



WEATHER IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA

Analysis of the political and security situation in the Sahel and West Africa

NOVEMBER 2024

Once again, the juxtaposition of political turmoil and security difficulties continues to dominate the news in the Sahel and West Africa during the month of November. Indeed, most Sahelian countries are facing a dual socio-political and security front. Chad broke off its military cooperation with France at almost the same time as the Senegalese authorities announced the departure of French forces stationed in the country. This picture is mitigated by the glimmers of hope for national dialogue in Mauritania, the democratic transition taking its course in Senegal, and the hatchet buried between neighbors Niger and Benin.

On the security front, jihadist attacks in Burkina Faso and Niger are prompting the authorities in both countries to step up their measures, not forgetting the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), which continues to join forces in the fight against terrorism. In short, while the regional security climate is relatively less stormy than usual, the picture painted by this "Sahel and West Africa Weather Forecast", dotted with numerous internal socio-political upheavals, is unlikely to be reassuring over the coming months.

Benin

Reconciliation with Niger and a turbulent internal front

The diplomatic thaw between Cotonou and Niamey is officially underway. General Abdourahamane Tiani, President of Niger's Conseil national pour la sauvegarde de la patrie (CNSP), has appointed Chaïbou Kadadé as the country's Ambassador to Benin. This appointment seals more than a year of political and economic tensions between the two countries, following the coup d'état in July 2023 that toppled Mohamed Bazoum. According to information from Africa Intelligence, Beninese and Nigerien oil ministers Samou Sedou Adambi and Sahabi Oumarou are due to travel to Cotonou before the end of the year to formalize their agreement on the transport of crude oil via the pipeline between Agadem (Niger) and the port of Sèmè-Kpodji (Benin). As a reminder, the quarrel between the two countries had prompted Beninese President Talon to block the passage of oil for several weeks between April and May. China, builder of the pipeline through its company China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC), played the role of mediator in the crisis.

Internally, the news was particularly marked by the arrest on November 13 of General Philippe Houndégnon, former Director General of the Police. He was head of the national police force under former head of state Boni Yayi, Patrice Talon's predecessor.

The Court for the Repression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (Criet) has charged him with "incitement to rebellion and harassment by electronic means". Currently under a committal order, he is due to appear in court on December 16. As far as we know, Philippe Houndégnon has been regularly criticizing Talon's democratic governance in the media and on social networks for several months. Houndégnon's brother, Damien Kotchikpa Houndégnon, was also arrested, following a post published the day after his older brother's arrest. "Philippe Houndégnon having been arbitrarily retired since February 2024, he has the right, like any other citizen, to opine on political issues and to contribute his expertise and experience to the proper edification of our country Benin," he expressed himself.

Meanwhile, a new episode in the "Frère Hounvi" case, the pseudonym of political activist Steve Amoussou, known for his criticism of Talon's governance. Appearing before the Criet on November 18, he criticized the "brutal and stupid violence" of his arrest.

"You can't inherit my person without inheriting the conditions of my arrest. I wouldn't wish on anyone what I've been through (...) Who benefits from the crime of my abduction?" he said. According to defense lawyer Barnabé Gbago, "taking someone criminally from another country and coming to try them is receiving stolen goods." The trial was finally adjourned to December 9, 2024. By way of background, "Frère Hounvi" had been abducted last August by kidnappers in Togo, brought back to Benin, handed over to the police and then charged with "harassment by electronic means, publication of false news". Ten days later, Olivier Boko and Oswald Homéky appeared again before the examining magistrate of the Criet appeals chamber. Talon's former right-hand man and the former Sports Minister are charged with "undermining state security, conspiracy to undermine state security, money laundering and corruption of a public official".

At the end of a ten-day mission, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, Ben Saul, drew up a mixed report. "We need more transparency", recommended the Australian lawyer, referring to statistics on terrorist attacks.

He also highlighted the overcrowding at Missérété prison, where many suspected terrorists are languishing. "There are 652 suspected terrorists in detention, including 10 convicted prisoners", he said of the prison, which has 3,000 inmates for 1,000 places. In the same vein, a report by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, dated August 2024 and made public in December, found that the detention of constitutionalist Joël Aïvo was arbitrary, recommending his immediate release. The law professor had been sentenced in 2021 to ten years' imprisonment for "money laundering" and "undermining state security" following his arrest, four days after Talon's election for a second term.

Finally, in the context of the 2026 general elections, the opposition's consultation framework met with the Minister of Justice on November 18 to discuss the audit of the electoral roll. Formed on November 10, the coalition's aim is to repair a "damaged democracy" and ensure that these elections take place transparently.

Burkina Faso

Jihadist attacks continue unabated, freedoms "on borrowed time".

