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„Coups d'état in Africa: A Case Study of the Sahel“

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Abstract - English

This paper examines the reasons for the prevalence of coups d'état in Africa with a special focus on the Sahel region and the influence of French colonialism and neo colonial interventionism, 16 of the 23 successful coups in Africa since 2000 have occurred in former French colonies, as well as the role that the Russian Federation has taken on in the Sahel in recent years.

Incorporating evidence from research analysis conducted by various scholars and new evidence from policy papers and official statements, this study demonstrates that the meddling of France in internal (security) affairs of the States of the Sahel region had and has a profound impact on the stability in the region. The reemergence of coups is directly correlated with growing discontent of the general public and the military establishment, following the failures of French and UN troops to contain the threat of terror organizations and the growing security crisis in the region.

Nevertheless, it argues that France is a major contributor but not the main or sole reason behind the coups. Economic mismanagement, corruption, and violent extremism by various (Islamist) terror organizations are other contributing factors that have to be taken into account.

The engagement of Russia consists largely of military-technical cooperation and security exports, despite the expanding economic cooperation. The Wagner Group has been an important tool in these endeavors, however, the newly formed Africa Corps, officially established by the Russian Defense Ministry marks a major shift in the Africa policy of Russia. Contrary to the secrecy behind the actions of Wagner, which was never publicly presented as having links to the Russian State, the Africa Corps officially provides security to African Statespeople.

The closer cooperation of Russia with the security apparatus of various countries of the Sahel region, as well as the hostile environment that France and its Western Partners experienced in recent years, is going to have a profound impact on the role and security situation of the Sahel region in the future. However, how this will play out will be subject to subsequent research.

Abstract - German

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Gründe für die Verbreitung von Staatsstreich in Afrika mit besonderem Schwerpunkt auf der Sahelzone und dem Einfluss des französischen Kolonialismus und deren neokolonialen Interventionismus, 16 der 23 erfolgreichen Staatsstreich in Afrika seit 2000 fanden in ehemaligen französischen Kolonien statt, sowie auf der Rolle, die die Russische Föderation in den letzten Jahren in der Sahelzone übernommen hat.

Unter Einbeziehung von Beweisen aus Forschungsanalysen verschiedener Wissenschaftler und neuen Erkenntnissen aus Grundsatzpapieren und offiziellen Stellungnahmen zeigt diese Studie, dass die Einmischung Frankreichs in innere (Sicherheits-)Angelegenheiten der Staaten der Sahelzone tiefgreifende Auswirkungen auf die Stabilität der Region hatte und hat. Das Wiederauftreten von Staatsstreich steht in direktem Zusammenhang mit der wachsenden Unzufriedenheit der Öffentlichkeit und des militärischen Establishments, nachdem es den französischen und UN-Truppen nicht gelungen ist, die Bedrohung durch Terrororganisationen einzudämmen, und die wachsende Sicherheitskrise in der Region.

Dennoch wird argumentiert, dass Frankreich ein wichtiger Mitwirkender sei, aber nicht der Haupt- oder alleinige Grund für die Putsche. Wirtschaftliche Misswirtschaft, Korruption und gewalttätiger Extremismus verschiedener (islamistischer) Terrororganisationen sind weitere Faktoren, die berücksichtigt werden müssen.

Das Engagement Russlands besteht trotz der zunehmenden wirtschaftlichen Zusammenarbeit größtenteils aus militärisch-technischer Zusammenarbeit und Sicherheitsexporten. Die Wagner-Gruppe war bei diesen Bemühungen ein wichtiges Instrument, doch das neu gegründete Afrika-Korps, das offiziell vom russischen Verteidigungsministerium gegründet wurde, markiert einen großen Wandel in der Afrika-Politik Russlands. Im Gegensatz zur Geheimhaltung hinter Wagners Aktionen, die öffentlich nie Verbindungen zum russischen Staat hatte, sorgt das Afrika-Korps offiziell für die Sicherheit afrikanischer Staatsleute.

Die engere Zusammenarbeit Russlands mit dem Sicherheitsapparat verschiedener Länder der Sahelzone sowie das feindselige Umfeld, das Frankreich und seine westlichen Partner in den letzten Jahren erlebt haben, werden tiefgreifende Auswirkungen auf die Rolle und Sicherheitssituation der Sahelzone in der Zukunft haben. Dies wird jedoch Gegenstand weiterer Untersuchungen sein.

