



# WEATHER IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA

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

**JANUARY 2025**

The West Africa and Sahel region in January 2025 is marked by a persistent security crisis, with an upsurge in terrorist attacks (Nigeria, Mali, Benin, Burkina Faso), despite national and regional military efforts (creation of battalions, joint operations). On the political front, a trend towards sovereignist withdrawal has been confirmed, with Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger leaving ECOWAS in favor of the SSA, the end or reduction of military partnerships with France (Chad, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire), and the emergence of new alliances (Turkey, Qatar). Electoral uncertainties dominate (Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea), with debates over presidential candidacies and tensions over the return to constitutional order. Finally, diplomatic relations oscillate between breaking off (Niger-Benin, Côte d'Ivoire-Burkina Faso) and strengthening (Senegal-Mauritania, Ghana). This dynamic reflects a region in search of stability in the face of interconnected security, political and economic challenges.

# BENIN

## National outcry after the country's deadliest terrorist attack

This is probably the first time that a terrorist attack in Benin has caused such a stir. On the evening of January 8, an attack by the al-Qaeda affiliated Groupe de soutien à l'islam et aux musulmans (GSIM) killed 30 soldiers. The attack took place at the "triple point" in Banikoara, on the border between Benin, Niger and Burkina Faso. It was the bloodiest attack in the country since the start of the jihadist threat. It was nevertheless one of the country's "strongest and most militarized" positions, laments Colonel Faizou Gomina, Chief of Staff of the National Guard, who admits: "We have been dealt a very hard blow." The missing soldiers belonged to Operation Mirador, an anti-terrorism unit created in February 2022 and numbering some 3,000 men. The attack prompted the Chief of Staff of the Benin Armed Forces (FAB), General Fructueux Gbaguidi, to convene an extraordinary military council.

Emotions were also felt by the opposition. This was the case for the Les Démocrates (LD) party, which deplored a "national tragedy on a massive scale". Nevertheless, the political group took the opportunity to launch an appeal. "We (...) are in a sub-region, and these lawless men who sometimes strike on our territory, strike on the Beninese side and take refuge in the other countries around us.

So for us, if there is no military cooperation (...) this fight against this nebula will be very difficult", declared Guy Mitokpè, the party's spokesman. The Catholic Church - through its bishops - expressed its sympathy to the nation and to the bereaved families. ECOWAS then issued a statement condemning the attack, while expressing its solidarity with the Beninese people. Further proof of the emotion aroused, the Confédération Syndicale des Travailleurs du Bénin (CSTB) announced a demonstration to demand, it said, the withdrawal of French military forces from the country, perceived as aggravating the terrorist threat. The demonstration was eventually banned. During a session in Parliament, LD deputies expressly asked the government to make a clear statement on the issue of the French military presence. So far, the government has repeatedly dismissed this information as false. The latest denial came from government spokesman Wilfried Hounbadji, who described the rumours as "irresponsible and unpatriotic", and as "playing into the enemy's hands".

## New dice cast for the 2026 presidential election

In a ten-minute video posted on his social networks, pan-Africanist activist Kémi Séba announced his intention to run for president in 2026. "After years of reflection, I have decided to accept your incessant requests aimed at pushing me to be a candidate for the presidency of Benin," he declared. Before continuing, "Benin is experiencing an unprecedented social crisis (...) which favors the richest while almost the entire population lives in conditions that are beyond comprehension", he justified, accusing President Talon of bad governance and "persecution" of his political opponents. In a petition sent to the Constitutional Court on January 24, Christian Lagnidé, Talon's former minister, raised a number of questions he considers "of capital importance for the stability and future" of the country. In his note, he poses two main questions: "Are we really in a new Republic since 2019? Can President Patrice Talon, in any case, be a candidate in the 2026 presidential election?". That was all it took to start a controversy, just when we thought the debate on Talon's inability to run for a third term was over. While this appeal is being examined, five jurists have lodged an appeal for unconstitutionality against the request, which they consider to be unfounded.

## Heavy sentences for Boko and

20 years in prison, 60 billion CFA francs in damages and 4.5 billion CFA francs in fines. This is the sentence finally handed down by the Court for the Repression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (Criet) against businessman Olivier Boko and former Sports Minister Oswald Homeky. The two former close allies of President Talon were found guilty of "conspiracy against the authority of the State, corruption of a public official, and false certification." Rock Nieri, Olivier Boko's brother-in-law - currently on the run - was also convicted.

In addition, the former president of the Parti du renouveau démocratique (PRD) took advantage of the New Year's greetings from some of his party's veterans to express his views on the country's political situation. The former president of the National Assembly described the situation as worrying. "We didn't want Beninese people to be in prison for offenses of opinion. (...) My strong conviction is that political prisoners must be released. My strong conviction is that those who are in exile must come back. That's how we organized the National Conference", he pleaded.

