



WEATHER IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA

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

FEBRUARY 2025

The weather report for February 2025 looks back on the highlights of the political and security situation in West Africa and the Sahel. In this issue, similtudes in terms of security challenges linked to terrorism, (Benin, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Togo) with terrorist attacks in Banikoara, Kobé, Tillabéri, Djibo, in addition to territorial reconquest efforts (Burkina: 71%). Pre-election political tensions dominate (Benin 2026, Cameroon 2025, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire), often marked by internal divisions and controversies (electoral audit in Benin, "Ivoirité" in Côte d'Ivoire). Repression of the opposition or civil society is recurrent (Guinea, Mali, Niger), as are contested political transitions (Niger, Burkina Faso). Humanitarian crises, exacerbated by insecurity or refugees (Chad: 716,000 Sudanese), and economic issues (austerity in Senegal, debt of 18,558 billion FCFA) are also on the agenda in these countries. Finally, a drive to strengthen diplomacy in several countries (Benin, Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire) is underway.

Political contexts also differ: Chad is dominated by the MPS (45/46 seats), while Togo is moving towards a contested parliamentary system, while Niger is extending its transition (5 years) with the dissolution of parties. Senegal stands out for its economic progress (oil: 595.5 billion FCFA), while Mali seems to be facing insecurity and dissent (boycott of the reconciliation charter). Mauritania is banking on energy agreements with Morocco, while Nigeria faces multiple crises (cybercrime, school fire: 17 deaths). Gambia celebrates its independence, but the threatening return of Jammeh sets it apart. Finally, Côte d'Ivoire strengthens its military sovereignty (French retrocession), while Cameroon remains uncertain about Biya.

BENIN

Towards an opening up of the electoral game?

He has clearly stated that he will not be a candidate in the next presidential elections. But long before that, after many criticisms and complaints about the integrity of the electoral system, President Patrice Talon had already shown an openness, by accepting the audit of the Computerized Electoral List (LEI) advocated by the opposition, with a view to the 2026 presidential election. On February 24 members of the audit steering committee met with the Head of State, Talon, to discuss the modalities of the audit, its timetable and the guarantees of independence of the experts hired. A few days earlier, the Council of Ministers meeting on February 19 had approved the disbursement of 159.4 million FCFA to support this procedure. Talon was firm, however, when he spoke to the five civil society experts appointed to conduct the audit. "It's a question of identifying shortcomings, whether or not they are attributable to our current model, in order to envisage progressive improvements", he said. You're not on a mission for the opposition, you're on a mission for the Republic".

As far as the Head of State was concerned, this audit was intended to be of a corrective nature and would not call into question the timetable for the electoral process. Moreover, revision of the electoral code is not on the agenda.

"I don't want to hear that until it's perfect, there won't be any more elections in Benin", he insisted. Proof of the high stakes involved, the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (Céna) and the Economic Commission of West African States (Ecowas) held a meeting to discuss the 2026 general election on February 26 . The opposition has three main demands in this regard. In addition to the audit of the electoral file to guarantee the transparency of the electoral process, it is calling for the revision of the electoral code, deemed to be exclusive, and the inclusion of opposition representatives in electoral bodies, notably the Cena and the Constitutional Court.

Talks for 2026?

Earlier this month, former President Boni Yayi visited two of Benin's leading political figures: Nicéphore Soglo, former President of the Republic, and Adrien Houngbédji, former President of the National Assembly. Officially, the President of the opposition party Les Démocrates (LD) presented New Year's greetings to the two men. However, some members of the public believe this to be a possible sign of negotiations with a view to 2026. Moreover, after Houngbédji's criticism of Talon's governance.

In principle, his Parti du renouveau démocratique (PRD), which he founded in 1990, has merged with one of the presidential parties, the Union Progressiste du Renouveau (UPR). Is this the beginning of a discordance of votes in the presidential camp? In any case, at a gathering of PRD militants in Porto-Novo to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the death of El Hadj Moucharafou Gbadamassi, the party's former vice-president, Me Houngbédji made a remark that was enigmatic, to say the least. "Pray for me, because the enemy is not happy. If you pray for me, his plan won't work", he declared.

Yayi Boni also continued his New Year's greetings tour. On February 11, the former president paid a visit to Bruno Amoussou, ex-president of the National Assembly and former minister under Mathieu Kérékou. Nothing substantial came out of these exchanges on the country's political situation. The Les Démocrates party has announced that the nomination process for the 2026 presidential election has been launched.

Between security challenges and diplomatic openness

In the north of the country, jihadist attacks are becoming more regular than ever. After the bloody attack of January 8, a new attack on February 15, 2025 in Banikoara was recorded. According to military sources, the provisional toll was six soldiers missing and 17 assailants neutralized.

In the wake of this latest setback, Major General Fructueux Gbaguidi, Chief of General Staff of the Benin Armed Forces (FAB), visited Camp Séro-Kpéra in Parakou, on February 18, the strategic heart of Operation Mirador. He led a working session with military officials, in the presence of the Chief of Staff of the National Guard and the Head of the Operations and Employment Division. Discussions at the meeting focused on re-evaluating and optimizing defense strategies, enhancing the effectiveness of Operation Mirador, and stepping up the pressure on attackers.

