

APSTA review of conflicts and instability (End of March 2021- Early April 2021)

- West Africa

Benin: pre-electoral trouble and elections

Benin voters are casting their ballots Sunday 11th April 2021 in a presidential election after a week of deadly violence against President Patrice Talon, who is seeking reelection¹. In contrast to previous presidential elections, there is only a shortlist of candidates. Apart from Talon, just Corentin Kohoue and Alassane Soumanou are on the ballot². Benin's main opposition figures either live in exile or have seen their candidacies rejected, due to political reforms opposed by a large part of the political class as unfair³.

These elections come after a wave of demonstrations, as protests in several cities turned violent. Speaking to the local radio station, the mayor of the central town of Bante said some people were killed in gunfire Thursday there as security forces fired warning shots, according to Reuters. The mayor did not say how many people were killed during protests⁴.

- East Africa

Eritrea: Troops accused of killing civilians in Tigray and agreement to withdraw

The Eritreans are said to have crossed the border soon after Mr. Abiy Ahmed launched a campaign in Tigray on Nov 4. They accused the rebellious Tigrayan leaders of orchestrating an attack on a major military base and trying to topple the federal government. Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed has admitted for the first time that Eritrean troops were indeed present on the territory since the inception of the conflict five months ago⁵.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released on Wednesday 24th March 2021 a report stating that Eritrean soldiers killed more than 100 civilians in a November massacre in war-torn Tigray. "Information collected during this preliminary investigation confirm that during the two days of November 28 and November 29, grave violations of human rights were committed and that in Axum, over one hundred residents... were killed by Eritrean soldiers," the commission said.⁶ These findings corroborate separate investigations by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch into the same killings in the historic town of Axum.⁷

On Friday 26th March 2021, under mounting American and international pressure, Mr. Abiy went one step further and announced that the Eritrean soldiers had agreed to go home. That same Friday, Eritrea's information minister, Yemane Ghebremeskel, appeared to confirm Mr. Abiy's declaration that an Eritrean troop withdrawal had been agreed upon⁸.

¹ <https://www.voanews.com/africa/benin-holds-presidential-election-after-week-violence>

² <https://www.dw.com/en/benin-election-democracy-patrice-talon/a-57144589>

³ <https://www.africanews.com/2021/04/07/protests-erupt-in-benin-as-talon-seeks-reelection/>

⁴ <https://www.voanews.com/africa/benin-holds-presidential-election-after-week-violence>

⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/23/ethiopia-pm-abiy-ahmed-says-atrocities-committed-in-tigray>

⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/24/eritrean-troops-killed-over-100-civilians-in-tigray-rights-group>

⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/24/eritrean-troops-killed-over-100-civilians-in-tigray-rights-group>

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/26/world/africa/eritrea-troops-tigray-ethiopia.html>

Somalia mortar attack

Three civilians have been killed and five wounded after a mortar attack targeting UN-AU peacekeeping mission headquarters in Mogadishu on the 25th March 2021. This is the second time the UN compound has been targeted in less than a week, following a March 19 attack with no reported casualties⁹.

Al-Qaeda affiliated terror group Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for this attack¹⁰. Al-Shabaab has carried out numerous attacks in Somalia over the years, including a 2017 truck bomb blast in Mogadishu which killed at least 300 people¹¹.

Sudan agreement for peace talk

Sudan's government and a major rebel group have struck an agreement paving the way for peace negotiations between the two sides after months of deadlock¹².

The "declaration of principles" signed on Sunday 28th March 2021 in South Sudan's capital, Juba, outlines priorities including the unification of armed forces and the establishment of a democratic, secular state with freedom of religion¹³. Sudan's transitional government has been engaging in peace talks with rebel groups over the past two years, looking to stabilize the country and help its fragile path to democracy survive following the military's overthrow of longtime autocrat Omar Al-Bashir in April 2019 after nearly three decades in power¹⁴. After Sunday's signing, only one rebel group - a faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) - remains a major security challenge to the government in Khartoum¹⁵.

Sudan to deploy joint force in Darfur

On the 10th April 2021, Sudan decided to deploy a joint force including former rebels in the Darfur region to maintain security and protect civilians¹⁶. This decision comes after the governor of Sudan's west Darfur urged the central government to send more troops to contain a surge of intercommunal violence that left at least 132 people dead¹⁷. Speaking after the meeting, the Minister of Defence Lt-Gen Yassin Ibrahim said that the Security and Defence Council decided to "form a joint force made up of regular forces and all parties signatory of the peace agreement, a flexible force capable of rapid intervention to maintain security in Darfur¹⁸".

⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/25/at-least-3-civilians-killed-in-mogadishu-mortar-attack>

¹⁰ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-mortar-attack-kills-at-least-3-civilians/2187702>

¹¹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-mortar-attack-kills-at-least-3-civilians/2187702>

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/28/sudan-and-main-rebel-group-sign-agreement-to-restart-peace-talks>

¹³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/28/sudan-and-main-rebel-group-sign-agreement-to-restart-peace-talks>

¹⁴ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1833251/middle-east>

¹⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-politics-idUSKBN2BK0DT>

¹⁶ <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69428>

¹⁷ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-04-08/clashes-in-sudan-s-darfur-leave-over-130-dead-hadath-reports>

¹⁸ <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69428>

The resurgence in violence comes as a joint UN-African Union peacekeeping mission winds down operations in Darfur, a western region of Sudan roughly the size of France that has been riven by conflict since 2003¹⁹.

- Southern Africa

Mozambique: Palma crisis

Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility Monday 29th March 2021 for a dayslong attack on the northern Mozambique town of Palma that began last week and has prompted thousands of people to flee²⁰. The attacks in Palma started Wednesday 24th March 2021 just hours after the French energy company Total announced that it would resume work outside the town on its huge natural gas project at Afungi, near Mozambique's northeastern border with Tanzania²¹. That attack besieged expatriate workers of the nascent gas industry. Dozens, including at least one South African, died²².

Dozens of civilians were killed when the armed Islamist group raided the town and fired on people and buildings. Seven more people were killed in an ambush on a convoy of vehicles as it attempted to leave the town, the government said²³.

On Sunday 28th March 2021, the Defense Ministry spokesman said that security forces were committed to clearing areas around Palma to ensure the local population's safe return. The three-year insurgency of the rebels, who are primarily disaffected young Muslim men, has taken more than 2,600 lives and displaced an estimated 670,000 people, according to the U.N.²⁴.

In a statement, AU chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat said he "condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks". He further expressed "utmost concern" at the presence of international extremist groups in southern Africa, where he called for an "urgent and coordinated regional and international action. Regional bloc the Southern African Development Community held emergency talks in Harare to discuss the violence."²⁵

¹⁹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-04-08/clashes-in-sudan-s-darfur-leave-over-130-dead-hadath-reports>

²⁰ <https://www.voanews.com/africa/islamic-state-claims-dayslong-attack-mozambique-town>

²¹ <https://apnews.com/article/africa-southern-africa-mozambique-32fbee2ee5ab780b16e46bb881238e31>

²² <https://www.businesslive.co.za/fm/features/africa/2021-04-01-behind-the-deadly-mozambique-attacks/>

²³ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/29/hundreds-missing-after-mozambique-attack>

²⁴ <https://www.news957.com/2021/03/30/rebel-attacks-deepen-humanitarian-crisis-in-north-mozambique/>

²⁵ <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/rest-of-africa/au-calls-for-urgent-action-after-mozambique-jihadist-attack-3344762>

Zimbabwe: Covid-19 pandemic is destabilizing the country

On April 2nd, 2021, the government of Zimbabwe reports that hunger and food insecurities have increased during the corona virus pandemic. The World Food Program says the problem is especially acute for unemployed residents of the cities. The Zimbabwe vulnerability Assessment Committee's (ZimVAC) reports about 2.4 million people in the country's urban areas are struggling to meet their basic needs because of lockdowns to contain the spread of COVID-19.²⁶

Zimbabwe plans to buy one million Covid-19 vaccines a month in the second quarter according to the Minister of Finance Mthuli Ncube. "Our target is that every month end, April, May and June, a million doses will be arriving, and these will be fully paid for." The country has given emergency authorization to four vaccines; SinoPharm, Sinovac, Covaxin and Sputnik-V.²⁷

The Zimbabwean government announced on Wednesday 7th April 2021 by that it has come up with a new Covid-19 vaccination cards with improved security features following the emergence of counterfeits. Minister Monica Mutsvangwa warns that the government will descend heavily on culprits tampering with the cards; "following reports of production of fake vaccination cards by unscrupulous individuals, the government in liaison with fidelity printers and the Registrar General's Office has strengthened security measures through designing a water-tight vaccination certificate card."²⁸

Moreover, there will be suspension of the June 2021 locally run Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) examinations due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Minister Monica Mutsvangwa said the affected ordinary and advanced level learners will sit for their examinations together with the rest of the pupils in November this year.²⁹

Flash:

Zimbabwe: an activist sent to jail

HARARE, a court in Zimbabwe has sentenced an opposition activist on Tuesday, 6th April to 14 months in prison for inciting public violence. Defense lawyers said Makomborero Haruzivishe was convicted last week on circumstantial evidence and the MDC alliance claimed he is a victim of political persecution³⁰

²⁶ <https://www.voanews.com/africa/zimbabwes-food-insecurity-escalates-during-covid-19-lockdowns>

²⁷ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-04-06/zimbabwe-to-buy-one-million-covid-19-vaccines-each-month>

