



SAHEL WEATHER

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POLITICAL AND SECURITY NEWS ANALYSIS OF THE SAHEL AND WEST

The political and security news analysis in the Sahel and West Africa continues to be marked by urgent security issues, notably the resurgence of terrorist attacks, political negotiations over the duration of transitions, the issue of candidacies and the arrest of journalists against a backdrop of political protests. These grievances, which are alarming to say the least, are compounded by economic issues, which amplify the factors of frustration that are taking over from what could be described as positive news. This month's Weather Report takes a look back at the highlights of the regional news, with country specificities likely to have a drastic impact on the political and security climate in Africa.

SENEGAL

After the Assises de la justice, the Assembly is up in arms against the Prime Minister

Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye visited Paris on Wednesday June 19, at the invitation of both GAVI (the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization) and the African Union, for the Paris Vaccine Summit. In his address to his African and French counterparts, Senegal's newly-elected president reminded them of the inadequacy of vaccines supplied to Africa in relation to its population: around 20% of the world's population. In other words, Africa is a long way from achieving sovereignty in vaccine production. He also congratulated GAVI and its partners on their work in the fight against pandemics, and reiterated the importance of the international community's support in replenishing GAVI's funds for the period 2026 to 2030. On the occasion of his first visit to France, the Paris Immunization Summit was an opportunity for President Bassirou Diomaye Faye to discuss with Emmanuel Macron, during a working lunch at the Élysée Palace on June 20, the redefinition of the foundations of a new "win-win" partnership with France.

Ousmane Sonko's alleged attempt to link "those who have plundered the public purse" with the Press's alleged "failure to pay its tax debt" may well be in keeping with the spirit of the rupture he has been advocating to date. These alleged accusations were made on Sunday June 9 at a public conference of PASTEF, of which he is the leader.

During the event, the Prime Minister made it clear that no leniency would be granted to journalists or activists who gratuitously attacked people. Without asking for a return of the favor, the press made a point of recalling the preponderant role it played and which, according to it, enabled PASTEF, of which it is the undisputed leader, to accede to power. Since President Bassirou Diomaye Faye came to power, the fight against impunity has become more topical than ever. Indeed, Macky Sall and his lieutenants seem to have no respite from the numerous accusations and prosecutions to which they are subjected, not to mention the repression of pre-election unrest.

The conviction of activist Bah Diakhaté and Imam Cheikh Tidiane Ndao can be seen as the manifestation of the promise made by Ousmane Sonko against those who gratuitously attack others. Indeed, on June 03, 2024, the two were sentenced to 3 months in prison and fined 100,000 CFA francs for spreading false news, charges they denied at the May 27 hearing. As a reminder, they had made remarks deemed despicable about Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko and his recent statements about homosexuality during a visit to Senegal by France Insoumise leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Furthermore, the protection of press freedom remains a major concern for the press in general.

Following the numerous arrests of journalists and the closure of certain media outlets in recent years, Reporters Sans Frontières calls on President Diomaye Faye to further protect press freedom, which is a fundamental right that enables the press to inform the public objectively.

Hence the urgent need to reform the judicial system in Senegal, so that certain provisions of the penal code, civil code and family code are reviewed. In any case, this was the aim of the June 04 meeting in Diamniadio of the Commission in charge of reforming the judicial system, as part of the "Assises de la Justice". A broad consensus emerged on the usefulness of reducing the powers of the public prosecutor's office. "After the general and methodological considerations, it was time to summarize the commission's work. What I can say is that there was a broad consensus on a number of points, including the need to reduce the powers of the Public Prosecutor," asserts the commission's rapporteur, Ahmadou Bamba Kassé. This should also make it possible to protect whistleblowers, especially as one of them was arrested after denouncing a gendarme who was allegedly caught in a restaurant in Kédougou, negotiating a mining contract with two Chinese nationals.

As Senegal joins the ranks of oil-producing countries with the first barrel of Sangomar production, announced by Woodside, operator of the Rufisque Offshore, Sangomar Offshore and Sangomar Offshore Profond (RSSD) joint venture, some are still taking the path of irregular migration.

