba Murkomen commissioned the vehicles at the General Service Unit Headquarters in Ruaraka. Murkomen said the vehicles were part of the government's modernization program that has seen a major decrease in crime, particularly in the northern parts of the country, with banditry dropping by 70%, defenceWeb reported. The new vehicles will be deployed to address cattle rustling, banditry and terrorism.

The Springback Standard Duty models have ballistic protection and can withstand a TM57 land mine directly under the hull, or two under any wheel. South African company DCD Protected Mobility developed the vehicles, according to Military Africa. Kenya's military has been operating the Springback for at least five years, with several surviving improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in operations along the border with Somalia.

The M1117 personnel carriers protect crews with multiple layers of armor. They are built to defend against small-arms fire, artillery projectile fragments, IEDs and land mines, according to the Army Recognition Group.

The M1117 vehicles are from U.S. Excess Defense Articles stocks. The U.S. Massachusetts National Guard is helping Kenya with refurbishment and training in



An M1117 Guardian armored security vehicle

collaboration with the Kenya Army Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering. U.S. maintenance experts exchanged best practices on the M1117 with Kenyan engineers at Kahawa Barracks in mid-2025.

In 2024, the U.S. revealed plans to transfer eight UH-1 Huey and eight MD500 helicopters to Kenya along with about 150 M1117 armored vehicles. The equipment is intended to help Kenya provide regional peace and security and participate in peacekeeping missions. In July 2024, Kenya received the first two of eight UH-1 helicopters. The helicopters also can be used in air assaults, to deploy and evacuate troops, and to deliver supplies.

Royal Moroccan Navy to Add Patrol Vessel

DEFENCEWEB

Spanish shipbuilder Navantia has launched a new offshore patrol vessel for the Royal Moroccan Navy, with delivery scheduled for 2026.

The Avante 1800 vessel was launched in mid-2025 at Navantia's San Fernando shipyard in Cadiz, Spain. It was being built as part of a contract announced in January 2021 and financed under a \$92 million loan from a Spanish financial group. The contract was years in the making, with Morocco expressing interest in early 2020 for two patrol vessels, but negotiations slowed due to diplomatic issues.

Navantia cut the first steel for the vessel in July 2023 and laid the keel in September 2024. Construction of the 87-meter patrol vessel has involved more than a million hours of work and about 1,100 jobs in three years.

At the launch, Royal Moroccan Navy representative Capt. Mohammed El Fadili called the project "an expression of the deep ties of friendship and cooperation that unite the Kingdoms of Morocco and Spain in general, the Royal Navy and the shipyard of Navantia in particular."

He highlighted the vessel's cutting-edge features, "which fully embody the Royal Navy's ambition to acquire an effective, multipurpose and durable fleet as part of the modernisation of the entire Royal Armed Forces."

The ships can conduct coastal surveillance and defense, protection of maritime traffic, health assistance to other ships, external fire-fighting, marine pollution control, transport, search and rescue operations, rapid intervention, frogmen support, surface defense, and passive electronic warfare.

The original design includes a 76 mm cannon, missile launch system, modern sensors and radars, and a helipad.

A Moroccan Navy vessel patrols near the Spanish enclave of Ceuta.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Botswana Adding to Air Transport Fleet

DEFENCEWEB

Botswana plans to acquire two C-130H Hercules transport planes, each valued at \$12 million, from the United States.

Pending aircraft inspections and negotiations on additional investments by both countries, the aircraft eventually will join the C-130H delivered in June 2024, which flies with the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) Air Wing. The U.S. Embassy said the proposed donation would further strengthen Botswana's strategic airlift capabilities for humanitarian response, peacekeeping and regional security missions.

"These aircraft showcase the powerful partnership between the United States and Botswana and our shared commitment to advancing peace and security across Africa," the embassy said.

The C-130H that Botswana acquired in 2024 was delivered under the U.S. Air Force Excess Defense Articles program. At the time of the handover, the U.S. said it would improve Botswana's ability to support military, humanitarian and emergency response missions locally and within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

The BDF has operated C-130s for many years. It acquired three C-130B Hercules for Z10 Squadron through the U.S. National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program.

Since 1997, the C-130B fleet has been the backbone of Botswana's military air operations. The Armed Forces has employed them as an instrument of Botswana's national power. C-130 missions over the years have included supporting the United Nations mission in Sudan, African Union missions, SADC Mission in Mozambique operations, security cooperation exercises such as SADC air power exercises, and special forces exercises with international forces.

The C-130 entered service with the U.S. in 1956 and has been in production for 70 years. Experts have estimated that it will continue to be built for at least another decade.

U.S. leaders participate in the transfer ceremony of a C-130H aircraft to the Botswana Defence Force in June 2024.

