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MONTHLY REGIONAL UPDATES UPDATE

Africa Overview: January 2026

The US launched missiles in Sokoto, Nigeria, the RSF gained control of more territory in West Kordofan, and the M23 seized control of Uvira in the DRC.

13 January 2026

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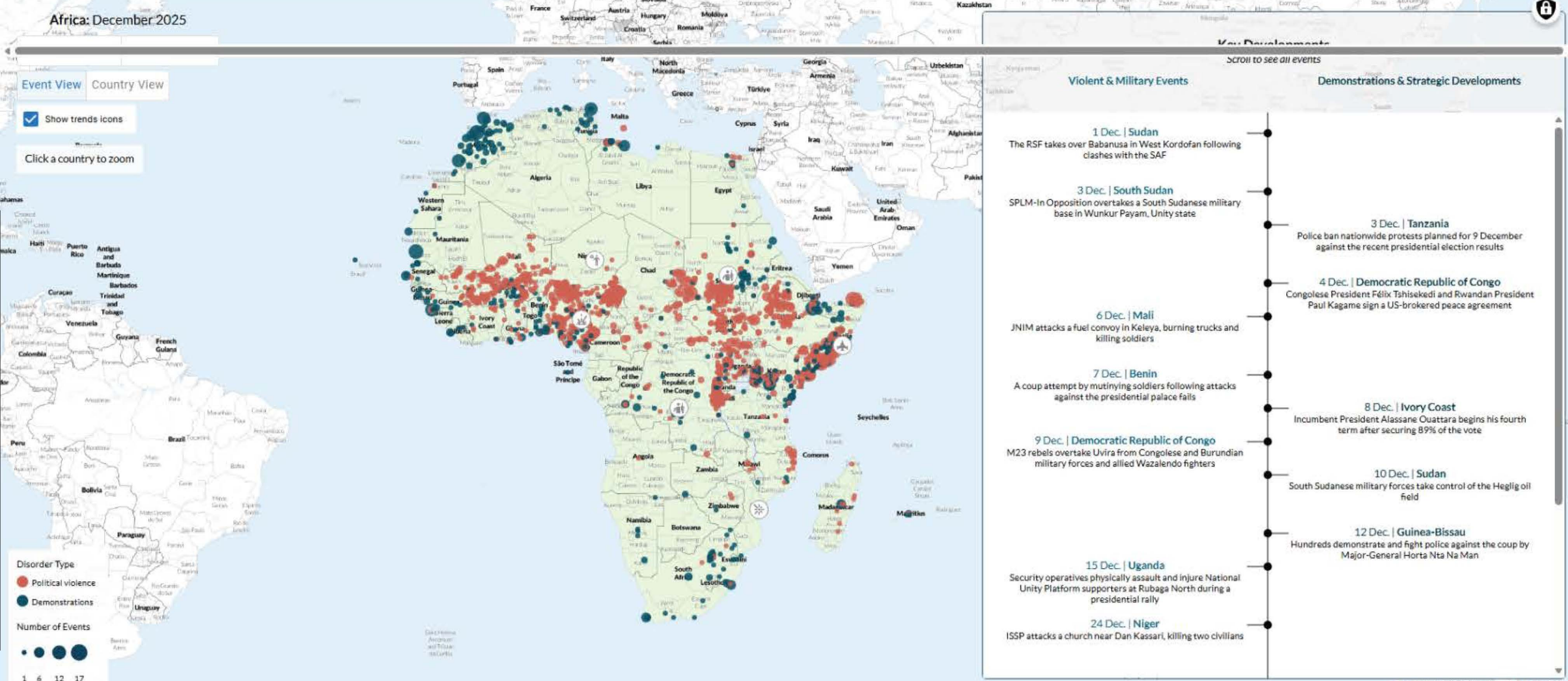
AUTHORS