This is the case of the Senegalese would-be emigrants who have been stranded in northern Niger for weeks, and who are asking the Senegalese authorities to repatriate them.

At the same time, Senegalese customs are conducting operations that have led to several arrests, including that of a shipment of 30 kilos of cocaine in the center of the country, near Gambia. This situation testifies to the important work carried out by Senegalese customs, both within the country and in border areas. In fact, the President of Guinea-Bissau, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, has ordered the partial closure of the border with Senegal, particularly towards Kolda, where two Muslim communities clashed on June 17, the day of the Eid (Tabaski). These were the followers of the local khalife, Thierno Amadou Tidiane Ba, known as the "Futankés", and those of marabout Thierno Mounirou Baldé, known as the "Gabunkés", who have been fighting for years over control of the Médina Gounass Mosque. Although events of this kind are virtually non-existent in Senegal, the clashes were extremely violent, resulting in the death of one person and the injury of some twenty others.

On the other hand, the fact that Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko has not made his general policy statement is indicative of the tug-of-war between the head of government and the National Assembly.

He denounces the inconsistency of the National Assembly's rules of procedure, which no longer mention a general policy statement by the prime minister

since 2019 after Macky Sall abolished the post. Even if the Prime Minister's post had been reinstated by the latter, Ousmane Sonko urges the National Assembly to review its internal rules, which the Assembly's bureau deems unacceptable.

Finally, following the announcement of the death of numerous worshippers in

Mecca as a result of the Coronavirus, the wearing of masks has become compulsory at Blaise Diagne International Airport, which has set up voluntary screening tests to protect the thousands of passengers transiting to and from the airport.

CHAD

Ndjamena, a Sahel stronghold in Moscow's sights

This is the sixth time in two years that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has completed a diplomatic tour of Africa. This time, after Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville and Burkina Faso, he ended his tour in Chad. After talks with Chadian President Mahamat Idriss Déby, he went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a meeting with his Chadian counterpart. On the agenda were the "renewal of the military agreement in force since 2013 to bring it into line with Chad's objectives" and the desire to "increase cooperation in economic and commercial matters" between the two countries, according to Lavrov. "We asked Chad to draw up a list of areas in which it would like to see the participation of Russian economic operators", he told a press conference after the meeting. This visit to Chad - France's last major military ally - is clearly part of Moscow's plan to strengthen Russia's presence in African regions historically under French influence. In addition, a demonstration - scheduled for June 10 - against the presence of French troops has been banned by the Chadian authorities, citing "risks of disturbing public order."

A few days later, an explosion at an ammunition depot in N'Djamena killed nine people and injured 46 others, on the night of Tuesday June 18 to Wednesday June 19. The incident rekindled concerns about the safety of ammunition depots in urban areas, and sparked debate about the management of military stocks in urban areas.

One month after the May 6 presidential election, the Chadian branch of the NGO "Tournons la page" published a damning report on the electoral process. The document denounces political violations and serious irregularities, such as the death of several people, the exclusion of candidates and doubts about the transparency of the electoral process. Expressing reservations about the credibility of the ballot, the NGO also calls for the publication of results by polling station for independent verification.

During a state visit to Chad, the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Félix Tshisekedi, was honored by the Chadian authorities. Awarded the Grand Cross of the National Order of Chad, the medal recognizes his role as a facilitator in the peaceful resolution of regional political crises. Tshisekedi was appointed facilitator in the aftermath of the bloody repression of the October 20, 2022 demonstrations, and also worked for the return to the country, under an amnesty agreement, of then-opponent and former Prime Minister Succès Masra.

BENIN

Cotonou and Niamey: irreconcilable positions or dialogue of the deaf?