# BURKINA FASO

## Turning your back on ECOWAS and facing up to security emergencies?

Burkina Faso, like its two partners Mali and Niger, has finally withdrawn from ECOWAS as planned. Effective as of January 29, this act will have short- and medium-term consequences for the country and the region as a whole. Nevertheless, for the time being, citizens of the region will still be able to use ECOWAS administrative documents, which is good news for the free movement of people and goods. In the SSA countries, the federal passport was due to be put into circulation on January 29, as announced by General Goïta. The document formalized the divorce, which seems to have been well received by the population, including in Burkina Faso, where demonstrations of support took place. Thousands of people gathered in Ouagadougou to celebrate their country's exit from ECOWAS. On January 28, in the presence of the transitional authorities, demonstrators proudly carried placards bearing slogans such as "Down with ECOWAS", "Down with France" and "Long live SSA". Burkina Faso's head of diplomacy, Karamoko Traoré, took the opportunity to recall that the SSA was created "as a response to the need to move towards a real space for peoples, towards a real space for economic integration, solidarity and fraternity. In taking this step, our three Heads of State have taken the right step". It should be remembered that these countries are leaving ECOWAS but remaining in UEMOA. Is this to avoid economic consequences?

Meanwhile, on the international front, Emmanuel Macron's speech was the highlight of the month of January in the Sahel. The French president said that "African presidents have forgotten" to say "thank you" to France, prompting strong reactions from his counterparts, including the head of Burkina Faso's transitional government. Indeed, Captain Traoré loudly proclaimed that his French counterpart had insulted all Africans with his statement. In the meantime, the newly-elected Prime Minister is continuing his work on the security and economic fronts, as announced last December. Rimalba Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo has set himself the objective of "Intensifying the war on terrorism, while opening up major development projects".

On the security front, calm is far from having returned to the country, if recent developments are anything to go by. On January 2, a "terrorist" attack caused significant loss of life, resulting in the death of five civilian army auxiliaries near the border with Ghana and Togo, according to security sources. These auxiliaries were volunteers for the defense of the homeland, a structure created to assist the army in the fight against terrorism, which is gaining ground.

In recent years, the country has suffered heavy loss of life as a result of terrorism, with 60% of related deaths occurring in sub-Saharan Africa (UN). According to the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations at the General Assembly on January 21, Burkina Faso leads the way in terms of the number of deaths caused by terrorist attacks. According to her, the data show "a staggering 68% increase". It is therefore imperative to reverse this trend in order to achieve the goal of reclaiming the territory.

At the same time, Burkina Faso continues to lead the fight against the jihadists, at the cost of inestimable material and human losses. Military operations have driven back the terrorists in the north of the country, resulting in the recovery of significant war materiel. This act is the culmination of a series of tough raids in the field aimed at eradicating the terrorist threat and maintaining peace in certain "red" zones of the country. Another important act is the creation of three new Rapid Intervention Battalions (BIR) in the North and East of the country to intensify the fight against terrorism in these areas. In addition to this flagship measure, it is worth highlighting the effective participation in the creation of the AES army, made up of 5,000 men, in order to better face the threat together, especially in the Liptako-Gourma region.



# CAMEROUN

## The 2025 presidential election is the focus of attention

Will Paul Biya be a presidential candidate in October 2025? In Cameroon, the fog surrounding this question remains intact, rekindling debate within public opinion and the political class. This fever was first felt in the country's Catholic community. Indeed, Monseigneur Kleda, Archbishop of Douala, described Biya's possible candidacy as "unrealistic". His counterparts in Ngaoundere and Yagoua, in the Far North, followed suit. In the process, the authorities tried to bring the fever down. This is clearly why Minister of Territorial Administration Paul Atanga Nji met with the Vatican representative, Monsignor José Avelino Bettencourt. While the minister declared that relations between Yaoundé and the Vatican are "excellent", Communication Minister René-Emmanuel Sadi asserted that "there is no conflict between the government and religious denominations." At the end of its annual seminar held on January 11, the Cameroon National Episcopal Conference (Cenc) deplored in a message "the economic crisis and the particularly worrying situation in the country", in which Cameroonians are "forced to live with corruption and accept it as a daily reality, thus reinforcing this scourge." In a press release issued on January 9, opposition politician Maurice Kanto once again strongly criticized the electoral process. According to him, the irregularities of Elecram (the body in charge of elections) that he denounces, constitute a "serious breach of the law is likely to compromise the participation of many Cameroonians in the expected presidential election."

For its part, the RDPC (Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais - Cameroon People's Democratic Rally) was quick to jump on the bandwagon. Unsurprisingly, the ruling party denounced what it saw as a campaign to "discredit the government" and "denigrate" its "natural candidate", Paul Biya. At the same time, the Council of Traditional Leaders in Cameroon - comprising three hundred of the country's traditional authorities - expressed its "firm and definitive support" for Biya's candidacy at the end of a congress on January 27. Earlier in the month, on January 10, President Biya and Toïmano Ndam Njoya, president of the UDC opposition party, met at the presidential palace to discuss the presidential election. "We were able to bring to the President's attention (...) the major current concern of the main players in the electoral process, namely an electoral system that is accepted, shared by all, a guarantor of the democratic game, credible, fair, equitable, transparent and peaceful", she said at the end of the exchange.