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Abbreviations

ACLED - Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project

ACSS – African Centre for Strategic Studies

ADF-RDA - Alliance pour la Démocratie and la Fédération-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain

AES – Alliance of Sahel States

AOS - Afrique-Occidentale française (French West Africa)

AQIM - Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

ASS – Alliance of Sahelian States

ATT – Amadou Toumani Touré

AU – African Union

CNSP - National Committee for the Salvation of the People

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

CAR – Central African Republic

CDR - Committees for the Defence of the Revolution

CFA - Communauté Financière Africaine

CMRPN - Comité Militaire de Redressement pour le Progrès National

CNT - National Transitional Council

CSP - Council of Popular Salvation

ENVR - Ecoles Nationales à Vocation Régionale

FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights

HAC - High Authority for Communication

HCIM – Haut Conseil Islamique du Mali

H5-RFP - The 5 June Movement, Rally of Patriotic Forces

IMF – International Monetary Fund

ISGS – Islamic State in the Greater Sahara

JNIM - Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal-Muslimin

LNA – Libyan National Army

LNG - Liquefied Natural Gas

MINUSMA - Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

MNLA - National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad

MPSR - MPSR, the Patriotic Movement for Safeguarding and Restoration

MUJAO - Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa

ODP/MT - Organisation pour la Démocratie Populaire/Mouvement du Travail

PMC – Private Military Company

RSP - Regiment of Presidential Security

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Honor statement

Pledge of Honesty: On my honor as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien,
I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received
unauthorized assistance on it.

Andreas Daniel Feichtenschlager-Feichtenschlager

1. Introduction

In July 2023, the president of Niger Mohamed Bazoum, elected in 2021 was overthrown in a coup d'état under the supervision of General Abdourahamane Tchiani, the commander of the presidential guard. In less than three years, there have been seven successful military takeovers throughout Western and Central Africa. In comparison, during the same period, there was only one successful coup in the rest of the world, which occurred in Myanmar in 2021. A coup d'état is described by the Cambridge Dictionary as the abrupt overthrow of a government by an unauthorized party, frequently a military one, using force.

The coup in Niger followed those in Mali in August 2020, Chad in April 2021, Guinea in September 2021, Burkina Faso in January and September of 2022, and Mali again nine months later in May 2021 (Engels 2023: 147). Three of those nations, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, left the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at the end of January 2024 as a result of the organization's severe sanctions on Mali and Niger following their successful coups. Trade was halted, Niger's borders and airspace were closed, and food prices skyrocketed as a result of the country's inability to import desperately needed medications. In order to get Niger's president Mohamed Bazoum to be released from house detention, ECOWAS even threatened to deploy military force.

Then, none of the three refrained from threatening to act in response to any military danger emanating from the area. They later left the G5, an international organization created to combat Islamists in the area, and in the latter part of last year, they established the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), a mutual defense alliance. This diminished the influence of ECOWAS and further weakened regional security. It also opened the door for other actors to enter the security policy frame. On the forefront of this development is the Russian Federation that increased their efforts in the region considerably in the wake of the international isolation that started with their war of aggression in Ukraine.

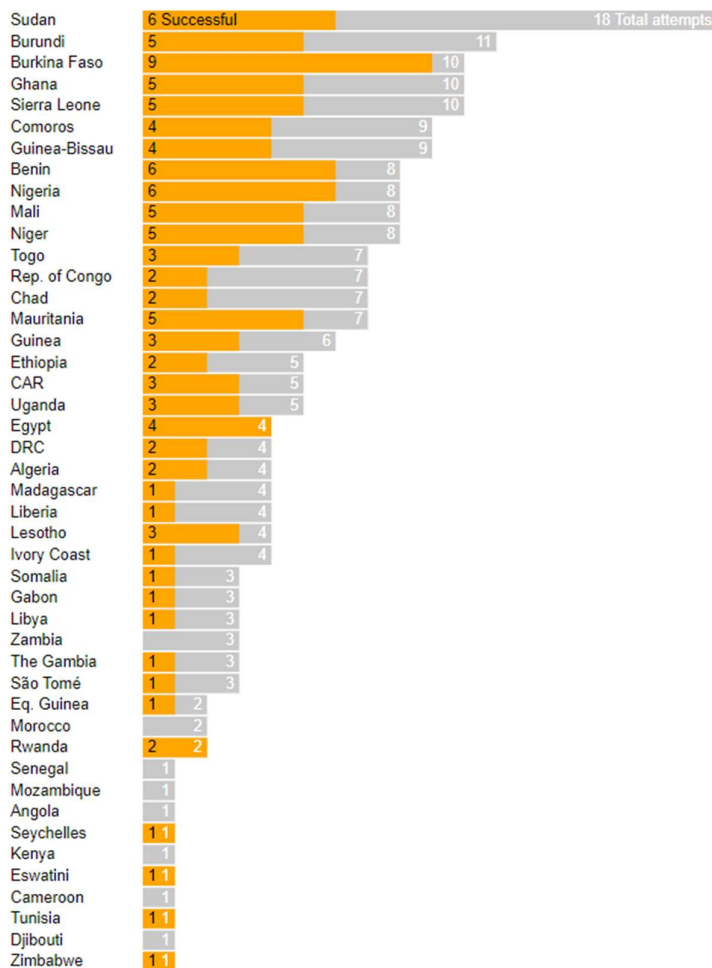
Between 1950 and 2023 there have been 220 Coup attempts in Africa with 93 of them happening in the Sahel region. Especially in the 1980s there were frequent attempts of Coups d'état, whereas in the 1990s and 2000s the number of attempts dropped