The crisis between Niger and Benin continues to escalate. The cause: the dispute over the reopening of their common border, the outcome of which is far from clear. In particular, the arrest of Nigerian officials at the port of Sèmè-Kpodji (Benin) has aggravated the situation. Five Nigerian nationals were arrested at the Beninese port after "entering the site without declaring their identity", according to the Special Prosecutor of the Beninese Court for the Repression of Economic Offences and Terrorism.

In the background, the strained relations between the two countries since the putsch that deposed the elected ex-president Mohamed Bazoum in July 2023. And now there's the tug-of-war over the border, with the loading of Nigerian oil at Sèmè Kpodji via the pipeline managed by the Chinese company Wapco. In the end, three of the five nationals arrested were remanded in custody and given an 18-month suspended prison sentence. On their return home, they were awarded the "Medal of Sovereignty Sarauniya Mangou" by General Tiani, for "highly patriotic acts [which] deserve the gratitude of the people of Niger."

With this in mind, former presidents Nicéphore Soglo and Boni Yayi visited Niger on June 24. The aim was to initiate mediation on the crisis. No official resolution has yet emerged from their mission. However, Beninese sources emphasize that General Tiani is "ready to work towards a consensual solution". The two Beninese mediators are also due to meet the President on July 1.

In addition, the security situation in the north of the country, now faced with the threat of terrorism, continues to evolve towards uncertainty. On June 4, seven soldiers were shot dead by unidentified gunmen in the Pendjari National Park. The park, located on the border with Burkina Faso, is the epicenter of jihadist incursions. In this connection, the Beninese army will soon be taking delivery of French Delair drones. This deployment is part of Operation Mirador, designed to counter the terrorist threat, mainly from Niger and Burkina Faso.

BURKINA FASO

Renewed terrorism, prolonged transition and attempts to muzzle the press

The month of June has seen an upsurge in terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso. Following the Mansila attack in the north-east of the country on June 11, which killed around 100 Burkinabè soldiers and took several hostages, Malian soldiers and Russian mercenaries arrived in Ouagadougou to provide military support. Between 80 and 120 men came to support their "brothers in arms" in the fight against the country's massive terrorism. Nevertheless, this situation has not failed to create controversy within the army itself. According to certain sources, there are movements within the barracks to protest against the orders of the head of the junta. A few days later, the armed forces neutralized more than 150 terrorists between June 25 and 26 with Operation Yamba, in response to the assailants who had been spreading terror in the area.

This upsurge in terrorist attacks comes on the heels of a series of serious security incidents. Indeed, exchanges of fire were heard inside the palace on May 17, and on June 12, a rocket attack resulted in two wounded and the exfiltration of Colonel Traoré, without him making a statement. In this climate of growing insecurity, Colonel Traoré's deafening silence has caused much ink to flow in Ouagadougou.

President Ibrahim Traoré also paid a friendly visit to his Malian counterpart, who took the opportunity to address the issue of terrorism in the Sahel, denouncing what he called "façade partners" and saluting what he described as "sincere" partners. Indeed, this historic and symbolic meeting between the two leaders of the AES is the first in the land of men of integrity since 2021. These 2 poles of sovereignty are increasingly distancing themselves from France, their historic partner, in favor of Russia.

What's more, the transition period has been extended by 60 months since last May, following the national conference attended by the nation's driving forces, which resulted in the introduction of a new charter. This allows Captain Traoré to remain in power. However, for some time now, there have been repeated kidnappings, targeting civil society players, members of the opposition and certain members of the military. For example, the kidnapping of investigative journalist Serge Oulon from his home, along with his computer and telephone, on June 24, caused considerable concern. The Conseil supérieur de la communication suspended his newspaper for a month.

