



## *¡El Sahel en llamas!: ¿Vuelta al caudillismo?*

### Resumen:

El siempre complejo equilibrio vital en el que, de forma secular, se ha movido el Sahel, se encuentra quebrado, debido, entre otras cuestiones, a un crecimiento demográfico explosivo, a una lucha creciente por unos cada vez más escasos recursos naturales y a unos gobiernos que se ven sobrepasados en sus intentos de mantener la estabilidad de sus países.

En ese entorno de desestabilización creciente, el Sahel y cada vez más partes de África Occidental, los afanes de grupos terroristas –especialmente los yihadistas- junto con los de viejas y nuevas potencias por instalarse en esa región clave de África y del planeta resultan constantes; y lo consiguen, en gran parte, aplicando una dinámica de “cuanto peor, mejor”. Cuanto peor para las sociedades, mejor para nosotros.

Una sucesión de golpes de estado se han producido en la región; y las percepciones sobre los mismos son variables, oscilando estas desde constituir una causa más de desorden a ser una simple consecuencia de esa inestabilidad creciente.

Una breve reflexión al respecto nuclea el presente Documento.

### Palabras clave:

Sahel, África Occidental, yihadismo, estabilización, golpes de estado, seguridad.

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## Coups d'état: New Sahelian "epidemic"?

The struggles for the (scarce and dwindling) vital resources for the majority of the population - land and water -, an almost exponential demographic growth, the brutal effect of climate change and the growing interest of old and new powers to position themselves in the region are generating, in the always complex Sahel<sup>1</sup>, an accelerated destabilisation process that is very difficult to reverse.

Stabilising a nation, a society, requires the cooperation of all actors, and that, under a minimum initial level of security - security is the basic human need and the primary element for development -, an adequate system of government is established to allow this economic and social development, which results in increased security and also an increase in the government's capacity to provide services - financed through taxes collected - to its citizens. This legitimises it before that society, which in turn increases its degree of cohesion and, consequently, its level of security in a virtuous cycle called "stabilisation cycle", which is no more or less than the process followed, essentially, in developed countries.

But unfortunately this cycle can also not only fail to turn, but turn in the opposite direction; and as security declines, government is challenged and economic and social development suffers, leading to more insecurity until, if the cycle becomes vicious - less security, less governance, less development - chaos ensues. This is what the Sahel is all about<sup>2</sup>.

Events that seemed to have been somewhat overcome, acts that seemed to be matters of the past, flourish and resurface in this growing chaos. The Sahel and West Africa are seeing governments overthrown by military coups in increasing sequence. Since the beginning of the decade, a significant number of coups have taken place in and around the Sahel: in Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), in Chad (April 2021), in Guinea-Conakry (September 2021), and in Burkina Faso in January 2022, in what has come to be defined

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro, 'Sahel: ¡Tormenta perfecta de amplitud e intensidad creciente!', in *Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2021*, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021, pages 229-252. Available at [https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/panorama\\_geopolitico\\_conflictos\\_21.pdf](https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/panorama_geopolitico_conflictos_21.pdf) (NOTE: All web links in this paper are active as of the closing date, 18 September 2022).

<sup>2</sup> SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro, 'El Sahel y la (in)seguridad: foco de inestabilidad creciente', in *El Sahel como centro de gravedad estratégico de África: Retos para la seguridad*, IPI/UFV, Analysis 16/2021, 25 June 2021. Available at [https://ipi-ufv.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Analisis-16-2021-Sahel\\_Retos-para-la-seguridad.pdf](https://ipi-ufv.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Analisis-16-2021-Sahel_Retos-para-la-seguridad.pdf)

as a "putschist epidemic"<sup>3</sup>, in a chain that seems to have no end and which it is feared could continue. Democracy in the region appears to be on the decline.

The situation is such that the UN Secretary General stressed<sup>4</sup> that, in the complex situation in the Sahel and West Africa, armies must put aside the uprisings and protect the population and democratic institutions. But in the light of the reality of the region, it is clear that the stabilisation cycle is broken, and are these uprisings perceived as a cause or a consequence of this destabilisation?

