



FRAGILITY OBSERVATORY OF WEST & CENTRAL AFRICA FOR RESILIENCE & DEMOCRACY - “FOWARD”

Analysis Note on Major Regional, Political, Security, and Diplomatic Trends - July 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Over the course of July, four major developments stand out and are helping to reshape the trajectories of sub-Saharan Africa (Senegal, Benin, Cameroon, Togo, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Chad, Mali and Niger). First, the significant reshaping of Senegal's political landscape, marked by the official launch of the Kiiraay party of President Bassirou Diomaye Faye, in keeping with a deliberate strategy of openness, illustrated in particular by his support for his predecessor Macky Sall's candidacy for the post of UN Secretary-General. Second, in neighboring Mali, where the deadliest ambush suffered by the FAMa since 2012 comes alongside possible friction in the military partnership with Russia. At the same time, the Cotonou Declaration on maritime security and the N'Djamena Declaration on water security, together with progress on the Nigeria-Morocco gas pipeline project, reflect the assertion of a multi-voiced continental diplomacy, which nuances the narrative of a simple pivot toward Moscow.



In addition, two major political signals have emerged, revealing new dynamics worth highlighting: Chad's announced withdrawal from the International Criminal Court, which extends the contestation of international judicial frameworks beyond the AES, and Paul Biya's prolonged absence from Cameroon, now exceeding fifty days, which fuels the notion of a de facto power vacuum and heightens uncertainty around presidential succession. In light of all these developments, trajectories are becoming clearer, power balances are hardening, and weak signals are emerging that nonetheless warrant particular vigilance.

MAJOR CROSS-CUTTING REGIONAL TRENDS



Beyond each country's own trajectory, several structuring dynamics run through the region as a whole:

An overall acceleration of institutional restructuring

Whether it concerns the Senegalese constitutional revision followed by the appointment of Ousmane Diagne as head of the Constitutional Council, the installation of the Beninese Senate, the empowerment of the Chadian government to legislate by ordinance, or the establishment of the AES confederal Parliament, this period has seen a proliferation of institutional overhauls driven by the executive branch, often resulting in a further concentration of decision-making levers, regardless of the nature of the regime in place.

A gradual challenging of the multilateral frameworks inherited from the post-colonial period, though contested from within

The withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from the International Criminal Court, the diplomatic rupture between Ouagadougou and Paris, and then the expulsion of two European Union officials from Ouagadougou, all point to a regional movement contesting Western institutional frameworks. This movement, long confined to the AES countries, took a major turn on July 27: after having reaffirmed its commitment to cooperation with the Court in early July, Chad in turn notified its withdrawal from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), joining Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and confirming that the challenge to inherited international judicial frameworks now extends beyond the AES alone. This contestation movement nonetheless remains contested from within: the African Union, through the visit of its Commission Chairperson to Ouagadougou and Bamako, launched an attempt to re-engage with the AES, advocating for closer ties with ECOWAS and a revitalization of the Nouakchott process.

An all-out diversification of external partnerships, driven by a resurgence of pan-African and Atlantic initiatives

Beyond the shift toward Russia observed within the AES, this period was marked by several structuring initiatives with a continental scope: the Cotonou Declaration, adopted by 23 African Atlantic states to structure maritime security and logistics corridors; the N'Djamena Declaration on water security, accompanied by Chad's announcement of visa-free entry for all Africans starting in 2027; and the intergovernmental agreement signed at the ECOWAS

summit in Freetown for the Nigeria-Morocco Africa-Atlantic gas pipeline. These initiatives, although still largely at a declaratory stage, reflect the desire of a number of countries to shape the continental agenda.

A jihadist pressure that shows no sign of easing and, more than ever, exposes the fragilities of the Russian-Sahelian security partnership

The attacks recorded in Mali (the Anéfis-Gao ambush, with at least 50 soldiers killed), in Niger (the Bankilaré-Téra attack, with 16 soldiers killed), and in Burkina Faso and Nigeria (Zamfara State, Lake Chad basin) confirm the persistence of a multi-front threat. But this period marks a qualitative turning point: Malian authorities themselves speak of «coordination shortcomings» with their Russian Africa Corps partners – whose convoys suffered no losses while FAMA recorded heavy ones – and Moscow has also cancelled the delivery of Mi-35M combat helicopters promised to the three AES countries, weakening a partnership that had until now been presented as a pillar of the confederal security strategy.