significantly. In the last couple of years these figures increased drastically again. According to the United Nations, the Sahel Region includes ten countries with more than 300 million inhabitants: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2023) also includes Sudan, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, and the Central African Republic stretching the Sahel region, which lies just below the Sahara Desert, all the way from the Atlantic Ocean in the West to the Red Sea in the East.

In Figure 1 we can see how many Coups attempts there have been per country in Africa since the 1950.

Figure 1: Coups per country in Africa since 1950

Coups per country since 1950



Source: (Duzor 2023)

Many motives and circumstances have been cited for these coups, as putschists accused the ruling regimes of corruption, economic mismanagement, and failure to confront armed separatist and jihadi movements, such as Boko Haram, that constitute a serious challenge to the region's states. Disparate international reactions to these coups also point to the complexities of the intense regional and international competition between interested major powers (Mahmoud 2023).

France, and the United States to a lesser degree, adhere to supporting elected governments in countries that experienced coups for reasons that do not necessarily have anything to do with supporting democracy, but rather with the isolated authorities' compatibility with their own interests. On the other hand, other international players, led by Russia, have found opportunities to enhance their influence by supporting the emergent regimes and the new power brokers, exploiting the region's growing wave of discontent with the West (Mahmoud 2023).

Haidara (2023) argues that the coups were mainly justified, among other things, by the desire of the perpetrators to improve the situation following the inability of the ousted regimes to do so. In all cases, the juntas quickly succeeded in exploiting the 'anti-French sentiment' that was already widespread while also winning the support of a large part of the population.

There have been a multitude of reasons for an anti-French sentiment in West and Central Africa, but it has increased considerably in the last couple of years with examples of deeply rooted anti-French sentiment abound in West Africa. From the October 2022 attacks on the French Embassy in Ouagadougou and the French Institute in Bobo-Dioulasso to regular demonstrations in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger protesting France's presence in the region, or from the ransacking of French-owned businesses in Dakar in March 2021 to the countless invectives spouted at French politicians, there is a great deal of hostility being felt by most of the general public which rejects all forms of French presence (Guiffard 2023).

The current anti-French sentiment, or the rejection of France's Africa policy, originated in Mali, before spreading to other countries, with the establishment, or more specifically the failure, of Operation Barkhane (formerly Serval) in 2013 (Haidara 2023). In an article in the Harvard International Review, King (2023) points out that the French military counter-terrorism campaign, which ended in 2022, has almost

universally been interpreted as a massive disaster and increased France's unpopularity in the Sahel region.

Especially the back-to-back coups in Mali in 2020 and 2021 and Burkina Faso in January and September of 2022, weakened the position of France and opened the door for the involvement of Russia, mostly through its proxies like the mercenary Wagner Group. Considering the international isolation of Russia mostly through the United States and Europe, they accelerated their efforts in diversifying their zone of influence in the African states of the Sahel region.

Due to the continuous failure of France, the United Nations and other players of the Western World, the discontent of local authorities, as well as the general population has increased considerably in the last couple of years. With the withdrawal of French troops in 2023, after the conclusion of Operation Barkhane, Russia has moved swiftly to fill in the hole and provide security measures.

The power struggle between France and its Western Partners with Russia and also China is projected to have an important influence on the security situation and stability of the Sahel region, and due to its proximity to the Maghreb region of North Africa, also of Europe.

1. 1. Research Question

Through this paper, I will be trying to analyze the specific reasons why the Sahel region in Northwestern Africa is the region with the most Coups d'état in the world and what role French colonialism (and perceived neo-colonialism) and Russian Neo-Colonialism plays in the grand scheme of things. The evolution of the power dynamics between France and Russia, first in the Middle East and North Africa which has started to trickle down towards the Sahel region, is an important point to understand in this regard. Following Almonds and Powell's system's capability framework which is designed as a basis for comparing different political systems in terms of their capacities to fulfill certain functional prerequisites necessary to ensure the maintenance, adaptation and survival of the political system, we will try to propose possible solutions for the emergence and frequency of Coups d'état in the Sahel region (Chilaka 2010).