### **Coups d'état: A cause of destabilisation?**

Following the death of President Idriss Déby while visiting one of the combat zones where the Chadian army was fighting rebels on 20 April 2021, he was succeeded by his son, a 37-year-old general, proclaimed head of a junta of generals and 'transitional' president. But promises of free elections after more than 18 months do not seem likely to be fulfilled, given that 'the transition could be prolonged'<sup>5</sup>, as the President himself has pointed out. And although France, the European Union and the African Union, in principle, did not raise problems with Déby's succession - since the Chadian army is the largest and most prepared in the region, and a key player in the fight against terrorism - now, months later, the international sphere is reminding and insisting that elections should take place no later than autumn 2022, something that seems highly improbable from the moment.

In Burkina Faso, the attack by jihadists on the gendarmerie post in Inata - in the north of the country, close to the border with Mali - could have been one of the straws that broke the camel's back and triggered the coup; this attack, one of the worst suffered by the Burkinabe security forces<sup>6</sup>, was perpetrated in the early hours of Sunday 14 November 2021, when dozens of jihadists on pick-up trucks and off-road motorbikes attacked the base, which although it had more than a hundred troops, lacked a large number of resources - including food - despite repeated requests to the government to provide the

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<sup>3</sup> *El País*, 'Seis golpes de Estado este año: la "epidemia putschista" que recorre África', 30 October 2021. Available at <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-10-30/seis-golpes-de-estado-este-ano-la-epidemia-putschista-que-recorre-africa.html>

<sup>4</sup> Holanews, 'Guterres pide a militares proteger la democracia tras los golpes en el Sahel', 25 January 2022. Available at <https://holanews.com/guterres-pide-a-militares-proteger-la-democracia-tras-los-golpes-en-el-sahel/>

<sup>5</sup> SWI, 'En Chad un año después de la muerte de Déby se diluyen las promesas de la junta', 18 April 2022. Available at <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/en-chad--un-a%C3%B1o-despu%C3%A9s-de-la-muerte-de-d%C3%A9by-se-diluyen-las-promesas-de-la-junta/47524096>

<sup>6</sup> *El País*, 'Al menos una treintena de muertos en Burkina Faso tras un ataque yihadista a una base de la Gendarmería', 16 November 2021. Available at <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-11-16/al-menos-una-treintena-de-muertos-en-burkina-faso-tras-un-ataque-yihadista-a-una-base-de-la-gendarmeria.html>

necessary resources to carry out the mission entrusted to them. Although there are some disparities in the figures, the results was 57 people killed, 53 of whom were gendarmes. This and other attacks, together with the serious security situation in the country, prompted demands for resources and responses to violence and growing jihadism, adding to the country's instability. In January 2022, the government decided to impose an indefinite curfew<sup>7</sup> in response to disturbances - which resulted in several arrests - and, above all, to signs of disenchantment evident in several of the country's military units, as the demand was in response to the request for more resources and the resignation of certain positions, as a way to be more successful in the fight against growing jihadism and instability.

After some confusing news, the Prime Minister was arrested by military forces and taken to a barracks, along with several ministers<sup>8</sup>; finally, the coup was confirmed on 24 January 2022 and the resignation of the country's president, with Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba taking over, while a hitherto unknown "Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration" (MPSR) issued the following communiqué: 'In view of the deteriorating security situation and Roch Marc Christian Kaboré's obvious inability to unite the Burkinabe in order to effectively deal with the situation and following the exasperation expressed by the nation's various groups, the *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Sauvegarde et la Restauration* has decided to assume its responsibilities and face history'<sup>9</sup>.