A growing nexus between climate vulnerability, urban governance and socio-political tensions

A coexistence, not without paradox, with the display of continental ambitions in water governance. The major floods observed simultaneously in Benin, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Chad stand in contrast to the holding, in N'Djamena itself, of an African Water Forum devoted to water security. This is a reminder that the gap between diplomatic commitments and operational capacity to manage climate crises remains a central point of vigilance.

An accelerated reconfiguration of internal political alliances, beyond traditional divides

Signs of an unexpected rapprochement between Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Macky Sall in Senegal, the fragmentation of the Ivorian opposition (Ahoua Don Mello's split from the PPA-CI, the proliferation of new formations), and rumors of internal tensions at the top of the Burkinabe state, illustrate a growing porosity of established political lines, in a context where actors are seeking to secure new bases of legitimacy ahead of upcoming elections.

MAJOR POLITICAL TRENDS



Senegal: an accelerated reconfiguration of power

The deepening rift between Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Ousmane Sonko increasingly reveals a deliberate presidential strategy of openness. Macky Sall's high-profile return to Dakar on July 17, welcomed by his supporters, enabled the former president to secure his successor's official backing for his candidacy for the post of UN Secretary-General. This marks a significant reversal in light of Pastef's historical stance, which had previously envisioned legal proceedings against Macky Sall. This gesture, combined with meetings with Karim Wade and trips to Qatar, confirms a strategy of realigning alliances aimed at broadening the head of state's political base beyond Pastef's historical circle. This strategy reached its institutional culmination on July 25, with Bassirou Diomaye Faye's official launch, at a constitutive general assembly held in Dakar, of his own party, «Kiiraay – Les Patriotes Républicains», under the slogan «La Patrie d'abord» ("Country First"). Born out of the transformation of the «Diomaye Président» coalition and prepared since November 2025 under the supervision of former Prime Minister Aminata Touré, this new formation publicly cements the break with Ousmane Sonko and Pastef – even the choice of name, drawn from Wolof vocabulary, sparked controversy. The presidential camp sees it as a reference to protection, while Pastef voices read it instead as suggesting concealment. Senegal's political landscape is thus being redrawn around three rival poles (Kiiraay, Pastef, APR), a configuration that several observers believe could hasten early legislative elections.

On the institutional front, the appointment on July 13 of magistrate Ousmane Diagne as head of the Constitutional Council, just days after the invalidation of the constitutional revision put forward by the parliamentary majority, has been accompanied by a gradual reassertion of control over the state apparatus: the dismissal of Waly Diouf Bodiang, close to Sonko, from the leadership of the Port Autonome de Dakar, changes at the head of the 3FPT and the National Office for Vocational Training, and the rallying of Pastef officials – such as Babacar Faye in Fatick – to the «presidential initiative». For his part, Ousmane Sonko has embarked on a nationwide tour to sell Pastef membership cards, an initiative presented by the party as a step toward strengthening its organization and financial autonomy. Welcomed by large mobilizations in several localities, the Pastef leader intends to use this campaign to remobilize his grassroots base. Finally, Bassirou Diomaye Faye's designation as the sitting Chair of ECOWAS, combined with the announced appointment of Senegalese General Birame Diop as head of the organization's Commission for 2026-2030, places Senegal at the center of regional diplomacy, with the responsibility of restoring cohesion between ECOWAS and the AES countries.