Ladd Serwat
Senior Analyst, Africa

Héni Nsaibia
Regional Expert, West Africa

Jalale Getachew Birru
Regional Expert, East Africa

Peter Bofin
Regional Expert



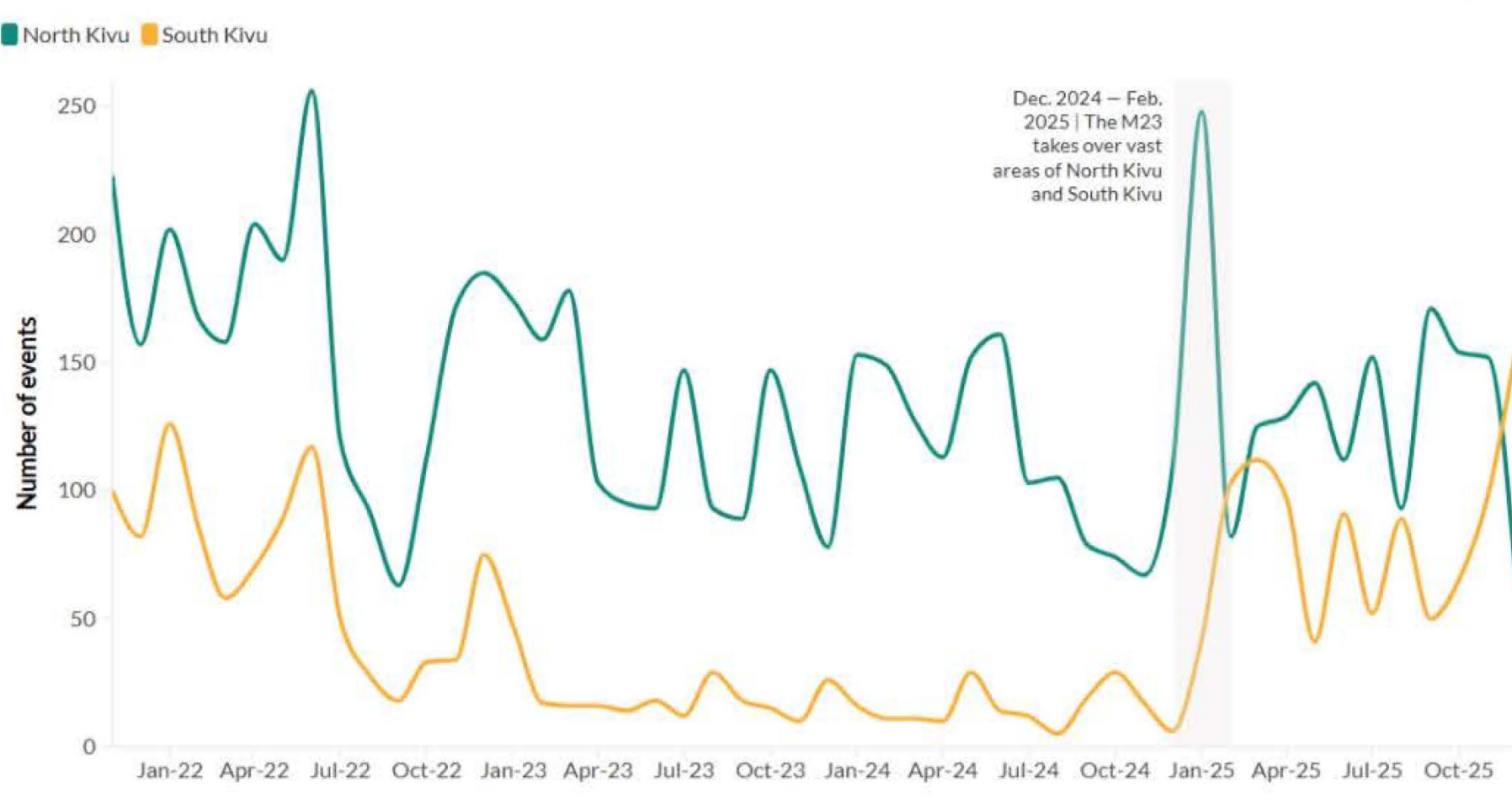
Democratic Republic of Congo: M23 takes Uvira amid a wider offensive in South Kivu

Rwanda-backed March 23 Movement (M23) rebels seized control of Uvira on 10 December, also capturing north and south corridors into the city. Uvira is a major economic hub and has been the location of the South Kivu provincial government aligned with Kinshasa since the fall of the political capital of Bukavu in February. The rebels continued their offensive further into South Kivu, with contestation surging in December in the highlands of Mwenga territory and further south in the territory of Fizi, despite the United States-brokered peace deal signed between Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi and Rwandan President Paul Kagame on 4 December.

