



WEATHER IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA

ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL AND SECURITY SITUATION IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA

DECEMBER 2024

As 2024 draws to a close, political instability and an almost omnipresent security threat continue to dominate the news. This situation is prompting some countries in the Sahel and West Africa to review their policies, focusing on building the resilience of local communities through dialogue and strengthening internal security. Between Boko Haram, which continues to sow terror in Nigeria - currently facing a major diplomatic crisis, notably with France, whose troop withdrawal from Chad is also being accelerated. The creation of the Front de Libération de l'Azawad (Azawad Liberation Front) in Mali has added a new level of complexity and concern to the security situation.

Meanwhile, suspicions are weighing on the political climate, as in the case of Niger, whose relations with Benin are still fraught with tension. Indeed, the former accuses the latter of serving as a rear base for terrorists or even destabilizing forces. This renewed tension shows that the lull between the two countries was short-lived. Added to this is the political uncertainty arising from the transitional regime in Guinea, on the one hand, and speculation on whether the President of Cameroon will be able to run for another term of office after 42 years in power, on the other.

On the security front, a lull has been noted following the double terrorist attack in northern Togo, while Mauritania is facing a series of kidnappings.

In the December 2024 issue of "Météo du Sahel et de l'Afrique de l'Ouest", most countries, like Burkina Faso, are resolutely committed to combating the perpetrators of terrorism and other serious threats to their stability.

BENIN

New quarrel with Niger and resurgence of the terrorist shadow

Clearly, the hatchet between Benin and Niger has not yet been completely buried, despite the thawing of diplomatic relations. In an interview broadcast on Niger's national television on December 25, General Abdourahamane Tiani accused Benin of serving as a rear base for terrorists and seeking to destabilize his country. According to the Nigerian head of state, Benin had acquired one hundred Chinese-made drones, which were then distributed to terrorist groups in the Sahel, all under the aegis of France and the European Union. This allegation has been roundly rejected by the Beninese authorities. Benin's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Olushegun Bakari, subsequently sent a letter to Niger's Minister of Foreign Affairs on December 31, summoning Niger's chargé d'affaires "for clarification (...) due to unfounded accusations".

The relative security lull of recent months was unfortunately short-lived. At the beginning of the month, two attacks put the security situation in the north of the country back in the spotlight. Firstly, on December 3, an attack by unidentified armed individuals in Malanville killed three Beninese soldiers and wounded four others, according to a military source.

The soldiers were part of a team monitoring the pipeline linking the Agadem oil fields to Sémè-Kpodji. Then, on December 10, three Beninese soldiers lost their lives in Pendjari Park, on the border with Burkina Faso. "Three of our soldiers lost their lives inside the park. Their vehicle hit a mine. We can't say any more for the moment," an officer with Operation Mirador told *Le Monde* laconically. Neither an official death toll nor the identity of the perpetrators has been released by the Beninese authorities. It has to be said that Benin communicates very little about incidents in the north of the country, where the army has been grappling with the terrorist threat for several years now. However, elements of Operation Miardor declared that they had carried out an offensive on December 15, "neutralizing seven suspected terrorists" in the town of Banikoara. According to the Beninese armed forces (FAB), between 2019 and January 2024, 43 civilians and 27 military personnel were killed, for "around a hundred terrorists" neutralized. These losses were mostly attributed to jihadist fighters from the Islamic State (EI) and al-Qaeda groups, present in neighboring countries.

On the domestic political front, President Patrice Talon's December 20 address to Parliament was particularly eagerly awaited. Firstly, he acknowledged that the security situation was worrying. "The only area in which we are still struggling is the fight against terrorism on the northern border," he lamented. For the rest, the Head of State expressed his overall satisfaction with the state of the country, affirming that "our successes are indisputable in all areas, even if their effects are not always immediately perceptible." At the end of his speech, Talon did not fail to castigate an opposition - in his words - "nostalgic for a shameful past". This presidential address was condemned by the opposition, such as Candide Azannai, president of the Restore Hope (RE) party, who described it as "trompe l'œil rhetoric, captive to hubris", in a post on his Facebook page.

