

I. Key general developments in the region

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There were at least 15 countries with active armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa in 2019: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. Eight were low-intensity, subnational armed conflicts (i.e. with fewer than conflict-related 1000 deaths), and seven were high-intensity armed conflicts (with 1000–9999 deaths): Nigeria (5400), Somalia (4000), the DRC (3700), Burkina Faso (2200), Mali (1900), South Sudan (1800) and Cameroon (1200). Almost all of the armed conflicts were internationalized.¹

Many of these armed conflicts overlapped across states and regions as a result of state actors, whether directly or through proxies, and/or the transnational activities of violent Islamist groups, other armed groups and criminal networks. While Islamist violence is not endemic to the region, many of the countries suffering from armed conflict are afflicted by extremist Islamist violence. With the continuation of the violence and the chaos it has created, a range of problems have followed or have been exacerbated, such as economic fragility, increased poverty and low resilience. The conflict dynamics and ethnic and religious tensions are often rooted in a combination of state weakness, corruption, ineffective delivery of basic services, competition over natural resources, inequality and a sense of marginalization.² Because of these overlaps and regional dimensions, developments in each of the armed conflicts in 2019 are discussed in more detail in subsequent subregional sections of this chapter: the Sahel and Lake Chad region (section II), Central Africa (section III) and the Horn of Africa (section IV)—except for the armed conflict in Mozambique, which is discussed briefly below.

While Southern Africa remains the most peaceful region in sub-Saharan Africa, it faces a number of evolving challenges, including high levels of inequality and growing socio-economic unrest. In Zimbabwe for example, the economic and humanitarian crisis deepened during the year. In August 2019 the United Nations World Food Programme warned that more than 2 million Zimbabweans were on the brink of starvation after a drought

¹ For conflict definitions and typologies, see chapter 2, section I, in this volume. For armed conflicts in North Africa, see chapter 6 in this volume.

² On the extent of cross-border state support to parties involved in intrastate armed conflict and its under-representation in Africa conflict data sets, see Twagiramungu, N. et al., 'Re-describing transnational conflict in Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 57, no. 3 (2019), pp. 377–91. On child poverty in Africa, see Watkins, K. and Quattri, M., 'Child poverty in Africa: An SDG emergency in the making', Overseas Development Institute Briefing paper, Aug. 2019. On the factors that influence unrest in the region, see Adelaja, A. and George, J., 'Grievances, latent anger and unrest in Africa', *African Security*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2019), pp. 111–40.

destroyed more than half of the country's maize harvest. Protests and acts of repression by the security forces were a regular occurrence in the early part of the year.³ There were also significant levels of political and criminal violence in South Africa during 2019.⁴

There were two new peace agreements in sub-Saharan Africa in 2019: in the CAR (see section III) and in Mozambique, where the former armed opposition group Mozambican National Resistance (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, RENAMO) signed a peace agreement with the government on 6 August 2019 (having signed an initial deal on 1 August), formally ending decades of hostilities.⁵ More than 5200 RENAMO fighters were expected to disarm under the agreement: some were due to be absorbed into the country's security forces, while others were to be reintegrated into civilian life. However, a RENAMO splinter group threatened to ignore the agreement, and tensions rose again in October 2019, as RENAMO rejected the 15 October general election results.⁶

In addition, there was an ongoing Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado province in the north of Mozambique. The main insurgent group was Ansar al-Sunna, a local extremist faction, but in June 2019 the Islamic State claimed its first attack against Mozambican security forces.⁷ According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) there were 663 conflict-related fatalities in Mozambique in 2019, with the majority being in the categories 'violence against civilians' (383) and 'battles' (252)—the latter confirming that Mozambique met the threshold for a low-level armed conflict in 2019.⁸

In the Horn of Africa, relatively peaceful transitions of power in Ethiopia (in 2018) and Sudan (in 2019) and the implementation of a 2018 peace agreement in South Sudan led to significant decreases in armed violence in those three states (see section IV).

There were 20 multilateral peace operations active in sub-Saharan Africa in 2019, two less than in 2018 and six fewer than in 2014.⁹ The UN Mission in Liberia and the Southern African Development Community Preventative

³ BBC, 'Zimbabwe: A third of population faces food crisis, says UN', 7 Aug. 2019; *The Economist*, 'Zimbabwe faces its worst economic crisis in a decade', 15 Aug. 2019; and *The Economist*, 'Zimbabwe sees its worst state violence in a decade', 26 Jan. 2019.

⁴ Campbell, J., 'What's behind South Africa's recent violence?', Council on Foreign Relations, 15 Nov. 2019.

