



Africa Regional Bulletin: March 6

Summary

This OSAC report format provides a brief update on recent events in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Democratic Republic of Congo

- In recent weeks, M23 rebels have intensified their kinetic activity and fortified positions in the eastern DRC, centering the main lines of their offensive around the strategic town of Sake, located approximately 25 km from the North Kivu regional capital of Goma. Direct fighting in Sake between M23 and the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC), United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), and South African Development Community forces (SADC) has internally displaced over 100,000 civilians. M23 began a southern offensive toward Goma in mid-2022, with fighting in recent weeks enclosing around Goma. UN forces created a secure corridor to Sake in January for civilians fleeing the town of Mweso, located approximately 75 km north of Sake, after significant M23 advances last month. M23 has also solidified control over Maisi, reportedly establishing civilian administration in the town through appointing a mayor and deputy mayor on January 28.
- In response to M23's latest offensive, relations between the DRC and Rwanda have continued to worsen. The DRC alleges Rwanda provides arms and financial support to M23 in addition to selectively deploying elements of the Rwandan Defense Forces (RDF) to fortify M23 forward operating lines. Rwanda alleges the DRC integrates elements of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) as part of the Wazalendo coalition into its regular armed forces. In this current context, the DRC has amassed troops near the border with Rwanda and Rwanda has rejected calls from the DRC and the US to withdraw its forces and SAM systems from Eastern Congo, threatening the outbreak of direct conflict between the DRC and Rwanda.

Ethiopia

- In January, Ethiopia and Somaliland signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) whereby Ethiopia would recognize Somaliland and provide stake in state-owned Ethiopian Airlines for usage of the commercial port of Berbera and a 50-year lease of coastline to build a naval port in the Red Sea. Ethiopia, a land locked country, is reliant upon Djibouti for commercial port access and does not operate any naval bases. In response to the MOU, Somalia rejected Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland, classifying the decision as a violation of the state's territorial integrity and stating it will defend itself against Ethiopia's encroachment. On February 26, Somalia and Turkey signed a maritime defense and economic cooperation agreement, which some reports note is aimed at balancing Ethiopia. Additionally, al-Shabaab released a statement condemning the MOU and increased its targeting of Ethiopian citizens over the past few weeks, including the murder of six Ethiopians in the southern Somalia stronghold Beled Hawo on February 5. The crisis risks spillover into Ethiopian supported ISR cooperation and CT operations targeting al-Shabaab as well as increased al-Shabaab incursions into Ethiopian territory, intensified by the recent disintegration of the Liyu police.

- Ethiopia has continued operations targeting the Amharic aligned militia Fano operating primarily in the Amhara region and in disputed territory in the Tigray and Oromia regions. Since the successful implementation of the November 2022 Pretoria Agreement between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), Ethiopia initiated a process of centralization over regional security forces and disarmament/demobilization of government aligned militias utilized in counter-offensives against the TPLF. In 2022, ENDF systemically employed Fano contingencies behind the forward operating line in the Tigray region to challenge TPLF horizontally, hold territory, and secure resupply routes. Ethiopia has had limited success in disintegrating Fano given the decentralized nature of the group and its successful recruitment amongst ethnic Amhara populations. Since the ENDF's failure to integrate the Amharan regional forces beginning of April 2023, hardline Amharan groups, including Fano, resisted resulting in the on-going conflict in the Amhara region.

Senegal

- President Macky Sall held talks with opposition leaders on February 26 to discuss ways forward after Senegal's Constitutional Council struck down President Sall's decision to delay elections originally set for February 25. President Sall committed to leaving office on April 2 when his presidential mandate officially ends but has not announced an official new date for elections, though a current proposal identifies June 2 as the new date for the first round of voting. Of the 19 approved opposition candidates invited to the talks, 17 boycotted. Dakar and other major cities have seen regular protests since February 3 when President Sall officially postponed the election, some of which have turned violent with 3 protesters killed in clashes between protesters and polices in mid-February. Civil unrest is unlikely to subside until a formal election date is declared.

Additional Information

For more information on the security environment in Sub-Saharan Africa, contact [OSAC's Africa team](#).

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