Benin: between regional normalization and judicial lockdown

The issue of the border with Niger, closed since August 2023, is seeing a notable development: President Wadagni's visit to Niamey in June 2026 opened the way to a gradual reopening, after three years that had heavily weighed on traffic through the Port Autonome de Cotonou and, even more so, on Niger's economy, which was forced to rely on costlier alternative corridors. At the same time, rumors of a joint military operation with Burkina Faso at the Koualou-Kourou border – a sensitive area due to a territorial dispute still pending before the International Court of Justice – were denied by Cotonou, which described it as a mere repositioning of Burkinabe troops. Benin is also strengthening its security cooperation with Nigeria through a geospatial surveillance system at the Sèmè-Kraké border, and hosted, on July 12 and 13, the summit of the 23 African Atlantic states that adopted the Cotonou Declaration.

On the domestic front, the judicial scene remains highly active: more than seven months after the attempted coup of December 7, 2025, the Criet continues proceedings against several political figures (a committal order against Candide Azannai, convictions of Soumaïla Sounon Boké and journalist Angela Kpeidja), while a prominent lawyer, Me Magloire Yansunu, was sentenced to seven years in prison, a ruling now being appealed. The trial linked to the 2010 disappearance of trade unionist Pierre Urbain Dangnivo is also continuing, with prosecutors seeking a 30-year prison term for one of the defendants. Benin thus appears caught between consolidating its regional reputation for stability and a marked weakening of its political opposition.

Togo: an opposition that regains the initiative

Buoyed by the ECOWAS Court of Justice ruling that described the March 2024 constitutional revision as an «unconstitutional change of government», the Togolese opposition boycotted the Permanent Framework for Dialogue and launched a combined legal and political offensive, demanding an inclusive transition and Faure Gnassingbé's departure. This reassertion of momentum materialized on July 26 with a rally held in Vogan by the National Consultation Framework for Change (CNCC) – which brings together the ANC, ADDI, FDR and PSR, among others – initially planned for July 12 and then postponed.

This gathering, the second held in three months after the one in Lomé in May, brought together several hundred people to protest the 2024 Constitution, illustrating the opposition's determination to extend its mobilization beyond the capital, in a context where public protest gatherings remain rare. This remobilization strategy was remarkably realized on July 26, through a rally in southern Togo by the National Consultation Framework for Change (CNCC), which brings together the ANC, ADDI, FDR and PSR, among others. Indeed, hundreds of people gathered once again to denounce the new Constitution.

Cameroon: a succession under tension, a de facto power vacuum raising questions

The affair of the fake CRTV presidential decree, which purported to appoint a vice president and form a new government, continues to fuel speculation about the succession: Oswald Baboke, deputy director of the civilian cabinet of the presidency, was questioned in early July by the Presidential Security Directorate as part of this affair, described as highly sensitive, while the person who delivered the document, identified as Johann Sitchom (or John Kuate according to other sources), remains under questioning by security services over the hypothesis that the presidential signature was manipulated by rival factions. This affair takes on particular resonance against a backdrop of de facto power vacancy: having left on June 7 for a «short private stay» in Europe – a trip that Jeune Afrique places at a private clinic in Geneva – 93-year-old President Paul Biya had not reappeared in public 50 days later, with no return date communicated, thereby surpassing his previous longest absence (42 days in 2024). This situation is all the more sensitive given that no vice president has been appointed despite the reintroduction of this position through the constitutional revision of April 14, 2026, leaving the

country without a clearly activated mechanism for institutional continuity: in the event of a confirmed vacancy, it would fall to the President of the Senate, Aboubakary Abdoulaye, to serve as interim head of state.

Several opposition voices – MP Jean-Michel Nintcheu, Maurice Kamto's Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC), and the Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC) – have called on the Constitutional Council to formally declare the power vacancy, while exiled opposition figure Issa Tchiroma Bakary has filed a complaint in France against the head of state. The authorities, through the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) and its Minister of State Jacques Fame Ndongo, firmly deny any vacancy, asserting that «power is not vacant» and that the president continues to sign decrees and telegrams from abroad, while dismissing the idea that the Constitution provides for a vacancy in the case of a mere prolonged absence. This entire sequence of events continues to highlight the power struggles surrounding the succession of a president who has been in power for 43 years.