⁵ France 24, 'Mozambique's former civil war foes sign landmark peace deal', 1 Aug. 2019; and *Mail & Guardian*, 'Mozambique's rivals sign peace deal', 8 Aug. 2019. On the history of the armed conflict in Mozambique, see Gerety, R. M., *Go Tell the Crocodiles: Chasing Prosperity in Mozambique* (New Press: New York, 2018).

⁶ Africa News, 'Mozambique's Renamo wants election results cancelled', 19 Oct. 2019; *East African*, 'Mozambique peace deal at risk over poll fraud claims', 3 Nov. 2019; and PSC Report, Institute for Security Studies, 'New threats to peace in Mozambique', 24 Nov. 2019.

⁷ Weiss, C., 'Islamic State claims first attack in Mozambique', *Long War Journal*, 4 June 2019.

⁸ ACLED, 'Data export tool', [n.d.].

⁹ The peace operations were deployed across 10 countries, see chapter 2, section II, in this volume.

Mission in the Kingdom of Lesotho ended in 2018, and there were no new missions in the sub-Saharan Africa region in 2019. The peace operations included several large-scale operations in countries that were experiencing armed conflict such as the CAR, the DRC, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. The number of personnel serving in multilateral peace operations in sub-Saharan Africa decreased by 6 per cent during 2019, from 103 528 on 31 December 2018 to 97 519 on 31 December 2019, mainly due to scaling down by the African Union (AU) Mission in Somalia, the UN–AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR and the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC. The number of personnel deployed in the region decreased for the fourth year in a row and reached the lowest point since 2012. All large-scale peace operations in the region except for the UN Mission in South Sudan decreased in size during the year.¹⁰ These developments notwithstanding, sub-Saharan Africa continued to host far more peace operations personnel in 2019 than any other region—on average 71 per cent of the global total.¹¹

In February 2019 AU leaders held their annual summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Key points on the agenda included tariff liberalization in the African Continental Free Trade Area, institutional reform of the AU and progress on Agenda 2063 (a vision and action plan to build a ‘prosperous and united Africa based on shared values and a common destiny’).¹² Since its creation in 2002 the AU has taken on greater responsibility for upholding peace and security in Africa, including through peace support operations—often through regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). There have been long-standing tensions between the UN Security Council and the equivalent decision-making body within the AU, its Peace and Security Council, over which institution should have primacy in addressing the prevention, management and resolution of African conflicts.¹³ These tensions continued in 2019 over the conflicts in Sudan (section IV in this chapter) and Libya (chapter 6), as well as over proposed changes to funding of AU-led peace operations.¹⁴ However, AU–UN cooperation improved in other areas, including the Sahel (section II), the CAR (section III) and South Sudan (section IV).

¹⁰ On the reasons for this decrease, see chapter 2, section II, in this volume.

¹¹ See figure 2.5 in chapter 2, section II, in this volume.

¹² Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, ‘Agenda 2063’; and AU, ‘Key decisions of the 32nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union (January 2019)’, 12 Feb. 2019. For further details and membership of the AU, see annex B in this volume.

¹³ International Crisis Group, *A Tale of Two Councils: Strengthening AU–UN Cooperation*, Africa Report no. 279 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 25 June 2019). For further details and membership of ECOWAS, see annex B in this volume.

¹⁴ On the AU–UN burden-sharing debate in 2019, see International Crisis Group, *The Price of Peace: Securing UN Financing for AU Peace Operations*, Africa Report no. 286 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 31 Jan. 2020).

Two additional cross-cutting issues shaped security dilemmas in sub-Saharan Africa in 2019: (a) the continuing internationalization of counterterrorism activities and (b) water scarcity and the growing impact of climate change.¹⁵ This section now briefly examines how these two issues evolved in 2019.

The internationalization of counterterrorism and security activities

Many of the global powers, such as the United States, China, several major West European powers and Russia, have significant security and economic interests in sub-Saharan Africa, which is being increasingly treated as an arena for great power competition in a process that has been dubbed the new or third ‘scramble’ for Africa.¹⁶ In the Horn of Africa for example, an even wider variety of international security actors—from Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and North America—operate in the region, largely driven by geopolitical, commercial and military competition.¹⁷

However, largely separate from this geopolitical competition, the USA and European states in particular are also centrally involved in the fight against transnational jihadist groups in the area, albeit rarely directly. In the case of European states this fight also extends to criminal networks and irregular migration. Most Western forces train and build capacity in local forces, including the two subregional counterterrorism task forces: the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad region and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (discussed in section II).¹⁸ The threat from transnational jihadism is particularly pronounced in the Sahel and Lake Chad region (section II) and in the Horn of Africa, from where Islamist and criminal violence is spreading into East Africa (section IV).¹⁹ Despite the loss

¹⁵ As identified in Davis, I. and Melvin, N., ‘Armed conflict and peace processes in sub-Saharan Africa’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2019*, pp. 115–21.