On the other hand, Benin has been given a new lease of diplomatic life. Six new ambassadors have been appointed to India, China, Morocco, the United States, Kuwait and Qatar. These appointments are part of the country's drive to strengthen its bilateral relations on the international stage. However, there is a downside to the recall of the ambassador to Niger for remarks considered to run counter to the official positions of the authorities. At a ceremony held on February 1 in Gaya (southern Niger), Gildas Agonkan declared: "On behalf of all Beninese, on behalf of the Beninese authorities, I would like to ask forgiveness from the people of Niger, because we are brothers. Serious things have happened that have caused problems here in Niger, here in Gaya."

BURKINA FASO

Post-ECOWAS and security uncertainties

In Burkina Faso, the question of leaving ECOWAS is still in the news, since the decision was taken with Mali and Niger. The issue of mobility within this regional area is a source of concern for many observers. For this reason, SSA ministerial delegations met in Bamako on February 22 and 23 to discuss the urgent need to open talks with their ECOWAS counterparts on the free movement of people and goods. The leaders of the three countries say they are "ready to negotiate in a constructive spirit". However, the confederation's passport was announced with great fanfare, as was the organization's new flag.

Meanwhile, the waves of support for Captain Traoré continue across the country. This time, it was the turn of the people of Markoye who marched on February 22 to show their support for the President of the transition, the FDS and the leaders of the SSA. This peaceful demonstration was attended by thousands of Burkinabè living in a locality facing security and socio-economic challenges. This community, among many others, is looking to the current regime for solutions to their problems.

On the security front, terrorist attacks continue to disturb the sleep of the population, despite a marked decline in recent months. In early February, the town of Djibo was the scene of a violent terrorist attack claimed by the Groupe de soutien à l'islam et aux musulmans (JNIM). For several years now, the town has been "blockaded" by this armed group, which often carries out atrocities there.

. In 2024, the jihadists' ultimatum caused many of Djibo's inhabitants to flee. This raises the nagging issue of territorial control. The authorities have deployed heavy artillery to confront the jihadists and reconquer the territory, much of which is beyond their control. Captain Traoré has made this territorial reconquest a priority.

According to Brigadier General Célestin Simporé, the rate of occupation and reconquest of the territory is around 71%. A great step forward compared to the situation three years ago. He took advantage of the tribute paid to the fighting forces on February 14, 2025, to assert that the war is far from over. According to him, "...even if the terrorist groups are weakened on all levels, namely logistically and psychologically. We are not yet at the end of the tunnel. We are well aware of this. He is therefore aware of the scale of the terrorist threat, and reaffirms the government's firm resolve to intensify efforts in the fight against the advance of terrorism.

On the ground, the armed forces continue to inflict heavy losses on the terrorist groups present in the country. For example, an operation by the 10th Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR 10), based in Dédougou, and the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) countered an attack on February 8. This large-scale operation resulted in the recovery of a significant quantity of weapons and equipment. Over the past few months, these sweep operations have been continuing, and have enabled terrorist attacks to be thwarted.

Surveillance stepped up around the entry and exit of is also being foreigners. At the Council of Ministers meeting on March 12, the government adopted the implementing decree for the law of February 22, 2024 on managing migratory flows. Prior to this, members of parliament had unanimously adopted the draft law which will set the conditions for the entry and residence of foreigners, and for the exit of nationals and foreigners from the national territory. According to the authorities, this law will strengthen the legal and institutional framework for managing migratory flows in Burkina Faso, and contribute to an effective fight against terrorism and all other forms of organized crime. Observers fear that its application will lead to reciprocity on the part of regional countries.

In addition, the double-attack of March 2018 saw a rebound this early in the year in Burkina Faso. Indeed, the headquarters of the Burkinabe armed forces and the French embassy in Ouagadougou were the targets of these attacks, resulting in almost 10 deaths and several injuries. Recently, on February 26, three people were sentenced to life imprisonment following the verdict of the judicial division specialized in the repression of terrorist acts by the Tribunal de Grande Instance. They were charged with "terrorist acts", "complicity in murder" and "complicity in attempted murder".

CAMEROUN

Nationalist memory, the bone of contention

The report of the commission on France's role in the repression of independence movements in Cameroon, submitted a month ago to French and Cameroonian presidents Macron and Biya, has visibly brought back to the surface the polemical imaginary of the country's nationalist memory. This time, the source of quarrel was Ernest Ouandié, politician and figure in the struggle for independence, who was shot dead in 1971 under the regime of Cameroon's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo. It all started with a comment made on a television set on February 23 by Abel Elimby Kobe, promoter of the Kwata political movement. "Ernest Ouandié's Bamilékés burned down entire villages in the Moungo (northeast of the country, editor's note) to take land. Ernest Ouandié is a great bandit. He wasn't into politics", he declared.

A wave of reactions immediately followed. In a press release, Manidem (Mouvement africain pour la nouvelle indépendance et la démocratie) formally condemned a "slanderous, outrageous and provocative statement." Armand Noutack Ilreacted, a former member of the Movement for the Rebirth of Cameroon (MRC), : "This is heresy, aimed at sowing doubt about this son of Cameroon, about his role in the history of our country! Désiré Sikati, a member of the Mouvement pour la renaissance du Cameroun - the party of the main opponent Maurice Kamto - regretted the silence of the Conseil national de la Communication (CNC), the country's media regulatory body.

