Examining Togo’s Implausible Election Results  The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) has declared incumbent Faure Gnassingbé the winner in a landslide in the first round of Togo’s February 22 presidential elections. The outcome is a setback for Togo's long-delayed aspiration to move toward democracy, in line with the rest of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ... The following is a review of deficiencies in the process that challenge the credibility of the announced tally. More than 70 percent of Togolese told Afrobarometer in 2017 both that a 2-term limit should be reinstated in the Constitution and that Gnassingbé should not run again in 2020 after having already served 3 terms. Moreover, almost 80 percent of Togolese say they disapprove of the government's handling of the economy. ... More than 80 percent of Togolese say the presidency, Parliament, police, and judges are corrupt, revealing deep levels of mistrust in government institutions. Similarly, more than 70 percent of the population does not see CENI as a nonpartisan, technical institution. Given these realities and the fact that, in 2015, Gnassingbé was declared to have won just over 58 percent of the vote, it strains credulity that his vote tally would have improved to 72 percent as CENI has claimed. Africa Center for Strategic Studies

Africa Readies for Coronavirus as Senegal and Morocco Confirm First Cases  Across Africa, steps are being taken to prepare for - and to reduce the effects of - the spread of the new coronavirus. Testing laboratories are being supplied, quarantine and hospital treatment facilities are being readied for patients, and public health advisories have been issued. As of Monday, the continent of 1.2 billion people has at least 11 confirmed cases of Covid-19 - five in Algeria, two in Egypt, one in Tunisia, one in Nigeria, one in Senegal and one in Morocco. The case in Senegal was a French citizen who lives in Senegal and who had recently returned from France. The patient in Morocco is a Moroccan man living in Italy, who is currently in non-critical condition in a hospital in Casablanca. Thirteen of Africa’s 54 countries have been identified by the World Health Organisation as at risk of becoming centres for the disease on the basis of volume of traffic between China and weak health surveillance and treatment systems. ... Most African airlines with direct flights to China have suspended them, and countries activated surveillance and quarantine measures. However, Ethiopia, one of Africa’s largest air traffic hubs, has maintained regular flights to China. AP

At Least 50 Killed in Northern Nigeria 'Bandit' Attacks  At least 50 people were killed in multiple attacks by armed 'bandits' on villages in an area of northern Nigeria rife with cattle theft and kidnappings, local officials said on Monday. Sources said around 100 armed assailants stormed into the villages of Kerawa, Zareyawa and Minda in Kaduna state at dawn on Sunday, gunning down worshippers as they left a mosque for morning prayers before killing residents, burning and looting homes. "So far 50 bodies have been recovered but the figure is not conclusive and is very likely to rise as rescue efforts are still under way," Zayyad Ibrahim, a lawmaker in the Nigerian parliament, told AFP on Monday. Several people were injured in the attacks and were taken to nearby hospitals Ibrahim said. The attacks were in retaliation for villagers allegedly assisting recent army operations against the so-called bandits in their forest hideouts, local counsellor Dayyabu Kerawa told AFP. ... Violence has soared in northwest Nigeria in recent years as criminal gangs involved in cattle rustling and kidnapping have carried out bloody raids on villages. The groups attack from hideouts in nearby forests exploiting a lack of security across the region. AFP
New ISWAP Boss Slays Five Rebel Leaders, Silences Clerical Tones The new leader of the Islamic State West Africa Province, ISWAP, Lawan Abubakar, otherwise called Ba Lawan, is moving rapidly to consolidate his position, by executing five Shura council members (the supreme leadership council of the terrorist group) including the erstwhile leader of the group Abu Abdullahi Umar Al Barnawi, also called Ba Idrisa, authoritative sources familiar with developments around the group said Sunday in Diffa and Maiduguri. "It is by far the most bloody and extensive move in the history of the group to behead its leadership crop in one fell swoop" researchers and reporters on the Media and Terrorism collaborative project of Premium Times and HumAngle Media Foundation learnt at the weekend, an indication that the regime of Ba Lawan may be paved with blood and pain. ... "No question about it, the fighting ranks within ISWAP has become divided, and with division within the larger group deepening, a major unrest will likely manifest in the coming weeks," sources knowledgeable about the conflict strongly believe.