¹⁶ The first ‘scramble’ was during the 19th century colonial period and the second during the cold war. *The Economist*, ‘The new scramble for Africa’, 7 Mar. 2019; Devermont, J., ‘Haven’t we done this before? Lessons from and recommendations for strategic competition in sub-Saharan Africa’, *Lawfare*, 15 Apr. 2019; and *The Economist*, ‘Africa is attracting ever more interest from powers elsewhere’, 7 Mar. 2019.

¹⁷ Melvin, N. J., ‘The foreign military presence in the Horn of Africa region’, SIPRI Background Paper, Apr. 2019; and Melvin, N. J., ‘The new external security politics of the Horn of Africa region’, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2019/2, Apr. 2019. Also see section IV in this chapter.

¹⁸ *The Economist*, ‘The West’s new front against Jihadism is in the Sahel’, 2 May 2019. On US counterterrorism policy in the region, see Guido, J., ‘The American way of war in Africa: The case of Niger’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2019), pp. 176–99.

¹⁹ On the targeting of civilians in the region by violent Islamist groups, see Dowd, C., ‘Fragmentation, conflict, and competition: Islamist anti-civilian violence in sub-Saharan Africa’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2019), pp. 433–53.

of its territories in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State and its affiliates appeared to be inspiring some jihadist groups in sub-Saharan Africa to link up with it.²⁰

The USA continued to adjust its regional deployments as part of its 2018 move away from counterterrorism operations around the world towards a focus on competition among major state powers. In 2018 these included an announced 10 per cent cut of its 7200 personnel deployed in Africa, but also a build-up of forces in Somalia. A first tranche of ‘roughly 300’ US military personnel are expected to be removed by June 2020, although it remains to be seen whether further cuts will be implemented.²¹ Armed unmanned aerial vehicles became operational at a US airbase in Niger during 2019. There were about 500–600 US military personnel in Somalia where US air strikes targeting the al-Shabab group became more frequent in 2019 (than in any year since the initial US air strikes in Somalia in 2007).²²

As expected regional and European partners took on a slightly larger share of crisis management and counterterrorism, especially France, which has 4700 military personnel in West and Central Africa under Operation Barkhane.²³ In turn, France appealed in June 2019 to other European states to assist their forces in Africa and join a new special forces task force.²⁴ European Union (EU) member states already collectively dedicate significant political, financial and military resources to the Sahel region, as part of one of the EU’s central foreign policy pillars—driven partly by concerns about refugees and irregular migrants from the region coming to Europe.²⁵ Germany and Italy each have about 1000 soldiers in Africa.²⁶ The United Kingdom’s military engagement in 40 Africa countries focuses on security sector reform and defence engagement, including the provision of specialist training for

²⁰ Burke, J., ‘ISIS claims sub-Saharan attacks in a sign of African ambitions’, *The Guardian*, 6 June 2019.

²¹ General Thomas Waldhauser, Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, ‘National security challenges and US military activities in the Greater Middle East and Africa’, 7 Mar. 2019; Alexis Arieff, Statement before the Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on National Security, US House of Representatives, Hearing on ‘US counterterrorism priorities and challenges in Africa’, Congressional Research Service Testimony, 16 Dec. 2019; and Cooper, H. et al., ‘Pentagon eyes Africa drawdown as first step in global troop shift’, *New York Times*, 24 Dec. 2019.

²² Correll, D. S., ‘Armed drones to fly out of Niger air base now operational after delayed completion’, *Air Force Times*, 1 Nov. 2019; and Browne, R., ‘US military mission in Somalia could take seven years to complete’, CNN, 13 Apr. 2019.

²³ SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/pko/>>; de Hoop Scheffer, A. and Quencez, M., ‘US “burden-shifting” strategy in Africa validates France’s ambition for greater European strategic autonomy’, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Transatlantic take, 23 Jan. 2019; *Africa Confidential*, ‘In search of allies’, 19 Dec. 2019; and Associated Press, ‘French forces kill 33 Islamic extremists in Mali, says Macron’, *The Guardian*, 21 Dec. 2019.

²⁴ Intelligence Online, ‘Special forces in Africa: French armed forces minister Florence Parly appeals to European allies’, issue 833, 26 June 2019. Also see chapter 2, section II, in this volume.

²⁵ European Commission, ‘The European Union’s partnership with the G5 Sahel countries’, 6 Dec. 2018; and Dörrie, P., ‘Europe has spent years trying to prevent “chaos” in the Sahel. It failed’, *World Politics Review*, 25 June 2019.

²⁶ *The Economist* (note 18).