### Hard times for human rights defenders

During the night of January 18 to 19, the premises of the NGO Nouveaux droits de l'homme - very active in the defense of human rights - were broken into. All computer workstations, hard drives and USB sticks were taken by the burglars. "This is creating a traumatic situation. For months now, we've been facing an upsurge in threats and intimidation because of our stance on civil liberties in Cameroon", lamented director Cyrille Rolande Bechon.

A few days earlier, the January 14th summons of the Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of the Central African Human Rights Defenders Network (Redhac), Maître Alice Nkom, to the national gendarmerie caused controversy. Indeed, the civil society figure known for her fight for the rights of LGBT people is the target of a denunciation by the NGO Observatoire du développement sociétal (ODS) for "undermining state security" and "financing terrorism". This is because of a forum on peace and transition organized and attended five years ago in Germany. In a letter addressed to the government commissioner of the Yaoundé military court, two lawyers described the charges as "fanciful".

Finally, a week after being handed over to President Emmanuel Macron, the commission's report on France's role in the repression of independence movements in Cameroon was also presented to President Paul Biya on January 28. For two years, fourteen researchers (French and Cameroonian historians) worked to unravel the history of this dark, buried period in Franco-Cameroonian history. The conclusions of the report, 1,000-page are crystal-clear: from 1945 to 1971, France did indeed wage a bloody war against Cameroon's independence fighters, once opposed to the former colonial empire.

## CÔTE D'IVOIRE

### Race for the next presidential election and retrocession of French bases

In Côte d'Ivoire, the candidacy of the current president continues to cause controversy. Indeed, Alassane Ouattara continues to maintain the vagueness surrounding his participation in the forthcoming elections. With nine months to go before the presidential election, he is still in a state of pendulum; on January 9, he stated that he had not yet taken a decision on his candidacy. Nevertheless, on January 9, 2025, he declared that he was "eager to continue serving" his country, while assuring that he had not yet made up his mind whether to run for a fourth term in the October 2025 presidential election. In any case, for his supporters, there is no plan B. The only good plan is plan A, like Alassane.

For his part, will Guillaume Soro stand in the October 2025 elections? His candidacy remains an equation with several unknowns to be resolved, given that the former rebel leader is still under an international arrest warrant and must benefit from an amnesty in order to run. It should be remembered that he announced his candidacy via an online meeting, as he was forced into exile. His dream of presiding over the country's destiny is increasingly shattered, given that the chances of Alassane Ouattara granting him amnesty are very slim. Meanwhile, on January 15, the Court of Appeal upheld the two-year prison sentences handed down to two of his lieutenants. These were two executives of his movement, Générations et peuples solidaires (GPS), arrested for "illegally maintaining a political party" and "undermining public order".

At the same time, the case of Laurent Gbagbo has also attracted public attention. He has been pardoned by the public authorities, but this does not erase the heavy charges against him, preventing him from being reinstated on the electoral roll. The same fate awaits Charles Blé Goudé, who still has the sword of Damocles hanging over his head from Lady Justice, preventing him from taking part in the next presidential election. The fratricidal duel between Houphouët's heirs is also still on the agenda. Indeed, Billon still maintains his "rebel" candidacy against the party's decision to invest businessman Tidjane Thiam. To resolve these nagging problems surrounding the electoral issue, some voices are calling for dialogue between the parties involved. The government, for its part, does not seem to agree with this proposal, since, according to the authorities, all these issues have already been discussed at previous national dialogues. On January 8, the government spokesman pointed out that the previous editions "enabled us to review all the concerns".

Diplomatic tensions with Burkina Faso continue to dominate the headlines. The diplomats recalled by Captain Traoré finally left Abidjan, further aggravating the situation. This strong action by the leaders of the two countries further complicates their bilateral relations. As a reminder, these conflicts have always existed between the two states under Houphouët and Sankara.



On another note, the beginning of 2025 marks a decisive turning point in security cooperation between Paris and Abidjan. How can we analyze this situation when we know that Côte d'Ivoire was once a staunch ally of the former colonizer? It should be noted that the French are not leaving Côte d'Ivoire altogether, as France is planning not a total withdrawal but a reduction in its armed presence, cutting the number of soldiers in the country from 2,200 to 600 as part of what it calls the "redeployment" of its military posture.