Cameroonian historian David Eboutou called on Abel Elimby to "quickly make amends". On February 8, the Elysée Palace announced that Presidents Macron and Biya had held talks on the work of the research commission.

Presidential elections in 2025, the great expectation

Officially, it is still unclear whether President Paul Biya, who has been in power for 42 years, will run for another term. In the wake of a new national controversy a month ago over whether Biya would run again, he has not sought to settle the debate. "I ask you (...) not to listen to the sirens of chaos sounded by certain irresponsible people (...) Nor let yourselves be lulled into complacency by the fallacious and mostly unattainable promises they are trying to sell you", he told young people in an address on February 10 - the eve of Cameroon's Youth Day. I will continue to be at your side to meet the challenges you face", he continued. In short, his possible candidacy remains unclear.

Meanwhile, in the Meyo district of the Ntem Valley department in the South region, inter-community violence broke out on February 20, resulting in the death of two people. At the heart of the dispute were demonstrations by local populations demanding the departure of "non-indigenous populations". According to opposition politician Maurice Kamto, this "violence in the South region, the granite bedrock of the President of the Republic" cannot be disconnected from the prospect of the 2025 presidential election.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Political negotiations and reinforced strategies

On the political scene, the concept of "Ivoirité" is in vogue. Indeed, Tidiane Thiam, candidate for the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire-Rassemblement démocratique africain (PDCI-RDA), is the target of criticism from his opponents, and even within his own political party. On February 18, four militants from his party challenged the legitimacy of his election before the courts. This case deserves particular attention, as it has plunged the country into an unprecedented crisis in the past. It should be remembered that the former Crédit Suisse strongman has applied to the French Embassy in Abidjan to renounce his French nationality. In any case, his duel with Alassane Ouattara is eagerly awaited by observers.

Meanwhile, the presidential race is becoming increasingly murky. Alassane Ouattara has still not announced his candidacy, while Laurent Gbagbo is still in limbo. At the age of 80, Gbagbo is still fighting for re-registration, and in February embarked on a nationwide political tour. Will he be able to afford his politics and face his historic rival once again? In any case, he is ready to fight for a "fair" presidential election. For his part, wealthy businessman Jean-Louis Billon is pulling out all the stops to counter the candidacy of his party brother, Tidiane Thiam. The latter is between two fronts: attacks from the government and from his own opposition clan.

He is still determined to do battle with his political "enemies" to win the next elections. On February 8, he met the party's _____ teacher _____ members _____ in Yamoussoukro.

This action is part of the mobilization tours he has been undertaking for several months. On the other hand, Charles Blé Goudé and Guillaume Soro continue to declare their candidacies despite the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads from Lady Justice. Will they be acquitted? In any case, they are determined to play a major role in what promises to be a turbulent presidential election.

Meanwhile, the 10-year prison sentences handed down to two members of Laurent Gbagbo's entourage made headlines in February. Damana Pickass, 2nd vice-president of the PPA-CI party, and one of his comrades, were prosecuted on charges of undermining national defense through various serious acts that could threaten the government. For their supporters, this arrest is quite simply a "political trial". According to one of their lawyers, "Those who are being sentenced here are close, loyal lieutenants of Laurent Gbagbo... The elections are coming soon! This court decision is likely to rekindle the political climate, which has hitherto been rather tense.

After months of talks between Paris and Yamoussoukro, France has finally handed over the military base to Côte d'Ivoire. This is the culmination of a process to strengthen Côte d'Ivoire's autonomy in defense matters, as Alassane Ouattara so aptly announced in his New Year's speech. On February 20, the 43rd Infantry and Marine Battalion was officially renamed "Camp Ouattara Thomas d'Aquin Ouattara", as announced in our January issue. This base had been occupied by the former colony for half a century. This affair once again raises the question of military sovereignty in Africa. The country's authorities and their partners are still committed to the fight against terrorism, which continues to sow terror in the Sahel and is advancing towards coastal countries. Taking advantage of the naming ceremony for the new military camp in Abidjan, Sébastien Lecornu was keen to point out that terrorism has not disappeared in Côte d'Ivoire, but has migrated to social networks. France is still present in Côte d'Ivoire, albeit in a different form.

In the same vein, Côte d'Ivoire has strengthened its legal framework to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The Groupe de Surveillance Financière GSF() was created by presidential decree as part of the fight against money laundering, the financing of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. A reading of the communiqué issued by the Council of Ministers on February 12 reveals a "...deployment of supervisory authorities in the fight against money laundering and the financing of terrorism, as provided for by the Order of March 30,

2022 determining the system of administrative sanctions applicable in the fight against money laundering, the financing of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction" (Spokesman).

Meanwhile, diplomatic tensions between Abidjan and Ouagadougou continued to rise this month. The rumor of the arrest of 18 Ivorian soldiers on Burkina Faso soil is fuelling further controversy.

On the other hand, the case of the Grand-Bassam attack has marked this month's news in Côte d'Ivoire. As a reminder, on March 13, 2016, the country was the scene of a murderous attack that sowed chaos for a time. At the trial that opened on February 3, the judges of the Abidjan Court of Appeal found 4 men guilty on appeal of terrorist acts, and sentenced them to life imprisonment.