Côte d'Ivoire: an opposition in full reconfiguration, a somewhat easing political climate

Nearly eight months after the October 2025 presidential election, the Ivorian opposition is searching for ways to reorganize. Left without parliamentary representation after boycotting the legislative elections, Laurent Gbagbo's PPA-CI announced the creation of an Observatory of Parliamentary Decisions, whose scope several observers nonetheless consider limited. This difficulty in exerting institutional influence has fueled internal rifts: expelled from the party for having taken part in the presidential election despite the boycott directive, Ahoua Don Mello is preparing to launch his own sovereignist movement, «La Côte d'Ivoire souveraine»,

whose founding congress is expected in October 2026 with the announced participation of Russian delegations. At the same time, Kévin Fiéni's «Pro-Côte d'Ivoire» party held its own congress focused on an economic program and a federal republic project. In a sign of a relatively easing political climate, six local PDCI officials, detained since the 2025 presidential campaign, were released on July 20, part of a broader series of releases affecting several PDCI activists and members of the Gbagbo camp, though it remains unclear whether this judicial thaw reflects a lasting shift.

Chad: a continental ambition on display, domestic stability still to be consolidated

The African Water Forum, held in N'Djamena on July 15 and 16, concluded with the adoption of the N'Djamena Declaration on water security and the signing of a National Water Pact, in a context where more than 400 million Africans still lack access to drinking water. President Déby Itno also announced the elimination of entry visas for all African nationals starting January 1, 2027, as part of the «Chad Connection 2030» plan. This continental agenda nonetheless contrasts with a more worrying domestic security reality: according to OCHA, Chad recorded a 40% increase in inter- and intra-community conflicts in the first half of 2026 (35 incidents compared with 25 a year earlier), concentrated in the Lac and Sud provinces and mainly linked to access to natural resources.

On the international judicial front, a spectacular reversal occurred on July 27: whereas N'Djamena had, in early July, during the visit of International Criminal Court (ICC) Deputy Prosecutor Nazhat Shameem Khan, reaffirmed its commitment to cooperation with the Court, the Chadian government notified the UN Secretary-General of its decision to withdraw from the Rome Statute, thereby joining Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Venezuela. N'Djamena denounces an international justice system with «undeniable selectivity», noting that nine of the thirteen investigations opened by the Court since 2002 concern African states, while reaffirming an «irreversible commitment to the fight against impunity» and its wish to see a more balanced continental African justice system emerge.

MAJOR SECURITY TRENDS



Mali: the deadliest ambush since 2012 and the first cracks in the Russian-Malian partnership

On July 18, 2026, a Malian army convoy leaving Anéfis for Gao was caught in an ambush coordinated by JNIM and the FLA, leaving at least 50 dead on the FAMA side and several soldiers captured – one of the deadliest attacks suffered by the Malian army since 2012. This attack follows a series of offensives by armed groups in the North aimed at controlling the town of Anéfis, and comes as FAMA simultaneously claims to have destroyed a terrorist hideout in the Kékoro forest (Bougouni region). Several strategic road axes in the Center and Center-North remain nonetheless under JNIM's influence, while the FLA claims control of Kidal – a situation that, more than ever, calls into question the solidity of the strategic alliance between Bamako and Moscow.

Niger: a tri-border area that remains volatile

An operation by the defense and security forces in the Tillabéry region reportedly neutralized 19 terrorists and led to the arrest of 32 suspected accomplices, according to the army, along with the destruction of a supply network. The same tri-border area (Niger-Burkina-Mali) was nonetheless the scene of a complex attack on the Bankilaré-Téra axis, leaving 16 dead and 23 wounded on the Nigerien side against 15 assailants neutralized, confirming the persistence of an active hub of JNIM activity in this area.

Burkina Faso: A persistent jihadist threat and a firm security response

The preceding weeks had already demonstrated JNIM's capacity to carry out coordinated attacks across several

regions (about 50 deaths on July 4), despite Operation Wibga II. The third week was marked less by major new offensives than by a tightening of internal control, particularly regarding religious affairs.