A few days earlier - on December 11 - the Head of State had announced the appointment of fifteen advisory ministers. A decision timidly welcomed by part of the political class and public opinion, against a backdrop of socio-economic difficulties in the country. For Jean-Baptiste Elias, President of the Front des Organisations nationales contre la corruption (FONAC), these appointments raise the question of the State's lifestyle. "People say to themselves: 'This is the situation, where the economy is sluggish'. (...) When you know what the people in charge of these political posts earn, compared with state employees, compared with those on the minimum wage, it creates a problem", he remarked, speaking on Beninese radio.

BURKINA FASO

A new government to tackle insecurity and terrorism

In 2024, Burkina Faso was hit by a series of terrorist attacks, particularly in the northern part of the country. Throughout the year, the security situation worsened, with kidnappings of public figures in addition to the attacks. On December 10, Captain Traoré addressed the nation to mark the anniversary of the country's accession to sovereignty. He took advantage of Burkina Faso's 64th anniversary to affirm that his country would not return to "slavery". According to him, "We are a proud, fighting, warlike and dignified people. And we will continue to be so. He was also keen to denounce the attempts at interference by the great powers, whose aim is to take advantage of terrorism to exploit their wealth. In his words, Burkina Faso is a "victim" of its wealth.

In the same vein, on December 31, in his traditional address to the nation, the Head of State announced the creation of at least five rapid intervention battalions to be placed in strategic zones, and of a Sahel expeditionary group to reconquer the territory, a large part of which is controlled by terrorist groups.

Burkina Faso is resolutely committed to fighting the perpetrators of terrorism and other serious acts that threaten the country's stability..

At the close of the December 16-23 session of the Judicial Pole specializing in the repression of acts of terrorism, 12 life sentences and 85 sentences of 5 to 21 years' imprisonment were handed down to individuals tried for these acts.

The kidnapping of a prominent member of civil society by civilians at the beginning of the month was a major event in the country's news. Daouda Diallo was abducted in broad daylight on December 1 while renewing his passport. This act continues to worry human rights organizations, who protest against these attempts to "muzzle" civil society actors. Mr. Diallo has been known for some time for his critical stance towards the country's authorities. Indeed, the Collectif contre l'impunité et la stigmatisation des communautés (CISC), of which he is secretary general, has denounced his arbitrary abduction and demanded his immediate and unconditional release.

In December, the main news was the dissolution of the government by Captain Traoré. He decided to dismiss the Prime Minister, while keeping the other members of the government in their posts until a new one was formed. His replacement, Rimalba Jean Emmanuel Ouedraogo, presented his policy statement, which focused on the fight against terrorism, the management of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other priorities. He is determined to pursue the government's efforts in the fight against jihadist attacks, and thus reconquer areas that have fallen into the hands of terrorists.

CAMEROUN

The 2025 presidential elections at the center of attention

The end of the year seems to have been the occasion for a number of political players to put the October 2025 presidential election back in the spotlight. Firstly, in his traditional end-of-year speech, President Paul Biya - who has been in power for 42 years - said he was attentive to the demands of his supporters for the presidential election. According to Jacques Fame Ndongo, Minister of State and senior member of the ruling party, Biya's camp is talking about the "irrefragable" possibility of running for another term. The tone of focus on the 2025 presidential election was also perceptible in the end-of-year greetings of main opponent Maurice Kamto, who clearly stated his desire to be a candidate. Opposition deputy Cabral Libii sounded a similar note, wishing that 2024 would see the end of "the power that has plunged Cameroon into unprecedented misery and poverty". So far, a total of ten candidates have already publicly announced their intention to run for Cameroon's supreme magistracy.

Moreover, the announcement on December 30 of the "availability of updated lists of the electoral roll" by the body in charge of elections, prompted controversy over the validity of the figures published. According to Election's Cameroon (ElecCam), 7,845,622 voters were duly registered.

According to Jean Michel Nintcheu of the Alliance politique pour le changement (APC) and supporter of Maurice Kamto, the method of publication of the electoral rolls suffers from "opacity". Then, Hubert Kamga, an expert in electoral issues, estimated that the figure of 7.8 million was well below the projections of political parties and analysts.

The Boko Haram scare in the Far North

The biannual meeting of the country's regional governors focused on security issues. The Minister of Territorial Administration, Paul Atanga Nji, stressed the need to curb urban and peri-urban crime, not forgetting the situation in the eastern and far northern border areas, where Boko Haram continues to terrorize the population. With a view to the 2025 presidential election, the Minister has clearly instructed us to monitor the activities of political parties, NGOs and associations. Earlier this month, the suspension of three NGOs for three months, and the banning of two others, once again caused concern among human rights defenders. Among the organizations targeted were two entities of the Human Rights Network in Central Africa (Redhac), the Socio-Cultural Charitable Association of Cameroon, the NGO Reach Out Cameroon, etc. Minister Paul Atanga Nji justified the sanctions on suspicion of "money laundering" and "terrorist financing".