In the same drive to reduce media and civic space, the TV5Monde news channel has been suspended nationwide for 6 months. The Conseil supérieur de la communication said it had: "(...) noted malicious insinuations, tendentious comments bordering on disinformation and assertions likely to minimize the efforts made by the transitional authorities, the defense and security forces and the population in the drive to regain national territory". Is this an attempt to muzzle the press, especially those trying to shed light on the junta's failings in certain areas of national interest? In response to the "detractors of the Transition", the Prime Minister made some threatening remarks: "No force will stop us". Meanwhile, in response to the peaceful sit-in by Burkina Faso's

Coordination Nationale des Associations de la Veille Citoyenne on June 25, Senegal's Minister of Foreign Affairs issued the following clarification: "Contrary to rumors circulating, neither diplomatic staff nor the Embassy premises have been threatened in any way, nor have Senegalese citizens residing in Burkina Faso, who continue to go about their business. As a reminder, these "pro-junta" demonstrators suspected Dakar of interfering in the country's internal affairs, even though these were NGO initiatives and had nothing to do with the Senegalese state.

CAMEROON

Rising terrorist threat ahead of elections

A rare event occurred in Cameroon on the night of June 15 to 16 at the Office of the President of the Republic. The office of the Director of the Civil Cabinet was burglarized and the subject of many rumors. According to a source close to the palace, "(...) nothing important was taken" apart from some material damage and missing documents. Meanwhile, in the north of the country, armed exactions continue apace. Seven dead and wounded were recorded following a terrorist attack in Tourou (Far North) by armed men suspected of being members of Boko Haram. In addition to these attacks, kidnappings and killings are taking place mainly in the border area with Nigeria.

Faced with this ongoing situation, the journalist and editor of "Week-Infos" called on the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway to address the "acts of mass murder" perpetrated in the English-speaking regions. According to him, these heinous acts are the work of a compatriot resident in Norway and founder of the Amazonian Armed Movement: "These acts of cruelty are ordered, encouraged and financed by a Cameroonian national resident in your country." At the same time, in January a committed priest launched a political movement called "Servir" to call on Christians to mobilize and prepare for the next elections in 2025. He denounced the poor governance that has plagued the country for several

years: "(...) we can see that Cameroon is plunged into bad governance, incivism and social injustice. And it's a question of appealing to Christians by creating this platform to mobilize them and make them face up to their responsibilities, especially with regard to the 2025 deadlines...".

At over 90 years of age and after more than 40 years in power, Paul Biya is still casting doubt on his participation in the next presidential election in 2025. On the other hand, the opposition is struggling to overcome the demons of division that led to its failure in 2018. As in the past, the question remains: will it succeed this time in defeating the political mohican Biya?

NIGERIA

Between economic challenges and security emergencies, the authorities are redoubling their vigilance

The news in Nigeria during the month of June 2024 was marked by the many economic challenges facing the federal state, which in particular prompted several trade union organizations to observe a general strike. First of all, the country's two largest unions, after announcing a walkout due to a disagreement with the authorities over the minimum wage of sixty thousand naira that they were proposing and should be revised upwards, announced an indefinite strike from Monday June 03. The Nigerian Minister of National Information described the strike as not the solution to the current negotiations, given that the interests of the masses should take precedence over everything else.

The strike, which began on June 03, has had a major impact on key sectors in Nigeria, such as the supply of electricity to ports, universities, hospitals and inland air transport, which are all at a standstill. This testifies to the great mobilization of the strikers, who should push the State to take urgent measures, at the risk of seeing its economy collapse. In fact, during the celebration of Democracy Day, Nigerian President Bola Tinubu spoke of the decades-long need to reform Nigeria's economy, which he considers too dependent on oil revenues. "Our economy has been in desperate need of reform for decades. It is unbalanced because it was built on the flawed foundation of over-reliance on

oil revenues," argues Tinubu. Added to this is inflation, with prices for transport, rent and healthcare rising exponentially over the months. Prices of certain foodstuffs, such as fish and cereals, have risen by over 40%.

Further north, the challenge is security. In a village in northern Nigeria, 26 people, including four policemen, were killed by armed men belonging to criminal gangs. At the same time, a dozen other people were kidnapped during an assault on a village in the north-west. This is indicative of the insecurity in Nigeria, which has intensified in Katsina and Zamfara states, and which President Tinubu promised to resolve a year ago when he was elected.