Nigeria: a dual geography of violence

In Zamfara State (northwest), an armed gang led by gang leader Kachalla Sa'idu attacked eleven villages on July 18 and 19, abducting at least 40 people, mostly women and children – a situation reflecting a recurring pattern of ransom kidnappings, despite the army's announcement in early July that around 300 gang members had been killed. President Tinubu has launched a reform establishing state police forces, still awaiting approval from federated states. In the northeast, Operations Hadin Kai and Fansan Yamma led to the release of hostages, the interception of logistical equipment and the arrest of several suspects, including a Sudanese national presented as a foreign terrorist fighter; several Boko Haram and ISWAP fighters, including two senior leaders, also laid down their arms.

Chad, Cameroon and the Lake Chad basin: a chronic humanitarian crisis

Previous elements remain unchanged: more than 3.5 million displaced people according to UNHCR, more than 8 million people in need, and persistent underfunding of the international response.

MAJOR DIPLOMATIC TRENDS



AES-Russia: a partnership on display, but signs of strain

Following a visit by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to Niamey earlier in the month, the third week brought a significant counterpoint: Russia cancelled the delivery of Mi-35M Hind-F combat helicopters promised to the three AES countries, even though the Confederation's Unified Force had explicitly requested them to strengthen its counterterrorism air capability. Combined with the coordination difficulties observed during the Anéfis-Gao ambush, this cancellation introduces an unprecedented area of friction in a partnership that had until now been presented as solid.

Chad: a major diplomatic reversal with the announced withdrawal from the ICC

On July 27, Chad notified the UN Secretary-General of its decision to withdraw from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, becoming the fifth country to initiate this process in less than a year, after Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Venezuela. This move, which comes just three weeks after N'Djamena received the ICC's Deputy Prosecutor and reaffirmed its cooperation with the Court, marks a swift diplomatic reversal and a de facto alignment with the position defended by AES countries on international justice, while framing it in a distinct rhetoric: Chad justifies its withdrawal by the Court's «selectivity» toward African states, while reaffirming its commitment to the fight against impunity and its wish to see a strengthened continental African justice system emerge.

Burkina Faso: an open standoff with the European Union and diplomatic diversification.

On July 14, Ouagadougou declared two European Union delegation officials persona non grata, in response to a European Parliament resolution denouncing the crackdown on civic space, a text described as «neo-colonial» by Burkinabe authorities. At the same time, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission conducted a re-engagement visit to

Ouagadougou and then Bamako, advocating for the reopening of political space, an AES-ECOWAS rapprochement, and the revitalization of the Nouakchott process. Burkina Faso also received the British ambassador to deepen bilateral security cooperation – a sign that the rupture with certain Western partners does not necessarily translate into total diplomatic isolation, but rather into a selective approach to partners deemed compatible with Burkina Faso's security agenda.

A continental and “Atlantic” diplomacy asserting itself

Three structuring initiatives marked this period: the Cotonou Declaration (23 African Atlantic states, maritime security and green logistics corridors), the N'Djamena Declaration (continental water security, ahead of the UN Water Conference in December 2026 in Abu Dhabi), and the intergovernmental agreement on the Nigeria-Morocco Africa-Atlantic gas pipeline, signed at the ECOWAS summit in Freetown on July 19 – a project with an annual capacity of 30 billion cubic meters, with construction announced for 2028.

Senegal: a reinforced return to the diplomatic stage

The sitting ECOWAS chairmanship entrusted to Bassirou Diomaye Faye, combined with the forthcoming chairmanship of the organization's Commission by Senegalese General Birame Diop, places Dakar in a potential arbitrator position between ECOWAS and the AES countries, in a context where such mediation remains highly necessary but politically delicate.

Benin-Niger: toward border normalization.

The prospect of reopening the border closed since 2023, confirmed following President Wadagni's visit to Niamey, illustrates a broader trend toward the gradual normalization of relations between Benin and the AES countries.