"We're very upset. (...) This decision has no legal basis (...) But then, we're not entirely surprised, because Cameroon has been living with the upheavals of territorial administration and these recurrent attempts to silence human rights defenders since 2014," denounced Cyrille Rolande Béchon, executive director of the NGO Nouveaux droits de l'homme au Cameroun, interviewed by RFI.

Finally, according to a report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the populations of the far north of the country are crumbling under the weight of climatic hazards and the violence of armed groups. According to the field survey carried out in June 2024,

this situation has altered the demographic distribution in this part of the country, creating some 450,000 internally displaced persons and a certain influx of refugees from neighboring countries. In addition, the study found that the population's overall resilience to high winds, as well as fluvial and pluvial flooding, was low, damaging crops and infrastructure.

IVORY COAST

Political expectations and diplomatic tensions

The year 2024 was marked by a turbulent political landscape, with electoral conflicts on all sides. Scheduled for October 2025, the presidential election is presented as an election with many unknowns. It remains to be seen whether or not the current president will run for another term, let alone who the opposition candidates will be. As a result, the spectre of uncertainty hangs over what promises to be a turbulent electoral contest.

And as is the case every year, the final day was an opportunity for political leaders to deliver their messages to the Ivorian people. Guillaume Soro's exit caused quite a stir. During his online meeting on December 31 with his militants and supporters, the former president of the National Assembly announced his candidacy for the next elections. From Mali, where he is in "exile", he took advantage of the audience to thank the SSA presidents who "enabled him to return to Africa". The former rebel leader has been absent for 6 years following his 20-year sentence for an attempted coup.

On the other hand, during his address to the nation on the evening of December 31, Alassane Ouattara announced the retrocession of the French army base in Abidjan. According to the President of Côte d'Ivoire, "...we have decided on a *concerted and organized withdrawal of*

French forces from Côte d'Ivoire...the camp of the 43rd Bima, the Marine Infantry Battalion of Port-Bouët, will be retroceded to the armed forces of Côte d'Ivoire from this month of January 2025". He decided to name the camp after General Ouattara Thomas d'Aquin, to honor the historic career of this former soldier, the first Chief of General Staff of the Ivorian army.

This move comes at a time when security cooperation with countries such as France is undergoing a period of upheaval, as is the case with the SSA countries and even other French-speaking states such as Senegal. A study by the Timbuktu Institute on local perceptions of security cooperation shows that 74% of respondents have complaints about external partners, notably France (*Report published January 2025*). For some time now, relations between states and former colonies such as France have been undergoing profound changes. While some countries have already withdrawn their foreign armies, others are in the process of finalizing the process.

The political front in turmoil

Meanwhile, the leader of the Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) also spoke out on this solemn New Year's Eve occasion. Taking advantage of the podium, he set out his ambitions and loudly proclaimed his desire to transform Côte d'Ivoire into a prosperous, united nation.

He shared with his fellow citizens his dream of “transforming our country, building a nation where we are proud of the education given to our children, proud of our freedoms, proud to be the architects of a society where neither violence nor fear have their place.”

Laurent Gbagbo, for his part, stated earlier this month that he would not give up his fight to be reinstated on the electoral roll. His conviction resulted in the loss of his civil and political rights. Taking advantage of a large crowd that had come to welcome him to his native village, Gadougou, he affirmed that he would take up the fight again and resume the march to stand for election by his fellow citizens in 2025.

On the diplomatic front, after Burkina Faso, Niger is accusing the Ivorian army of contributing to the military training of so-called Niger irredentists who have taken refuge in Côte d'Ivoire, according to General Tiani, who answered journalists' questions in an interview. The Ivorian army's response was to deny the allegations, which it considered to be spurious, in a new accusation of destabilization. “The Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire, which remain focused on the defense and security of Côte d'Ivoire, take issue with these serious accusations made without any evidence by the head of the junta in Niger...” reads a statement from General Doumbia, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire. This new diplomatic tension augurs disturbing developments between these two countries, and risks further destabilizing the sub-region.