GAMBIA

Jammeh's "return" disrupts Independence Day celebrations

On February 18, Gambia celebrated its 60th Independence Day under the theme "Walking together for self-sufficiency and national development". The commemoration was celebrated with great pomp, and several heads of state from the sub-region honored the occasion with their presence, including Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Guinea-Bissau President Umaro Sissoko Embaló, both guests of honor. In his speech, President Adama Barrow emphasized the importance of autonomy, unity and national development. He also spoke of the country's significant advances under his presidency, such as freedom of expression, freedom of association and peace. The ceremony was punctuated by a national dialogue on Gambian identity, addressing both its political landscape and other areas of national interest.

Is this a bluff or a real intention? That's the question on everyone's lips after ex-president Yahya Jammeh's declarations in an audio message to his supporters in the Alliance Patriotique pour la Réorientation et la Construction (APRC) (Patriotic Alliance for Reorientation and Construction) that he is ready to "take back the leadership of his political party and not entrust it to anyone else", before adding: "Whether you like it or not, by the grace of Allah, I'm coming back!"

However, his comments are somewhat confusing, given that he is the subject of several complaints and that ECOWAS approved the creation of a special court in Banjul at the end of last year, notably for extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances of political opponents by death squads. To this threat he replied: "Let those who threaten to put me in prison wait until I arrive. The day of reckoning is approaching, and on that day, we will settle accounts". Will it come, or won't it?

GUINEA

An open boulevard for Doumbouya in the presidential election?

For over a year, human rights organizations have been denouncing the intimidation, kidnappings and enforced disappearances of civil society players, most of them members of the National Front for the Defense of the Constitution (FNDC). The most recent kidnapping involved the coordinator of the Forum des forces sociales de Guinée, who was found a few hours later, abandoned by his captors in a "critical state", according to his lawyers. This restriction of Guinean civic space follows the transitional regime's suspected desire to remain in power after the 2021 coup d'état. While the transitional authorities had hinted at a return to constitutional order at the end of the transitional period, the rhetoric has become quite different. At a time when political demonstrations are banned for the opposition, supporters and movements backing the transitional president are mobilizing to promote his candidacy for the next presidential election.

Meanwhile, the main opposition parties are in turmoil. The Union des forces démocratiques de la Guinée (UFDG) had announced that its congress would be held in April.

A few days ago, the Cercle des amis de Gaoul (CERAG- UFDG), a movement affiliated to the UFDG and supporting the government spokesman and Minister of Transport of the current regime in Guinea, and also a member of the UFDG, announced its national congress, to be held a week before the official date of the congress announced by the party (UFDG). Behind these announcements lies a leadership battle between Cellou Dalein Diallo, opponent and exiled president of the UFDG, and Ousmane Gaoul Diallo, candidate for the party presidency and minister in Guinea's transitional government. In the ranks of the Rassemblement du Peuple de Guinée (RPG), there has been total silence since the fall of Alpha Condé, while some of the leading figures former ruling party's are facing Guinean justice on charges of embezzlement of public funds, illicit enrichment and money laundering. The President of the Union des forces républicaines (UFR), who is also in exile, last spoke at the beginning of the year. As a reminder, he was reacting to statements made by the President of the Transition during his New Year's speech.

MAURITANIA

Between education sector protests and diplomatic openness

Much of the news has been dominated by mood swings in the education sector. Firstly, teachers planned demonstrations by twelve education unions, scheduled to start on February 12 - and announced as early as January 10 - and which actually took place. Among the teachers' demands: higher salaries, decent housing, payment to education service providers, chalk allowance, improvement in the situation of contract agents, etc. Then it was the turn of the students. In September 2024, the government decided to stop granting foreign scholarships to new baccalaureate holders. On February 25, the Syndicat National des Étudiants de Mauritanie (SNEM) announced a general halt to classes, in view of the situation regarding the allocation of scholarships. "We deployed our teams in the various institutes and faculties of the University of Nouakchott to demonstrate our bitterness at this decision by the Ministry of Higher Education", says a union press release. Two days later, the University of Nouakchott announced the suspension, until further notice, of elections for student delegates to university councils. The reason given was acts of "violence and vandalism" - in the words of the University - which had disrupted the electoral process in a number of polling stations.

On the other hand, Mauritanian students in Morocco have also expressed their dissatisfaction with the reduction in their scholarships. On February 24, the Union of Mauritanian Students and Trainees in Morocco organized a demonstration in front of the Mauritanian Embassy in Rabat.

The Union rejected all "measures aimed at reducing or compromising scholarships", and at the same time called on Mauritanian students abroad "to prepare for escalatory options in defense of legitimate rights and the protection of gains".

Closer ties with Morocco

Mauritania and Morocco signed an electricity interconnection agreement on February 5, as part of a drive to strengthen their strategic partnership. The agreement, which aims to increase energy security in both countries and promote economic integration, is intended as a response to the challenges of energy distribution in West Africa. At the end of the month, the two countries also announced the opening of a new land border crossing east of Morocco. The Polisario Front, for its part, sees this as a way for Mauritania to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. For the kingdom, this act, which is part of the "Atlantic Initiative" project, aims to open up access to the Atlantic for the Sahel states (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad). Mauritania is also pursuing its economic rapprochement with Algeria, this time through the signing of nine export agreements. These cover agricultural products, building materials, household appliances, detergents and electrical equipment, and pharmaceutical and parapharmaceutical products.