WEAK SIGNALS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL FRAGILITY



The institutionalization of the Pastef rift

Beyond the personal rivalry between Faye and Sonko, the appointment of a presidential ally as head of the Constitutional Council, the drive to reassert control over the state apparatus (Port Autonome de Dakar, 3FPT, ONFP), and now the official creation of the presidential party, together entrench a lasting bipolarization of the political landscape involving factions or currents originating from Pastef, raising the question of the perceived neutrality of Senegalese institutions in a climate of growing polarization.

Institutional ambiguity surrounding the power vacancy in Cameroon

Paul Biya's absence from national territory for 50 days, the lack of any appointment to the vice presidency despite its reintroduction through the April 2026 constitutional revision, and growing opposition calls for the Constitutional Council to formally declare the power vacancy, together outline an unprecedented institutional uncertainty at the top of the Cameroonian state, in a climate already destabilized by the fake presidential decree affair.

The tightening of the religious sphere in Burkina Faso

The arrest of the well-known imam Ishaq Kindo, the announcement of tighter oversight of preachers and religious training abroad, and the president's firm

rhetoric on the need for a «moderate» Islam, introduce a source of tension with part of the Muslim leadership, who have nonetheless been significant supporters since the regime came to power.

Rumors of internal tensions at the top of the Burkinabe state

The prolonged absence of several regime figures (Commander Oumarou Yabré, Captain Sorgho) and Ibrahim Traoré's particularly firm response («there are not two captains on one boat») suggest internal fault lines that those in power are seeking to contain publicly.

The fragmentation of the Ivorian opposition

The proliferation of splits and new formations (Ahoua Don Mello's CIS, Pro-Côte d'Ivoire) reflects a persistent difficulty in converting grassroots influence into institutional weight, with a risk of lasting weakening of political pluralism despite recent judicial easing measures.

WEAK SIGNALS OF SECURITY FRAGILITY



The tangible weakening of the Russian-Sahelian security partnership

The cancellation of the Mi-35M helicopter delivery and the coordination shortcomings noted during the Anéfis-Gao ambush, in which Russian paramilitaries suffered no losses unlike FAMA, constitute the most concrete signal so far of a possible erosion of trust between the AES countries and their Russian military partner.

The worsening of the Malian security crisis

The July 18 ambush, the deadliest suffered by the army since 2012, the FLA's claim to control Kidal, and the capture of Malian soldiers confirm that the strategy to reconquer the North, four years after Assimi Goïta's rise to power, remains stalled along several strategic axes.

The persistence of volatility in the Niger-Mali-Burkina tri-border area

The Bankilaré-Téra attack (16 dead, 23 wounded on the Nigerien side) confirms that this area remains an active hub of JNIM operations, despite the tactical successes claimed in Tillabéry.

The persistent endemic nature of mass abductions in Nigeria

The Zamfara attack (40 people abducted) came just weeks after the army announced the elimination of 300 gang members – a sign that claimed tactical successes do not necessarily translate into a lasting reduction of the threat.

The Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis in the Lake Chad Basin

The chronic underfunding of the humanitarian response in the Lake Chad Basin remains a structural constraint that permanently undermines the capacity to respond to a multifaceted and persistent crisis. Despite the scale of humanitarian needs, the resources mobilized remain insufficient to effectively respond to emergencies and support affected populations in the long term. This funding shortfall thus constitutes a major risk factor, likely to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and undermine stabilization and resilience efforts in the region.

LEVERS OF RESILIENCE



In light of these vulnerabilities, several measures—already implemented to varying degrees by state, regional, and civil society actors—should be strengthened and better coordinated:

Strengthen the ECOWAS-AES mediation led by Senegal

Senegal's current ECOWAS chairmanship, under the leadership of Bassirou Diomaye Faye, along with the prospect of General Birame Diop assuming the presidency of the Commission, opens a window of opportunity to revive dialogue between ECOWAS and the AES. This situation could be leveraged to move beyond a confrontational mindset and foster an approach more grounded in the search for common ground, in line with the African Union's call for a renewed dialogue with the AES member states.

