

# ON THE HORIZON

FEBRUARY–JULY 2026 | 8TH EDITION



INTERNATIONAL  
CRISIS  
GROUP



## LATEST TRENDS

Jihadist violence spiked in northern Benin in early 2025, while several armed group attacks were reported in recent months in the country's previously more peaceful east. Meanwhile, Benin is gearing up for a presidential election in April amid heightened political tensions in the wake of a December 2025 coup attempt.

## WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

### 1 The jihadist threat is expected to persist in northern departments

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Musulimin (JNIM), Benin's dominant jihadist group, will probably keep entrenching itself in the northern Alibori and Atacora departments. Parks Pendjari and W, which straddle the borderlands of Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger, serve as a transit and supply zone and provide cover for the group's activities.

Changes in Benin's defence posture following a large-scale JNIM attack on soldiers in Alibori in April 2025 could have mixed outcomes. Since the military pulled back from isolated outposts to more defensible bases, such attacks have decreased. But insurgents could attain greater freedom of movement in zones the troops have left, putting civilians at risk.

The lack of security cooperation with Niger and Burkina Faso will continue to hamper Benin's efforts to secure its northern border and curb insurgent activity.

**TO WATCH** JNIM messaging on Benin; attacks on civilians; resurgence in raids on army posts; intercommunal tensions, which JNIM could exploit; shifts in Benin's security posture; relationship with Burkina Faso and Niger.

### Potential Consequences

Persistent or large-scale jihadist attacks could fuel discontent within state forces, affecting political stability. The soldiers who launched the failed December 2025 coup attempt cited insecurity as a motivation.

Jihadists' footprint in northern Benin could give them greater capacity to intensify or expand operations in the country and the wider region.

### 2 Armed violence could spread and destabilise eastern Benin

Criminal or jihadist groups could step up attacks in Borgou department as they entrench themselves in Nigeria's Kainji Lake Park across the border. Borgou, where several incidents of non-state armed group violence have occurred since June 2025, holds strategic value for JNIM due to its potential to connect the group's activities in south-eastern Burkina Faso with a nascent presence in western Nigeria.

Limited security coordination between Cotonou and Abuja could hinder efforts to prevent intensifying violence on the Nigerian side from spilling into Benin.

**TO WATCH** Attacks in western Nigeria or eastern Benin; increased cross-border movement; intercommunal tensions in Borgou, which armed groups could exploit; Nigeria-Benin security

cooperation; shifts in JNIM messaging on Benin or Nigeria.

### Potential Consequences

A corridor between south-eastern Burkina Faso and western Nigeria running through Benin's territory could facilitate JNIM's contacts with Nigerian armed groups and its access to the Nigerian market for weapons and fuel. It would also impede counter-terrorism efforts.

The expansion of violence could force Cotonou to shift troops to Borgou, giving greater freedom of action to armed groups in Alibori and Atacora.

### 3 Political tensions will probably intensify around the presidential election

President Patrice Talon's chosen successor, Finance Minister Romuald Wadagni, is expected to coast to victory in the 12 April presidential election. But, with his low political profile, Wadagni could struggle to control a divided ruling coalition that will remain under Talon's influence.

The exclusion from formal politics of the main opposition party, Les Démocrates – which holds no seats in the national legislature and has been barred from the presidential election under 2024 changes to the electoral code – has heightened political tensions. In the lead-up to the poll, the currently limited risk of street protests could increase, prompting a crackdown.

Authorities might detain more opposition politicians as part of the investigation into the failed December 2025 coup attempt, further raising the political temperature. Several



### FLASHPOINT

high-profile opposition figures, including from Les Démocrates, have already been arrested.

**TO WATCH** Public criticism of the regime candidate; socio-economic grievances; further arrests of opposition figures; large-scale jihadist attacks fuelling public and/or military discontent.

### Potential Consequences

Difficulty consolidating authority early in his tenure could complicate a newly elected President Wadagni's rule and fuel questioning of his leadership.



## LATEST TRENDS

The expansion of Colombia's armed and criminal groups comes at a time of regional turbulence. Relations between President Gustavo Petro and U.S. President Donald Trump have been strained, while neighbouring Venezuela is in flux following Washington's capture of President Nicolás Maduro. Against this backdrop, congressional and presidential elections are scheduled for 8 March and 31 May.

## WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

### 1 Political violence will remain high ahead of elections

Threats against and attacks on politicians, party activists and community leaders will likely persist at high levels as armed groups exploit the electoral period to expand their territorial control. High-profile assassinations, aimed at instilling fear and shaping election outcomes, remain a credible risk, as underscored by the June killing of prospective right-wing candidate Miguel Uribe.

On or before election day, armed groups could restrict access to polling stations in areas they control and expose voters to a range of pressures, including intimidation and vote buying.

**TO WATCH** Departments with a significant armed group presence: along the Pacific coast (Chocó and Cauca); southern Amazon (Caquetá and Putumayo); across the central belt (Córdoba and Antioquia); along the Colombia-Venezuela border (Arauca and Norte de Santander).

### Potential Consequences

Election-related violence could exacerbate political polarisation, particularly over security, with some candidates calling for a militarised crack-down on criminal groups. A right-wing president would likely curtail Petro's "total peace" policy, jeopardising dialogues.

A closely contested election or outcome that disappoints certain constituencies could trigger protests, which may continue under a new government. A heavy-handed police response could spark violent confrontations with protesters.

### 2 Washington could seek to influence the presidential election

The recent Petro-Trump détente – which followed months of tensions over the Gaza war, migration and U.S. strikes on alleged drug vessels – could unravel, increasing the possibility that the White House seeks to ensure a pliable candidate wins the election through public messaging, threats or diplomatic pressure.

If such manoeuvres favour a right-wing candidate, they could strengthen Petro's movement by stirring resentment of Washington, especially in the aftermath of the Venezuela raid.

**TO WATCH** Petro-Trump relations; public U.S. signalling around candidates.

### Potential Consequences

If Trump's favoured candidate loses, he could challenge the result, inflaming domestic tensions and increasing the likelihood of protests and the attendant risk of unrest. He could also scale back aid or security cooperation, as well as apply economic pressure. More extreme

measures, such as sanctions or military action, cannot be ruled out.

If a Trump-backed candidate wins, fraud allegations or condemnations of U.S. interference could be another trigger for demonstrations.

### 3 Armed group violence could escalate along the Colombia-Venezuela border

Following Washington's extraction of Maduro, the National Liberation Army (ELN) – which had long benefited from an alliance of convenience with Caracas – will likely station more fighters along the border to preserve its control of drug trafficking and human smuggling corridors, as well as the lucrative mines in southern Venezuela. In response, Bogotá could adopt increasingly aggressive tactics to counter the group; on 4 February in Catatumbo region, its forces killed at least seven alleged combatants in airstrikes, including a minor.

Amid intensifying military pressure, the ELN may seek tactical truces with rivals, including the FARC dissident group known as the EMC, which has called for an alliance against "U.S. imperialism".

Venezuela's security apparatus has remained intact since the U.S. raid, but if Washington presses Caracas to squeeze the ELN, military cohesion could be threatened in some areas due to ties between officers and the ELN in mining regions and along trafficking routes.

**TO WATCH** Asymmetric ELN attacks on state forces and infrastructure; tensions within Venezuela's military; durability of any ELN-EMC truce.



### Potential Consequences

ELN consolidation along the border could drive hostilities with rivals like the 33rd Front and state forces, forcing residents to flee and adding to the roughly 100,000 displaced over the last year. Attempts to curb the ELN from within Venezuela could open fissures within the security forces. Meanwhile, a durable EMC-ELN alliance could strengthen these groups' resistance to military offensives, fuelling insecurity.

## LATEST TRENDS

Tensions are escalating between Ethiopia's federal government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, on one side, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) – Tigray region's dominant political force – and Eritrea on the other, stirring fears of a return to conflict. The war in Sudan and Saudi Arabia-United Arab Emirates (UAE) diplomatic rift exacerbate this risk.

## WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

### 1 Rising federal-TPLF tensions could descend into conflict in Tigray

Acrimony between federal authorities and the TPLF will likely persist. The latter accuses the government of breaching the Pretoria agreement that ended the 2020-2022 Tigray war, crippling the region's economy, backing an anti-TPLF insurgency and blocking the party's registration for elections. Addis Ababa says the TPLF has formed a hostile alliance with Eritrea. In late January, the standoff turned violent. The TPLF pulled back its forces following a federal drone strike, but the incident underscored the danger of escalation. Even if the sides avoid further direct confrontation, proxy activity could intensify: the anti-TPLF insurgents get support from the federal government, which in turn accuses Eritrea of backing Fano militias in the neighbouring Amhara region with TPLF assistance.

The TPLF could opt for military action to recapture Western Tigray and other contested areas, currently administered by Amhara with

federal backing. Tigray's leaders would hesitate before launching such an offensive, as their own forces are still recovering from the last war. But their attempt in January to seize the disputed Tselemti area indicates they have not ruled out the possibility.

Adding to frictions, the federal government has refused to fully restore the TPLF's registration as a political party following its suspension during the war, meaning June elections could take place without Tigray's participation. Given TPLF control of the region's interim administration and security forces, the federal government could not stage the vote without the group's cooperation. Alternatively, the Tigray leadership might try to organise its own polls, though a similar manoeuvre in 2020 contributed to the onset of war.

**TO WATCH** Tigray-Amhara disputes over contested areas and prospects for resolving their status; Ethiopia-Eritrea relations; intra-TPLF power struggles; electoral preparations.

### Potential Consequences

Renewed clashes in Tigray could spiral into full-scale conflict, potentially pulling in Eritrea on the TPLF side and devastating a region scarred by war.

### 2 Ethiopia and Eritrea could return to outright hostilities

Ethiopia could launch an attack on Eritrea. Abiy has made clear his ambition to regain sea access, fuelling fears in Asmara that he is eyeing the Red Sea port of Assab. In addition, he may decide that Eritrea's links to Ethiopian opposition groups or its continued occupation of Ethiopian

territory in the north are no longer tolerable. Until now, concerns about a protracted conflict and international backlash appear to have restrained the prime minister.

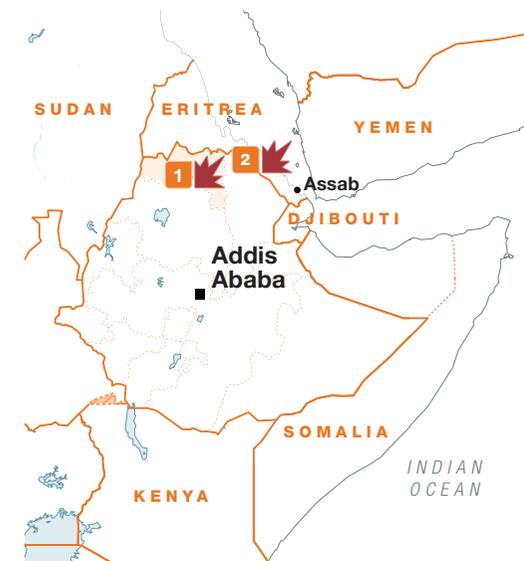
Eritrea will maintain forces in strategic border areas and continue sponsoring proxy groups inside Ethiopia as a deterrent. But this approach could backfire, by pushing Addis Ababa toward direct military action, and complicate any hope of rapprochement unless Asmara can prove that such support has ended.

The war in Sudan heightens these risks, particularly as the rift between Saudi Arabia and the UAE widens. Ethiopia is close to the UAE, which backs Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF). According to a 10 February Reuters report, Addis Ababa has allegedly bolstered its support for the RSF, including by building a military base in the Benishangul-Gumuz region near the Sudanese border. Eritrea has sided with Sudan's army (as has the TPLF) and is strengthening ties with its key backers, Riyadh and Cairo (another arch-rival of Ethiopia's). As these blocs harden, Ethiopia-Eritrea tensions could surge, complicating external mediation while reinforcing the use of Sudan as a theatre for proxy competition.

**TO WATCH** Bellicose rhetoric traded between Ethiopia and Eritrea; military build-ups on both sides; developments in Sudan.