In addition, the thorny issue of reintegrating Boko Haram survivors remains unresolved. The latter, having escaped years of aggression and abuse of all kinds, are said to be the target of violence by the Nigerian authorities, who should assist them at the risk of seeing them rejoin the Boko Haram movement.

Finally, Nigeria, which has over 300 ethnic groups, still faces the major challenge of resolving inter-community conflicts, mainly between farmers and herders, as is the case in other countries in the sub-region. In Nigeria alone, clashes between herders and farmers have claimed 7,000 lives, according to a report published this year by the NGO Mercy Corps.

IVORY COAST

2025 presidential elections: opposition squabbles and ADO's candidacy remains unclear

The Ivorian political scene is marked by the fratricidal duel between Tidjane Thiam, the new strongman of the Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) and his "enemy brother" Jean-Louis Billon. A duel that promises to be fierce, given that the businessman and former Minister of Trade is increasingly distancing himself from his "boss", the President's designated heir. This situation appears to be a closed parenthesis of the Ivoirité that sowed chaos in the country during the Gbagbo-Ouattara era. Meanwhile, former president Laurent Gbagbo has already launched his campaign for the upcoming presidential elections. Indeed, on June 29 in Bonoua, the party's General Secretary met with the party's organizing committee to prepare for their leader's first outing after his investiture with great fanfare.

What about Simone Gbagbo, former First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire? She seems keen to get involved in the presidential campaign, if we are to believe her statement that she will be a candidate if her party so wishes. It should be remembered that the presidential couple are currently undergoing divorce proceedings in court, and this situation will certainly have consequences for the forthcoming elections.

Alongside Charles Blé Goudé, the former First Lady has recently been holding a series of meetings with opposition parties, with the aim of creating an alliance capable of defeating the Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix (RHDP). As for Alassane Ouattara, he is still keeping his candidacy under wraps.

In any case, the Ivorians seem to be turning away from their traditional partners in the fight against terrorism. Indeed, President ADO has stated that he wants to obtain war logistics, including combat aircraft, from the Chinese. The vice-president of the state-owned China National Aero-Technology Import & Export Corporation recently travelled to Côte d'Ivoire to finalize the contract.

In June, Côte d'Ivoire suffered enormous material and human damage as a result of heavy rains between the 13th and 22nd of the month. The national civil protection office reported 24 deaths and "flooding of roads, dwellings and the risk of buildings collapsing".

MAURITANIA

Ghazouani wins the presidential elections, far ahead of his opponents in fractured order

Despite the election campaign, Mauritania's president is very concerned about the security situation in the region. In an interview with AFP, he called on West African countries to form a bloc against jihadism, saying: "The region needs a common political will to fight insecurity". In his view, the security situation is deteriorating by the day, making it necessary to forge an alliance to block the path of the terrorists. It should be noted that Ghazouani has just won the Mauritanian elections with 56% of the vote, according to the provisional results of the CENI. For many observers, this defeat of the opposition is due to the dispersal of candidates within the opposition. This means that opposition candidates would do well to pool their forces in order to gain more votes and increase their chances of winning. It should be noted that part of the opposition rejected these results.

During the election campaign, the outgoing president had focused his campaign on security and employment to charm the young electorate and hope for the support of the international community. For this second term, he marked the campaign with the slogan "Ready for your support, in gratitude and loyalty", focusing on stability in the region and "creating opportunities for Mauritania's youth".

Mauritania presents itself as a stable country in this unstable sub-regional space. Its territory is the only one of the former G5 Sahel countries not to have experienced major terrorism since 2011. With the discovery of significant quantities of gas that the country is exploiting with Senegal, the country would benefit from working harder to stabilize its area. According to Abdellahi Ewah, a professor at the University of Nouakchott and supporter of the outgoing president, the country has become "very important for Europe's energy security, as it will become a gas producer and is very promising in terms of green hydrogen, an energy destined to replace fossil fuels". The challenge is enormous, and calls for all levels of society to be aware of the issues at stake.