Nigerian troops fighting Boko Haram, three helicopters and about 90 troops to support French counterterrorism activities in Mali and training in Kenya of AU peacekeepers deployed in Somalia.²⁷

China's increasing military footprint is partly linked to its growing economic presence in Africa, including securing its Belt and Road Initiative facilities.²⁸ Out of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, it is the leading supplier of UN peacekeepers in the region, mostly in the DRC, Mali, South Sudan and Sudan.²⁹ Russia's increasing security activities on the continent also have a strong economic and geostrategic dimension.³⁰ In 2018 and 2019 Russia supplied arms and advisers to the CAR (section III). In October 2019 Russia and more than 40 heads of state gathered in Sochi, Russia, for the first ever Russia–Africa summit, during which President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia has written off African debt worth more than \$20 billion and called for trade with African countries to double in the next five years.³¹ In addition, Russia and China are the largest arms exporters to sub-Saharan Africa.³²

Water scarcity and climate change

While Africa is responsible for only 4 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions, it is particularly vulnerable to the double burden of climate-related factors and political fragility. Of the 21 countries facing the highest risk from this double burden, 12 are in sub-Saharan Africa: Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, Ethiopia, Guinea, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.³³ The *African Peace and Security Architecture Roadmap 2016–2020* highlights climate change as one of the cross-cutting issues

²⁷ UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Conflict, Stability and Security Fund: Annual Report 2017/18* (Foreign and Commonwealth Office: July 2018); UK Government, 'PM's speech in Cape Town', 28 Aug. 2018; and UK Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, *Revisiting the UK's National Security Strategy: The National Security Capability Review and the Modernising Defence Programme* (House of Commons: 21 July 2019).

²⁸ Kovrig, M., 'China expands its peace and security footprint in Africa', International Crisis Group commentary, 24 Oct. 2018; Cabestan, J.-P., 'China's military base in Djibouti: A microcosm of China's growing competition with the United States and new bipolarity', *Journal of Contemporary China* (2019); and Walsh, B., 'China's pervasive yet forgotten regional security role in Africa', *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 28, no. 120 (2019), pp. 965–83.

²⁹ *The Economist*, 'Africa is attracting ever more interest from powers elsewhere' (note 16).

³⁰ Marten, K., 'Russia's back in Africa: Is the cold war returning?', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 4 (2019), pp. 155–70; and Besenyó, J., 'The Africa policy of Russia', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2019), pp. 132–53.

³¹ Roscongress, 'Declaration of the First Russia–Africa Summit', 24 Oct. 2019; *Moscow Times*, 'Russia vows to forgive Ethiopia's debt amid growing push for influence in Africa', 22 Oct. 2019; and *The Economist*, 'Vladimir Putin flaunts Russia's increasing influence in Africa', 24 Oct. 2019.

³² On arms transfers to sub-Saharan Africa, see chapter 9, section II, in this volume.

³³ Moran, A. et al., *The Intersection of Global Fragility and Climate Risks* (US Agency for International Development: Sep. 2018), pp. 11–13; and Ritchie, H., 'Global inequalities in CO₂ emissions', *Our World in Data*, 16 Oct. 2018.

affecting peace and security.³⁴ A 2019 study shows how climate change has amplified existing challenges and strengthened radical groups in Somalia.³⁵

There is always a direct or decisive link between climate change and increased insecurity. However, economic opportunity and political considerations are just as important factors behind increased insecurity. Nonetheless, the context is set in part by frequent and severe droughts, famines and flash floods in sub-Saharan Africa that have displaced millions and contributed to high levels of migration: in 2018, 6 of the 10 largest flooding events globally that triggered displacement were in the region, and urban areas were the worst hit.³⁶ In Zambia an estimated 2.3 million people were in urgent need of food assistance in 2019 as a result of recurring and prolonged droughts, with seasonal rainfalls in southern and western Zambia recorded at their lowest levels since 1981.³⁷ It is broadly accepted that water management and infrastructure will need to improve to reduce climate vulnerability in the region.³⁸

³⁴ African Union Commission, *African Peace and Security Architecture, APSA Roadmap 2016–2020* (African Union Commission, Peace and Security Department: Addis Ababa, Dec. 2015), pp. 20–21. On the framing and understanding of climate-related security risks in AU policy frameworks, see Aminga, V., 'Policy responses to climate-related security risks: The African Union', SIPRI Background Paper, May 2020

³⁵ Eklöv, K. and Krampe, F., 'Climate-related security risks and peacebuilding in Somalia', SIPRI Policy Paper no. 53, Oct. 2019.

³⁶ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019*, p. 12.

³⁷ IPC, 'IPC acute food insecurity analysis Zambia, May 2019–March 2020', Aug. 2019; and European Commission, 'ECHO daily flash archive, Zambia', 31 Aug. 2019.

³⁸ Mason, N. et al., 'Climate change is hurting Africa's water sector, but investing in water can pay off', World Resources Institute, 7 Oct. 2019.