²⁸ <https://africa.cgtn.com/2021/04/08/zimbabwe-strengthens-security-of-covid-19-vaccination-cards/>

²⁹ <https://africa.cgtn.com/2021/04/08/zimbabwe-suspends-june-2021-public-examinations-due-to-covid-19>

³⁰ <https://www.google.com/gmp/s/ewn.co.zg/2021/04/06/zimbabwean-activist-sent-to-prison-for-inciting-violence-/amp>

- Central Africa

Niger: attacks on civilians and military coup

On Sunday, 21st March 2021, gunmen on motorbikes attacked villages of in Southwestern Niger; Intazayene, Bakorat and Wistane located near the border with Mali. On Monday 22nd March 2021, the government said the attacks had left 137 people dead. Zakaria Abdourahamane a government spokesman reported that "In treating civilian populations systematically as target now, these armed bandits have gone a step further into horror and brutality".³¹

Reinforced security and sanitary measures will be taken in the regions and an investigation has been launched to find the perpetrators of these cowardly and criminal acts in order to bring them before the courts.

According to the UN's development ranking for 189 countries, Niger is the poorest nation yet struggling with jihadist insurgencies that have split over from Mali and Nigeria.³²

At least 10 people were killed in attacks on two villages in the Tillaberi region of Western Niger on Wednesday 24th March 2021. Armed bandits burned a school and killed three people in the village of Zibane and seven in Gabado.³³

Niger's security forces thwarted an attempted military coup at the West African country's presidential palace overnight just two days before the newly elected president is to be sworn into office in a peaceful transfer of power, the government said Wednesday 31st March 2021³⁴.

Attacks by militants have grown since Bazoum's victory in February presidential election.

Government spokesman Abdourahamane Zakaria said several people had been arrested while others were still being sought but that the situation was under control³⁵.

In pockets of the capital on Wednesday, Ousmane supporters took to the streets for a scheduled protest and clashed with police, who fired tear gas to disperse them, according to witnesses, who also said roads out of the city had been closed³⁶.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is following developments "with great concern" and "urges all involved to desist from any form of incitement that threatens democratic consolidation and the stability of the country," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said³⁷.

³¹ <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2021/3/22/gunmen-on-motorbikes-raid-niger-villages-kill-scores>

³² <https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/22suspected-jihadists-attacks-killing-scores-of-people>

³³ <https://www.google.com/amp/s/mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN2BG38J>

³⁴ <http://www.tribtown.com/2021/03/31/ap-af-niger-crisis/>

³⁵ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7192203/niger-foils-coup-bid-before-inauguration/>

³⁶ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7192203/niger-foils-coup-bid-before-inauguration/>

³⁷ <https://www.newwestrecord.ca/world-news/niger-government-confirms-military-coup-attempt-thwarted-3591939>

Cameroon: civilians rescued by the Multinational Joint Task force

On Thursday 8th April 2021, Cameroon said the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) of the Lake Chad Basin Commission freed civilians from Boko Haram. The MNJTF is based in N'Djamena, the Chadian capital, and is made up of troops of countries who have been victim of Boko Haram, that is Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria. However, Benin is also member of the task force

It is reported that during the rescue operations, some Boko Haram fighters who were disgruntled and wanted to surrender, dropped their weapons³⁸.

Cameroon said it had agreed with troops from Nigeria and Chad to free civilians still held in captivity by the terror group and make sure Boko Haram's ability to attack is reduced to minimum, for peace to return³⁹.

According to the United Nations, Boko Haram violence has killed over 30000 people and displaced about 2 million in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad.

Chad: presidential elections

Presidential elections took place on Sunday 11th April 2021 in Chad. The provisional results will be published by the election commission by the 25th of April. Among the candidates, there is the current president, Idriss Deby Itno, who came to power spearheading the rebellion that the military ruler Hissene Habre in 1990.

. Among Deby's six rivals is former prime minister Albert Pahimi Padacke, but several leading opponents are boycotting the race, including the 2016 runner-up Saleh Kebzabo, who has vowed to make Chad "ungovernable" if Deby wins⁴⁰. Lydie Beassemda, 54, a former minister of agricultural production, is the first woman to run for president in Chad's history⁴¹.

Though Deby is widely expected to secure a sixth term, protests are expected to continue up to and following the vote.⁴²

³⁸ <https://www.voanews.com/africa/african-troops-free-dozens-boko-haram-victims>

³⁹ <https://www.voanews.com/africa/african-troops-free-dozens-boko-haram-victims>

⁴⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-chad-election/chad-count-votes-as-deby-seeks-sixth-term-after-30-years-in-power-idUSKBN2BY018>

⁴¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/11/voters-in-chad-head-to-polls-as-leader-deby-seeks-sixth-term>

⁴² <https://foreignbrief.com/daily-news/presidential-elections-to-be-held-in-chad/>

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