After the coup d'état in Mali a year and a half earlier, the coup in Burkina Faso follows a similar pattern, whereby the military feel supported in seizing power by the wave of popular indignation generated by the government's inability to deal with jihadist violence, as well as by the armed forces' own demands and the growing distrust between the government and security forces, which contributes to the fact that these coups take place with relatively little violence and very little resistance<sup>10</sup>; their leaders even have similar

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<sup>7</sup> DW, 'Toque de queda en Burkina Faso ante conatos de revuelta', 23 January 2021. Available at <https://www.dw.com/es/toque-de-queda-en-burkina-faso-ante-conatos-de-revuelta/a-60531128>

<sup>8</sup> Infobae, 'Golpe de Estado en Burkina Faso: militares detuvieron al presidente y varios ministros', 24 January 2022. Available at <https://www.infobae.com/america/mundo/2022/01/24/la-familia-del-presidente-de-burkina-faso-abandono-el-pais-y-los-militares-exigen-la-dimision-de-kabore/>

<sup>9</sup> DW, 'Dimite el presidente de Burkina Faso tras el golpe de estado de los militares', 25 January 2022. Available at <https://www.dw.com/es/dimite-el-presidente-de-burkina-faso-tras-el-golpe-de-estado-de-los-militares/a-60544194>

<sup>10</sup> *El País*, 'Los golpes militares de baja intensidad ganan terreno en el Sahel', 26 January 2022. Available at <https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-01-26/los-golpes-militares-de-baja-intensidad-ganan-terreno-en-el-sahel.html>

profiles, prestigious military officers experienced, in both cases, in the fight against jihadist terrorism.

The triumphant coup d'état in Burkina Faso had already been attempted on 10 January as a result of the military's disenchantment with the resources used by the government to care of its troops with regard to aid to the families of those killed in the fight against terrorism, and also to the government's decisions regarding military commanders, decisions often taken based on criteria of political loyalty rather than on the merit and ability of commanders, which generated profound disenchantment among the majority and the existence of a 'privileged elite' - sometimes with serious signs of corruption - especially around the President and his Presidential Guard. And all this accumulated tension, together with the feeling of a large part of the population that a military commander at the head of the country would be a better option for the fight against terrorism<sup>11</sup>, led to the fact that during negotiations prior to the coup d'état on 24 January, in which even the head of the Mossi ethnic group - the majority ethnic group in Burkina Faso and a regular mediator in the country's complex moments - took part, some of the government negotiators raised the issue of withdrawing their support for the president. Tensions were not even lessened when the President, faced with evidence that the military establishment was increasingly hostile to his decisions, sought to reverse the security situation by creating a local militia called 'Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland', civilian militias that, armed and 'attached' to the army, would defend their towns against attacks by terrorist and organised crime groups. This initiative was in fact not a great success; on the contrary, it was often counter-productive and contributed to increased instability.

The lack of security in the country due to jihadist groups, organised crime groups and even the excesses of some security force members, led the population to support the coup d'état in Burkina Faso. And the many actors capable of violence have led to the coup government, in a show of the real or apparent attempts to improve coordination and the response to jihadism, and to bring a 'breath of fresh air'<sup>12</sup> to the fight against terrorism

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<sup>11</sup> PELLERIN, Mathieu and DEPAGNE, Rinaldo, 'The Ouagadougou coup: a reaction to insecurity', International Crisis Group, 28 January 2022. Available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/linsecurite-facteur-determinant-du-putsch-de-ouagadougou>

<sup>12</sup> Europa Press, 'El nuevo jefe del Ejército de Burkina Faso apuesta por dar "un soplo de aire nuevo" a la lucha antiterrorista', 9 February 2022. Available at <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-nuevo-jefe-ejercito-burkina-faso-apuesta-dar-soplo-aire-nuevo-lucha-antiterrorista-20220209152024.html>



and align Army efforts, to creating<sup>13</sup> a National Territory Operations Command in February 2022, which will exercise authority over the Armed Forces and the 'Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland' groups. It will also have capacity to adopt any measure that responds to security and defence needs, such as restrictions on circulation and banning certain means of transport, recalling that motorbikes and pick-up trucks are used by armed groups of all kinds to carry out their attacks.

In the case of Burkina Faso - the case of Mali is dealt with in greater detail in chapter 3 of Strategy Paper 214<sup>14</sup>- and despite the international community's condemnation of the coup d'état, the military junta in charge of the country is asking the same international community for help in overcoming the crisis<sup>15</sup>, which shows that the primary need is to increase security levels by reducing areas outside state control and recovering the will to fight of the country's security forces and the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland, as this security is a prerequisite for the gradual return of the public administration and the resettlement of displaced persons in their villages of origin.