At the beginning of November, the case of the two kidnapped lawyers resurfaced. In the last issue of *Météo Sahel*, it was reported that they had been kidnapped on October 10 on the RN1 towards Bobo. They are finally free to move after spending almost a month in the hands of terrorists. This case of kidnapping greatly worried the population, who were already terrified by the endemic insecurity in many parts of the country. With the multitude of terrorist attacks, the leaders of the transition seem to be tightening up the legal provisions. Indeed, the death penalty, which had been abolished by the civilian authorities under Kaboré in 2018, is resurfacing and is likely to be reinstated in Burkinabe legislation. According to the Minister of Justice, Rodrigue Bayala, discussions are underway and the issue should be included in the draft reform of the penal code. For the moment, the contours of this project have not yet been defined by the authorities. Many human rights organizations that have fought for the definitive abolition of the death penalty see this decision as a step backwards.

In this context, aware of the porous borders and cross-border nature of the of terrorism, Ouagadougou and Cotonou have joined forces to tackle the persistent threat.

Indeed, the two countries have pledged to strengthen their collaboration to counter the terrorist threat in their border regions. Speaking to the press, Burkina Faso's Minister of Defense said that "this collaboration is a direct response to the concerns of citizens". They will deploy joint security measures and share intelligence to better combat the phenomenon. For months now, terrorist attacks have continued to disturb the peace and quiet of the population.

The authorities are still determined to do battle with these "thugs" and reclaim lost territory. Addressing the nation on November 4 at the solemn raising of the colors, Captain Ibrahima Traoré reminded everyone that "the period of awareness-raising is over, and the time has come to act rigorously", while solemnly calling on citizens to adopt a culture of denunciation. In the Sahel region of Burkina Faso and in villages in the east of the country, several terrorists have been killed by army air strikes.

Meanwhile, the national army undertook a major operation between November 14 and 20, which caused heavy losses in the ranks of the terrorist groups.

Meanwhile, on November 6, several terrorists were neutralized in Priwé and Daboura in the Banwa province. Weapons and combat equipment were also seized on the same occasion, according to the Burkinabe press agency. Burkina Faso is still under security pressure, despite the actions of the new authorities, who have made the fight against terrorism their priority. In November, villages in the Solenzo area suffered terrorist attacks of rare violence, resulting in several deaths. In response to the lack of security in the area, the local population expressed their anger on November 25, demanding that the authorities restore calm. They felt that the FDS were not very present at their side to ensure their safety. Another demonstration had taken place a few days earlier, on November 19, in the north-east of the country to demand "reinforced" security and "supplies" for two communes under jihadist blockade. These were Sebba and Solhan, which have been living in the presence of terror-spreading terrorist groups for over a year.

On another front, 15 officers have been disbarred for attempting to destabilize the country, including former president Damiba, who was overthrown by the current regime. The latter is currently in Togo, with his alleged "accomplices", accused of being "conviennes".

with a foreign power" or "terrorist groups aiming to destabilize Burkina Faso" and "serious affront to the dignity of a soldier". These accusations could accelerate the process of his extradition to the country and his trial for these serious offences against state security.

In addition, the government deemed it necessary to freeze the assets and economic resources of over a hundred individuals and legal entities, and to impose a renewable 6-month ban on leaving the country. These measures concern former president Damiba and several personalities and private-sector players "close" to the former regime. In this case, which has shaken the web, the FDS are said to have refused a large sum of money disbursed to destabilize the government. During the month, a man tried to bribe members of the armed forces with a briefcase containing 5 billion CFA francs, and was finally arrested and interrogated. The money was paid into the public treasury.

In terms of security cooperation, Burkina Faso is resolutely turning towards Russia, thus turning its back on its traditional partners in military cooperation. According to the head of Burkina Faso's diplomacy, Russia is the best choice for the Burkinabe people, given the prospects in the context of growing insecurity.

cameroun

Towards a progressive narrowing of civic space?

Shocking images of Idabato sub-prefect Roland Ewane tied up and abused have rekindled the debate on torture in the country. Kidnapped in early October, it was only a month later that the images were made public, and the Central African Human Rights Defenders Network (Radhec) denounced "acts of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment of a sub-prefect (...) representing the Head of State in this region. As a reminder, the English-speaking region that is home to the Idabato commune has been plagued by armed violence between the Cameroonian army and separatists since 2016. Furthermore, according to a report by a consortium of civil society organizations, the NGO Mandela Carter and "Nouveaux droits de l'homme "the government practices a "denial" about torture in the country. "People are tortured on a daily basis. The torturers who are responsible, including for the death of their victims, are often promoted. So this is one of the indicators that the state, in its governing structure, validates torture, perhaps as an instrument of governance. "said Hilaire Kamga, one of the authors of the report presented to the UN committee.

The security situation is still not exactly rosy. In the far north of the country, several women and children drowned on the night of November 23-24, after their pirogue capsized while they were fleeing a Boko Haram attack. According to the divisional officer of Blangoua - the region's administrative unit - hundreds of Boko Haram elements stormed the village of Koutoula, then fired random shots, looted stores and killed several people, including the village chief.