Support the African Union's reengagement with the AES

The relaunch of the Nouakchott process and the call to reopen the political space within the AES are important levers for resuming dialogue with the Sahelian states. Consolidating these efforts appears all the more necessary given that the criticisms voiced by Burkinabé Prime Minister Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo regarding the lack of African solidarity in the face of Sahelian crises reveal a persistent lack of trust between continental institutions and the regimes of the AES.

Capitalize on pan-African and transatlantic initiatives aimed at building institutional frameworks

The Cotonou Declaration, the N'Djamena Declaration, and the agreement on the Nigeria-Morocco gas pipeline provide frameworks for regional cooperation that go beyond the security divide alone; their impact, however, will depend on the states' ability to translate these declaratory commitments into concrete, funded projects.

Diversify security partnerships without breaking off dialogue

As exemplified by the strengthened cooperation between Burkina Faso and the United Kingdom, or the geospatial initiative established between Benin and Nigeria along the Sèmè-Kraké border, diversifying security partnerships can help overcome certain bilateral tensions. A lack of trust with one partner should not necessarily lead to a breakdown in dialogue, but rather encourage the establishment of targeted technical cooperation with other actors.

Accelerate the normalization of regional corridors and borders

The gradual reopening of the border between Benin and Niger could set a useful precedent for other regional corridors that remain closed or are subject to significant tensions. The normalization of cross-border trade thus appears to be a key lever for preserving population mobility, supporting local economies, and strengthening regional cooperation.

Strengthen transparency and the perceived independence of judicial and institutional processes

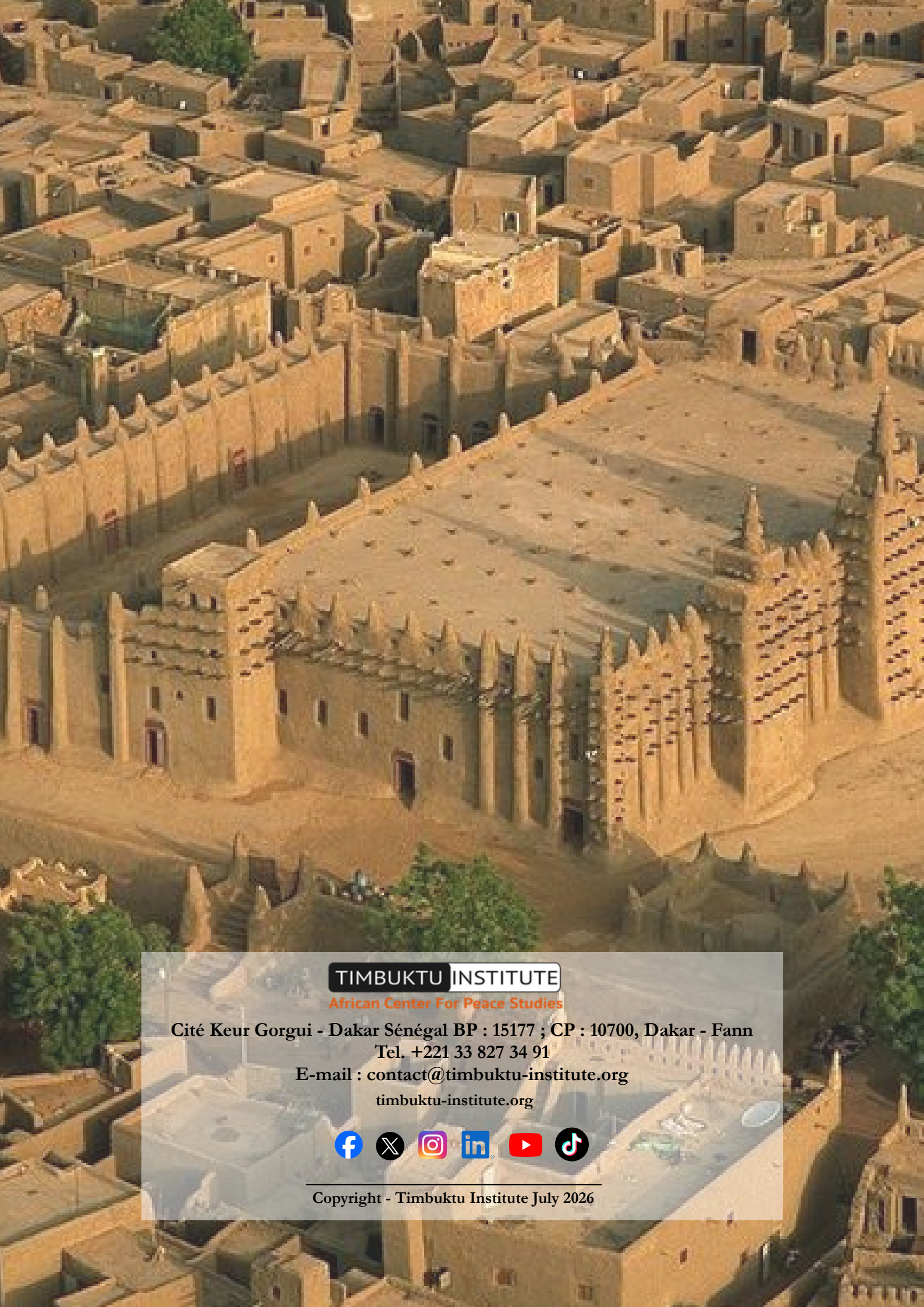
In Senegal—particularly regarding appointments to the Constitutional Council—as well as in Benin, through cases handled by the Criet and the Dangnivo case, strengthening transparency and the perceived independence of institutions remains essential. The goal is to preserve citizens' trust in judicial mechanisms and checks and balances, regardless of political divisions and affiliations.