The former Mauritanian Foreign Minister advocated "better control of gold resources and more transparent regulation of the sector by States", including all levels of society for an inclusive and participatory approach. He also raised the issue of the link between the circulation of gold and the financing of terrorism in the Sahel.

GUINEA

Tumult of June 2024: Reduced civic space and uncertain return to constitutional order

The beginning of June was marked by a visit to Guinea on June 4 by the head of Russian diplomacy, Sergei Lavrov, as part of his African tour. He held talks with the President of the Transition, Colonel Mamadi Doumbia, and his counterpart, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. This "express" visit consolidates the continuing good relations between the two countries.

Colonel Sadiba Koulibaly, former Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and former No. 2 in the ruling junta, died in detention on June 22 as a result of cardiac arrest due to psychological trauma, according to the results of the autopsy ordered by the military justice system. This death has raised many questions, notably among one of the deceased's lawyers, Me Lancinet Diabaté, who has denounced the grey areas surrounding his sudden death.

As a reminder, General Koulibaly was sentenced on June 14 to 5 years' imprisonment by the Conakry military court for "desertion of duty and illegal possession of weapons". Subsequently, the number 2 of the CNRD was demoted to the rank of colonel and disbarred from the Guinean army for "undermining state security, misconduct and desertion".

A few days later, the arrest of a French journalist working for the France Médias Monde group highlighted the persistent challenges journalists face in exercising their profession in complete freedom.

The journalist in question is Simon Désiré Aimé Martin of France 24. He was arrested with a senior member of the Association des Victimes du Camp Boiro (AVCB) on Sunday June 30. He held a permit issued by the Haute Autorité de la Communication (HAC) on June 28 for his report on the infamous Camp Boiro, nicknamed the Auschwitz of Guineans. The two were subsequently released after consultation of the appropriate authorization.

This arrest joins the chorus of restrictions on the press and media instituted by the ruling junta. For example, a French journalist, Thomas Dietrich, was arrested in January 2024, and last May, four radio stations and a private television channel were banned for "non-compliance with the content of the specifications".

Finally, in the face of these developments, the Guinean opposition is raising its voice and denouncing the failure to respect the transition timetable by the government, which had announced its desire to remain in power until 2025. Several opposition parties, including ANAD, have threatened to organize violent demonstrations to demand a return to constitutional order. Other parties, however, take the opposite view. This is the case of the Parti de l'Espoir pour le Développement National (PEDN), whose leader Lansana Kouyaté announced that: "We remain in a state of uncertainty, but we will never use force to say that if it's not done by December 31, 2024, we'll take to the streets".

Furthermore, the former Guinean Prime Minister, no less than one of the leading figures of the Guinean opposition, who is currently being prosecuted in connection with the Air Guinée case, believes that African politics has its own realities. Exile or prison are risks that every aspiring politician must consider at one time or another. His thoughts reflect a career marked by major political challenges. "The entire people feel betrayed by this decision to stay in power. Everyone knows that these are fanciful prosecutions. This privatization operation took place in 2002, and those who worked on it are covered by the statute of limitations.

They have admitted that I played no role, but the junta is not interested, because the Court for the Repression of Economic and Financial Offences (CRIEF) has been used to prosecute me. Faced with this desire to neutralize political players, I've taken my time, but you can be sure that I'll be back.

Exile or prison is one of the risks when you decide to play politics in Africa," says Cellou Dalein Diallo.

NIGER

Emerging conflicts, political maneuvering and mining covetousness

In June 2024, Niger faced several attacks. On June 16, a rebel movement called Front Patriotique de Libération (FLP), motivated by the liberation of former president Mohamed Bazoum, attacked the Agadem oil pipeline, causing the death of six Nigerien soldiers. This attack had serious economic consequences, given the capacity of the pipeline to transport oil from Agadem (north-east Niger) to the port of Sèmè-Kpodji in Benin. Another politico-military group, the Front Populaire pour la Justice (FPJ), motivated by the same reasons, made its mark by kidnapping the prefect of Bilma (north-east of Agadez).