# GUINEA

## Expectation of a return to constitutional order?

In Guinea, the deadline for political parties to reorganize expired at the end of January. In a report published in October 2024, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, after assessing 211 political parties to "clean up the country's political scene", dissolved 53 of them and placed around 100 "under observation", giving them three months to comply with the law. This measure prompted the political parties concerned, such as the Bloc Libéral (BL), to comply with the law. For its part, the Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée (UFDG) has officially convened an extraordinary national congress in Conakry in April 2025, as the authorities' report criticized it for not having renewed its governing bodies for some time. However, the Rassemblement du peuple Guinéen (RPG) is slow to comply with the ministerial authority's demands. The party's spokesman, questioned about the measures to be taken following the Ministry's report, asserts that the "information requested by the authorities has been provided by the RPG". As for the Congress, the delegate maintains that it is "the exclusive responsibility of the party". The measures taken by Guinea's transitional authorities to streamline the country's political parties are seen by many as a multi-faceted pressure tactic on political players and human rights defenders in the run-up to the upcoming general elections. These restrictions on the political class, the media and civil society have been denounced in a United Nations report.

The report notes a "growing and worrying erosion of social cohesion in Guinea", a "deterioration of democratic space and a narrowing of civic space and the rule of law". The UN experts also raised concerns about "the lack of clarity on the timetable for a return to constitutional order", "the lack of consensus around the new Constitution" and the "potential participation of transition leaders in a future presidential election".

As far as elections are concerned, and in particular the presidential election, it's all a blur. While the transition period negotiated with the international community in the wake of the 2021 coup d'état came to an end on December 31, the dates put forward for the return to constitutional order are multiplying and contradicting each other. In his New speech Year's , the President of the Transition declared that "2025 will be a crucial electoral year to complete the return to constitutional order" and that "a date for a referendum to adopt a new constitution will be announced within the next three months". This announced date was contradicted by the government spokesman, who in turn announced that the referendum held constitutional would be "at the end of the first half of the year", before adding in front of the press that "it would be impossible to hold all the elections in 2025", whereas the Minister of Foreign Affairs had assured us at the end of the year that "all the elections would be held this year".

# MAURITANIA

## Between increased security and denser diplomacy?

With the aim of strengthening national security, Mauritania has appointed a new security advisor in the person of General Abdellahi Ebou Medienne, the Prime Minister's office announced on Thursday January 16. His mission will be to advise the Prime Minister's office on security issues, as well as the fight against terrorism. This appointment comes at a time when security issues are crucial, particularly with the exploitation of their joint gas field with Senegal.

The two countries have taken an important step towards commercializing the product of their joint gas development, with the opening of the first well in their marine field. This is part of the Grand Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA) project, implemented in collaboration with British giant BP, American Kosmos Energy, Société Mauritanienne de l'Hydrocarbure (SMH) and Senegal's Petrosen. "The ministries in charge of energy in Mauritania and Senegal, Petrosen and the Société mauritanienne des hydrocarbures [two state-owned Senegalese and Mauritanian companies] proudly announce the official opening of the first well in the GTA field," they announced in a press release. By 2025, this development should be producing nearly 2.5 million tonnes of liquefied gas every year.

Similarly, Société Nationale Industrielle et Minière (SNIM), which is 78.35%-owned by the Mauritanian state, is beating its annual production record, rising from 14 million tonnes of iron in 2023 to 14.3 million in 2024.

At the same time, the country is banking on hydrogen to reduce environmental impact and double Mauritania's iron production by 2031.

Mauritania is also strengthening its relations with Qatar in the field of vocational training, as well as on the economic front. A partnership agreement was signed to support the Mauritanian government in both vocational training and economic empowerment. The partnership agreement was signed by Mr. Emadi Ould Taleb, Secretary to the Mauritanian Minister of Vocational Training, Handicrafts and Trades, and the General Supervisor of Qatar Charity's office in Mauritania, Mr. Turki Mohamed Turki Al Turki Al Subaie. The two sectors mentioned above will be further strengthened by a legal framework that will govern and regulate this partnership.

On the parliamentary side, Mauritania's Prime Minister addressed members of the National Assembly on the financial problems of the national water and electricity companies, which are recording over 57% unpaid water and electricity bills. According to the Prime Minister, this situation is justified by corruption, which can slow down the country's development, especially in terms of basic infrastructure. At the same time, he denounced Mauritania's culture of complacency, especially with regard to financial obligations, and suggested a little more rigor to deal with the corruption that is gangreneing the country and hampering its development.

The Mauritanian Parliament also passed two bills. The first is "Bill No. 001-25, which amends certain provisions of Ordinance No. 024-91 of July 25, 1991 on political parties, marking an important step in adapting the legal framework to the current political reality". This bill is fully in line with the Mauritanian President's desire to establish dialogue in the country. Next comes the bill "n° 002-25, which repeals and replaces certain provisions of the 2011 civil status code", which comes at a time when numerous shortcomings have been noted, especially in the administrative field.

These shortcomings include the registration of births after the deadline, and the modification of civil status data, which needs to be adapted to digital technology for greater transparency and ease of use in administrative procedures. These initiatives were welcomed by the deputies, who raised fears about the dissolution of certain political parties and the potential abuse of changes to civil status files.

