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Africa

# A bleak future for the Sahel

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**In the face of the criminal policy of the jihadists, the all-military policy of the juntas of Mali and Burkina Faso remains a failure and is taking a heavy toll on the population, aggravated by the deteriorating food situation.**

Jihadist fighters in the Sahel are advancing inexorably, to the extent that countries on the west coast of Africa, previously spared, are under attack. This is the case for Ghana, Benin and Togo, which has just renewed its curfew in the north of the country. The juntas that took power in Mali and then Burkina Faso on the pretext of improving the security situation are hardly doing any better than their predecessors.

## Different tactics

The putschists in Mali decided to intensify military operations against jihadist groups with the help of mercenaries from the Russian company Wagner. As a result, the number of civilian deaths in 2022 doubled. One third of the victims were murdered by the Malian army and its Russian auxiliaries.

Burkina Faso has taken a different path. The junta there organised the enlistment of civilians into the Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP). The result is not very convincing, as these VDPs tend to focus on the Peuhl community, accusing them of terrorism. In the village of Ouahigouya, for example, the military and the VDP have massacred teenagers and children in atrocious conditions simply because they were Peul.

In Mali as in Burkina Faso, the strategy remains the same. Use military force to settle the crisis. It is the same strategy that the French army, with Serval and Barkhane, has employed... with the success that we know.

Of the three countries, Niger is perhaps the one that is doing best. The fact that it managed to settle the Tuareg rebellions in the 1990s has created a peaceful situation. Another element is the authorities' stated willingness to engage in dialogue with all armed groups, including those of the Islamic State. The aim is to attempt a political resolution of the conflict.

## Identical repression

The war situation in all three countries is the alibi for restricting democratic freedoms. In Mali, criticism of the junta is considered a crime. For example, the African Social Democratic Party is threatened with dissolution because its president, Ismaël Sacko, made "insulting remarks about the transitional authorities" during an interview with RFI. Omar Mariko, one of the leaders of the radical left, is still living in clandestinity. The press is obliged to support the patriotic effort and the slightest criticism is seen as treason. The government of Burkina Faso also acts in the same way. It recently expelled two journalists following the report on the Ouahigouya massacre of civilians. Human rights activists are forcibly incorporated into the VDP.

Niger is also not left out of this repressive cycle. Abdoulaye Seydou, coordinator of M62, a platform of civil society organizations, was arrested.

Behind the repression lies the survival of these regimes which, unable to honour their promise of improved security, maintain pressure on the population.

# Suffering of the populations

The Sahel is experiencing an increase in refugee populations. They are caught between the regular forces and the various armed jihadist or community groups. Each group carries out reprisal policies by attacking civilians who, according to their ethnicity, are supposed to belong to a particular camp.

Some towns, such as Sebba, Dori and Djibo, are under blockade by the jihadists. Food crises are looming throughout the region. Estimates of the number of people suffering from hunger amount to more than 40 million. The educational situation is not good. The jihadists have forced the closure of more than 11,000 schools in the territories they control. Hundreds of thousands of children are thus left without schooling, jeopardising their future. Living together in the Sahel is becoming increasingly difficult. But despite the difficulties, it is still possible to find harmony between communities.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).*

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