CPL. MARY LINNIMAN/U.S. MARINE CORPS



KENYA CALLS FOR AI THAT **ENHANCES** COLLECTIVE SECURITY

ADF STAFF

Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Defence Soipan Tuya is calling on African nations to take the lead in making sure that artificial intelligence improves the lives of citizens and does not harm them.

She spoke at the 2025 Africa Regional workshop on the Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain (REAIM) in Nairobi, which brought together delegates and military personnel from 17 countries.

"We must ensure that AI enhances our collective security while upholding international humanitarian law and protecting civilian populations," she told attendees.

The meeting aimed to consolidate best practices, advance regulatory and ethical frameworks for AI in defense, and reinforce partnerships among governments and research organizations. Attendees sought to identify Africa-specific AI priorities for peace, security and human rights.

Kenya has emerged as a global leader in the effort to ensure the responsible and ethical use of AI. In 2024, it co-hosted the inaugural REAIM conference in South Korea and was one of 60 signatories to a blueprint for AI's productive use in the military.

Maj. Gen. Joyce Sitienei of the Centre for Security and Strategic Studies at the National Defence University-Kenya (NDU-K) told attendees in Nairobi that military learning institutions must help address ethical questions regarding AI and should be incubators for AI innovation and leadership.

"NDU-K's commitment to responsible AI is ensuring that innovation strengthens our security while safeguarding humanity," she said. "That is the true measure of leadership."

Tuya also urged AI sector leaders to include young people in the planning process since they will be most affected by the rapid growth of AI and soon will be responsible for charting its direction.

"If we don't involve them in the discussions around responsible use of AI, bringing on board the issue of ethical frameworks, human rights and human dignity, then we will continue to see the very concerning, irresponsible use of AI and technology," Tuya said.

Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Defence Soipan Tuya speaks during the 2025 Africa Regional workshop on the Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain.

KENYA DEFENCE FORCES

Senegal Breaks Ground on West Africa's First Astronomical Observatory

ADF STAFF

Senegal has begun building West Africa's first optical astronomical observatory near Thies.

The observatory, overseen by the Senegalese Agency for Space Studies, will add to the country's growing reputation as a leader in space research, innovation and training. It will include a 600 mm optical telescope designed for precision observation and the study of celestial phenomena, and four Celestron telescopes with deep-sky research and astrophotography capability.

Senegal's space sector leaders say it's part of a national push to open new possibilities and position the country to compete in the high-tech, global economy.

"We want the young generations not only to dream of the stars but also to envision careers in space," said Maram Kaïré, agency director-general. "Space must become a lever for growth and development for our country. We have 50 years to catch up, but with determination and anticipation, we can achieve it."



Senegalese officials lay the first stone for construction of the Astronomical Observatory of Senegal on November 13, 2025, in Khombole.

SENEGALESE AGENCY FOR SPACE STUDIES

In addition to the telescopes, the observatory will include an Astronomy and Astrophysics Training Institute and research facilities. Its observation devices can be fully operated remotely and will collect data that integrates seamlessly into international research networks.

Senegal had an important year in space development in 2025 that included signing a memorandum of understanding with Axiom Space in October to collaborate on efforts to advance human spaceflight, microgravity research and low Earth orbit infrastructure development. In July, Senegal became the 56th global signatory to the Artemis Accords, which promote transparency, peaceful exploration and global collaboration in outer space.



ETHIOPIA, NIGERIA COLLABORATE

on African-Made Drones

ADF STAFF

Ethiopia and Nigeria are joining forces to develop a fleet of African-made aerial drones capable of civilian and military applications.

In July 2025, Ethiopian officials hosted members of the Nigerian Air Force on tours of Ethiopia's aircraft manufacturing and maintenance facilities. Nigeria has promised the Ethiopians a reciprocal visit focused on Nigeria's military training institutions.

The visits are the latest step toward increasing the number of indigenous African unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) in a market flooded by technology imported from China, Iran and Turkey.

By pooling resources, two of the continent's most experienced dronemakers and users can develop a homegrown solution to African nations' demand for drone technology, according to analysts Ekene Lionel and Patrick Kenyette. They also might inspire other African nations to develop similar joint ventures.

"This partnership carries implications far beyond the immediate goal of UAV co-production," Lionel and Kenyette wrote for Military Africa. "It represents a model of how African

nations can address shared challenges through cooperation, leveraging their strengths to achieve collective progress."

Nigeria has established itself as a hub for drone manufacturing. The country's first drone, the Tsaigumi, was released in 2018 for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. Nigeria more recently has developed a kamikaze drone known as the Damisa in partnership with technology company Briech UAS. Africa's largest drone factory, TerraHaptix, has the capacity to produce 10,000 units a year in Nigeria's capital, Abuja.