### Potential Consequences

A major conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea could tip the Horn of Africa into a conflagration that drags in Tigray, as well as Sudan, Egypt and Gulf actors.



**FLASHPOINT**

## LATEST TRENDS

The Gaza ceasefire is holding (at least in name) but lethal Israeli attacks persist. It remains to be seen if the Board of Peace, launched by U.S. President Trump with UN Security Council endorsement, can oversee the territory's transition to a stable future. Meanwhile, humanitarian conditions in the strip remain appalling. In the West Bank, Israel is harshly repressing Palestinians and accelerating de facto annexation.

## WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

### 1 The October 2025 truce in Gaza will likely remain fragile

Israeli attacks in violation of the ceasefire, which have killed over 600 Palestinians – mostly civilians – since 10 October 2025, are expected to continue.

Dire humanitarian conditions are unlikely to get better unless Israel allows in agreed-upon volumes of aid. While food supply has improved, two million Palestinians are suffering from poor nutrition, inadequate sanitation, crowding and a depleted medical system, raising the risks of disease.

The U.S. is pushing the parties to implement Phase 2 of the ceasefire, meant to focus on governance and reconstruction. But progress will face serious challenges, including ambiguities about the structure and ambitions of the Board of Peace (which Trump has tried to assign a global mandate); hesitancy among international

actors about committing troops to police Gaza; Israel's blocking of Gaza's rebuilding; and the terms of Hamas's disarmament.

Citing a lack of progress in Hamas's disarmament, the Israeli military could continue to delay relief for Gaza or relaunch military operations on the Hamas-controlled side of the "yellow line" – the boundary to which Israeli forces withdrew during the truce's first phase.

**TO WATCH** The volume/variety of aid Israel allows to enter Gaza; the degree of pressure Trump and his envoys keep on Israel, and Arab parties on Hamas, to advance the truce; Hamas's terms for surrendering weaponry; the authority given to the Palestinian technocratic committee (created under the Board of Peace to deal with day-to-day governance) to begin reconstruction.

### Potential Consequences

In a worst case, Israel may resume large-scale military operations against Hamas, leading to mass fatalities, threatening the forced exodus of Palestinians, severing the frail lifeline of aid and enabling Israel's total reoccupation. The ceasefire's collapse could reignite regional fronts, such as Israel's confrontation with Yemen's Houthis, and trigger increased violence in the West Bank.

Alternatively, the truce may become stuck as negotiations get bogged down in the aforementioned challenges. Israel's de facto partition might become entrenched, leaving Gaza in limbo and its surviving population destitute.

In a better scenario, talks could see progress toward decommissioning Hamas's heavy

weapons, standing up an international stabilisation force, getting the Israeli military out of Gaza, loosening restrictions on aid flows and beginning reconstruction. Yet major questions would persist about the future of Palestinian governance and Washington's long-term designs on the territory.

### 2 In the West Bank, Israel may accelerate repression and dispossession of Palestinians

Far-right ministers are expected to continue establishing new settlements/outposts at a quick pace, revising laws to extend Israeli control, uprooting Palestinians and chopping up Palestinian land into ever-smaller chunks.

Settler violence, having reached unprecedented levels in 2025, will likely persist with the Israeli state's active support, threatening Palestinians with death and displacement.

The Israeli military may continue to employ aggressive tactics, including large-scale raids and airstrikes.

Israel may continue policies designed at economic suffocation. It may keep withholding billions of dollars of tax revenue from the Palestinian Authority (PA) – the territory's biggest employer. It could also cut off the Palestinian banking system.

**TO WATCH** Approval and construction of Israeli settlements such as E1, designed to cut the West Bank in two; large-scale Israeli military operations; Israeli moves to cripple the PA; Israel's next election, due in October 2026 at the latest, may see power shift toward centrist parties.



### FLASHPOINT

### Potential Consequences

Israel's moves on the West Bank are explicitly designed to render a future Palestinian state impossible.

Even harsher economic strictures could push the West Bank into deep poverty and chaos, particularly if combined with the PA's collapse. Over the longer term, many Palestinians could be forced to emigrate. While the immiseration of the population has not yet resulted in mass unrest, that possibility cannot be excluded should conditions deteriorate.