In the same vein, the Tillabéri region in the "three borders" zone was not spared. Twenty soldiers were killed in a terrorist attack on the night of June 21-22. Thanks to a military raid, an influential member of the Islamic State named Mohamed Souleymane "Idouwal" and nine terrorists were neutralized, not to mention the arrest of some thirty individuals on June 20 in the same area.

Lastly, the least deadly attack was in Diffa, where four people were killed, including three civil servants and a soldier. The attack was carried out by terrorists from Nigeria. The Diffa region often faces attacks from Boko Haram. In response, the authorities have banned the circulation of 4x4 vehicles between the towns of Maïné Sorao and Diffa in order to prevent such attacks.

Meanwhile, former president Mohamed Bazoum is still in the news, as the courts have ordered the lifting of his immunity. The former Nigerien head of state is accused of "treason", "alleged apology for terrorism" and "financing terrorism". Since the latest coup d'état, the deposed President has been held in the presidential residence, fearing that his immunity will be lifted, paving the way for a possible trial.

In addition to political dealings, the RJDH (Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme - Journalists' Network for Human Rights) is angry about the toughening of the law by General Tiani, head of the military regime. This law represses the dissemination of digital data in Niger, while exposing journalists to prison sentences and higher fines. This raises the question of whether the new version of this law will not jeopardize press freedom and increase self-censorship among journalists. The NGO Reporters Without Borders shares this fear of seeing a decline in press freedom in Niger.

The Nigerien government, ever eager to assert its sovereignty over its mining resources, is withdrawing the mining permit for the Imouraren mine from the French multinational ORANO. This decision comes on top of those taken previously, and confirms Niger's determination to gradually separate itself from its traditional partner, France.

Issues with strong economic repercussions continue to make the news, as can be seen from the blocking of the transport of Nigerien oil to the port of Sémé and the arrest of five Nigerien agents of the Chinese company WAPCO, effectively bogging down the already difficult relations between Niger and Benin. The Nigerien authorities hold President Talon solely responsible, and recall the three agreements on which oil transport is based.

MALI

Political status quo and uncertainties

Food insecurity continues to weigh heavily on certain Sahelian populations, as can be seen in Mali. This scourge, which threatens more than a million people according to the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), fuels the motivation of armed groups who attack villages in the south (Orokoutan, Tégrou and Toukoto) to loot livestock, among other things. Faced with this situation, the President of the Transition, Colonel Assimi Goïta, visited the Sikasso region on June 22, accompanied by Minister Commissioner Redouwane Ag Med Ali, and announced the launch of the National Food Insecurity Response Plan aimed at supporting vulnerable populations, improving agricultural production and strengthening local resilience to food crises. Colonel Goïta also took the opportunity to lay the foundation stone for the University of Sikasso, a project aimed at the intellectual and economic growth of Sikasso.

Faced with the multiple challenges facing the country, the opposition has not remained inert. Indeed, the Synergie d'action pour le Mali (Action Synergy for Mali) organized a demonstration in the Malian capital, Bamako, on June 7 to denounce the high cost of living, the lack of electricity, and the management of the country by the transitional authorities since 2020.

Journalist Yeri Bocoum, who had covered the event, was abducted the following day, despite having been "advised" not to cover the demonstration, which had been banned by the authorities.

Similarly, the provisional detention of Hamadoun Bah has become a major political issue in Mali, bringing banking activity to a standstill for the rest of the week.

The series of arrests continued on June 20 with that of 11 Malian opponents of the transitional authorities, including presidents of political parties and movements, all signatories of a declaration published on March 31, calling for the holding of presidential elections as soon as possible, justified by a decree signed in March 2024, suspending political activities. The decree, which has been challenged before the Supreme Court, has contributed to the continuing high level of tension in the country, prompting a number of political players to denounce a biased reading of the law.

In the same vein, the video intervention by the Prime Minister, whose capacity for action vis-à-vis the military is said to be very limited, was highlighted by local observers, who noted his ambiguous and confused position. On the one hand, he aligned himself with a text openly critical of the junta, while on the

other, he called for support for the head of the transition, Colonel Assimi Goïta, while denouncing attempts to pit him against the military.