Under pressure from the US, the M23 claimed to retreat from Uvira city to the surrounding areas.¹ However, plainclothes militants have continued to occupy the city and engage in clashes with Wazalendo. The M23 and allied armed groups took control of vast swathes of territory throughout the year since their initial offensive against Goma in January, contributing to a 70% rise in political violence in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces in 2025 compared to the previous year.

Violence in DRC's North Kivu and South Kivu

November 2021* – December 2025



*The M23 resumes its offensive in the DRC.

Mozambique: Mozambican and Rwandan forces struggle to control the Cabo Delgado coast

As in previous years, Islamic State Mozambique (ISM) activity in northern Mozambique declined significantly at the end of 2025, with December being the height of the rainy season, which constrains the group's mobility and thereby its capacity to undertake operations. Despite reduced activity, several significant clashes between ISM and the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) took place at the end of the year.

RDF activity in 2025 remained lower than in 2024. However, a concentration of activity in Macomia, Mocimboa da Praia, and Muidumbe districts in the second half of 2025 indicates a new resolve to disable ISM, possibly related to the lifting of force majeure on the Total Energies-led liquefied natural gas project in Palma district in October.² Despite RDF efforts on the Macomia coast, including the [killing of at least 35 ISM militants](#) around 30 November near Cogolo village and the establishment of an RDF combat outpost at Pangane,³ ISM fighters remained active in the area. On 24 December, the group killed five RDF soldiers at Cogolo. In Muidumbe district, ISM and the RDF clashed on the main N380 road on 5 and 6 December as Rwandan forces responded to an ISM ambush on a commercial convoy. In the past, the RDF has been [noticeably reluctant](#) to take on ISM on that road. ISM also clashed with RDF and Defense Armed Forces of Mozambique (FADM) naval vessels in the waters off Mocimboa da Praia and Macomia.

Both FADM and the RDF still struggle to control the Macomia coast. District Administrator Tomás Badae admitted in early January that ISM remains firmly entrenched in the Quiterajo area, north of Cogolo.⁴

Niger: The Tillabéri region becomes the deadliest front in central Sahel

In 2025, Niger's Tillabéri became the deadliest region across central Sahel, with more than 1,200 fatalities recorded – surpassing all other regions in neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso. Violence in Tillabéri was geographically widespread across many of the region's departments, illustrating its growing significance for jihadist militancy and competition. Tillabéri also stood out in terms of civilian harm since it recorded the highest level of civilian targeting among all regions in the three central Sahel countries over the past year. This trend continued in December, when Tillabéri again recorded the highest number of fatalities from attacks on civilians, demonstrating the persistent exposure of civilian populations to violence. The violence was primarily driven by the [Islamic State Sahel Province \(ISSP\)](#), which accounted for the largest number of fatalities, followed by operations by the Nigerien military, and then its jihadist rival [Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin \(JNIM\)](#).

Within Tillabéri, the Tera department, which borders Burkina Faso to the west, experienced the highest level of violence, driven by cross-border dynamics and militant mobility between Niger and eastern Burkina Faso. Militia formation is also ongoing in both Tera and Bankilare, contributing to instability and violent contestation in these areas. Tillabéri further connects several overlapping conflict theaters, including the Liptako-Gourma, the W-Arly-Pendjari Complex, and the regions of Menaka, Tahoua, and Dosso. As both ISSP and JNIM expand southward in the [Benin, Niger, and Nigeria borderlands](#), Tillabéri will continue to hold a geographically strategic position, situated at the crossroads between violence in western Niger, eastern Burkina Faso, and northeastern Mali. Current conflict dynamics suggest that without significant changes in the region's security conditions, Tillabéri is likely to remain a flashpoint of violence in the coming year.

For more, see the report on [the Sahel in ACLED's 2026 Conflict Watchlist](#).