On the internal political front, opposition politician Jean-Michel Nintcheu saw his home surrounded by "gendarmes and police from the anti-terrorist unit", when he was due to hold a meeting of the national steering committee of his party, the Front pour le changement du Cameroun (FCC). "We have the impression that the government of the Republic, or at least certain players in the seraglio, have become feverish as the big night approaches. (...) What is the "big night"? It's the post-Biya era "said Jean-Robert Wafo, the party's national communications secretary, speaking to RFI.

The assault on lawyer Richard Tamfu provoked a wave of indignation in the legal profession. The lawyer opposed the arrest of his client, who had received a summons without an arrest warrant from the Bonanjo gendarmerie in Douala. As a result, Richard Tamfu was molested and carried to the back of a pick-up truck.

"They then made me get into the back of their van and started beating me (...) They kicked me, pressed their hands hard on my neck and jumped on me with their boots," he lamented. The NGO Mandela Carter deplored "yet another excessive use of force."

At the same time, a
Cameroonian
driver was killed on the main road between Bangui (Central African Republic) and Douala. According to the Central African Ministry of Defense, the cause was "acts of violence perpetrated against one of the allied vehicles". The truckers subsequently went on strike, demanding an investigation into the death of their colleague, who they claimed was the victim of an "assassination" perpetrated by Russian paramilitaries present in the Central African Republic.

Ivory Coast

Tense political climate and persistent security challenges in the North

In Côte d'Ivoire, Guillaume Soro's aura seems to have diminished considerably in recent years, despite the fact that he was a major figure in the country's political life in the early 2010s. The former president of the National Assembly has been keeping a low profile since his exile on charges of "undermining state security" in 2019. The leader of the Générations et Peuples Solidaires (GPS) movement is increasingly weakened politically by the massive departures of his lieutenants to the current government. Can he bounce back and restore his image on the political scene to its former glory? In any case, he still has some way to go to position himself in this rather turbulent political arena.

Charles Blé Goudé, for his part, has also been in the news in Côte d'Ivoire during this controversial period of pre-campaigning for the next presidential election. In an interview with France 2024, he spoke of his candidacy for the upcoming presidential elections. "I have never hidden my ambition to lead Côte d'Ivoire", said the former youth minister under Gbagbo. He also took the opportunity to ask the current president to create the conditions for those who wish to participate to ease the tense political climate of recent months. He was referring to his former boss Laurent Gbagbo, whose candidacy remains uncertain. As a reminder, they have all been acquitted by this international judicial organization, but the sword of Damocles still hangs over his head.

with the 20-year sentence for which he is seeking amnesty.

In this political climate, political players continue to call for a frank political dialogue as a prelude to the forthcoming elections. The fifth phase was held after the events of 2020, bringing together the government, political players and civil society to discuss ways of strengthening peace and social cohesion. One of the main recommendations was a commitment by the players to refrain from violence in the process of acceding to the supreme magistracy. At a press conference on November 1, the Union Démocratique et Citoyenne called for a sixth phase of dialogue to "take stock of the implementation of the recommendations of the previous phase" and "envisage new recommendations" for the forthcoming elections.

The members of this organization took the opportunity to open the debate on the reform of the Independent Electoral Commission and the revision of the electoral rolls in order to prevent political conflicts. At the same time, Alassane Ouattara's candidacy continues to sow controversy within the political class and public opinion. Members of the opposition group "Les Acteurs de la Nouvelle Côte d'Ivoire" are demanding that Ouattara withdraw his candidacy for the forthcoming elections. According to them, ADO should prevent the worst from happening again by retiring.

Political tensions ...

Are we heading for the arrest of opposition leader Tidjane Thiam, as some are whispering? In any case, rumors are circulating throughout the capital that the businessman is about to be arrested for disturbing the peace. The reason for this is that, for several weeks now, the candidate for the next presidential election has been making outreach visits to raise public awareness of the need to register to vote, and to consolidate his electorate. He continues to swell his ranks within the party, and it is clear that his "rival" Billon is increasingly isolated. On November 6, businessman Maurice Guikahué met with Tidjane Thiam to discuss party issues in the run-up to the upcoming presidential election. For some time now, the former Minister of Commerce has been taking every opportunity to pillory the party's positions. Despite the majority's support for his challenger Thiam, he still maintains his candidacy, which he declared on October 25 and which he considers timely. Jean-Louis Billon has been summoned to appear before the PDCI disciplinary council for "undermining the unity and interests of the party" and "insubordination to party decisions". He is due to appear at party headquarters on December 3 to explain the charges against him to his peers.

Meanwhile, the issue of Laurent Gbagbo's voter registration continues to dominate political news in Côte d'Ivoire.