UN Envoy for Libya Resigns as Truce Appears to Crumble The U.N. envoy for Libya announced his resignation on Monday, as a fragile cease-fire in the North African country continued to crumble. Ghassan Salame tweeted he was stepping down as special representative for Libya because of his health. Salame was appointed in July 2017, and had recently been mediating three-tiered talks between Libya's warring sides on economic, political and military tracks. His goal had been to end the violence and troubles that have wracked oil-rich Libya since 2011, when an international military coalition helped rebels overthrow longtime autocrat Moammar Gadhafi. In his tweet, Salame, 69, said he had tried to "unify the Libyans, curb foreign interference and protect the country's integrity." "My health no longer allows this rate of stress," he said, adding that he had asked U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to relieve him of his post. Salame resigned amid an escalation in fighting in Libya, and just days after he announced the near breakdown of a shaky truce between the country's two rival governments. AP

At Least 20 Killed in DRC Militia Violence Fresh violence in Democratic Republic of Congo's restive northeastern Ituri province has killed at least 20 more people, the army and a local source said Monday. Congolese soldiers clashed with raiding militia fighters from the Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO) on Saturday night in the village of Kparangaza, army spokesman lieutenant Jules Ngongo said. Nine militia fighters and three soldiers died in the violence, he told AFP, and the militia was eventually chased out of the village. In the nearby village of Venru, CODECO militiamen shot and hacked to death eight others, a tribal chief said. ... CODECO is an armed political-religious sect drawn from the Lendu ethnic group. Conflict erupted between the Lendu, mainly farmers, and the Hema, herders and traders, in the gold-mining and oil-rich province between 1999 to 2003, killing tens of thousands. ... The conflict has reignited and more than 700 people have been killed in Ituri since late 2017, a UN report said in January, adding that some of deaths might constitute a "crime against humanity." More than half a million people have been displaced by the violence since February 2018, the report said. AFP

Malawi's Army Praised for Protecting Protesters Malawi's army is being hailed for protecting protesters
who have been calling for electoral justice, following last year's disputed presidential elections. The military's latest intervention occurred after a fraud-marred election last year that returned President Peter Mutharika to office. The results were annulled by the country's top court and fresh polls are due in May. Thousands of civilians last month marched to the offices of the disgraced electoral commission where they chained and padlocked its entrance - and handed the keys to an army officer. ... Opposition politicians, whose supporters led last year's protests while the top court combed through evidence of electoral fraud, have only praise for the military. "The MDF is one institution the people of Malawi have always been able to count on to uphold the constitution in times of political crisis," said main opposition Malawi Congress Party leader Lazarus Chakwera. Another opposition politician Saulos Chilima added: "They stood up to their billing and reputation as one of the most professional armies in Africa and the world." AFP

Cameroon's Biya Agrees Probe Needed into Village Attack -France Cameroonian President Paul Biya agreed on Sunday with his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, that an impartial probe was needed after gunmen killed 22 people in a village at the heart of a separatist insurgency last month, the French presidency said. The two leaders spoke by phone about the Feb. 14 attack in a village in western Cameroon, where gunmen in military uniforms and masks shot women and children and burned others in their homes. "They agreed an impartial probe was needed in reaction to the violence committed against civilians in the village of Ngarbuh in the northwestern province," the French presidency said in a statement. Cameroon's army since 2017 has been fighting English-speaking militias seeking to form a breakaway state called Ambazonia amid the cocoa farms and forests of west Cameroon. As fighting has intensified, so have abuses by both sides, witnesses and rights groups say. The fighting is the gravest threat to stability in the oil- and cocoa-producing country since Biya took power nearly 40 years ago. Reuters