GUINEA

After the deadly Nzérékoré tragedy, politics take over again

The political transition is keeping Guineans on their toes. Suspicions about the transition leader's candidacy are rife, and his entourage is doing all it can to enhance his image in the eyes of the public through various programs, despite the ban on public demonstrations in the name of "social cohesion". A tragedy marked the demonstrations allegedly encouraged by pro-Doumbouya during the final of a soccer tournament named after the General. A stampede occurred during the match, resulting in death and injury in Nzérékoré. Following these events, the authorities declared three days of national mourning. Despite the emotion, the tragedy quickly passed, giving way once again to questions about the future of the political situation in Guinea.

Guinea's political future seems to be in limbo, following the official end of the transition on December 31. As a reminder, in the aftermath of the 2021 coup d'état, the transitional regime had agreed with ECOWAS to return power to civilians on that date. However, initiatives in this direction have been few and far between. Even if the military regime has not made an official statement, the government's language showed that this deadline would not be respected. A few

days before the deadline, the government spokesman acknowledged that the deadline marking the end of the transition would not be respected, justifying this by "the need to rebuild the State", without however declaring a timetable announcing the return to constitutional order. The opposition refuses, however, because the Forces vives de Guinée, a group of political parties and civil society organizations, say they will no longer " recognize the authorities as of December 31, 2024, demand his departure and the establishment of a civilian transition in January 2025", and are calling for demonstrations at the same time. The organizations denounce the current authorities' "maneuvers" to ensure the candidacy of the president of the transition, General Mamadi Doumbouya, and the failure to achieve the ten major stages of the transition timetable, as well as the restriction of freedoms, the muzzling of the press and dissenting voices, and enforced disappearances.

MAURITANIA

Security turmoil and intensified cooperation

Mauritanian news at the beginning of December highlighted the kidnapping of six Mauritians on Malian territory, by Russian forces of the Africa Corps (ex-Wagner) in the company of Malian soldiers. Faced with growing misinformation on this affair, Mauritanian government spokesman Houssein Ould Medou was quick to provide details of a Malian army operation in the localities of Hassi Laghdaf and Taleb Abdallah in which “Mauritians were questioned and their vehicles seized” before being released with their belongings. In addition, the authority stressed that many of the reports relayed were false, and at no time did it mention the involvement of Russian forces.

This incident on the Mauritanian-Malian border is reminiscent of the Fama raid with Russian mercenaries in April this year on Mauritanian territory, where 100,000 Malian refugees are present.

On the other side of the border, relations between Mauritania and its Moroccan neighbor, often tense because of the Sahara question, seem to be more cordial of late. Indeed, during his visit to the Cherifian kingdom, the President of the National Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Mohamed Bemba Meguet, expressed his country's commitment to the development and promotion of historic and fraternal relations in various sectors.

The parliamentarian also called for greater involvement of MPs in bilateral cooperation, notably through activation of the Morocco-Mauritania Parliamentary Forum. His counterpart, counterpart, Mr Ould Erachid, President of the Chamber of Councillors, after welcoming the progress made in drawing up the legal framework governing bilateral relations, recalled the multifaceted challenges facing Africa and the Sahel-Saharan region. Terrorism, organized crime and human trafficking are serious security threats for the countries of this region.

However, with a view to strengthening its defense and security capabilities, Mauritania received medical, communications and firearms protection equipment from NATO, during a visit by NATO experts to Nouakchott from December 1 to 6. This support is part of the “DCB package for Mauritania”, which includes support for armed forces training, intelligence, career transition for military personnel, etc., with the aim of contributing to the maintenance of regional stability and security.

MALI

National security and social cohesion at the heart of priorities

Following the meeting of the leaders of the Permanent Strategic Framework for the Defense of the People of Azawad (Cadre stratégique permanent pour la défense du peuple de l'Azawad - CSP-DPA) held between November 26 and 30, a coalition of armed groups[i] separatists with a predominantly Tuareg base, the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) created on November 30, 2024, was created at Tinzaouaten on the border with Algeria, which is the target of strikes by the Malian army. The announcement was made from Tinzaouaten, their stronghold. The new coalition calls on " *all the sons of Azawad with other ideologies to open up to union* ", and on the countries of the sub-region and the international community to " *recognize the FLA as the sole representative of the people of Azawad* ". The FLA, which brings together several separatist groups in northern Mali, aims for independence from the central government in Bamako. The latter is accused of making no distinction between independence fighters and jihadist groups, especially with the death of Fahad Ag Almahmoud and seven other FLA leaders on December 1, 2024, just a few days after its creation. This situation calls into question the durability of the Algiers Agreement signed in 2015 between the Malian government and the separatist groups of northern Mali. " *The creation of the Azawad Liberation Front must be placed in the context of the breakdown of the agreement for peace and reconciliation in Mali, which came out of the Algiers process.*