Persistent migratory drama

Internally, the Mauritanian justice system has requested twenty years' imprisonment on appeal for ex-president Ould Abdel Aziz. President of the country from 2008 to 2019, he is accused of "influence peddling", "money laundering", "breach of trust" and "illicit enrichment". He was sentenced in the first instance to five years in prison in December 2023. In addition, an investigation by the French media Off Investigation revealed a case of "squandered 22 million euros of French development aid". According to the investigative medium, this sum, poured by the French Development Agency (AFD) into a project aimed at developing access to drinking water in the country, "turned into a fiasco and would above all have enriched powerful allies of Paris in the region."

Earlier this month, fifteen illegal migrants, including one Mauritanian, were found dead in a boat off the coast of Nouadhibou (north-west Mauritania). According to the town's authorities, the boat was carrying 39 migrants, nine of whom were dead and ten in a critical condition, who were taken to hospital by the Mauritanian Red Crescent. The survivors are Senegalese and Malians. On February 12, the media outlet Dakar Actu reported that a boat from Mauritania had capsized at sea. At that time, Spanish sources reported that 78 people had been rescued, including 10 women and a baby, a lifeless body had been recovered and transferred to the island of Hierro, and two people were reported missing.

MALI

Persistent security challenges and national dissent

On the evening of Friday February 10, suspected jihadists attacked a convoy of civilian vehicles escorted by the Malian army and mercenaries from the Russian group Wagner in the north of the country. The attack targeted the village of Kobé, thirty-five kilometers from Gao. According to the results of army combing operations, "nineteen bodies of abandoned terrorists" were found. According to Agence France Presse (AFP), a local NGO source put the death toll at "thirty-two civilians and soldiers". The Malian army reported 25 civilians killed and 13 wounded. According to the testimony of a official local interviewed by RFI, "the convoy's passengers were mainly gold miners - some of them foreign - on their way to a site near the Intahaka artisanal gold mine, close to Niger." Following the tragedy, on February 10, Gao transporters went on strike to denounce the ongoing insecurity in the region, calling for better security on the Ansongo-Gao axis. A week later, on February 16 and 17, the Malian army, with the Wagner group at its side, carried out a series of operations in the Kidal and Gao regions. During these operations, seven pro-independence rebels from the Front de Libération de l'Azawad were killed, according to RFI, which also mentions the death of 28 civilians following these operations.

A few days earlier, on February 12, sixteen people perished in a terrorist attack in the village of Berta in the Ségou region, located in the inter-river of the Macina circle, and attributed to the Macina Katiba of the Jnim, the Groupe de Soutien à l'Islam et aux Musulmans. The Jnim's jihadist blockade of the town of Léré, which lies on an axis linking the Segou and Timbuktu regions, has been lifted. The town had been under embargo for almost two months. Meanwhile, a similar blockade has been in place for almost a year in the village of Diosso in Ségou.

Aborted return of Imam Dicko

Having been living in Algeria since December 2023, the return of the influential politico-religious leader and former president of Mali's High Islamic Council, Mahmoud Dicko, was originally scheduled for February 14 . In the end, Imam Dicko has not yet returned to Mali. Fearing possible disruptions due to gatherings of the Imam's supporters, the government has deployed a large security force in Bamako. "The aim is to avoid any outbursts," say the security forces, while the Imam's supporters say they have cancelled his visit to "[refuse] to offer a pretext for any confrontation.

The situation is made all the more tense by the fact that on February 5, Daouda Magassa, a close friend of Imam Dicko, was kidnapped by State Security and is now being held in Bamako. Daouda is in charge of religious issues for CMAS, the Coordination of Movements, Associations and Sympathizers of Imam Mahmoud Dicko, and is also one of the spokesmen for the Imam's return commission. Ten supporters of Imam Dicko were placed under arrest on February 17. They are accused of "unlawful assembly" on February 14, the day of the supposed return of the influential Imam. Among them was a senior citizen, who was eventually released.

Political disagreements

Begun in July 2024, the work of the drafting commission for the "National Charter for Peace and Reconciliation" is continuing. The charter aims to lay the foundations for lasting peace and promote national cohesion in a country marked by more than a decade of violence. The charter has been criticized by some for what they see as a lack of inclusiveness. On February 17, the Working Commission launched a series of consultations in Bamako. But key players such as the Front de libération de l'Azawad (FLA) and personalities such as Amadou Koufa and Iyad Ag Ghaly are not taking part in these consultations.

In addition, over 200 of the 500 or so political parties have boycotted meetings with the commission. Further proof of the national dissensus underway, former transitional Prime Minister Choguel Maïga - who was sacked last November - has levelled fresh criticism at the government. At a press conference in Bamako on February 22, Choguel Maïga claimed that the government had "definitively sounded the death knell of the pact of honor of May 24 2021 [with] the M5-RFP", his political group. "The break is complete (...) A sort of spectre of confusion and amalgam hangs over the Transition", he continued.