Guinea-Bissau's Embalo Names New Cabinet amid Political Crisis Guinea-Bissau's Umaro Sissoco Embalo, the winner of the December presidential election, appointed a new cabinet even as the current Prime Minister Aristides Gomes has yet to resign. Embalo named Joao Fadia as finance minister days after outgoing President Jose Mario Vaz handed over power following weeks of political turmoil in the West African nation. The PAIGC party, whose candidate lost a run-off vote to Embalo but has a majority in parliament, is demanding a recount and has rejected his swearing-in at a hotel last week. Embalo appointed Nono Gomes Nabiam as his prime minister on Feb. 29. The political feud is threatening more turmoil in one of the world's poorest countries, which has previously been a haven for gangs smuggling cocaine from South America into Europe. The tiny coastal nation has seen at least nine coups or coup attempts since independence from Portugal in 1974. The Economic Community of West African States said in a statement having two prime ministers makes it difficult to find a solution to the crisis and called for all parties to "end all actions that would equal anarchy." Bloomberg

New Tensions in Guinea after Referendum Postponement Since October, a coalition of non-governmental groups and opposition parties opposing the referendum have been organizing protests against the planned constitutional change. At least 30 protesters and one gendarme have died. President Alpha Conde plans to reset presidential term limits, allowing him to run for a third spell.
Conde has not openly declared intentions to run again. However, critics say the draft constitution extends presidential terms to six years and remove the two-term limits. ... The International Organisation of La Francophonie had pointed to problems of verifying around 2.5 million of the 7.7 million names on the electoral roll last week. "Given that the age structure is very youthful in Guinea, it is typically that about 40 percent of the population would be of an age to vote," said Melly. 12.5 million people live in Guinea. "The opposition is saying that the register is not trustworthy, La Francophonie is saying the register is not credible and it looks like West African leaders are also privately pointing out to Conde that this is a huge problem," Melly added. The African Union cancelled an electoral observation mission to Guinea, citing a "major controversy" with the roll. The EU has also cast doubt on the poll's credibility. DW

South Sudan: Thousands Flee Escalating Violence in Pibor

Thousands of people have fled into the bush as conflict intensifies in the Pibor area in the last two weeks, Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) said. The clashes in parts of the Greater Pibor Administrative Area involve members of the Lou Nuer and their neighboring Murle community. In a statement on Monday, the medical charity said its teams have treated over 28 wounded people in the last two weeks in Pibor town. MSF says it is providing lifesaving medical assistance in the Protection of Civilians site and has set up an emergency room for patient triage and stabilisation, adding that a delivery room and a referral system for those in need of surgery are also in place. "We are seeing a high number of malaria, pneumonia, measles, and weapon injuries cases," says Lojana Augustino Ngorok, MSF Clinical Officer in Pibor. "The wounded are hard to treat here, and some need referral to Juba for more intensive care. The organization stated that it continues to receive some wounded in Pibor, while many people are arriving in other health facilities, and many more are likely to have been unable to reach a health centre. Radio Tamazuj

Somalia: After Taliban, Will al-Shabab Negotiate?

Al-Shabab supports the Taliban and calls its leader the "Amir al-Mu'minin" (Leader of the Faithful). But experts are split on whether the group will follow the Taliban's example and open talks with the African Union, which has troops in Somalia, and AU forces' host, the Somali government. A leading Salafi scholar who tried to mediate talks between al-Shabab and the Somali government in 2009 says the group is now more extreme than ever before and is unlikely to accept a negotiated settlement. ... Warsame is not just any negotiator. He is the co-founder and first leader of the now-defunct al-Itihad al-Islam, a Salafi organization that produced many al-Shabab leaders, including the group's current emir, Ahmed Diriye, also known as Abu Ubaidah. Warsame told VOA Somali that during his negotiations, the impasse came from two sticking points, one ideological and one political. On the ideological front, many of the group's leaders were not willing to step back from the Takfir ideology, which drives the group to label everyone in the government and its supporters as having abandoned Islam. VOA