The Malian government denounced the Algiers agreement in January 2024, and proposed replacing it with an intermalian dialogue. This dialogue did take place, but did not bring together all the components. For some of the former signatories of the Algiers agreements, armed struggle is the only option left," points out journalist Seidik Abba, a Sahel specialist and author of *Mali-Sahel, notre Afghanistan à nous*(Impacts Editions, 2022).

Under unclear conditions, the Khalif of the Omar family of Nioro du Sahel, Thierno Amadou Hady Tall, was kidnapped on December 26, 2023, following accusations of collaboration with the military authorities and Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group. The announcement of his death was made by the leader of the Macina Katiba, Amadou Koufa, according to a recording attributed to him. Without any confirmation of this recording, it nevertheless sows doubt in the minds of Malians in a context where the Nioro du Sahel region, the stronghold of the Omar brotherhood, is going through an unprecedented crisis with the rise of armed jihadist groups, with consequences for social cohesion, living together and the security of local populations.

In Mali, after four years of legal proceedings of various kinds, the transitional government and the political class are in a state of calm.

This is evidenced by the release of the former Malian Minister of Energy and Mines, Lamine Seydou Traoré, who returned to his home in Bamako on December 03 after more than 10 months under arrest. He had been implicated in the purchase of 27 generators and 2 transformers, a major contract worth 6.2 billion CFA francs awarded to Case Construction. Officials of the electricity company EDM, as well as economic operators, were also charged in this case. They were all charged with *"forgery, use of forgeries and damage to public property"*, even though Lamine Seydou Traoré has always maintained his innocence.

Still in the spirit of appeasement between the authorities and the political class, on December 05, several opponents of the authorities were granted provisional release after several months in prison. They had been accused of pursuing their political activities at a time when these had

been banned throughout Mali, and therefore prosecuted for *"plotting against the legal authorities and illegal assembly"*. Among those released were former ministers and leaders of political parties and movements who had signed a declaration urging the authorities to return power to civilians. Speaking on condition of anonymity, one of the released opponents said: *"We've all gone home. The prosecutor told us that it's a provisional release, but without judicial control or travel restrictions"*. After years of work, Mali has just taken an important step towards strengthening its security with the finalization by Malian experts of the new national security policy. This new strategic organization tool, under the leadership of General Yamoussa Camara, aims to strengthen security and prevent conflict by involving all stakeholders in a more inclusive way. In the face of the security threat, the success of the national security policy depends on the involvement of all players, and on the State making the necessary resources available for more effective implementation.

NIGER

Full commitment to the SSA and enhanced security

Terrorist attacks continue to claim huge numbers of victims in Niger. Between December 12 and 14, “39 villagers were killed in a double jihadist attack, according to the military”, in the western part of the country, in Libiri and Kokorou. This deplorable attack took place a week after another offensive by jihadist groups in the Téra region, where 21 civilians lost their lives. Also in Téra, more precisely in Chatoumane, “90 to 100 deaths” were reported among the ranks of the army, according to a Western security source. However, this latest information was denied by the authorities, who cited a disinformation campaign. This led to the suspension of the BBC for three months and a complaint against RFI, which had been off the air in Niger for several months. The military's management of the country continues to be strongly marked by this series of restrictions and ruptures in partnerships with Western powers, notably France.

Moreover, the withdrawal of the SSA states from ECOWAS has become, in a way, definitive, if not more assumed by its leaders, who support the irreversibility of this decision. Nevertheless, on December 14 2024, in Bamako, the SSA states confirmed that their borders would remain open to ECOWAS nationals, through the

signing of “this symbolic act” in Bamako by Assimi Goita, President of the Confederation, following the meeting of foreign affairs ministers in Niamey on December 13.