Ethiopia inaugurated state-run SkyWin Aeronautics Industries in March 2025 to begin manufacturing drones at a factory in Addis Ababa. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed described his nation's new drone capabilities as "unimaginable just a few years ago."

Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Sudan also are producing drones. Morocco established a factory in 2024 to assemble Israeli-designed WanderB and ThunderB drones. Morocco has used those UAVs for reconnaissance, intelligence and target acquisition missions.

Members of the Nigerian Air Force tour Ethiopia's Air Force Headquarters in July 2025 as part of a delegation to strengthen ties between the two nations.

NIGERIAN AIR FORCE HQ

Senegal, Mauritania Launch Joint Patrols as Terror Threat Looms



Senegalese Soldiers assigned to patrol the river near Bakel meet their Mauritanian counterparts to improve border security.

ADF STAFF | PHOTOS BY DIRPA

Senegalese and Mauritanian armed forces have intensified joint security operations along their shared border in response to growing terrorism in the region.

Both militaries patrolled a river covering several localities between Bakel-Aroundou and Diougountourou on the Malian border in October 2025, according to Senegal's Directorate of Information and Public Relations of the Armed Forces (DIRPA). This comes after a September joint ground patrol in the same area.

The countries, separated by the Senegal River, have established closer collaboration as terror groups in western Mali try to exploit weaknesses and push toward the coast. In July 2025, the terror group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, known as JNIM, attacked the Kayes, Nioro and Ségou regions near the tri-border area before blockading cities with trade connections to Senegal and Mauritania. Terrorism has slowed trade along the Kidira-Bamako corridor, which is vital to the regional economy.

In April 2025, Senegalese Minister of the Armed Forces Birame Diop visited Nouakchott and met with Mauritanian Minister of Defense Hanana Ould Sidi. The two leaders stressed the need for more joint patrols, information

and expertise exchanges, and cooperation to halt trafficker and terrorist movement.

Observers believe it is vital for both countries to collaborate to keep the threat outside their borders.

"Prevention is better than trying to find a cure and today the Senegalese and Mauritians have every interest in cooperating," Boubacar Ba, a Senegalese political analyst, told Africa24. "This is not only to assure security at their border but also to share intelligence because today the war against jihadists is also very much an external war."



Senegalese and Mauritanian Soldiers patrol the Senegal River.

SOMALIA'S Counter-IED Strategy Is 'Whole-of-Society' Effort

ADF STAFF



Somalia has unveiled a national strategy designed to counter improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the weapon of choice for terror group al-Shabaab.

The effort has been in the works since 2023, when experts conducted a baseline assessment of the country's C-IED capabilities. The strategy, announced at a September 2025 event in Mogadishu, provides a framework for adding more explosive ordnance disposal units to the Somali National Army and improving interagency collaboration.

"This is a historic milestone for our country. Never before have we had a unified, nationally owned framework to address the IED threat," said Awes Hagi Yusuf Ahmed, Somalia's

A Somali deminer trains to locate explosive ordnance and mines near the border with Ethiopia. UNITED NATIONS MINE ACTION SERVICE

national security advisor. "This strategy represents a decisive shift from reactive measures to a proactive, intelligence-led approach anchored in national ownership."

The strategy will help Somali officials quickly implement new laws and regulations, particularly those needed to control access to chemicals used in making bombs. It will establish a national electronic tracking system for materials used in bombs.

It also calls for a national C-IED center and strategies to improve border security, disrupt terrorist financial networks and educate the public about the threat.

"This is not a military effort alone," Somalia's Defence Minister Ahmed Moallim Fiqi said. "It is a whole-of-government and whole-of-society mission to safeguard Somali lives and secure our future."

Explosives have taken a heavy toll on the nation. In 2024, more than 600 IED blasts killed or injured more than 1,400 people. In the past decade, 61% of the victims were Somali civilians, according to the group Action on Armed Violence. Somalia was the fifth-most-affected country by IEDs globally in 2024.

The United Nations has led the way in helping Somalia improve its C-IED expertise. The U.N. Mine Action Service trained and equipped 61 Somali explosive ordnance disposal teams and led train-the-trainer courses to ensure that the knowledge is spread throughout the military. The service also trained 21 disposal teams in the Somali Police Force.

Nigeria's Armed Forces Museum to Be 'More than Just a Building'

ADF STAFF

Nigeria announced plans to open an Armed Forces Museum that it says will honor its military heritage by preserving the past and promoting scholarship to guide its future.

Gen. Christopher Musa, Nigeria's then-chief of defense staff, described the project as a landmark initiative and said it would open in 2026 on 10 acres in Abuja. "It will serve not only as a repository of military artifacts and service records but also as a hub for education, tourism and economic opportunities," Musa said.

The museum is expected to create jobs for veterans and civilians and will feature multilingual, immersive education programs designed for students across the country.