# MALI

## Increasing number of attacks despite the authorities' counter-terrorism efforts

In its determination to combat the terrorism that has plunged Mali into a security crisis for more than a decade, and to reinforce stability, the transitional government, through Major General Daoud Aly Mohamedine, Minister of Security, handed over a large consignment of rolling stock to the Gendarmerie Nationale on January 10. This action is just the first in a long series of government initiatives aimed at restoring public confidence.

Following suspicions of his involvement in atrocities against civilians in Ménaka and Gao, the Malian armed forces (FAMA) have finally arrested Mahamad Ould Erkehile, alias Abou Rakia, one of the top leaders of the group Etat Islamique au Grand Sahara (EIGS). État Islamique au Sahel (EIS) is the new name of the EIGS group, following the massacres of civilians in Ménaka in March 2022. This arrest comes against a backdrop of intensified anti-terrorist operations by the Malian army. According to investigations, there is a link between Ould Erkehile and other regional terrorist figures, such as Ossama Madalo, Abou Houzeifa, and Adnan Walid Alsarahaoui, founder of the group, as well as his lieutenant Abdel Hakim Alсахараoui and Rhissa Alсахараoui.

Meanwhile, in central Mali, a massacre of civilians resulted in the death of eight civilians. According to the Front de Libération de l'Azawad (FLA), the Malian army and its Russian partners from the Wagner group were behind the massacre.

The Malian army and Russian mercenaries fired on a group of Malians on their way to a refugee camp in Mauritania, according to a local elected official speaking on condition of anonymity. According to one of the victims' relatives, they were all killed and buried in a mass grave.

Meanwhile, five FLA fighters have reportedly surrendered their vehicles and ammunition to the authorities in Timbuktu, specifically to the command of the country's 5th military region. Colonel Bassirou Niangado praised "the initiative of these lost brothers who have decided to return to the Republic". The FLA's version is quite different. According to the separatist group, the vehicles and ammunition were stolen by criminals during a leave of absence. The FLA maintains that it was a "maneuver orchestrated" by the Malian army and the "Bamako junta" in exchange for financial compensation. "Since the resumption of the war [...] in 2023, never has a vehicle and its armament belonging to our Movements been taken by the FAMAs or their mercenary allies from Wagner", says the FLA spokesman. The fact remains that, since the recapture of Kidal in 2023, the Malian army has been pursuing operations against separatist movements to ensure the security of Malians on their own territory. The continuation of security operations is more than urgent for Mali in the sense that attacks do not stop multiplying for all that.



## A new diplomatic impetus in Mali?

In the pursuit of relations with other countries in the region, His Excellency General Assimi Goïta received his counterpart His Excellency General Abdel Fattah AL-BURHAN, President of the Sovereign Transitional Council of Sudan. The latter made a friendly working visit, and was invited to the Palais de Koulouba for a day of activities by Army General Assimi Goïta, President of the Malian Transition.

Passports for nationals of SSA countries were put into circulation on January 29 in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to facilitate the free movement of nationals of the three countries. The announcement was made by Army General Assimi Goïta, President of the Confederation of Sahel States (SSA). Although the old passports are valid until their expiry date, "citizens of the Confederation holding old passports bearing the logo of the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) can have them replaced by new SSA passports in accordance with the relevant rules".

Now that the passports have been put into circulation, the transitional government must face up to the allies of what could be described as Mali's most present absentee, Imam Mahmoud Dicko, who has taken refuge in Algeria. Indeed, in line with its doctrine of non-interference, Algeria seems more aware than ever that questions of national security depend on the security situation in the Sahel. Welcoming Imam Dicko can be seen as a sign that Algeria has always been an actor for peace in the Sahel. An expert in international relations considers that "Algeria has always been a peace player in the Sahel, and the hospitality extended to Mahmoud Dicko is part of a desire to support an inclusive political solution in Mali". As a result, the Imam continues to hold sway in Mali thanks to his unconditional supporters, who are influential religious leaders and popular Malian movements that support Mahmoud Dicko's fight through constructive criticism of Mali's current governance.

# NIGER

## Break with ECOWAS and persistent security challenges

The news from Niger in January 2025 was marked by the country's departure from the ECOWAS zone, along with Mali and Burkina Faso. As of January 29, these three countries are no longer officially members of the common community space, thus confirming their anchorage in the SSA. This decision was well received by the people of Niger, so much so that thousands of people demonstrated in Niamey to celebrate Niger's exit from ECOWAS. Gathered at the mythical "Place de la concertation" in front of the National Assembly, the demonstrators were keen to show their support for the junta's historic decision.

Meanwhile, on January 11, the press reported the kidnapping of a 73-year-old Austrian woman living in the Saharan city of Agadez. According to several sources, she had been threatened for some time by unidentified individuals. Armed individuals infiltrated her home, grabbed her and disappeared with her, according to eyewitness accounts. Many observers have accused the JNIM, which operates in the area with the same modus operandi. The terrorist organization, for its part, denied these accusations in a public statement. In fact, the al-Qaeda branch denies having played any role in the kidnapping of Eva Gretzmacher, a humanitarian actress and human rights defender for 30 years. The search for her is still underway, and support is growing.