In support of their leader, the youth of the Parti des peuples africains-Côte d'Ivoire (Ppa-CI) have announced a mobilization tour to demand his reinstatement on the lists. These young people have decided to fight the republican battle alongside all their comrades, "using legal and democratic means".

Gbagbo and France reconnected....

One fact in particular attracted attention during the month: the former head of state seems to have renewed the thread of dialogue with France, a thread that had been officially severed since the events of 2010. On November 10, he was received by ambassador Jean-Christophe Belliard for two rounds of talks on the country and the upcoming presidential election, the Sahel and perceptions of France, according to sources close to the embassy. The former colony has begun discussions with the major players in the life of the nation. Laurent Gbagbo has promised Ivorians to set up a truth and justice commission, as Nelson Mandela did after the painful apartheid period. Once elected, he hopes to encourage dialogue between Ivorians to consolidate peace and national harmony. Members of his party went to the headquarters of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) to plead for his reinstatement on the lists.

Terrorism in the North

On the security front, an operation carried out by the defense and security forces on the night of November 9-10 attracted a great deal of attention. A large arsenal of weapons was seized near Diawala, on the border with Burkina Faso. This event worried many observers at a time when relations between the two countries are not at their best, and Burkina's security situation is deteriorating daily. Côte d'Ivoire has suffered terrorist attacks in the past, notably the Grand Bassam attack claimed by the group Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The threat remains persistent in view of terrorist attacks in neighboring countries. Meanwhile, six suspected members of the Islamic State group have reportedly been arrested in Abidjan, including Syrians and Iraqis. According to sources, these individuals have connections with accomplices based in Antananarivo to commit terrorist attacks.

exactions in the Sahel and Europe. The two countries succeeded in dismantling this jihadist network, which was planning to carry out an attack during the Paris Olympics. It should be noted that the FDS were assisted by US and French intelligence.

On November 13, Côte d'Ivoire and the United States signed two memorandums of understanding to strengthen security cooperation in the face of current challenges. Although Uncle Sam's country is keeping a low profile in many Sahelian states, it continues to provide military support to Côte d'Ivoire, which is taking the threat very seriously. According to its ambassador based in Abidjan, "Our aim is to continue as we did yesterday: to strengthen our security partnership cooperation between the United States and Côte d'Ivoire". As part of the drive to combat fragility in the northern border areas of the country, a budget of 11.1 billion FCFA has been earmarked for the 3rd phase.

gambia

Abandon of lawsuits against the press and controversial political tours

On November 6, President Adama Barrow decided to drop his civil suit against The Voice newspaper, whose two journalists had accused him of having chosen businessman Mohamed Jah as his successor. This resolution of the situation despite the lawsuit was reached following a meeting between the President and a joint delegation from the media fraternity. President Barrow did not fail to stress that his primary intention was only to remind journalists of their sense of responsibility and respect for professional ethics. The media delegation welcomed the President's gesture, which helped consolidate press freedom. As for the management of the daily The Voice, they appreciated the President's wisdom and regretted that his publication had caused harm.

On the other hand, on November 30, the Gambia Action Party (PAG) described President Barrow's remarks about the elders of the Lower River region as divisive, because as Head of State he must not take one tribe as a reference to the detriment of another, in order to avoid undermining national unity and harmony at a time when ethnic diversity is valued as a guarantee of lasting peace.

In the batch of reactions to President Barrow's remarks, his main supporter, the People's National Party (NPP), positively welcomed the Head of Government's statement in which he sees "a call for collective progress".

The United Democratic Party (UPD) tour scheduled for November 28 was officially postponed, according to its press release. The party regretted that the necessary authorization for this tour had not been issued, on the grounds that it was impossible for the police to manage this event at the same time as "Meet the People", a tour by President Barrow, according to the Inspector General of this security corps. Meanwhile, members of the National Assembly raised concerns about the 70% increase in the budget for the "Meet the People" tour during the debate on the Public Finance and Accounts Committee's (FPAC) report on revenue and expenditure estimates for 2025. As a result, the Hon. Yahya Sanyang, MP for Latrikunda Sadiji, considered the increase ill-advised against a backdrop of budget cuts to ministries such as health and education. However, for NAM MP Sabach Sanjal, the increase It's "worth it", because listening to and discussing with the people is a constitutional mandate.

Guinea

Uncertainties surrounding the next presidential election?

In Guinea, the possibility of ex-Colonel Mamadi Doumya, who was promoted to army general among other distinctions during the celebrations marking the 66th anniversary of the Guinean army, standing as a candidate in the next presidential election, is now being debated out loud. While several leading figures in the transition have declared their support for his candidacy, many Guineans are wondering about the consequences of not respecting the transition oath. After the 2021 coup d'état, the junta authorities brandished article 65 of the Transition Charter, which stipulates that "members of the National Transition Council may not stand as candidates in local or national elections organized to mark the end of the Transition", to give themselves popular legitimacy. But three years on, the story is very different. According to the Guinean press, since mid-September, several events, attracting thousands of people, have been organized in the name of the junta leader in the country's provinces, in order to prepare his future candidacy. The "Général Mamadi Doumbouya" soccer tournament is part of this dynamic.