Why 11 Kenyan MPs on Secret Trip to Somalia Could Face Espionage Charges

A secret weekend visit to Somalia by 11 Kenyan MPs at a time the two countries are locked in a diplomatic tiff has raised eyebrows in security circles. Upon their return on Sunday, the legislators were held briefly for questioning at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) before being released, with indications that they could face a parliamentary probe for leaving the country without official clearance. Six of the
parliamentarians are from the border counties of Mandera, three from Wajir and two from Garissa. They chartered a flight to Somalia capital Mogadishu on Saturday, where they had dinner with President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo. Their agenda was not disclosed, although they travelled on diplomatic passports and were treated as State guests. ... Initial reports indicated that the MPs met with members of the Somali National Intelligence Agency (NISA) but one of the leaders, who spoke to the Nation, denied this. Addressing the press at JKIA, Interior Security Secretary Muriithi Kangi said the MPs would not be charged in court "at least for the time being." "What was of concern to the country was how the MPs travelled to a foreign country without clearance and on a matter whose agenda was not clear to the government," said Mr Kangi. Daily Nation

**US Department of Defence to Familiarise Itself with South African Defence Technology** Next week a team from the United States military will visit South Africa to interact with local defence companies to learn more about the capabilities that exist within the defence industry. This is according to the Aerospace, Maritime and Defence (AMD) Industries Association of South Africa, which said the visit will take place between 9 and 13 March 2020. The visit will come after a November 2019 meeting between the South African Department of Defence and the US military. "Part of the deliberations between the two countries centred on the need for the South African Defence Industry to take or make use of opportunities that the US Defence Force procurement process avail. It was noted that not many South African Defence Industry (SADI) companies are part of the supply chain of the US Armed Forces. This is despite the fact that the US has one of the largest standing armies in the world," the SA AMD Export Council (SAAMDEC) said. defenceWeb

**Fake News and Nigeria's Media** ... But there was one problem; the ThisDay story turned out to be completely false. "False news alert," the US embassy said in a widely published statement, referring to the alleged visa row. "If you have seen this manufactured item in the media, help defeat this misinformation by communicating to everyone that it is completely false." ... A few days later, ThisDay published an apology, then suspended the journalists responsible for the story. ... After the outrage at the original story came the disgust. "How could such a sensational story, about such an influential figure, have escaped the attention of gatekeepers at such a high-profile organisation?" people asked. The received wisdom was that while a certain recklessness is to be expected of stories published on social media, an established newspaper ought to be more responsible. If only this was a one-off. Working as a journalist in Nigeria is tough - even getting officials to confirm basic details can be hard. In the face of this, many maintain high standards. ... Life is hard for reporters here. At least 19 journalists and bloggers were arrested in Nigeria between January and September 2019, according to Amnesty International. BBC

**Uganda Rolls Out Digital Land Registry to Eradicate Fraud** Fake land titles could soon be a thing of the past in Uganda as the government, supported by a French mapping company, experiments with a computerised land registry to stop fraudsters in their tracks. But not everyone is convinced. A nationwide land registry has been in the pipeline since 2010. Ugandan officials have been under pressure to improve transparency of the land sector, and last Thursday unveiled the completion of the
Land Information System, the first of its kind in Africa. "Twenty-two districts are now registered, and we've seen a tenfold reduction in the time it takes to carry out transactions," explains Christophe Dekeyne, the CEO of French company IGN FI, behind the digitisation process, saying it had brought the land ministry’s services closer to the population. Delegates from over 30 countries gathered in Uganda last week to strengthen land rights for citizens and computerise land records to safeguard against fraud. ... Land is a very sensitive issue in Uganda, where the majority of people still rely on agriculture for their livelihood. And the country has suffered from heated disputes over who owns what. RFI