As noted, the coup has been condemned by several international organisations, including the European Union, the African Union and ECOWAS. And while the latter organisation initially proposed<sup>16</sup> imposing sanctions on the country, as it had already done with Mali and Guinea-Conakry, it subsequently did not do so<sup>17</sup>, deciding to 'give a chance' to the new government of Burkina Faso and urging it to carry out a short transition. It may be that, given that the sanctions imposed on Mali have not deterred the coup in Burkina Faso, and given that not all nations are willing to close their borders and comply with these sanctions, such actions lose some of their effectiveness and deterrence, as well as generating powerful dissent within the Economic Community of West African States

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<sup>13</sup> SWI, 'La junta militar de Burkina Faso crea un comando para luchar contra yihadismo', 4 February 2022. Available at [https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/yihadistas-burkina-faso\\_la-junta-militar-de-burkina-faso-crea-un-comando-para-luchar-contra-yihadismo/47322140](https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/yihadistas-burkina-faso_la-junta-militar-de-burkina-faso-crea-un-comando-para-luchar-contra-yihadismo/47322140)

<sup>14</sup> SÁNCHEZ HERRAÉZ, Pedro, 'El Sahel: epicentro yihadista en África Occidental' in *Terrorismo internacional: mutación y adaptación de un fenómeno global*, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Strategy Paper 214 (forthcoming).

<sup>15</sup> AA, 'Líder golpista en Burkina Faso pide ayuda de la Comunidad Internacional para salir de la crisis', 28 January 2022. Available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/es/mundo/l%C3%ADder-golpista-en-burkina-faso-pide-ayuda-de-la-comunidad-internacional-para-salir-de-la-crisis/2488177>

<sup>16</sup> SWI, 'Países del oeste de África se reúnen para decidir posibles sanciones a la junta de Burkina Faso', 28 January 2022. Available at <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/pa%C3%ADses-del-oeste-de-%C3%A1frica-se-re%C3%BAnen-para-decidir-posibles-sanciones-a-la-junta-de-burkina-faso/47301832>

<sup>17</sup> SWI, 'La CEDEAO no impone sanciones a Burkina Faso pero pide una "transición corta"', 3 February 2022. Available at [https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/burkina-faso-golpe\\_la-cedeao-no-impone-sanciones-a-burkina-faso-pero-pide-una--transici%C3%B3n-corta-/47318846](https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/burkina-faso-golpe_la-cedeao-no-impone-sanciones-a-burkina-faso-pero-pide-una--transici%C3%B3n-corta-/47318846)

(ECOWAS) itself<sup>18</sup>, especially given that not all Sahelian countries belong to it and not all members are Sahelian.

In any case, coups d'état in themselves are causes of destabilisation, to a greater or lesser degree, both on a national and regional scale. But in the Sahelian case, given the complex panorama and in light of the frequency and sequence of these coups, can they not also be interpreted from another perspective?

### **Coups d'état: Consequences of destabilisation?**

It is sometimes believed<sup>19</sup> that a strong president, ruling with an iron fist, will be better able to deal with the growing violence that is increasingly gripping the entire region.

Thus, the coup d'état in Guinea-Conakry on 5 September 2021 was greeted with jubilation by a large part of the population, who were disenchanted to see that their standard of living in a country full of wealth did not improve and as corruption took over, to such an extent that the highest political representative of the opposition to the overthrown government, on learning of the coup, said: "I was not surprised by the depth of the political, economic and social crisis in which we are immersed. A coup was the only possible alternative, there was no way to change an illegitimate regime in which everything was at its service, rigged elections and instrumentalised justice. Nobody within the country has condemned it, everyone is happy"<sup>20</sup>, recalling that the deposed president had run for a third term in office against the provisions of the country's constitution.

In the face of discontent with rulers, the prevailing situation of insecurity and the social chaos in which they live, the population often applauds these coups d'état<sup>21</sup>. This is why there is such support, although it can quickly dwindle if there is no improvement in security, thus initiating a new cycle of social unrest towards the incoming government.