Support spaces for the peaceful reorganization of the opposition

Ivorian parliamentary oversight initiatives and economic programs, such as Pro-Côte d'Ivoire, demonstrate the value of creating institutional spaces that allow the opposition and dissenting actors to voice their demands through peaceful means. Strengthening these mechanisms can help channel political dissent and limit the risks of radicalization when institutional channels prove insufficient.

Summary

The dynamics observed over the course of July confirm that the region is caught in a dual movement, with a notable shift compared to the start of the month. On one hand, capitals continue a deliberate institutional consolidation and an increasingly assertive continental diplomacy: political realignments, including the July 25 official launch of the presidential Kiiraay party in Senegal, and pan-African initiatives on water and Atlantic corridors. On the other hand, fault lines are becoming sharper: the Malian security crisis reaches a critical threshold with the deadliest ambush since 2012, and, above all, for the first time since the AES became anchored in Russia's orbit, tangible signs of friction are appearing in a partnership that had until now been presented as a strategic pillar – whether in the form of coordination shortcomings on the ground or the cancellation of military equipment deliveries. This potential weakening of the AES-Russia partnership, combined with persistent internal political fractures (Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso) and a growing gap between continental ambitions and domestic vulnerabilities (Chad), is arguably the most significant development to watch in the coming weeks. The very latest developments, up to July 27, reinforce this diagnosis of a region that is both more assertive on the international stage and increasingly marked by internal institutional fragilities. In Cameroon, Paul Biya's absence from national territory for 50 days, with no vice president appointed despite the April 2026 constitutional revision, has created a de facto power vacuum that the opposition is trying to have formally established before the Constitutional Council, adding a new source of institutional uncertainty to a context already marked by the fake presidential decree affair. In Togo, the CNCC's rally in Vogan on July 26 confirms that the opposition, emboldened by the ECOWAS Court of Justice ruling, is continuing its remobilization strategy, though it remains too early to gauge its capacity to durably shift the balance of power with Faure Gnassingbé's regime. Finally, and above all, Chad's withdrawal from the ICC's Rome Statute, announced on July 27, constitutes a major diplomatic shift: presented just three weeks earlier as the counter-example of a Sahel resistant to international judicial frameworks, N'Djamena has now joined the contestation movement led by the AES, confirming that the challenge to multilateral architectures inherited from the post-colonial period extends well beyond the Sahelian region alone and could, in the coming weeks, prompt other countries in the region to reconsider their own international commitments.



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