Faced with this pro-junta push for the General's candidacy, the opposition in turn mobilized against the measures taken by the Ministry of Territorial Administration to place political parties "under observation", among other decisions. The media is also increasingly controlled by the transition regime, and human rights are severely restricted. The "placing under observation" of certain opposition parties, particularly Cellou Daleine Diallo's UFDG and Sidya Touré's UFR, is justified by the ministerial authority, among other "shortcomings", by the fact that for several years, these two parties have not organized a congress. These parties have been given three months to remedy their "shortcomings", but they have no intention of complying with this directive, especially as their political leaders are in exile. The main opposition leaders are organizing from outside the country, fine-tuning their strategies against the junta. This situation has created a tense pre-electoral context in Guinea, with no date yet announced for the next presidential election.

Mauritania

Between dialogue national and strengthening of the external cooperation

On the occasion of the 64th anniversary of Mauritania's independence on November 28, President Ghazouani announced the forthcoming organization of an inclusive, frank and responsible political dialogue, with a view to wide-ranging consultations. With this in mind, he stated that he was "reaching out to the opposition and the majority".

The Mauritanian President also recalled the need to find "a new mechanism and a new methodology" to ensure the success of this dialogue on all levels. The Mauritanian President also stressed the need to find "a new mechanism and a new methodology" to guarantee the success of this dialogue at all levels. However, for some observers, the opposition is facing up to its responsibilities and is expected to formulate concrete proposals for a social project for a united Mauritania. With this in mind, Hamadi Sid El Mokhtar, President of the Institution de l'Opposition Démocratique (Democratic Opposition Institution), a grouping of opposition parties, said he had discussed their role in the dialogue with Prime Minister Mokhtar Ould Djay.

On Sunday November 10, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Mauritians Abroad, Mohamed Salem Merzoug, represented Mauritania at the first edition of the Africa-Russia Ministerial Forum in Sochi.

The Mauritanian Minister passed on the words of his Head of State, no less than the current Chairman of the African Union, who was keen to advocate the integration of the African Union's Agenda 2063 into all partnerships in order to better promote sustainable development, after recalling the importance of cooperation between Africa and Russia. For his part, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed his commitment to implementing concrete actions to achieve the objectives of the meeting and "set the record straight" on priority international issues.

In its strategy of broadening cooperation with African countries, and in its desire to make its presence felt on the continent at the heart of a positioning war between Western powers and Asian countries, Russia is taking a major step forward with the organization of this ministerial forum, which will help to strengthen already strong Russian-African cooperation, particularly in the fields of technological modernization, education and economic transformation.

mali

Stirring internal, anti-terrorism and sovereignist tendencies

Following his remarks on November 16 at the rally of the M5 RFP movement, of which he is the pillar, in which he was said to have been sidelined from certain decisions such as the postponement of the election, even though he was still the head of government, Choguel Maïga continued his criticism of the leaders of Mali's transition. "The Prime Minister cannot learn from the media that the elections have been postponed without debate within the government", he declared, in addition to having referred to possible receipts granted by Assimi Goïta to new pro-junta political parties (around a hundred), whereas he himself advocated a reduction in the number of parties during the last meetings. With this dismissal, could Choguel Maïga be signing the end of his political career, or who knows, a new leap towards other adventures? Four days after making these remarks, the Secretary General of the Presidency, Alfousseyni Diawara, announced on television that Choguel Maïga had been relieved of his duties and replaced by the former spokesman for the transitional government, General Abdoulaye Maïga.

In his address to the nation after his first cabinet meeting, Mali's new Prime Minister informed Malians that General Assimi Goïta had prepared a "framework document" with eight priorities.

These include the organization of free and transparent elections - all the more so as the two-year deadline set by the junta expired in March 2024 - the improvement of sectors such as health and education, and the pursuit of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) timetable.

A new government has been appointed in Mali, with eight ministers replaced, including Bintou Camara, former Minister of Energy, in addition to Choguel Maïga. It should be pointed out that the new government has a very different configuration from the previous one, insofar as the new Prime Minister Abdoulaye Maïga retains his post as Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization.

In addition to the political wrangling, judicial issues are also topical in Mali. While Al Hassan, the head of the Islamic police in Timbuktu, was sentenced by the ICC to 10 years in prison after being found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity, six "terrorists" involved in the major attacks in Bamako on September 17, claimed by an Islamic group affiliated to Al Qaeda, were arrested. The information was made official by the Malian General Staff: "The individuals arrested are suspected of having facilitated the arrival and installation of the terrorist commandos.

who carried out the attacks, carried out surveillance missions of the sites to be attacked and provided logistical support to the armed terrorist groups".