As is often expressed in this instability-stricken region, the dilemma of democracy or military dictatorship takes a back seat to the real problem, lack of security; and while

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<sup>18</sup> Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), official website: <https://www.ecowas.int/>

<sup>19</sup> MCLEAN, Ruth, 'Seis golpes en cinco países africanos: ¿Qué está pasando?', *The New York Times*, 1 February 2022. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2022/02/01/espanol/golpes-de-estado-africa-burkina-faso.html>

<sup>20</sup> *El País*, 'La profunda crisis que cobija al golpe de estado de Guinea-Conakry', 13 September 2021. Available at <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-09-13/la-profunda-crisis-que-cobija-al-golpe-de-estado-de-guinea-conakry.html>

<sup>21</sup> RFI, '¿Por qué gran parte de la población apoya los golpes de estado?', 26 January 2022. Available at <https://www.rfi.fr/es/afrika/20220126-por-qu%C3%A9-gran-parte-de-la-poblaci%C3%B3n-apoya-los-golpes-de-estado>



democracy is loved, it is sometimes simply a matter of trying to survive<sup>22</sup>. If we add that in large parts of the territory the population has to be self-sufficient in terms of food and energy, and has hardly any services or infrastructure provided by the state, they do not really see the advantages that democracy has had in the course of their daily lives; and, on the other hand, these same populations are highly critical of the fact that the international community cries out when a coup takes place - claiming that it is against democracy - but says nothing when that same democracy is degraded or becomes inoperative. It is also necessary to consider that demonstrations in support of the coup d'état take place mainly in cities, as abuses by security forces and the increased security situation in the countryside generate a different perception. In order to properly assess the feelings of the population, it is also necessary to consider how the very sanctions imposed by CEDAO, whose effects are essentially suffered by the population, awaken 'a wave of patriotism' and help to align the population even more with the coup perpetrators. Clearly, the reality of living in an epicentre of generalised violence brings to the fore the need for survival first, which in turn leads to choices that, in other circumstances and environments, might not be as easily viable or even as apparent. This may be the solution for improving the situation. Is that so?

### Is the situation improving?

Not only is it not getting better, it is getting worse; and nations, faced with growing chaos, are (still) asking for international help as they do not know which is the next to fall into total destabilisation<sup>23</sup>; even the governments and military juntas that assume power after a coup d'état do so. They also call for assistance, but tend to approach issues from a much more unilateral and particularistic perspective. Even Mali does so<sup>24</sup> despite the fact that it has not allowed most international missions to continue on its territory.

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<sup>22</sup> *El Diario*, 'De Guinea a Burkina Faso: qué está alimentando los golpes militares en África occidental', 10 February 2022- Available at [https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/theguardian/guinea-burkina-faso-alimentando-golpes-militares-africa-occidental\\_1\\_8726541.html](https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/theguardian/guinea-burkina-faso-alimentando-golpes-militares-africa-occidental_1_8726541.html)

<sup>23</sup> Europa Press, 'Los países del Sahel piden una respuesta coordinada; "No sabemos cuál va a ser el siguiente en caer en la inestabilidad"', 4 April 2022. Available at <https://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-paises-sahel-piden-respuesta-coordinada-no-sabemos-cual-va-ser-siguiente-caer-inestabilidad-20220404212556.html>

<sup>24</sup> Europa Press, 'Malí impone condiciones para la colaboración con otros países tras el repliegue militar de Francia', 20 August 2022. Available at <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-mali-impone-condiciones-colaboracion-otros-paises-repliegue-militar-francia-20220820091025.html#:~:text=The%20Government%20of%20Mal%20Mal%C3%AD%20has%20strategi c%20interests%20in%22%20the%20African%20country%C3%ADs%20..>

A Patriotic Front has been created in Burkina Faso, claiming that the military junta only intends<sup>25</sup>, using the so-called reconciliation process, to 'rehabilitate accomplices' of activities contrary to the country's interests, that the same junta has used lies and deceit to achieve power, and that it is simply a re-edition of the previous regime.

