Western Africa again dominated reported fatalities in the continent last week, with significant militant attacks on military bases recorded in the Sahel countries of Niger and Mali, as well as ongoing militant activity Nigeria. In Cameroon, Ambazonian separatists staged political kidnappings in an attempt to interrupt the upcoming elections. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the FARDC made strong gains against insurgencies in the country’s east. In North Africa, the Libyan National Army (LNA) made a significant advance in the ongoing conflict, with the capture of Sirte.

In the Tillaberi region of Niger, at least 89 Nigerien soldiers and 77 militants were reportedly killed when suspected Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) militants attacked a military base at Chinagodrar. It was the second major Islamic State attack on military forces in the Tillaberi region in the past month, following an attack at In Antes that claimed the lives of 71 Nigerien soldiers on December 10.

In Mali, 18 Chadian peacekeepers were wounded in a mortar attack. Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) militants fired around fifteen mortars in the attack, targeting the joint United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and Operation Barkhane base in Tessalit.

The border region between Nigeria’s Borno state and Cameroon’s Far North was also the site of significant militant activity, with a bomb explosion in the border town of Gamboru reportedly killing at least 30 civilians. Boko Haram continued attacks on civilian targets on both sides of the border, including an IDP camp in Mayo-Sava department. Boko Haram attacks on travellers were also reported on highways that were previously considered safe,
including an ambush on the convoy of a high ranked Nigerian military commander on the Maiduguri-Damaturu road. On the same stretch, two other attacks occurred during the week, resulting in both military and civilian fatalities.

Meanwhile, Ambazonian separatists remained active in the Southwest and Northwest regions of Cameroon, with five fatalities reported in clashes with state military forces. They also carried out multiple abductions of politicians in Ngo-ketunjia department, including a town mayor and a district Social Democratic Front (SDF) chairman. Another attempted abduction of a traditional leader was repelled by local villagers, who also retaliated against Ambazonian camps in the area, accusing separatists of targeting innocent civilians. The abductions are the latest in an ongoing campaign to disrupt upcoming parliamentary and municipal elections, with Ambazonian separatists declaring that they will stage a six-day shutdown to block voting on the February 9 (Xinhua, 7 January 2020). The Ambazonian insurgency has been fighting to carve out an Anglophone republic in the western regions of the majority Francophone Cameroon (for more on Ambazonian separatism, see these ACLED reports from 2018 and 2019).

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), DRC military forces (FARDC) engaged in operations against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in North Kivu and the Cooperative for Development of Congo (CODECO) in Ituri. The FARDC announced a campaign against the ADF on October 30 (VOA, 12 January 2020). Last week, at least 40 ADF militants were reportedly killed in a military operation at Madina in North Kivu, which, in addition to being an ADF headquarters, the FARDC claim is one of the ADF's last strongholds. In operations in Ituri, the FARDC killed 16 CODECO militants, with more than 200 militants surrendering.

In Libya, the Libyan National Army (LNA) captured the city of Sirte. The seizure followed the Sirte-based 604 Brigade's decision to switch allegiance from the GNA to the LNA (Reuters 6 January 2020). The news came on the same day that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that Turkey had initiated the deployment of military forces in support of the Government of National Accord (GNA) (BBC, 6 January 2020). The week ended with a ceasefire that began on Sunday 12 January, after the LNA rejected earlier calls for a ceasefire by Russia and Turkey (Al Jazeera, 12 January 2020).

Finally, Al Shabaab's recent activity continued in Kenya and Somalia, with attacks on state forces in both countries. Most significantly, two United States (US) contractors and a service member were reportedly killed when Al Shabaab launched an attack on the Camp Simba military base in Kenya's Lamu county. In Somalia's capital Mogadishu, Al Shabaab carried out several targeted shootings, killing two policemen and the Qoryoley town head of intelligence, as well as a suicide bombing, resulting in at least four deaths. In the Lower Juba region, Jubaland security forces killed ten Al Shabaab militants in three days of clashes.
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