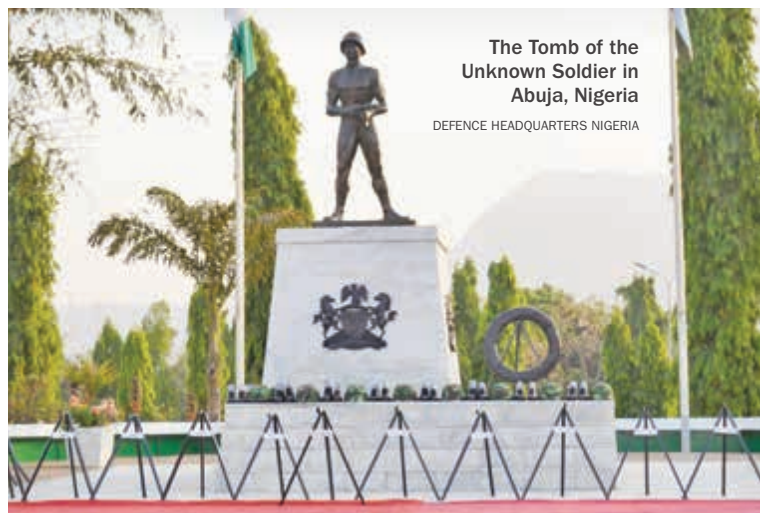
"Museums are vital custodians of national memory," Musa said. "We want a museum that restores Nigeria to a global standard, serves as a pride to our service members and families, and ensures that the sacrifices of our heroes are never forgotten."

Rear Adm. Olu Bankole, chairman of the museum's steering committee, described it as a "milestone that will transform how Nigeria preserves its military history."

"This museum is more than just a building. It will tell the stories of our heroes, preserve priceless artifacts and inspire future generations," Bankole said. "Nigeria has a rich history of peacekeeping missions across Africa and a legacy

of defending our territorial integrity. It is only fitting that we create a place to preserve and celebrate this heritage."

Nigeria's National War Museum in Unuahia opened in 1985. It houses artifacts used by precolonial warriors, an exhibit that traces the history of the Nigerian Army and items from the era of the Biafra War, including planes and ships used in combat.



The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Abuja, Nigeria

DEFENCE HEADQUARTERS NIGERIA

UNMISS Hands Back Land to South Sudanese Airport

UNMISS

Three engineering contingents with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan worked seven days a week for eight months to clear and improve land so it could be returned for use by Juba International Airport.

The South Sudanese government asked the peacekeeping mission, known as UNMISS, to hand back the land it occupies next to the airport to improve aviation safety and help attract major airlines. The mission returned the first parcel of 2½ hectares on November 14, 2025.

“There was a significant amount of investment of money and energy made here, so I want to thank UNMISS so much for adding value to Juba International Airport,” Daffalla Habib Awongo, director-general of the South Sudan Civil Aviation Authority, said at the handover. “We will continue to partner with the mission to ensure that we make the airport modern, safe, reliable and efficient.”

The extensive and costly project began in March 2025 as the mission was forced to close and downsize bases around the country, reduce peacekeepers, and cut its

operational budget due to U.N. funding shortfalls.

To free up the land, the mission had to remove 300 shipping containers and relocate its hangar and many accommodation units. Peacekeeping engineers battled the long, heavy rainy season to level and compact the soil, build culverts, and clear drainage systems. At times engineers had to dig 1.7 meters deep to find hard ground.

“When I saw the topography of the soil, I was a bit hesitant, because this area is swampy ... with a lot of bad soil which expands in the rain and then later contracts,” said Kat Mosety Monyjok, an engineer and airport general manager.

The mission also has provided vehicles and training to build the capacity of South Sudan’s air aviation unit.

“We do not take this effort for granted,” Awongo said. “It attests to the level of partnership that has been established with UNMISS over many years.”

Much more work needs to be done to complete the return of more land and for local authorities to improve airport facilities, including tarmacking dirt areas and installing lighting to improve surveillance at night.

Workers with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan clear land so it can be returned to Juba International Airport. UNMISS



Ethiopian Contingent Brings Healing to Somali Mission AUSSOM

Like many others, Saeed Osman Gabow visits a Baidoa health facility run by the Ethiopian contingent serving under the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia, known as AUSSOM.

“I cannot afford the cost of medication,” said Saeed, 39, who is from Al-Aamin camp in Baidoa and is visually impaired. “I am grateful for the free care.”

Each Wednesday, Ethiopia’s civil-military cooperation team in Baidoa provides free medical care, serving hundreds of displaced and vulnerable people. Capt. Andualem Mamo, the Baidoa hospital’s general practitioner, said the “medical camp is a lifeline. It enables us to deliver essential care and medication to many people who otherwise couldn’t afford it.”