Similarly, the families of the more than 10,000 civilian and military victims of terrorist attacks in the country since 2015 are asking the government for more help, to which the Burkinabe justice minister said<sup>26</sup> that a court specialising in terrorist acts has been set up and the institutional framework has been strengthened to attend to the rights of victims. But the violence continues<sup>27</sup>, the number of victims and displaced people is growing - already two million people in a country of just over 20 million inhabitants - and 10% of the population has been forced to flee their homes and livelihoods because of the violence. But the violence is not only jihadist; accusations linking one ethnic group - the Peuls or Fulani - to terrorists are not only a source of local disputes, but radio messages are beginning to be broadcast reminiscent of the run-up to the Rwandan genocide in 1994 where three quarters of a million Tutsis were killed by ethnic Hutus with machetes and improvised weapons. The Peul's narrative<sup>28</sup> regarding the need for mass murder, ethnic cleansing and massacres is populating social media, which may lead to a full-blown civil war. And, in addition to growing inter-community violence, accusations<sup>29</sup> of extrajudicial killings by security forces are also rife.

All this shows that, despite the measures adopted, governments are not capable of providing security - obviously a very complicated issue given the situation in the region - and it seems that there has been no substantial improvement compared to the pre-coup

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<sup>25</sup> Europa Press, 'Cerca de 35 partidos y organizaciones civiles crean Frente Patriótico crean el Frente Patriótico frente a la Junta Militar de Burkina Faso', 5 August 2022. Available at <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-cerca-35-partidos-organizaciones-civiles-crean-frente-patriotico-frente-junta-militar-burkina-faso-20220805151925.html>

<sup>26</sup> LA VANGUARDIA, 'Más de 10.000 muertos por ataques terroristas en Burkina Faso desde 2015', 2 September 2022. Available at <https://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20220902/8498077/mas-10-000-muertos-ataques-terroristas-burkina-faso-2015.html>

<sup>27</sup> Increasingly common news reports on the subject include: Europa Press, 'Mueren cerca de diez personas en dos ataques en el norte de Burkina Faso', 7 September 2022. Available at <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-mueren-cerca-diez-personas-dos-ataques-norte-burkina-faso-20220907103747.html> SWI, 'Mueren 8 soldados y 41 terroristas en un ataque al Ejército de Burkina Faso', 14 September 2022. Available at [https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/yihadistas-burkina-faso\\_mueren-8-soldados-y-41-terroristas-en-un-ataque-al-ej%C3%A9rcito-de-burkina-faso/47901198](https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/yihadistas-burkina-faso_mueren-8-soldados-y-41-terroristas-en-un-ataque-al-ej%C3%A9rcito-de-burkina-faso/47901198)

<sup>28</sup> FRANCE24, 'Burkina Faso: llamamientos a la « exterminación » de la comunidad fulani hacen temer una guerra civil', 19 August 2022. Available at <https://www.france24.com/es/%C3%A1frica/20220819-burkina-faso-grabaciones-piden-exterminar-fulani>

<sup>29</sup> CIDAF, 'Encuentran un campo de exterminio en Burkina Faso', 9 July 2020. Available at <https://cidafucm.es/encuentran-un-campo-de-exterminio-en-burkina-faso>

period either. As a result, self-defence groups continue to flourish - which are also, on many occasions, part of the problem - such as the aforementioned Homeland Defence Groups, Jungle Guards, Anti-Jihadist Groups, etc. The situation of growing insecurity has reached such an extent that the President of the Junta of Burkina has dismissed the Minister of Defence and taken over the post himself<sup>30</sup>.

And terrorism is growing and spreading, throughout the Sahel and increasingly to and through the Gulf of Guinea<sup>31</sup>, a great concern to these nations and to all of us.

Adding to the complexity of the search for solutions, international missions essentially focused on security, have been largely expelled from Mali<sup>32</sup>- Operation Barkane completed its withdrawal from the country in August 2022, the EU training mission (EUTM Mali) and the training mission (EUCAP Mali) are at a low profile<sup>33</sup> and with the constant sword of Damocles of not being able to continue their activities, the UN mission (MINUSMA) almost lost Germany, one of its major troop contributors, as a member, in addition to limitations on movement and Bamako's constant questioning of its reports and activities - probably to avoid annoying witnesses of what is actually happening in the country, especially by the mercenaries of Russian company Wagner. The fact is that insecurity continues, populations are increasingly isolated and initial triumphalism is giving way to the feeling that the new government is only protecting its interests, that the terrorists dominate the terrain, and that it seems they are going to win, so the only thing left to do is to accept their radical living conditions or flee.