Meanwhile, Mali's High Authority for Communication (HAC) has decided to withdraw the license of the Malian channel Joliba TV News, after being asked to do so by Burkina Faso's media regulator, Issa Kaou N'Djinn, a Malian politician who criticized Burkina Faso's military rulers on the channel. Burkina Faso, along with Mali and Niger, has formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). Within this framework, the three countries have decided, through their respective telecommunications regulatory agencies, to sign a protocol that will enable "free reception of calls and SMS" between the three countries. The protocol was signed by representatives of the three agencies, who met in Niamey to lift roaming charges between ESA mobile operators.

In the same perspective, the ministers in charge of security from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso met in Bamako to "validate harmonized technical specifications for travel and identity documents (passports and national identity cards) in order to promote the free movement of people and goods in a dynamic of deeper integration", according to a press release published on social networks. The harmonized documents will then be submitted to the Heads of State of the three countries for validation.

Moreover, relations between General Assimi Goïta and the mining companies present in Mali are no longer on the up-and-up, particularly with the arrest of the head of Resolute, followed by that of the executives of Barrik Gold, which is also a mining group present in the country. Despite the reassuring words of the CEO of Bartick Gold, the world's number-two gold miner, the transitional government seems, according to some observers, to want to make the mining companies present in Mali, one of Africa's leading gold producers, pack their bags.

niger

Between a desire for stabilization and mixed security

The arrest of Moussa Tchangari, a well-known civil society activist, under the guise of a political kidnapping, has dominated the political news in Niger in recent days, to the point of overshadowing new security measures, despite the failure of previous ones to prove their worth. On November 9, with the aim of reinforcing security in the Nigerien capital, the Regional Security Council carried out its second "coup de poing" operation, with the intervention of operational units of the Defense and Security Forces (FDS) in the criminogenic areas of the green belt around Niamey's Airport district. During the raid, around a hundred individuals were arrested, some of whom were carrying edged weapons, narcotics and pharmaceutical products.

Furthermore, with a view to further strengthening its military capabilities, on Thursday November 28 Niger officially took delivery of a large consignment of equipment from Russia, with which it has intensified its military collaboration. This strategic investment reflects the determination of the transitional authorities to "eradicate the security threats that are holding back stability and economic development".

The Minister of Defense, General Salifou Mody, underlined the importance of strengthening the operational capabilities of the Nigerien army, without failing to salute the solidity of relations between Niger and Russia and their shared determination to face up to security challenges. Bilateral cooperation between the two countries has intensified steadily since the putsch that overthrew President Mohamed Bazoum. On the one hand, Niger is diversifying its partners, and on the other, Russia has adopted a new foreign policy.

Beyond the fighting with armed groups, the transitional government is counting on General Tiani's call for dialogue to bring peace. In Agadez, this

On November 27, the Patriotic Liberation Front (FLP) and the Movement for the Justice and Rehabilitation of Niger (MJRN) responded to the call of the President of the Transition, putting an end to their rebellions, which were born out of demands for development in the Kavar and Manga zones and the rejection of the coup d'état of July 2023.

The surrender of these fighters represents a major step towards stabilizing and securing the territory of Niger. Nevertheless, the terrorist threat remains constant.

From November 27 to 29, Niamey hosted the meeting of the Committee of Experts of the West and Central Africa (WCA) region of the World Customs Organization (WCO), which will work to strengthen the modernization of customs administrations, integrate technology and optimize trade and security management, in order to meet the challenges of a constantly evolving region. In the presence of members of the Conseil national de la Sauvegarde de la Patrie and other stakeholders, Prime Minister Lamine Zeine Ali Mahaman presided over the closing ceremony of the meeting, which also addressed the prospect of a new dynamic of cooperation and modernization of customs administrations in Africa.

nigeria

Macron rolls out the red carpet for Tinubu in Paris

On Thursday November 28, 2024, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Bola Tinubu, paid a two-day state visit to Paris at the invitation of his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, as part of a drive to strengthen political and economic relations. This was the first such visit between the two countries in 24 years, against a backdrop of Nigeria's internal socio-economic crisis, exacerbated by persistent social unrest and rising inflation. France is seeking to diversify its economic and commercial partners in Africa, particularly in view of recent events in certain Sahel states. The two countries have a long-standing economic partnership, making France Nigeria's leading trading partner in Europe. French companies have long had a presence in the country, particularly in the energy sector (Total Energie).

At the end of the state visit, a number of announcements and investment pledges were made, notably by the French President who, through the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), intends to invest over 330 million euros from 2025 in food security, urban mobility, higher education, agriculture, vocational training and climate change projects. An agreement was also signed between the finance ministers of the

two countries, focusing on bilateral investment in priority sectors such as energy infrastructure and public transport.