Generally speaking, the security situation is increasingly worrying, especially in the north of the country, as are the rights and freedoms of citizens. On January 18, the editor-in-chief of the private channel Canal 3 was arrested and placed in police custody for "violating the rules of ethics and deontology". The Ministry of Communication decided to suspend the channel for broadcasting information on the performance of the current government. This suspension has been denounced by civil society and NGOs such as Reporter Sans Frontières, who see it as an abusive decision and are calling on the current regime to lift the sanctions.

On the diplomatic front, the situation does not seem to be going well. At the beginning of this month, tensions between Benin and Niger escalated with General Tiani's thunderous statements accusing his Beninese counterpart of servicing as a rear base for terrorists and wanting to "destabilize" his country. Since these events, entry to and exit from the country have been increasingly filtered in order to further reinforce security. New rules were enacted with the adoption of the ordinance made public on January 13, 2025 by the Conseil national pour la sauvegarde de la patrie (National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland), which governs the entry, stay and movement of foreigners in Niger.

On the subject of migratory flows, more than 600 migrants were expelled from Libya to Niger on the night of January 3 to 4 by Libyan forces. This situation has exacerbated the migratory crisis, and has the public and authorities even more worried about the fate of these returning migrants.

On January 6, the President of the Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie (National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland) signed a decree temporarily revoking the nationality of two people for various offences provided for and sanctioned by law. The individuals in question are suspected of "activities likely to disrupt public peace and security, production and dissemination of data likely to disrupt public order, and racist, regionalist, ethnic, religious and xenophobic statements".

# NIGERIA

## Between the resurgence of the North-East front and fragilities

The beginning of 2025 has seen an upsurge in terrorist attacks in Nigeria, with many victims. On January 4, 2025, the terrorist group Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP) attacked a military base in Borno State, in the northeast of the country. The offensive claimed the lives of eight soldiers. The attack specifically targeted the Sabron Gari military base in Damboa, which was set on fire, with vehicles destroyed. The attackers, travelling on motorcycles and in armed trucks, got their hands on large stores of weapons and ammunition. The army's intervention, supported by fighter jets deployed from Maiduguri, the regional capital, resulted in the neutralization of 34 terrorists and the recovery of 24 AK-47 rifles as well as several rounds of ammunition. President Bola Tinubu welcomed the intervention and urged the army to adopt a "proactive posture" by waging a relentless war against terrorist groups and bandits. Following this attack, on January 24, the army launched a ground offensive against ISWAP in a border area between Borno and Yobe states. During this operation, a suicide bomber killed 27 soldiers. According to the testimony of an officer speaking on condition of anonymity, the attack occurred at around 9.30pm, in the middle of the night. The soldiers, taken by surprise, had no time to react when a suicide bomber, concealed under thick foliage and carrying explosives, threw himself onto their convoy.

The rise in terrorist attacks in northeastern Nigeria illustrates the severity of the security crisis there. Since the split between Boko Haram and ISWAP in 2016, a bitter struggle for control of the region has given rise to numerous deadly attacks claimed by one or other of these groups. According to statistics, this conflict has already led to the deaths of 40,000 people and displaced around 2 million inhabitants in the space of fifteen years.

Despite its efforts, the Nigerian army is regularly criticized by local populations, who denounce the repetition of tactical errors. Moreover, on January 11, 2025, in Zamfara State, an erroneous army strike caused the death of at least 16 members of a local self-defense group. Mistakes such as these reinforce the mistrust of the inhabitants of the North, who are already confronted with looting, kidnappings and atrocities perpetrated by armed groups. The Coalition des groupes du Nord (CNG), represented by Jamilu Aliyu, describes a dramatic situation in these terms: "If these populations are not killed by army strikes, they are killed by bandits. And if the bandits don't kill them, they end up being kidnapped."

The continuing insecurity in north-eastern Nigeria highlights the extremely difficult living conditions of the local population. On January 12, members of ISWAP rounded up dozens of farmers in the town of Dumba, on the shores of Lake Chad, and executed them.

According to Borno State Information Commissioner Usman Tar, "preliminary findings indicate that about 40 farmers were killed". However, Babakura Kolo, head of a local anti-jihadist militia, believes this toll is grossly underestimated. He explains that ISWAP terrorists wanted to punish farmers for paying money to Boko Haram so that they could cultivate their land. This situation highlights the struggle for control of Lake Chad, a strategic area on the border between Niger and Cameroon, used as a sanctuary by these groups to launch their offensives.

In this context, the proliferation of terrorist groups and criminal gangs continues to threaten the stability of the region. On January 23, 2025, the Nigerian judiciary officially declared illegal the activities of the Lakurawa sect and other similar groups throughout the country, particularly in the North-West and North-Central regions. The Prevention of Terrorism Act will henceforth make it possible to punish more severely not only the members of these groups, but also their informers and anyone providing them with logistical support.

