

THREATWATCH AFRICA

Matt Henman, Jordan Anderson and Martin Roberts report on the growing issues in the region and the groups posing a threat



AL-SHABAAB

Founded in 2003, al-Shabaab is a militant Islamist group based in Southern and Central Somalia. The group has consolidated its position over subsequent years to become the dominant actor in the country, controlling vast swathes of territories including most of the capital, Mogadishu, until it withdrew in 2011.

Following several US counter-terrorism operations in 2014 and early 2015, al-Shabaab suffered significant leadership blows, including the killing of its leader in a US airstrike. Attacks continued with a concentration of efforts in Mogadishu and cross-border assaults in Kenya, notably the 2015 Garissa University attack that killed 148.

Throughout 2015, the group continued to stage attacks against civilians and security forces, including assaults on AMISOM bases. An ambition to target the aviation sector was demonstrated in early 2016, with al-Shabaab claiming a failed suicide attack on a plane departing from Mogadishu. In early 2016, US and AMISOM forces were able to kill several key al-Shabaab commanders, in addition to the reported killing of around 150 fighters in airstrikes in the Hiiraan region. Al-Shabaab has maintained pressure on the Government with several suicide attacks on state targets in Mogadishu through 2016 and into early 2017.

Al-Shabaab has carried out several suicide attacks on state targets in Mogadishu

BOKO HARAM

Nigerian militant Islamist group Boko Haram's ideology originated in the Yusufiyya movement, although early operations were undertaken from December 2003 by a splinter group. Following a joint uprising in July 2009, the group re-emerged under new leadership and launched a guerrilla campaign in late 2010.

International notoriety followed mass-casualty attacks on schools, notably the April 2014 abduction of 276 female students in Chibok. The group became the subject of increasing international attention amid concerns that its campaign could spread to neighbouring countries, with Cameroon experiencing a notable increase in Boko Haram-attributed attacks since early 2014. By early 2015, violence in Northern Nigerian states prompted the rescheduling of Nigeria's 14 February general election and the launching of a regional multi-national offensive against the group.

In March 2015, the largest faction of Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, who formally accepted on 12 March, and subsequently this faction identified itself as the Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyya of the Islamic State.

Although President Muhammadu Buhari claimed to have dealt a "final crushing of Boko Haram terrorists", the group has continued to launch attacks in North-East Nigeria and the surrounding region into 2017, although it suffered a major factional split in mid-2016.

AQIM

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is a militant Islamist group operating throughout North Africa. Originally founded in Algeria as the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et la Combat (GSPC) in 1998 as a splinter of the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA), it waged low-level guerrilla insurgency against Algerian security forces.

Ideological divisions and a turbulent leadership struggle culminated in Abdelmalek Droukdel becoming leader in June 2004, pledging formal loyalty to then al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in June 2006. In January 2007, the GSPC renamed itself AQIM in recognition of its

IN 2015 THE LARGEST FACTION OF BOKO HARAM PLEDGED ALLEGIANCE TO THE ISLAMIC STATE

affiliation to al-Qaeda, and supplemented its guerrilla insurgency with periodic mass-casualty attacks.

Following the armed takeover of the region by Tuareg militants in early 2012, AQIM established a territorial foothold in Timbuktu, although the January 2013 French military intervention in Mali forced AQIM and allied groups to withdraw. It has since launched a guerrilla campaign against French and Malian forces, with a notable conducting of attacks in Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso in 2016.



AQIM (top) was originally founded in Algeria

Former Vice-President Machar's forces became known as the SPLM/A (above)

SPLM/A-IO

The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) is a splinter

group of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), the ruling party of South Sudan. It is comprised predominantly of ethnic Nuer forces loyal to former Vice-President Riek Machar, who was removed in July 2013 by President Salva Kiir Mayardit after announcing his intention to openly challenge Kiir for leadership of the ruling SPLM/A.