The Nigerian market today attracts international partners not only because of its geographical position, but also because of its galloping demography, estimated at 227 million inhabitants, with projections of up to 410 million by 2050 according to the United Nations (UN). As one of Africa's most populous countries, Nigeria ranks fourth in GDP according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). What's more, on November 17, 2024, Tinubu invited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modid for two days to breathe new life into their bilateral partnerships.

Given the immense opportunities in several sectors, coveted by many countries, France considers that Nigeria could be a pivotal state in its vision of diversifying partners in Africa. At present, Tinubu's political vision is one of openness to attract foreign investors. And as mentioned in the joint speeches: "We must do more, promote more, invest more". These words also underline the importance of intensifying efforts in key areas such as security and education, which are closely linked to socio-economic issues.

At the same time, Nigeria is facing intensifying security challenges, with the rise of terrorist attacks carried out by armed groups, especially in the Gulf of Guinea, the northeast and the Lake Chad region. In fact, on November 9, 2024, the Nigerian army reported a security threat in the northwest of the country, where the armed group Lakurawa carried out incursions into the states of Sokoto and Kebbi, bordering Niger. Despite the scale of these challenges, Nigeria also faces major internal problems, such as poverty and education, as it alone accounts for 15% of the world's out-of-school children. This latter phenomenon is attributed to a number of factors, including the lack of funding for schools by the federal states.

The country is facing a number of problems, provoking anger among the population, who express it through demonstrations. People have been arrested in protest against rising prices and bad governance. On November 04, 2024, a controversy broke out concerning children accused of treason, exacerbated by the broadcast of a video of their appearance, raising concerns about their treatment. Voices were raised at national and international level, notably on social networks, calling for their release. In the face of this pressure, the children were released. However, mobilizers are calling for the creation of an independent commission of inquiry to examine the treatment of the minors, and for the release of all detainees accused of treason.

senegal

Pastef triumph, commemoration of Thiaroye 44 and sovereignist signals

The early legislative elections of November 17 ended in a landslide victory for the ruling party. According to the CNRV (Commission nationale de recensement des votes), Pastef (Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité) won 54.97% of the vote in 47 of the country's 54 electoral districts. In fact, the list led by Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko won 130 of the 54 constituencies.

165 seats in Parliament. In addition, the Takku Wallu coalition ("Unite to save" led by former president Macky Sall came second with 16 seats. Third place went to the Jamm Ak Njarign ("Peace and Prosperity") coalition led by former Prime Minister Amadou Ba, with 7 deputies. With this new architecture of the 15th legislature, El Malick Ndiaye is elected as the new President of the National Assembly. Previously Minister of Infrastructure, Land and Air Transport, he had to resign to take up the parliamentary perch.

In interviews with Agence France Presse and France 2 on November 28, President Diomaye Faye said that the French military presence was incompatible with his country's sovereignty. "Senegal is an independent country, a sovereign country, and sovereignty does not accommodate the presence of military bases in a sovereign country," he declared.

However, the Head of State made it clear that Senegal's approach was not one of "rupture", but rather of seeking a "renewed partnership" with the former colonial power. At the same time, he hailed as a "major step forward" France's recognition of the Thiaroye massacre in 1944, in a letter sent by French President Emmanuel Macron.

In this context, the commemoration of the massacre was the subject of great solemnity at the Thiaroye military cemetery. To mark the 80th anniversary of the "massacre", President Diomaye Faye took five key measures to "restore the memory and dignity" of the Senegalese riflemen. These include: a memorial to the tirailleurs at Thiaroye, a dedicated documentation and research center "to preserve the memory" of these African soldiers, the teaching of this history in educational curricula, the naming of streets and squares after the missing soldiers, and Tirailleur Day, now set for December 1.

Internally, the news was also punctuated by a mood movement by students at Ziguinchor's Assane Seck University against their living conditions on campus. "We have decided (...) to go on an indefinite strike with a total blockade of classes to demand

the completion of the amphitheatres, which have been at a standstill since 2015," said student coordinator Khadim Diène.

According to him, their university "is the only one to have only one functional restaurant, in addition to a 1,000-bed pavilion which has been delayed for two years". During a protest march, three vehicles belonging to the university's rectorate were set on fire, and the students were eventually dispersed. A video showing a police vehicle ramming into the students made the rounds on social networks. Subsequently, the university's Rector announced its closure "until further notice." Reacting to the situation, President Faye asked the government for an "emergency plan (...) for the delivery, according to a controlled timetable, of all building sites relating to amphitheatres, lecture halls, restaurants and pavilions committed by the State in public universities", informs a communiqué from the Council of Ministers.

On the diplomatic front, President Bassirou Diomaye Faye spoke by telephone with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. During this exchange, the Senegalese President was invited to Russia, where he will be visiting early next year. An opportunity to discuss bilateral relations and joint economic projects between the two countries. Last July, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov was received by the Senegalese President and Foreign Minister Yassine Fall.