Finally, the security crisis in Nigeria is multi-scalar, with political and economic implications. On January 18, a fuel tanker exploded in Niger State, killing 98 people. The vehicle, carrying 60,000 liters of petrol, overturned at the Dikko junction between Abuja and Kaduna. While attempting to transfer the fuel to another tanker, the liquid caught fire when it came into contact with a generator, causing the death of dozens of people, some of whom had rushed to collect the spilled petrol. The current economic crisis, marked by rising fuel and food prices, is exacerbating the precariousness of populations to the point of exposing them to such tragedies. In 2020, the Federal Road Safety Commission recorded over 1,500 accidents involving tanker trucks, resulting in 535 fatalities. Faced with this situation, effective strategies must be put in place to combat these scourges and improve the living conditions of Nigerians in the long term.



# SENEGAL

## From reorganization to intensification of diplomatic relations?

Following the announced withdrawal of French troops from Senegal, Senegalese civilians are wondering about the conditions under which they will be dismissed and replaced. At least, that's the message they wanted to get across at a public meeting on January 15. At the meeting, employees and subcontractors of the French army based in Senegal called for "the human factor to be put at the heart of negotiations, with a social plan better than the one drawn up in 2011". Especially since, in the past, hundreds of employees have lost their jobs without any reorganization plan from the French army. Djibril Ndiaye, General Secretary of the Syndicat du personnel des éléments français au Sénégal (EFS), after expressing his expectations of the Senegalese government, particularly with regard to the reintegration of the said personnel, pleads for "a peaceful and gradual departure, while maintaining a new form of cooperation in the interests of both countries".

This call for appeasement does not seem to have been understood by Senegal and Chad, at least not after Emmanuel Macron's remarks about Africa, which Senegal and Chad considered "contemptuous". As a reminder, French President Emmanuel Macron, in his statement to the Ambassadors' Conference, accused Africa of having "forgotten to say thank you to France".

Chadian President Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno was quick to respond. He declared: "I would like to express my indignation at President Macron's recent remarks, which border on contempt for Africa and Africans. I think he's in the wrong era". Senegal's Prime Minister also expressed his indignation at Emmanuel Macron's remarks. Ousmane Sonko set the record straight, pointing out that "this is the right time to remind President Macron that if African soldiers, sometimes forcibly mobilized, mistreated and ultimately betrayed, had not deployed during the Second World War to defend France, the latter would still be German today".

As part of the accountability process, MP Farba Ngom's parliamentary immunity has finally been lifted. This paves the way for a judicial hearing and possible subsequent indictment of the businessman MP, who is currently serving his third consecutive term as a member of the National Assembly. As a reminder, the very wealthy businessman, very close to former Senegalese president Macky Sall, is allegedly involved in several financial scandals.

## The urgent need for enhanced bilateral cooperation

As part of the fight against the trafficking of timber, drugs, weapons and human beings, elements of military zone 6 and those of the Bassé infantry on the Casamance side, carried out a joint patrol along the entire Senegalese-Gambian border operation, specifically in 9 villages located along the border. The commander of zone 6 on the Senegalese side described it as an operation to secure the populations living in this border zone, and praised the dynamism shown by the two armies. Likewise, the Gambian operations chief expressed his satisfaction with the progress of the operation.

The resurgence of terrorist attacks is not only an emergency for Senegal's immediate neighbor, Mali, but is also of interest to Senegal, especially with the attack perpetrated on the night of January 19 just a few kilometers from the Senegalese border, in Kayes, which plays a key role in trade between the two countries. Carried out with heavy weapons, the attack led to the diversion of buses carrying Senegalese, Burkina Faso and Niger nationals, heightening concerns about the porous nature of the border. Despite the fact that "the country's religious depth, dominated by peaceful Sufi brotherhoods, constitutes an ideological bulwark against extremism" according to Dr. Bakary SAMBE, Senegal should be more vigilant, especially in this area dominated by illicit trafficking (gold panning, arms, drugs, human trafficking).

But the reality of the brotherhoods is different in this zone, perceived as the most exposed, than in the center of the country.

As part of the drive to strengthen relations between Mauritania and Senegal, Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko made an official visit to Mauritania on January 13 and 14. At the invitation of his counterpart El Moctar Ould Diay, the visit focused on strategic areas such as Senegalese-Mauritanian cooperation, notably energy, transport, security, fisheries and above all the conditions of Senegalese nationals living in Mauritania.

In the same vein, Ghanaian President John Mahama visited Senegal on January 17. Welcomed by his Senegalese counterpart Bassirou Diomaye Faye, the Ghanaian president's visit was no coincidence. Indeed, it was a working visit aimed at strengthening relations between the two countries, particularly in the economic and commercial fields, with a view to diversifying trade in key sectors such as hydrocarbons, defense, security, education, health and tourism. Exchanges also focused on the regional situation, especially within ECOWAS. The two counterparts reaffirmed their commitment to a secure, prosperous and united Africa.