Ethiopian troops also conduct medical outreaches in Diinsoor, Bardhere, Qansadhare, Burdhubo, Garbaharey and Bardale, covering Somalia’s Bay, Bakool and Gedo regions.

Health workers focus on vulnerable people, especially women and children, and treat conditions such as hypertension, diabetes and skin diseases. The medical camps help the mission build trust, foster collaboration, support post-conflict recovery and advance its mandate.



“Regular health care is out of reach for many,” Mamo said. “By providing these services, we help people heal, strengthen community relations and support security.”

Mohamed Issack Ali, deputy commissioner for security and policing in Baidoa, thanked the Ethiopian troops for securing the region and caring for its residents. “They are part of our community.”

Ethiopian support extends beyond weekly medical clinics to include donating medical supplies to Bay Regional Hospital, Baidoa’s main public health facility.

Maj. Ahmed Adam, AUSSOM Ethiopia Civil-Military Cooperation officer, said free health care is only one part of a broader support system. “We assist the community in many ways,” he said, according to the AUSSOM website. “During times of flooding or displacement, we work with humanitarian organisations to distribute food and essential non-food items to those affected.”

A visually impaired man seeks medical care at a clinic in Baidoa, Somalia.

AUSSOM



Peacekeeping Mission Responds to **Cholera Outbreak**

UNISFA

United Nations peacekeepers have responded to cholera cases in the contested Sudan-South Sudan border regions of Abyei and Kadugli. They have launched health-focused initiatives across the mission’s area of operation aimed at protecting peacekeepers and local communities.

Ghanaian peacekeepers in the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei offer medical care in communities in the administrative region between Sudan and South Sudan.

GHANA ARMED FORCES

Peacekeepers with the U.N. Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) worked with local health authorities to establish a cholera isolation center. The facility provided treatment and isolation services for affected people. Pakistani peacekeepers distributed medicine, masks, sanitizer, raincoats, mosquito nets and clothes to support prevention.

In another sector, Ghanaian peacekeepers promoted community awareness campaigns. These included hygiene promotion and medical outreach to support vulnerable groups. The peacekeepers provided clean water education, distributed purification tablets and spread hygiene messages. They also ran clinics to offer screening and basic treatment.

Ghanaian peacekeepers in another sector set up an isolation center for cholera vaccinations and treatment for local residents and peacekeepers. This dual approach safeguards host communities and mission personnel, highlighting UNISFA’s commitment to health security and operational readiness.

As Abyei confronts the twin challenges of public health risks and regional instability, UNISFA’s health interventions underscore the evolving role of peacekeepers. They continue to act as protectors and partners in times of crisis.

The U.N. approved the mission in mid-2011 after security problems in the Sudanese region of South Kordofan. The Ethiopian Army was the only troop contributor until 2022, when the U.N. reconfigured the mission into a multinational force with the arrival of a Ghanaian battalion. Since then, countries including Nepal and Vietnam have contributed troops.

MAURITANIA Signs Defense Pact With Czechia

ADF STAFF

The Mauritanian defense minister and his Czech counterpart have signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate in military training, defense technologies, and special forces and peacekeeping training.

It includes provisions for sharing Czech expertise when needed and mutual visits, according to intelligence website Groupe ADIT. The deal also enables intelligence sharing and counterterrorism and cybersecurity cooperation. The countries will collaborate on protection against chemical, radiological, nuclear and cyber threats, ADIT reported.

The pact solidifies Czechia's commitment to training Mauritania's armed forces for two years. The collaboration,

supported by NATO, builds on a growing relationship that Czech President Petr Pavel initiated with his historic visit to Mauritania in April 2025. During that visit, Pavel emphasized Mauritania's strategic role in ensuring regional stability and European security, saying the country is a key element in stopping terrorist threats and cross-border

trafficking, the African Press Agency reported.

Beyond security, the Czech Republic also wants to increase its economic footprint in Mauritania, particularly in trade and rare-earth minerals.

Trade between the two countries has been "modest and uneven," according to the website Military Africa.

In 2024, Czech exports to Mauritania amounted to \$2.2 million, consisting mainly of machinery, electrical equipment, and iron and steel products. Mauritanian exports to the Czech Republic were far smaller, totaling less than \$100,000 and primarily made up of seafood, melons and small amounts of raw goods.

"Despite this imbalance, the partnership offers clear benefits for Mauritania," Military Africa noted. "It provides access to affordable, high-quality European industrial goods, offering an alternative to Chinese products and more competitive prices than those from Germany or France."

The agreement emphasized Czech forces' training of the Mauritanian Army.

"This is of particular importance to Czechia and Europe as Mauritania is one of the few remaining countries in Western Africa where European forces are still present," ADIT reported. In 2024, the Czech Republic deployed more than 20 instructors under a NATO military mission to help train Mauritanian Special Forces.