In addition, on November 25, Kounghoul customs once again announced the seizure of 235 kilos of cocaine "from a neighboring country". This latest development highlights the problem of Senegal becoming a hub for drug trafficking in West Africa. At the same time, former parliamentarian Moustapha Diakhaté was sentenced to two months' imprisonment following statements deemed insulting to voters of the ruling Pastef party.

chad

N'Djamena breaks off defense agreement with Paris

The announcement came as a thunderclap. On Thursday November 28, a few hours after the visit of French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot, his counterpart Abderaman Koulamallah declared the "end of defense cooperation signed with the French Republic". According to the press release, "it is time for Chad to assert its full sovereignty, and to redefine its strategic partnerships according to national ownership." However, the document stresses, "carefully considered (...), this decision in no way calls into question the historic relations and friendly ties between the two nations." France's historic military ally, N'Djamena, however, said it hoped for a "harmonious transition", remaining "open to constructive dialogue to explore new forms of partnership" following this revised agreement in 2019.

Clearly taken by surprise, the French Foreign Ministry took note of this decision, while expressing its wish to continue the dialogue. "(...) Close dialogue is underway with the Chadian authorities, who have expressed their wish to see the security and defense partnership evolve," said a spokesman for the French Foreign Ministry.

A few days after the announcement, President Idriss Mahamat Déby referred to the "obsolete" nature of the agreement with Paris, which no longer provided "added value" in the face of current challenges. However, he added, "Chad is by no means in the business of replacing one power with another, still less in the business of changing masters. Indeed, N'Djamena's decision has been interpreted by some as a desire to draw closer to Russia, as the two countries have moved closer diplomatically in recent months.

All in all, this situation comes at a time when Chad is finding it increasingly difficult to respond effectively to its security challenges. Earlier this month, the country threatened to withdraw from the Mixed Multinational Force (MMF), set up to combat jihadist groups in Lake Chad. N'Djamena criticized the "lack of pooling of efforts".

"In the wake of last month's attack, which left 27 soldiers dead, the Chadian army has drawn up an initial balance sheet for Operation Haskanite. The Chadian army has drawn up an initial assessment of Operation Haskanite, launched the day after the bloody attack. According to the General Staff, "96 terrorists were neutralized", with 15 Chadian soldiers killed and 32 others wounded.

On the other hand, the final list of candidates for the December 29 legislative elections is now known. The Constitutional Council has confirmed the rejection of the candidacy of Mahamat Zen Barda, Secretary General of the Mouvement patriotique du salut (MPS), convicted of embezzlement of public funds. However, the candidacies of the two former mayors of N'Djamena, Mariam Djimet Ibet and Wang Louana Foullah, were accepted. As a reminder, these legislative elections were boycotted by a large part of the opposition. At the same time, several detainees held by the secret services were released. After the release of two bankers, three Russians and a Belarusian, the secretary general of the Socialist Party without Borders (PSI), [Abakar Tourabi, was released from prison](#) after 9 months in detention. He had been arrested during the events of February 2024, which led to the death of opposition figure Yaya Dillo, the late president of the PSI.

Finally, neighboring Sudan has lodged an official complaint against Chad with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, in connection with the war that has been raging between the country's armed forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) since April 2023. According to Khartoum, N'Djamena has played "an essential role in the crimes committed by the rebel militia". The Chadian side simply rejects these accusations of interference. According to a British report, over 61,000 people have died in Khartoum, mainly from disease and starvation. Meanwhile, Sudanese refugee women in the east of the country have been sexually abused by UN humanitarian teams and Chadian security forces, according to Associated Press revelations.

togo

political freedoms under surveillance?

In Togo, the transition from a presidential to a parliamentary regime has sharply divided the political class, exasperating the political tensions that led the opposition to boycott the 2018 legislative elections. These contested legislative elections, followed by a wave of protests organized by the C14 (Coalition of 14 opposition parties), resulted in arrests for "disturbing public order" and "attempting to undermine state security".

These arrests, together with the restriction of Togo's political space, have prompted some human rights defenders to warn of a backward slide in the country's democratic gains. Moreover, most of the demonstrators arrested during these popular protests have been in prison for nearly 6 years without trial, and the state of health of one of them is worrying, according to the Association of Victims of Torture in Togo (Asvitto).

For some time now, the case of these "political detainees" has been mobilizing various players in the country and internationally for their release. What's more, the change in political regime introduced by the government at the beginning of the year, from a presidential to a parliamentary system, has once again divided the Togolese political scene. Part of the opposition and civil society consider this change, which was not adopted by referendum but rather by parliament, as a constitutional coup d'état. This tense political context, with its economic challenges, followed by a youthful quest for better living conditions and a security situation in the north of the country with recurrent jihadist incursions, places Togo at a crossroads, even if the government is taking "major decisions" with decentralization policies aimed at "bringing decision-making bodies closer to local populations".

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