# TCHAD

## The end of the French military presence

A few hours after the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, heavy gunfire was heard on the evening of January 8 in the center of N'Djamena, near the presidency. Some twenty assailants attempted to attack the presidential compound in the Djambel Bahr district. According to government spokesman Abderaman Koulamalla, the attack was an "attempt to destabilize (...) young people from a district of Ndjamaena and from a Chadian community".

Ruling out the possibility of terrorism, he tried to put the incident into perspective. "On the face of it, it has nothing to do with Boko Haram (...). If there were no deaths, it would make you smile, because it's a bunch of nickel-and-diming gangs who came with wire cutters, knives, no weapons of war", he asserted. He continued: "There's nothing to panic about. There's no threat to the security of our country (...). It's really an epiphenomenon that we'll soon forget." Reacting to the incident, President Mahamat Idriss Déby said that "the assailants in this vain attempt were aiming to vitrify [him]." According to the government, the attack left 20 dead: 18 of the assailants and two soldiers. An investigation into the incident has been entrusted to the public prosecutor.

### France out, Turkey in?

Meanwhile, January saw the end of a century-long French military presence in Chad. On January 11, the military base in Abéché - the country's third most populous city - was officially handed back by France. Just over two weeks later, on January 30, the Adji Kosseï base in Ndjamaena was handed over. The last 180 soldiers left Chadian soil on the same day. It was on the runway of this base that Chad celebrated the official end of the French military presence in the country the following morning. Another sign of the divorce between France and Chad was the reaction of the Chadian President, who described the remarks made by French President Emmanuel Macron as "remarks bordering on contempt for Africa and Africans". Macron had lamented the "ingratitude" of African heads of state, who he claimed had "forgotten" to "say thank you" when France intervened militarily in the Sahel in 2013.

At the same time, RFI reports, Turkish drones will be installed at the Faya-Largeau base in the north of the country, where Turkey already has a presence, and probably soon at the Abeche base. This is not, however, a full-scale military presence, as the source points out, "but rather technicians, specialists in charge of operating the Bayraktar aerial drones acquired by Chad. The personnel deployed in Faya-Largeau are therefore drone pilots or Bayraktar employees.

## Déby, the country's leader more than ever?

Unsurprisingly, the ruling party won the legislative elections held on December 29, 2024, which were boycotted by part of the opposition. The Mouvement patriotique du salut (MPS) won an absolute majority of seats in the new National Assembly: 124 out of a total of 188. A week after the publication of these results by the Constitutional Court, President Déby was appointed national president of the ruling party on January 30, at the 13th MPS congress. Until then, he had only been honorary president. On the eve of this distinction, the opposition Succès Masra said he was ready to work with President Déby.

"We are ready to work with the President of the Republic, Marshal Mahamat Idriss Déby, to bring the added value of our political force to this meeting, which is a republican meeting in the service of the Chadian people", he declared. A curious call, to say the least, given that the former Prime Minister's party boycotted the recent legislative elections.

# TOGO

## Senatorial elections in sight, feet in ECOWAS and hand extended to SSA

Will Togo join the Sahel Alliance? This question has been raised by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who suggested that Togo's membership of the Sahel Alliance "is not impossible". Right from the start of the crisis between ECOWAS and the 3 countries that are now members of the SSA - Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger - Togo positioned itself as a mediator, as these countries faced economic sanctions from the sub-regional organization following successive coups d'état. While some see Togo's desire to join the SSA, despite being a member of ECOWAS, as a geopolitical ambition, others see it as a political calculation linked to national challenges, for a country faced with jihadist incursions and a major constitutional revision that has exasperated divisions within the political players.

The constitutional reform that will enable the country to move from a presidential to a parliamentary system of government will come into effect definitively with the election of senators. Preparations for this election, scheduled for February, are progressing rapidly, with the Constitutional Court having published the final list of candidates. The election will take place a few days after the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the death of former President Gnassingbé Eyadema, and a few days after the recall to God of General Akawilou Sizing Walla, a friend of the late

President and a key player in Togolese political life through the various positions he held.

A seasoned politician and military man, Togo pays tribute to a man who knew how to evolve in the political and security spheres, at a time when the country was at a crossroads on both fronts.

Meanwhile, the Dynamique pour la majorité du peuple (DMP), a grouping of Togolese opposition political parties and civil society organizations, and the Alliance nationale pour le changement (ANC) had already announced their boycott of the senatorial election. Although the government rearranged the timetable for this election following a request from the Cadre Permanent de Concertation (CPC), asking for more time to allow political players to better prepare, this decision seems to have changed nothing for part of the political class and civil society, who have decided not to take part in this election, exacerbating the political divisions within the players. While the political scene is marked by divisions over the new Constitution and the ongoing electoral processes, the security situation seems to be brighter, with a clear decline in terrorist attacks, thanks to the vigilance of the defense and security forces and the efforts of the Togolese government.



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