Buoyed by these developments, the transitional government officially launched the DDR-1 "Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration" program on February 11. Begun as part of the 2015 Algiers peace agreement, this program aims to reintegrate combatants from armed groups in the north and center of the country into the army. According to the Malian authorities, 2,000 ex-combatants will be reintegrated as 2nd-class soldiers, in addition to the socio-economic reintegration of 1,000 others, in this case those from the operational coordination mechanism.

NIGER

After the Assises Nationales, the authoritarian temptation?

The political news in Niger during the month of February was marked by the holding, in the capital, of the Assises nationales from February 15 to 19 to discuss the duration of the transition, among other subjects. General Tiani's role is to draw up a preliminary draft of the Transition Charter, a fundamental document for structuring the political transition process. An ad hoc commission has been set up to formulate operational recommendations to support the political authorities during the transition. It should be remembered that these meetings were announced in the early days of the Tiani-led military seizure of power. At the end of the discussions, it seems that the participants want a long transition to allow the Head of State to implement these reforms. According to the general rapporteur, the main proposals revolve around "Dissolving the existing political parties and drawing up a new Constitution and an amnesty for the perpetrators of the coup d'état".

The 716 "assisards" from all over the country proposed to the President of the Conseil national pour la sauvegarde de la patrie du Niger, through what they called the "charte de la refondation", a five-year term at the head of the State renewable and that he adopt the title of President of the Republic. At the same time, the dissolution of the 172 parties was proposed to the participants, causing controversy among the public.

While some deplore the decision, others approve. According to journalist Sedik Abba, "...people are disappointed with the current political parties and fear that if we start again with the same players and the same political structures, we'll find ourselves reliving the same experiences in a few years' time". For his part, the Head of State pledged to implement the strong recommendations that emerged from the conclave's discussions. According to him, "These results are also the fruit of the collective work of all the nation's driving forces, and we have every reason to believe that they have won the support of our sovereign people".

The security situation in Niger has not yet calmed down. During the month, terrorist attacks were recorded, notably in the tri-border area in the Tillabéri region. Earlier this month, the country was the target of an ambush which resulted in the death of 10 men on the side of the army Nigerien . The assailants finally managed to disappear into thin air after their exaction. According to one source, "It was during the operation that a group of criminals ambushed the Internal Security Forces detachment, resulting in the loss of ten of our soldiers". In December, near the same area, a dozen soldiers were killed by unidentified gunmen. This poses a real security problem in this part of the country.

During the month of February, the armed forces of Niger and Burkina Faso carried out a number of security operations, particularly on their borders, with a view to stepping up the fight against terrorism. On February 16, they neutralized several terrorists and dismantled several logistical hubs along the river. The sweep was part of a joint operation called "Sudu Lugdu", aimed at improving security in the areas between Kantchari (Burkina Faso) and Tamou (Niger), which are plagued by massive terrorism. For almost 10 years, this area has been subjected to deadly terrorist attacks.

The news was also marked by the arrest of Nigerian rebel leader Mahamoud Sallah, a supporter of Mohamed Bazoum. The leader of the Patriotic Liberation Front was arrested by elements of Unit 87 of the Libyan National Army on February 23 in southern Libya. He had claimed responsibility for sabotaging an oil pipeline between Niger and Benin.

NIGERIA

Nigeria's multi-faceted crises?

In Nigeria, at the beginning of February, a large-scale swindling network exploited young Ivorians in search of a better future. Lured by the promise of a trip to Europe, many young people are persuaded to pay sums ranging from 500,000 to 3 million CFA francs to travel. Once they arrive in Nigeria, their documents are confiscated, and all contact with their loved ones is severed, leaving them in a very precarious situation.

In view of the scale of the phenomenon, the Côte d'Ivoire embassy in Abuja sent a letter to the Ivorian Minister of Foreign Affairs to alert him to the situation and to help the victims. Earlier this month, Nigerian police arrested 110 illegal Ivorians suspected of involvement in a pyramid scheme. Some 50 of them were repatriated to Côte d'Ivoire, on grounds put forward by Abuja that they had entered the country illegally.

But this case is part of a wider context: Nigeria has become a veritable epicenter of cybercrime, attracting international networks with complex ramifications. On February 3, 2025, the Nigerian courts tried almost forty foreigners accused of belonging to an organization specializing in online scams. Arrested in mid-December by the National Anti-Corruption Agency, the suspects, mainly from China, the Philippines, Pakistan and Indonesia, are charged with cyberterrorism, identity theft and possession of false documents. According to the investigation, they recruited and clandestinely employed Nigerians to carry out their fraudulent activities, posing a threat to the country's economic and security stability.

Between insecurity, political tensions and humanitarian emergency

While the authorities fight this growing crime, another tragedy has shaken Nigeria. On February 5, a fire broke out in an Islamic school in the Kaura Namoda district of Zamfara state, in the northwest of the country. The school was attended by around a hundred children at the time of the tragedy, and at least seventeen (17) of them lost their lives, according to the National Emergency Response Agency. While the exact origin of the fire has yet to be determined, initial investigations indicate that it was caused by a stock of oral hygiene sticks, known locally as "Kara", stored near the school. In response, President Bola Tinubu offered his condolences to the bereaved families and urged schools to reinforce child safety. But above all, this incident highlights the fragility of the Nigerian education system. Already facing multiple challenges, it has to cope with persistent insecurity, which feeds parents' fears and encourages children to drop out of school. According to UNICEF, some 18.3 million Nigerian children are not in school, an alarming figure in a country where education is crucial to the future.