Nigeria: The US strikes Sokoto as part of its broadening geographic reach

On 25 December, the US military launched over a dozen missiles into Sokoto state, hitting Warriya; Alkasim; and the forest areas of Kawuri, Malgum, and Bauni with unexploded missiles landing elsewhere. While bandit groups remain the most prolific armed actors in this state, ACLED records 56 incidents of Islamist-related political violence in Sokoto since 2024, all attributed to Lakurawa militants. Lakurawa is the most plausible target, given that some [Lakurawa groups have reported ties to ISSP](#); recent Lakurawa activity near the strike locations, and the US interest in targeting groups with ties to the Islamic State.⁵

While ACLED records religious and Islamist-related violence in the area, Sokoto has neither been a primary hotspot for violence targeting Christians in 2025 nor an area of concentrated activity by Islamist armed groups – both key claims made by the US to support the strikes.⁶ Islamist violence in Nigeria remains concentrated in northeastern Nigeria, accounting for over 85% of all Islamist-related incidents in 2025. However, the Christmas Day strikes in Nigeria are the first since ACLED began recording data for the country in 1997 and underscore a widening geographic footprint for the US military. US aerial and drone strikes across the globe doubled in 2025, as the US carried out strikes across a growing list of countries, including Iran and Venezuela.

Somalia: An airstrike kills over 60 al-Shabaab militants in Lower Juba

In December, ACLED records one of the deadliest air- and drone strikes in 2025 targeting the Islamist groups al-Shabaab and Islamic State (IS) Somalia. On 4 December, international forces killed over 65 al-Shabaab militants in a single airstrike in Lower Juba.

These strikes occurred amid ongoing clashes between security forces and the two Islamist groups. In Bari, the Puntland Dervish Force engaged IS Somalia in an ongoing attempt to dislodge the group from the Golis Mountains range and surrounding areas in the Bari region. Heavy clashes between the militants and US-backed Puntland forces broke out across multiple areas in Qandala and Bosaso districts throughout December. Operations against IS Somalia in Puntland escalated dramatically in 2025, increasing from a single instance in 2024 to over 400 in 2025. The Puntland security forces managed to control some territories in Bari, but IS Somalia still controls some territories in and around the Golis Mountains range in Bari.

Simultaneously, Somali security forces clashed with al-Shabaab in central and southern Somalia. On 9 December, heavy fighting erupted in Lower Shabelle – where the most violence was recorded last year – when government forces, backed by airstrikes from international forces, engaged al-Shabaab in a clash that resulted in 44 reported fatalities, including 30 civilians. On 15 December, Jubaland security forces clashed with al-Shabaab across six areas in Lower Juba and reportedly killed around 100 fighters.

Sudan: The RSF consolidates its control over West Kordofan

In December, the conflict in Sudan reached a pivotal turning point as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) consolidated control over West Kordofan – one of the three states in the Kordofan region. On 1 December, the RSF seized Babanusa after overrunning the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) 22nd Infantry Division, followed by the capture of Heglig, a strategic hub that processes 130,000 barrels of South Sudanese crude oil daily,⁷ on 8 December. These were the last two locations controlled by the SAF in West Kordofan. Complete control over West Kordofan represents an important step in the RSF's aim to anchor its rival administration in western Sudan.

Their control of Heglig, though, was short-lived. On 9 December, the SAF carried out a drone strike on a delegation from the Misseriya ethnic group that had traveled to the area to assess the situation and implement new security measures.⁸ The strike killed at least seven traditional leaders, six RSF soldiers, three South Sudanese soldiers, and around 40 Sudanese and South Sudanese residents, including technicians. To safeguard vital infrastructure, a rare tripartite agreement between the SAF, RSF, and the South Sudanese government led to the South Sudanese army taking control of Heglig on 10 December.

These events illustrate the broader 2025 trend: a transition into a war of attrition defined by territorial consolidation and intensified lethality. Although conflict incidents dropped by 35% compared to 2024, fatalities rose by 11%, driven by high-casualty mass killings. Armed groups, mostly the RSF, have increasingly targeted civilians based on identity. On 24 December, ethnically motivated attacks by the RSF in Umm Bara, Sirba, and Abu Gamra in North Darfur resulted in over 200 deaths. This pattern of ethnically motivated violence mirrored earlier atrocities in North Kordofan, North Darfur, al-Jazirah, and Sennar. The RSF was the world's deadliest non-state armed group in 2025, with at least 4,471 recorded civilian fatalities, which accounted for 11% of such deaths globally – though these figures are likely a significant undercount.

For more, see the report on [Sudan in ACLED's 2026 Conflict Watchlist](#).

Footnotes

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- [Faical Ali, "South Sudan army to secure critical Heglig oilfield in Sudan war spillover," Al Jazeera, 11 December 2025](#)
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