ECOWAS is highly active in trying to get the situation back to normal; it ends up eliminating sanctions on Mali after finally becoming aware of the differences they create among members of the organisation and that they are ultimately only harmful to the

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<sup>30</sup> Europa Press, 'El jefe de la Junta cesa al ministro de Defensa y asume el cargo ante la inseguridad en Burkina Faso', 13 September 2022. Available at <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-jefe-junta-cesa-ministro-defensa-asume-cargo-inseguridad-burkina-faso-20220913110516.html>

<sup>31</sup> Europa Press, 'Togo prorroga durante seis meses el estado de emergencia ante la amenaza yihadista', 7 September 2022. Available at <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-togo-prorroga-seis-meses-estado-emergencia-amenaza-yihadista-20220907070436.html> Agencia Fides, 'Nigeria: "Estamos atravesando el capítulo más oscuro de nuestra historia" dice el Presidente de la Conferencia Episcopal', 12 September 2022. Available at [http://www.fides.org/es/news/72790-AFRICA\\_NIGERIA\\_Estamos\\_atravesando\\_el\\_capitulo\\_mas\\_oscuero\\_de\\_nuestra\\_historia\\_dice\\_el\\_Presid\\_ente\\_de\\_la\\_Conferencia\\_Episcopal](http://www.fides.org/es/news/72790-AFRICA_NIGERIA_Estamos_atravesando_el_capitulo_mas_oscuero_de_nuestra_historia_dice_el_Presid_ente_de_la_Conferencia_Episcopal) Europa Press, 'Estado Islámico reclama la autoría de varios ataques en Benín', 16 September 2022. Available at <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-estado-islamico-reclama-autoria-varios-ataques-benin-20220916133733.html>

<sup>32</sup> European Union External Service, 'The terrorist threat is expanding in the Sahel', 19 August 2022. Available at [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/terrorist-threat-expanding-sahel\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/terrorist-threat-expanding-sahel_en)

<sup>33</sup> Reuters, 'EU ends part of Mali training mission, fearing Russian interference, Borrell says', 12 April 2022. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-ends-part-mali-training-mission-fearing-russian-interference-borrell-says-2022-04-11/>

population, not really the government; it gets the Military Junta in Guinea-Bissau (officially the National Committee of Reconciliation and Development) to accept<sup>34</sup> a two-year transition regime, although the Guinean President's initial intention was for the period to be a little longer, for 36 months. The initiatives are rolled out fully aware that instability, and especially if it entails a powerful component of insecurity - as is currently occurring - spreads quickly like an oil slick; and also considering that borders are extremely porous in the region and that ethnic peoples and groups are spread and fight between and throughout different countries, which only contributes to complicating the situation and hindering the search for solutions.

As previously noted, the lack of security in the region, the jihadist advance, the excesses of some elements of the security force - and of self-defence groups - together with the sense of abandonment of the population, of the victims and even part of the armed forces by their governments largely led to generate and encourage this sequence of coups d'état... and, since then...?

### **Conclusion?**

The flames are not extinguished and stabilisation achieved with lead and fury alone.

Nor without a minimum of security.

Nor without having a system of government that is minimally fair and beneficial to all - or almost all.

Nor without having a society with a reasonable degree of cohesion that makes it possible to move forward together in pursuit of the common good.

Therefore, unless these 'withouts' are transformed into 'haves', the conclusion is very simple: more lead and more fury, more fury and more lead.

Will this be the conclusion for the Sahel and West Africa?

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<sup>34</sup> Europa Press, 'La junta militar de Guinea acepta un período de transición de dos años', 28 July 2022. Available at <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-junta-militar-guinea-acepta-periodo-transicion-dos-anos-20220728213325.html>