At this latest meeting, two key decisions were taken: the irreversibility of ECOWAS's withdrawal from the SSA states, and the imminent introduction of unified travel and identity documents. Thus, in order to preserve their sovereignty, the three member countries “retain the right to refuse entry to their territory to individuals deemed inadmissible under their current regulations”.

Moreover, with the aim of better ensuring security in Niger, on December 25, General Tiani spoke at length about the efforts made to strengthen the defense and security forces on Niger Radio and Television. According to him, “ 25,000 recruits and 150 billion CFA francs have been invested ” in one year, by the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Homeland, which has left no branch of the FDS untouched, in order to further guarantee the security and protection of people and their property. However, during his interview, General Tiani did not fail to criticize his former Western partners, whom he accuses of economic and military sabotage.

NIGERIA

between diplomatic tensions and regional insecurity

Since the coup d'état of July 26, 2023, which toppled President Mohamed Bazoum, relations between Niger and Nigeria have been marked by a certain coldness. When the military came to power in Niamey, Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, also head of ECOWAS, reacted firmly, even going so far as to envisage military intervention to restore constitutional order. Despite a temporary resumption of military cooperation between the two neighbors, recent tensions show that relations remain marked by mistrust and strategic differences.

On December 18, 2024, the Nigerian Minister of Foreign Affairs summoned a representative of the Nigerian Embassy in Niamey. Nigerien authorities accuse Nigeria of serving as a rear base for destabilization attempts orchestrated with the complicity of foreign powers and former dignitaries of Mohamed Bazoum's regime. This accusation comes against a backdrop of repeated sabotage of the pipeline transporting Nigerian oil to Benin, which is attributed to armed groups from Nigeria.

Nigeria, through its Minister of Foreign Affairs, formally denied these accusations, asserting that no foreign troops, particularly French, were present on its territory to prepare operations against Niger. General Christopher Musa, head of the Nigerian armed forces, at a luncheon

with soldiers based in the Sokoto region, adopted a conciliatory stance, asserting: "Any element using Nigerian soil to attack our neighbors is an enemy of Nigeria. We are one with our neighbors and we will ensure that such threats are neutralized." Despite these efforts at appeasement, tension persists, especially as Niger has announced its withdrawal from ECOWAS, deepening the rift between the two countries.

The diplomatic tensions between Niger and Nigeria come against a backdrop of major security challenges affecting the entire Sahel region. Terrorist groups such as Boko Haram continue to sow terror. On December 14, 2024, Boko Haram jihadists murdered 14 Nigerian fishermen in the Bosso region of Niger. The victims were among the thousands of Nigerian refugees who had fled the violence in northeastern Nigeria to seek asylum in Niger.

The North returns to violence

In the north-western Nigerian state of Zamfara, armed groups known as "bandits" continue to terrorize the local population. These gangs carry out violent raids, kidnap women and children, and use explosive devices to control roads. On December 10, 2024, more than 50 women and children were abducted in an attack on the village of Kakin Dawa. Despite the deployment of additional security forces, the population still lives in fear.

Beyond these attacks, there are also inter-community conflicts. On December 25, 2024, Christmas Day, violence left at least fifteen people dead in a district of Benue, a region bordering Cameroon that has been marked for several years by conflicts between herders and farmers, causing deaths and displaced persons.

Against this backdrop, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics has published, for the first time, a survey on crime and perceptions of security. The survey, carried out in 12,000 households across the country, reveals alarming figures: some 2 million people are thought to have been kidnapped in one year. However, the study drew criticism about the reliability of its methodology. In response, the authorities shut down the Statistics Bureau's website and summoned its director to State Security.

On December 03, 2024, one year later, drone attacks in the village of Tudunbiri in northern Nigeria caused dozens of deaths, mainly among civilians, including women and children. Initially intended to target terrorist positions, the strike is said to have been a tragic mistake, plunging the community into deep mourning. Residents described scenes of horror: bodies strewn about, houses destroyed, and total chaos. One year on, residents are calling for justice and guarantees that such tragedies will never happen again, and for greater consideration to be given to the humanitarian impact of anti-terrorist operations.