Parallel to this situation of insecurity, political tension is intensifying. On February 7, 2025, several Nigerian MPs called for the release of Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), imprisoned since 2021 and accused of terrorism.

Founder of this separatist movement, Kanu is a central figure in the pro-independence movement in the south-east of the country. His detention continues to inflame tensions and fuel a climate of instability. Against this backdrop, the chairman of the parliamentary committee responsible for regional development declared that his release would be "a first step towards peace and stability". However, the violence continues unabated: demonstrations and dead cities are regularly organized, while mutual accusations between the federal government and the IPOB multiply, each blaming the other for the attacks and kidnappings that rock the region.

Finally, on the humanitarian front, the Nigerian authorities are attempting to limit the damage caused by another emergency situation. On February 14, 2025, Parliament approved an additional budget of \$200 million to strengthen the health sector. This decision was taken in response to the 90-day suspension of USAID funding by the US administration.

While this initiative is intended to fill the gap left by the absence of US financial support, it may not be enough to offset the impact of this suspension on other sectors. In particular, humanitarian aid in the north-east of the country is likely to suffer, even though this region has been plagued by a jihadist insurgency since 2009. Deprived of crucial assistance, thousands of displaced people could find themselves in an even more precarious situation.

SENEGAL

Senegal, Towards austerity measures?

Ahmadou Al Aminou Lô, Minister Secretary General of the Government of Senegal, made it clear during an appearance on the national television program Point de vue that the country's socio-economic situation is not going well. To turn things around, "we need a fair social plan, bringing things back into proportion [and] tightening our belts (...) starting with the State", he advocates. "These are not redundancies (...) the government has no room for maneuver (...) the State is committed to making life less difficult", he tries to temper this secondly. The other important announcement is the abolition of state agencies to lighten the books, and the abolition of electricity price subsidies for industry and the wealthiest. Senegal "can't go further into debt", so "the only weapon left is the tax weapon", justified Ahmadou Al Aminou Lo.

In the aftermath, the unions went into battle, deploring the government's lack of dialogue with them. Faced with threats of strike action, the government took steps to calm the situation. At a meeting on February 27 between the unions and Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko, the latter urged them to "put strikes and demonstrations on hold for a while", until the government managed to turn around the country's economic situation.

"No one wants social confrontation, because no one wins. We must all avoid pushing each other towards radicalization", declared the Senegalese Prime Minister. Achieving a "social dialogue pact", in his words, is crucial. "The whole social system, worker protection, the new Labor Code, fairness and equity in remuneration systems - we're going to work on that together. But it has to be built, it doesn't fall from the sky. And we want to do that in complete transparency," explained the Prime Minister.

Effective accountability

The long-awaited accountability process, which has been a hobbyhorse of the regime since long before it came to power, is now well underway. The long-awaited report from the Cour des Comptes - published on February 12 - has been the talk of the town. According to the document, which reports on economic management between 2019 and March 2024, Senegal is more than 18,000 billion in debt. "The total outstanding debt of the central budgetary administration amounted to 18,558.91 billion CFA francs at December 31, 2023, and represents 99.67% of GDP," the report informs.

A rate "higher" than that announced by the former ruling regime. As a result, the deficit declared by the previous regime is lower than that established by the Cour des Comptes. For the year 2023, the Court calculated a deficit of 12.3%, compared with 4.9% announced. The report also points to obvious financial mismanagement. Among the shortcomings in terms of management of public funds are nebulous and opaque transactions, authorized expenditure outside the circuit of the public treasury with the creation of special accounts, etc. In this connection, the Minister of Justice announced the opening of new investigations to clarify the facts revealed in the report.

Naturally, all eyes are on the tenors of the previous regime, in particular former president Macky Sall, who now lives in Morocco. "It's a political process. We have always worked in complete transparency (...) I'm not afraid of anything, they can sue me if they want," he reacted, a few days after these revelations. "Inevitably, he [Macky Sall] will face justice. He is primarily responsible for extremely serious acts that have been committed (...) He cannot escape justice because he was behind all of this", said on RFM on February 28 Senegalese government spokesman Moustapha Ndjekk Sarré . Furthermore, at the very beginning of March, an inter-commission worked on a draft law that would allow prisoners in Senegal or Morocco to serve their sentences in either of the two countries.

In addition, at the end of a ten-day visit to Senegal, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Alice Jill Edwards, noted that prison overcrowding was "dramatic and inhumane (...) a powder keg that could explode at any moment".

Prospects for stability

A new step in the Casamance peace process. On February 23, Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko signed a peace agreement in Guinea-Bissau with one of the factions of the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC). Implemented under the mediation of President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, this new protocol is part of the Diomaye Plan for Casamance, launched in January with the stated aim of promoting development in the region.