Czech Soldiers take part in a NATO drill. Mauritania and the Czech Republic are working together on training.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SOUTH AFRICA'S **RED LION** TESTS MARITIME READINESS

ADF STAFF

France joined the South African Navy's annual force preparation exercise, Red Lion, which concluded in late August 2025.

The Navy conducted the three-week program across multiple sites nationwide. It put naval crews, vessels and support units through a series of drills designed to sharpen their abilities in diverse scenarios from maritime combat to disaster response, Military Africa reported. The exercise involved military personnel and civilian agencies.

The operation emphasized practical simulations that mirrored real-world challenges such as civil unrest and natural disasters affecting public safety and security. It included simulated media interactions to handle public

communications during crises, briefings on search and rescue protocols, vessel-to-shore radio links, security measures around naval installations, and aviation safety standards, Military Africa reported.

A key feature came two weeks into the exercise, when drills off Durban highlighted cross-agency cooperation. In a coordinated maritime rescue simulation, the Navy teamed up with the National Sea Rescue Institute, the South African Police Service, the Customs Marine Unit and the South African Air Force, defenceWeb reported. The joint effort underscored the value of unified action in emergency settings, where rapid and synchronized responses can make all the difference.

The initial at-sea sessions featured a mock fast inshore assault by a harbor patrol boat approaching from port and starboard sides of a frigate and a patrol vessel. Other operations included live gunnery practice, towing maneuvers, maintaining flying stations, deploying boarding craft, weapons handling drills and exercises involving navigational charts.

At one point, the French Navy's offshore patrol vessel Auguste Techer joined in what appeared to be a passage exercise. The ship made a stopover in South Africa that included a visit to the South African Naval Museum, defenceWeb reported.

Before heading offshore, Western Cape units tackled a series of shore-based simulations. These included responses to bomb threats with building evacuations, shipboard fires, and increased perimeter security around military facilities and a dockyard, Military Africa reported.



The South African Navy's inshore patrol ship SAS Adam Kok III participated in the Red Lion military exercise.

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL DEFENCE FORCE

EUROPEAN UNION Boosts West African Security



DEFENCEWEB

The European Union has agreed to support Cabo Verde, the Central African Republic and Senegal in improving their security and stability.

Cabo Verde, a country consisting of 10 volcanic islands, will receive \$14 million over four years from the European Peace Facility (EPF). In addition to strengthening Cabo Verde's armed forces, the money will boost cooperation with the navies of EU states. The EU will provide the Cabo Verdean Armed Forces with equipment and services for patrolling and surveillance, including delivery of an oceangoing patrol vessel and training.

The mandate of the EU Military Training Mission in the CAR is extended to September 2026 with \$13 million allocated. The mission, established in April 2016, offers strategic advice and education for noncommissioned officers and officers of the Central African Armed Forces. So far, the mission has trained and educated 9,500 CAR military personnel and built a modern, effective, credible, ethnically balanced and democratically accountable nation.

The EU has given Senegal an \$11.6 million boost over three years to help the country's armed forces defend against internal and external threats. The funding will go to nonlethal equipment and operational infrastructure for continuous land and river surveillance, intelligence gathering and force protection.

In the Sahel, the EU Council has extended the mandate of the regional advisory and coordination cell in the civilian EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali. It supports regional and cross-border cooperation in the Sahel and strengthens national capabilities in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The extension, according to the council, will not incur any cost.

The EPF was established in March 2021 for the financing of actions to prevent conflicts, preserve peace, and strengthen international security and stability. When created, the facility had an initial financial ceiling of \$7.6 million but has since raised it three times. The majority of facility funding goes to Ukraine.

Senegalese Soldiers prepare to dismantle illegal gold mines near the Malian border.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

SOMALIA, TURKEY Partner on Maritime Security

ADF STAFF

TO SECURE AFRICA'S LONGEST COASTLINE, Somalia has signed a 10-year partnership with Turkey for maritime security and law enforcement.

Somalia loses \$300 million a year to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing along its 3,300-kilometer coastline on the northern Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden, according to the Enhancing Africa's Response to Transnational Organized Crime (ENACT) project. Somalia has been plagued with terrorism, piracy, weak governance, political instability and ineffective law enforcement.

Most illegal fishing in Somalia is carried out by foreign fishing vessels. A Mogadishu-based researcher told ENACT that some foreign vessel operators illegally obtain fishing licenses, making it impossible for Somalia to know how much fish has been taken. The researcher said the fish is processed and exported to world markets.

Turkey and Somalia signed the initial memorandum of understanding in February 2024. Turkey will strengthen Somalia's maritime security capabilities through training, joint operations, information sharing and naval acquisition, ENACT reported.