Finally, the Direction de l'information et des relations publiques des armées (Dirpa), announced that several terrorists had been neutralized during operations carried out in the Sikasso region, around the Niamazana forest in the Kignan cercle and in the Tiere locality.

During his visit to Ouagadougou on June 26, Colonel Assimi Goïta affirmed that Mali's security situation was under control, and that the upcoming objectives were to secure the referendum and the inter-Malian dialogue. Earlier, during his visit to Sikasso, the head of the junta made similar remarks, this time directly accusing France of seeking to destabilize the country's economy by printing counterfeit FCFA bills. The colonel added that Mali must now face three types of terrorism: armed terrorism, media terrorism (lies and fake news) "to pit us against each other" and economic terrorism."

TOGO

Between constitutional controversy and political pressure

The anger of the opposition and civil society remains palpable after the adoption of the new constitution promulgated on May 6, 2024. This new fundamental law establishes an honorary role for the President of the Republic and confers full executive powers on the President of the Council of Ministers. The opposition sees this as a constitutional hold-up, enabling the Gnassingbé dynasty to remain in power indefinitely. Demonstrations were organized by opposition parties and civil society organizations on June 30.

In conjunction with these constitutional challenges, the formal notice issued to the French media outlet France 24 bears witness to the tightening of state repression of foreign media.

In the space of two months, two leading French media outlets, Radio France Internationale (RFI) and France 24, have been served with formal notices by Togo's Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication (HAAC). These formal notices follow accusations of disseminating false information, exacerbating tensions between the Togolese government and the international media.

Previously, on May 7, 2024, RFI received a formal notice for incorrectly reporting that a total ban on demonstrations against the Fifth Republic was in force in Togo. The HAAC quickly denied this information, pointing out that an authorized and peaceful demonstration against the Constitution had taken place on the same day.

RFI was also criticized for wrongly announcing that all international media, including RFI, had been suspended from covering the legislative and regional elections on April 29.

France 24, for its part, also received a formal notice in a letter dated June 27 addressed to the Director General of France 24, for broadcasting false news and inequitable treatment of information on Togo, following the broadcast of the report entitled: "Les Maternités face au manque de personnel médical". The HAAC accused the channel of failing to respect the principles of neutrality and fairness in its treatment of information. The Togolese regulator warned France 24 that more severe measures, including a possible suspension of its broadcasting rights, could be taken if these breaches persist. These actions by the HAAC illustrate the Togolese authorities' increasing determination to control international media reporting on the country.

Finally, the arrest of a writer, activist and blogger sparked an outcry on social networks with the hashtag #JeSuisMartheFaré. As a reminder, Marthe Faré, as she is known, is in charge of Communications and Public Relations at the Agence nationale du volontariat in Togo. She was arrested and placed in police custody on June 26, 2024 following the publication on her tiktok account of a video showing a woman in distress who, according to

Internet users and a lawyer at the Marseille bar, Me Mawaba Songue Balouki, is unidentifiable. The latter at the same time denounces the failings of the Togolese justice system particularly on this case, which is prosecuting Marthe Faré on the basis of article 368 of the 2015 Togolese penal code, which states: "Constitutes a violation of a person's privacy, the fact: 1) to publish or distribute private papers or recordings, a drawing, photograph, film or any other medium reproducing the image of this person

without his or her consent or that of his or her beneficiaries; 2) to organize, by any means whatsoever, the interception, listening or recording of private communications, oral, optical, magnetic or other exchanges received in a private place, without the knowledge or consent of the persons in communication or the master of the premises. "

With contributions from :

Mbassa Thioune
Kensio Akpo
Adji Awa Samb
Aida Sy Ndiaye (Trainee)
Hiba Naciri (Trainee)
Aminata Ndiaye (Trainee)

Design : Thiané Thiam

Validated by Dr. Bakary Sambe