SENEGAL

From prospects for Senegal's economic competitiveness to dismissals for “inappropriate” remarks and law enforcement

Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko's long-awaited general policy statement finally took place. For around three hours on Friday December 27, the President of Pastef outlined the foundations of a vast program of economic reforms to turn around the country's socio-economic situation. “ *It is imperative to make a break of a depth and scope never seen before in our country, never seen since our accession to independence* ”, he declared. Denouncing Senegal's entrenchment “ *in the colonial economic model* ’, Ousmane Sonko announced a major tax reform, by ‘ *broadening the tax base, while gradually lowering average tax rates* ’. The aim is to “ *make all Senegalese pay less, but make all Senegalese pay more* ’, in order to ‘ *achieve an efficient and equitable tax system* ’. The Prime Minister promised that Senegal would “ *withdraw from all bilateral agreements involving a tax haven, and renegotiate unfavorable clauses in agreements concluded with normal-tax states, where these agreements are unfavorable to us.*” In addition, he announced the application of “*the principle of reciprocity for the issuance of visas to nationals of certain countries who require them for our nationals* ”. Finally, he mentions a project to repeal the amnesty law - brought in by ex-president Macky Sall - which covers the violent events that left dozens dead between 2021 and 2024.

Sovereignty from theory to practice?

“ I have instructed the Minister of the Armed Forces to propose a new doctrine for defense and security cooperation, implying, among other consequences, the end of all foreign military presences in Senegal, as of 2025 ”. With these words, President Diomaye Faye set December 31, in his New Year's address, as the date for the withdrawal of foreign military bases from the country. Although France was not mentioned by name, this statement is in line with the Senegalese president's comments on the incompatibility of France's military presence with Senegalese sovereignty. In keeping with his declared desire to redefine the terms of his partnerships rather than to make a complete break with them, Diomaye Faye nevertheless made it clear that “ *all Senegal's friends will be treated as strategic partners; within the framework of an open, diversified and uncomplicated cooperation.* ”

The political front still open?

Earlier this month, in the space of a few days, the now ex-mayor of Dakar, Barthélémy Dias, suffered two major setbacks. First, notwithstanding his election, he lost his seat in Parliament.

This follows the removal of his mandate as a member of parliament for the opposition coalition Samm Sa Kaddu, due to a two-year prison sentence - including six months' imprisonment - in December 2023, in the Ndiaga Diouf case dating back to 2011. In accordance with article 61 of the Senegalese Constitution, the Minister of Justice, Ousmane Diagne, referred the matter to the office of the National Assembly, which thus proceeded to strike him off the list. *Not to return to the National Assembly, but so that the Senegalese can see for themselves whether those currently in power believe in the rule of law*", he reacted on December 9. A few days later - on December 13 - Barthélémy Dias was also stripped of his seat as mayor of Dakar. According to a document signed by Dias himself, the prefect was asked to pronounce his resignation on grounds of ineligibility in connection with the above-mentioned affair. The complaint was instigated by a Pastef party activist.

Internally, comments made by Minister-Counsellor Cheikh Oumar Diagne on the subject of Senegalese infantrymen have caused a major controversy. In a television broadcast on December 21, he called them " traitors who fought for their brothers ". This statement, which came just three weeks after the Senegalese government's solemn commemoration of the skirmishers, was clearly ill-timed.

Finally, in a presidential decree issued on December 30, President Diomaye Faye appointed Papa Thione Dieng as the new Director of General Resources at the Presidency, replacing Cheikh Oumar Diagne.

Economic interests as a link with Mauritania?

Senegal and Mauritania continue to move ever closer to exploiting their joint gas field. Indeed, the two countries have announced the opening of the first well of their marine deposit, an important step that should lead to the 'commercialization' of the product, according to a joint press release issued on January 1. " The achievement of this milestone marks a major step towards the completion of the GTA project, and consolidates the exemplary partnership between Mauritania and Senegal, which is now destined to play a key role in the regional energy industry ", says the note. The project, known as Grand Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA), is being developed by the UK's BP together with the US's Kosmos Energy, Mauritania's Société Mauritanienne des Hydrocarbures (SMH) and Senegal's Petrosen. Launched in 2020, it aims to produce 100,000 barrels per day.

CHAD

Accelerated withdrawal of French troops, low voter turnout

The effects of the termination of the defense agreements between Chad and France were not long in materializing. A few days after the announcement, the French army began withdrawing its troops. In a press release published on December 10, 2024, the Chadian General Staff stated that "part of the fighter aircraft" - two of the three French Mirage 2000s - had left the Adji Kossei air base in the capital N'Djaména. On December 19, Paris received a request for the departure of French forces before January 31, 2025. "Negotiations are still underway," said the French military, according to RFI. This relatively tight deadline, set by Chad, is seen as a simple "pressure tactic from the hard fringe of the first circle of Chadian power", according to the same source.