In April 2025, Turkey boosted its military presence in Somalia to 500 troops after attacks by al-Shabaab near Mogadishu, the Middle East Eye news website reported. It was about double the troop numbers Turkey has had in Somalia. Turkey has maintained a presence in Somalia since President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's first visit in 2011 under a humanitarian mission.

Turkey's Anatolia Barracks in Mogadishu is its largest foreign military training base. It has trained more than 15,000 Somali troops since its inauguration in 2017, according to the Nordic Monitor news website.

The two countries have agreed to allocate land for each other's embassies. Under the deal, Turkey will build a new office and residence for the Somali Embassy in Ankara on a 5,000-square-meter plot in the Incek diplomatic enclave, according to the Nordic Monitor. Somalia has granted more than 61,000 square meters in Mogadishu, now home to Turkey's largest embassy compound abroad.

Fishers anchor boats at Xamarweyne beach in Mogadishu, Somalia. REUTERS



AMINA, WARRIOR QUEEN

ADF STAFF

Amina of Zazzau was born a princess, raised in wealth and privilege. But her mother and grandfather saw to it that she also was trained as a warrior. Today she is remembered as one of West Africa's great military leaders.

The princess was born about 1533 in Zazzau, one of seven original states of the Hausa Kingdom, in what is now Nigeria. Even in her early years, her grandfather recognized her intelligence and bearing. He trained her along with his soldiers, and she accompanied him to state meetings. Her mother gave her responsibility for a section of the capital city, and Amina convened daily councils.

She was the oldest of three royal siblings, but males traditionally inherited the throne in the Zazzau kingdom. Her brother Karama became the ruler in 1566, during a time of peace and prosperity. During Karama's 10-year reign, Amina continued her military training and established herself as the head of his cavalry. When her brother died, she succeeded him.

As queen, she understood the importance of military strength.

Her campaigns would become a constant of her 34-year reign. She led an army of 20,000 men in expanding the Zazzau territory and made conquered rulers swear allegiance to her.

A key to Amina's power was the trade routes connecting what are now Sudan and Chad with Egypt in the northeast and Niger and Mali to the north. She ensured safe passage for her traders and often used trade as justification for war with surrounding kingdoms that threatened friendly merchants.

Her kingdom was advanced, even before she took power. Although most of the people in the neighboring territories were farmers, the Zazzau people also were skilled in the industrial arts of tanning, weaving and advanced metalworking. Metalworking allowed Amina to equip her soldiers with helmets and chain mail, making her one of the first to introduce armored warfare to West Africa. It proved to be a tremendous military advantage.

She also was responsible for building fortified earthen barriers known as Ganuar Amina — Amina's Walls — around conquered encampments.

Some of those camps evolved into villages and towns. A few of the walls still exist, including a 15-kilometer structure that surrounds the modern-day city of Zaria, Nigeria.

Historians say that Amina's industrial skills transformed her kingdom's hierarchy into one based more on competence and merit than on social standing and tradition.