At the same time, the first financial returns from the sale of Senegalese oil have been announced. According to Woodside, the company that extracts the black gold from Sangomar, the country's production for 2024 amounted in the fourth quarter to over 13.3 million barrels of crude produced in 2024, of which 12.9 million barrels have already been sold. Total revenue: over 595.5 billion CFA francs. According to the economist and permanent secretary of the Comité d'Orientation Stratégique du Pétrole et du Gaz, Cheikh Khadim Bamba Diagne, Senegal's share of this windfall is less than 70 billion FCFA.

CHAD

The ruling party, master of the game

After the legislative elections, in which the ruling Mouvement patriotique du salut (MPS) won an absolute majority of seats in Parliament, the party led by President Mahamat Déby won another landslide in the senatorial elections. According to the provisional senatorial results published on February 25 by the Agence nationale de gestion des élections (ANGE), the MPS won 45 of the 46 elective seats. The remaining seat went to the president of the Rassemblement national des démocrates tchadiens (RNDT-Le Réveil), Pahimi Padacké Albert, a presidential candidate in May 2024. In doing so, Prime Minister Allamaye Halina, who was reappointed after resigning, unveiled a new government. Among the most significant changes, Abdoulaye Sabre Fadoul replaces Abderaman Koulamallah, former head of diplomacy and government spokesman, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, Aziz Mahamat, recently appointed Secretary General of the MPS, leaves the Ministry of Infrastructure. In addition, Youssouf Tom, formerly Controller General of the Independent Anti-Corruption Authority, has been appointed to head the Ministry of Justice.

At the same time, even if the terrorist attacks seem to be taking a relative breather, communities living in the affected areas continue to face the multi-dimensional repercussions of the security crisis on a daily basis. These include the no less important issue of community health.

With this in mind, the Ministry of Public Health and Prevention organized the first national forum on community health from February 11 to 14 in N'Djamena, under the theme "Revitalizing community health in Chad: challenges and prospects". The forum provided an opportunity for public health players to discuss the challenges and identify possible solutions for improving health infrastructures and guaranteeing equitable access to care, particularly in rural and remote areas. Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis in the east of the country continues unabated. In a report published on February 3, Unicef states that the humanitarian situation has particularly worsened in 2024 due to the massive influx of Sudanese refugees, epidemics and food insecurity. According to the document, since April 2023, over 716,000 Sudanese refugees have fled to Chad, in addition to 146,871 Chadian returnees, adding to the 410,000 refugees already in the area.

Yaya Dillo case, one year without an answer

On February 28, 2024, the opponent and cousin of President Mahamat Déby Itno, Yaya Dillo of the Parti socialiste sans frontière (PSF), lost his life during an assault by the Chadian army on the headquarters of his party, the Parti socialiste sans frontière (PSF). Officially, he was accused of having ordered the assassination of the President of the Supreme Court. His camp immediately put forward the theory of a political "assassination".

A year later, the investigation announced by the government has yet to produce any conclusive evidence. PSF activists have two main demands: clarification of the circumstances surrounding Yaya Dillo's death, and the release of the party's secretary general, Gam Robert, who has been held for six months. "Concerning the investigation announced by the military government into his assassination, to date it has not been followed up. It's a misleading statement, designed to dull the conscience of those fighting for justice for this emblematic figure", Allifa Youssouf Mahamat, general coordinator of the PSF in the diaspora, told RFI. The Chadian authorities are content to assure us that justice is taking its course and that a commission of inquiry is being prepared.

What's more, following France's departure, several hundred former employees of French military bases now find themselves in a precarious situation. In Chad, a total of 402 former workers from the military bases N'Djamena, Abéché and Faya are criticizing the poor payment of their social rights and the lack of accompanying measures following the departure of the French army. At a general assembly held on February 3, these ex-employees of the French bases' health and maintenance services called on the Chadian authorities to provide them with financial support and assistance for professional reintegration.

TOGO

Between a tense political climate and a security lull

Togo has officially entered its Fifth Republic. The election of senators ratifies the new Constitution promulgated in May, and at the same time marks the start of parliamentary government in the country. The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) has announced the provisional results. Of the 41 seats up for grabs, the presidential party won 34, while the other 7 were held by part of the opposition, which took part in the election. The rest of the opposition boycotted the election, claiming that it was "a disguised continuation of Faure Gnassingbé's rule under the new Constitution", an accusation refuted by the ruling party through the Minister of the Civil Service, Labor and Social Dialogue on his X account (Twitter). The Minister maintains that: "Our new Constitution will help to clean up and rationalize the political landscape, by contributing, to put it plainly, to the extinction of political micro-parties, and thereby reducing the fragmentation of the Togolese political landscape".

Constitutional and regime change continue to divide Togo's political class.

On the security front, Togo is facing recurrent terrorist incursions in the Savanes region, bordering Burkina Faso. These security threats and the attacks perpetrated by terrorist groups prompted the Togolese government to declare a state of security emergency in this part of the country. This measure, introduced in June 2022, came to an end a few weeks ago. The Togolese government has announced the extension of the state of security emergency in the Savanes region. The reason given for maintaining the state of emergency is the "alarming, worrying and recurrent nature of serious threats and attacks perpetrated by terrorist groups in the Savanes region". However, there has been a marked lull in terrorist attacks in the region, although the humanitarian situation remains worrying.

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