SPLM/A-IO was formed in December 2013 after Kiir accused pro-Machar SPLM/A forces of attempting a coup against him following fighting between ethnic Dinka and ethnic Nuer Presidential Guardsmen in South Sudan's capital, Juba.

Fighting continued throughout 2014, despite a series of internationally brokered ceasefires, with Machar's forces becoming known as the SPLM/A - In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO).

In August 2016, Machar signed a peace deal, with Kiir subsequently signing on 26 August following the threat of UN sanctions. Nonetheless, Kiir's reservations are clear in multiple violations of the deal through attacks on SPLM/A-IO positions in Central Equatorial, Unity and Upper Nile states over the following weeks.

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ANGOLA

Anti-Government demonstrations are likely to attract hundreds of thousands in the capital Luanda and the opposition stronghold of Huambo, and tens of thousands in other major cities nationwide in the run-up to general elections on 23 August.

Angola's largest opposition party, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola: UNITA) has pledged to continue organising nationwide protests. The Government is likely to respond by deploying thousands of soldiers and police. The protests pose a moderate risk of vandalism to assets and injury to bystanders. UNITA's demands for an independent audit of electoral registers nationwide are highly unlikely to be carried out, with the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola: MPLA) very likely to remain the largest party in the legislature. This will automatically enable its flagbearer, current defence minister João Lourenço, to become President in succession to José Eduardo dos Santos, who will step down after 38 years in power.



KENYA

In a repeat of the March 2013 elections, Kenya's county, legislative, and Presidential elections scheduled for 8 August will be closely contested between the country's ruling Jubilee party, headed by President Uhuru Kenyatta and Deputy President William Ruto, and the opposition National Super Alliance (NSA) coalition led by Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka. The Jubilee party occupies a strong position, while the opposition's campaign has highlighted the ruling party's alleged manipulation of the electoral process and its demands for reform are unlikely to be satisfied. Therefore, in the likely scenario of a ruling-party win by a small majority, there is a high risk of inter-ethnic violence in the capital, Nairobi. This would be driven by ethnic rivalries, rumours of vote rigging by the Government and perceived electoral manipulation by external actors. The Government has established more effective security measures than during the 2013 elections. A strong deployment of police armed with batons, tear gas and water cannons would reduce the likelihood of damage to commercial property in the CBD.

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SENEGAL

Legislative elections in Senegal would not normally lead to major protests, but campaigning ahead of polls on 30 July has been spiced up by the imprisonment of Dakar Mayor Khalifa Sall, who has become a cause célèbre for the opposition to President Macky Sall and his ruling BBY coalition. The Mayor has been remanded in custody over alleged misappropriation of 1.83 billion CFA francs (US\$2.85 million) from city funds in 2011-15. His lawyers have repeatedly stated that Khalifa Sall's arrest and detention are purely to stop his political ambitions, and have been demanding his release from prison so he can head an opposition coalition. Whether that happens or not, anger from civil society activists and political opponents over the President's alleged instrumentalisation of the judiciary to target his most likely rival for the 2019 Presidential election is likely to lead to further demonstrations in Dakar. Well-trained security forces are likely to keep the protests confined to established routes, but violence is likely.



ETHIOPIA

Before Ethiopia's declaration of the six-month state of emergency on 9 October 2016, now extended into August 2017, rising discontent in the Oromia and Amhara regions had made violent anti-Government demonstrations regular occurrences. Arson attacks against foreign-owned commercial projects became frequent. The Government's heavy security response led to more than 650 people dying since August 2016.

While the state of emergency has largely suppressed the protests, the grievances remain, and a recent spate of home-made explosive attacks in the Amhara region indicates a radicalising fringe of the opposition. Protests will likely resume after the state of emergency is lifted, continuing in their cycle of surges of activity and periods of quiet. Large gatherings that take place are likely to feature displays of anti-Government sentiments, and consequently be violently dispersed by security forces. When this leads to protester fatalities, it risks sparking triggering a surge in protests in these regions.

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