Media denounce "censorship"

On the other hand, the clash between the Association des médias en ligne du Tchad (Amet) and the Haute autorité de l'audiovisuel (Hama) has had a few emulators. Following a decision by the Hama to ban news websites from producing audiovisual content, Amet protested strongly, immediately calling an indefinite strike. The Chadian Convention for the Defense of Human Rights (CTDH) agreed with Amet, denouncing "unjustified censorship" and "demanding the repeal of restrictive measures" that "undermine freedom of expression".

A meeting between the two parties on December 12 was totally fruitless, to say the least. Protesting against "a discourteous convocation", Amet deemed Hama responsible for an "informational black hole" in the middle of the election campaign. On the Hama's side, it denounced the behavior of certain media outlets as going against journalistic rules and potentially harmful during the election period. In the end, the Supreme Court settled the controversy, ordering the suspension of the Hama's decision. "Any online newspaper may be published without prior authorization and without posting a bond after the declaration prescribed by law", the Court notified in an order on December 20.

Low voter turnout

It was in this particularly tense atmosphere that some eight million voters turned out on Sunday December 29 for the general elections (legislative, provincial and local). According to estimates by the Agence nationale de gestion des élections (ANGE), the turnout for this election, boycotted by the opposition, was around 52% (36.22% in N'Djaména). Even before the end of the count, some opposition parties denounced "fraud". This was the case of Abdelaziz Koulamallah, candidate for the post of deputy for the Federal Party for Justice and Development (PFJD), who declared in a video that "the military came to vote (Saturday 28) without a voter's card or national identity card.

The same person could vote twenty-five or fifty times." In addition, local observers expressed reservations about the transparency of the ballot. Meanwhile, according to ANGE president Ahmat Batcherit, the ballot was a "success". "You can't say there was no pressure at all. These are small incidents (...) that are contained on the spot", he moderated. The results of these general elections are scheduled for January 25, 2025 at the latest.

On the other hand, the current socio-political turmoil in the country has not prevented the National Transition Council from elevating President Mahamat Idriss Déby to the rank of Field Marshal. At a ceremony held at the presidency, the Chadian head of state followed in his late father's footsteps, donning the blue and gold uniform of the country's highest distinction. The security situation is

unlikely to have improved significantly, despite a relative lull. Earlier this month, at least 27 people lost their lives in the southern town of Maro, during violent clashes between pastoralists and armed men from the Central African Republic (CAR). According to the local gendarmerie commander, an armed group from the CAR attacked local pastoralists and gendarmes. At the same time, another bloody clash between herders and farmers left at least 11 people dead, in the Logone Oriental province of the Nya Pendé department.

TOGO

Between a tense political context and a “controlled” terrorist threat

In Togo, the government announced the date of the senatorial elections, only to postpone them by a few days. These elections mark the final stage in the implementation of the new Constitution promulgated over the past year, putting an end to the presidential regime in favor of a parliamentary one. From now on, senators will first examine bills before deputies adopt them. These two chambers, meeting in Congress, will elect the President of the Republic. The new Constitution, contested by the opposition and civil society organizations, put an end to the election of the Head of State by direct universal suffrage, thus placing the country in a tense political context. Some political parties, such as the Alliance nationale pour le changement (ANC) and the Dynamique pour la majorité du peuple (DMP), which includes opposition parties and civil society organizations, announced that they would boycott the elections. The opposition continues to protest against this constitutional revision, which it describes as a “constitutional coup d'état”.

On the security front, there has been a lull since the double terrorist attack in the north of the country in November. However, efforts to combat violent extremism in the north of the country, on the border with Burkina Faso, need to be continued, and community resilience strengthened. The country has positioned itself as a mediator in the crisis shaking the countries of the central Sahel, now known as the Sahel States Alliance (SSA), along with ECOWAS. Following the latest meeting of the Heads of State of the Community of West African States, the Togolese President and his Senegalese counterpart were appointed mediators to bring the SSA countries back into the sub-regional organization. The Togolese Foreign Minister's recent announcement of potential SSA membership has raised questions across the region.

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