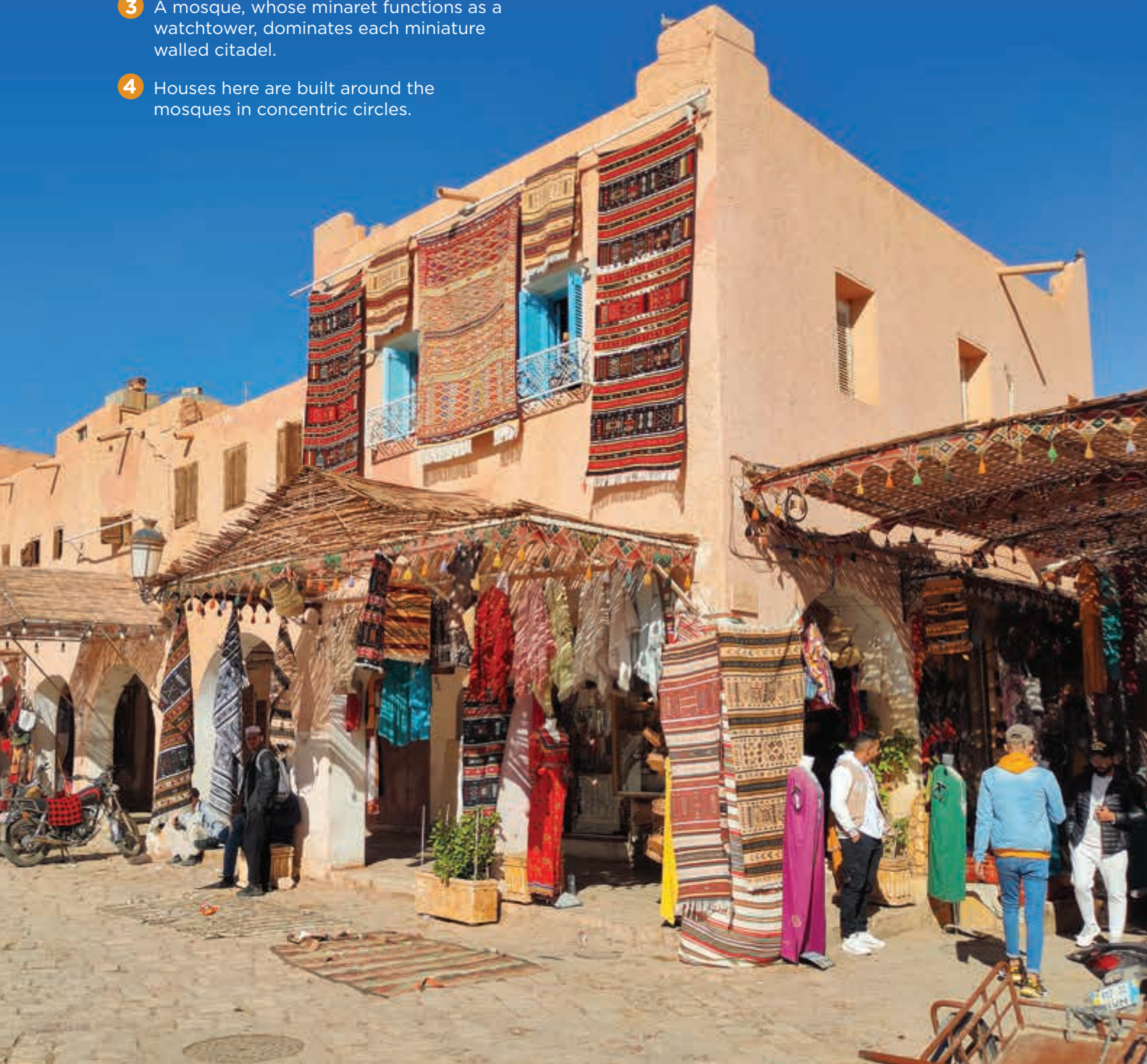
She died about 1610, possibly during a military campaign. She is honored throughout Nigeria with statues and other memorials. One statue, showing her in battle, stands at the National Arts Theatre in Lagos.

The Nigerian Defence Academy in Kaduna unveiled another statue of Amina in battle in April 2025, according to Nigeria's National Accord newspaper.

"Queen Amina of Zazzau at the height of her reign occupied a territory of about 400,000 kilometers square, which is about 40 to 50% of the territory we now call Nigeria," said Maj. Gen. John Ochai, commander of the academy, during the statue's dedication. "You can imagine the magnitude of the area she controlled and this was as a result of her determination and leadership."

CLUES

- 1 The Ibadites created five fortified cities in the 10th century.
- 2 The architecture was designed for community living while respecting family structures.
- 3 A mosque, whose minaret functions as a watchtower, dominates each miniature walled citadel.
- 4 Houses here are built around the mosques in concentric circles.



SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE



Want to be published?

Africa Defense Forum (ADF) is a professional military magazine and digital news platform that serves as an international forum for security professionals across the continent.

The magazine is published quarterly by **U.S. Africa Command** and covers topics such as counterterrorism strategies, security and defense operations, transnational crime, and issues affecting peace, stability, good governance and prosperity.

The forum allows for in-depth discussions and idea exchanges. We want to hear from people who understand the security dynamics and challenges on the continent. Submit an article for publication in ADF, and let your voice be heard.

CAN'T WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT EDITION?

ADF-Magazine.com brings you in-depth coverage of current events that affect peace and stability. Check out our website for the same credible and accurate security news reported weekly, from around the continent.



If you would like to stay connected on social media, follow ADF on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, or you can join our email list by signing up on our website, **ADF-Magazine.com**, or by sending an email to **News@ADF-Magazine.com**.

Author guidelines for ADF submission

Editorial requirements

- Articles of approximately 1,500 words are preferred.
- Articles may be edited for style and space, but ADF will collaborate with the author on final changes.
- Include a short biography of yourself with contact information.
- If possible, include a high-resolution photograph of yourself and images related to your article with captions and photo credit information.

Rights

Authors retain all rights to their original material. However, we reserve the right to edit articles to conform with editorial standards and meet space restrictions. Article submission does not guarantee publication.

Submissions

Send all story ideas, content and queries to ADF editorial staff at **Editor@ADF-Magazine.com**. Or mail to one of the following addresses:

Headquarters, U.S. Africa Command
ATTN: J3/ADF News Media
Unit 29951
APO AE 09154 USA

Headquarters, U.S. Africa Command
ATTN: J3/ADF News Media
Kelley Kaserne
Plieninger Strasse 289
70567 Stuttgart, Germany