1. 2. Methodology

Before we delve into the main part of this paper there will be an introduction to some key questions including, the term Coups d'état, what it is and why it keeps happening, especially in the region. Subsequently, there will be a short introduction on the chosen theoretical framework this paper aims to follow. The main part of the paper will then follow where we take a closer look at how the French colonial past and present affected and still affects the region and how Russian mercenaries have further destabilized the region. Furthermore, we will look how the dynamics in the Russo-Sahel relationship changed since the start of the Ukrainian war and how the Africa policy of Russia changed. For a more thorough analysis we will include two case studies on two of the countries in which a Coups d'état has taken place in the last four years, namely Mali and Burkina Faso. For a deeper understanding of the coups of the present day, we will examine the history of coups both countries have experienced since their independence from France in 1960. In order to analyze the aforementioned dynamics, this paper will work quantitatively and analyze some of the many academic works that exist on this topic and have a look at official statements by African Statespeople and the United Nations. To conclude there will be a presentation of the results and an attempt to propose possibilities to reduce the emergence and frequency of Coups d'état. In the conclusion the contents of this paper will be summarized.

1. 3. Theoretical Framework

The way that military coups are conceptualized has changed significantly over time, influenced by both historical developments and academic discussions. Since the French Revolution, the perception of coups has changed from being seen as largely carried out by the governing elite to being seen as measures against them. This modification underscores the complicated character of coups, which have political, analytical, and normative aspects (Bester 2024: 5).

Scholarship improved upon this understanding throughout the 20th century, especially with the wave of military coups in the Middle East and Africa. Early definitions, such as those by Thompson (1975) and Welch (1970), defined coups as direct military interventions to overthrow civilian governments, with a focus on the military as the primary actor. Military coups are defined as "overt collective actions by a coalition

including some portion of a country's armed forces, police, or paramilitary forces, with the intent to overthrow the government" by Singh (2014) and other scholars. Later, these definitions were expanded to cover a wider variety of players. The concept of "silent coups," which are discrete and non-violent in nature, was suggested by Marsteintredet (2020), who provides additional evidence of this progression in thought. These coups differ from conventional ones in that they employ unique strategies, including the non-use of force or violence to achieve overthrow. By providing definitional criteria for military coups, emphasizing the participation of members of the regime's military or security apparatus, and distinguishing between failed and successful coups, Chin and Kirkpatrick (2023) made additional contributions. The primary actor, the six-security apparatus, the objective, the desire to topple the current government, the strategy, the use of force, the threat of force, or overt acts, are all mentioned in these categories.

This paper adopts the regulative capability analytical framework, which is an integral part of Almond's General Systems theory. According to Almond and Powell (1966), the system's capability framework is an analytical construct designed as a basis for comparing different political systems in terms of their capacities to fulfill certain functional prerequisites necessary to ensure the maintenance, adaptation and survival of the political system (Chilaka 2010).

The notion of systems capabilities defines the extent to which the system can, as David Easton (1953) has noted that some demands can be challenging to the system and the system must possess the necessary elements and mechanisms to meet them in order to survive. Essentially, Almond and Powell's systems capability scheme consists of five capabilities: the extractives, the regulative, the distributive, the symbolic, and the responsive; the fulfillment of which is necessary to ensure systems adaptation, change and survival. It is really the "regulative capability" that is our concern here, but it is necessary that we first briefly explain what the others involve.

The extractive capability addresses the issue of the ability of the political system to obtain the relevant resources, both from within and outside the system, to sustain itself. The symbolic capability addresses the need and ability of the political system to create, develop and maintain relevant and adequate symbols with which to attract to itself and its institutions the support, loyalty, and affection of its citizens. The distributive

capability focuses on the ability of the political system to adequately and equitably distribute “values” –goods and services to, and among its citizens both as individuals and as social groups throughout the society. The responsive capability focuses on the capacity of the political system to respond adequately and vigorously to the demands made upon it both from the domestic and international environment. In short, the responsive capability addresses the issue of the need and ability of the political system to make available to its citizens, both in their individual and group capacities, those characteristics of democracy which they desire (Chilaka, 2010).

As Almond & Powell (1966) argued, the regulative capability that this study analyzes addresses the issue of the capacity of the political system to penetrate and exercise control over individuals and groups throughout the society. By its nature, the regulative capability involves the issue of the maintenance and use of the states’ instruments of force to ensure the protection and defense of the society against external aggression and internal insurrection as evidenced in military coups as well as the maintenance of law and order in the society. The regulative capability is an important and crucial function to be adequately fulfilled to guarantee that military coups do not succeed in West Africa. This is because it is through it that the political system responds to pressures that are likely to mar and endanger the peace and security of a state. This is particularly so in a rentier continent like Africa where politics is seen as a means of wealth accumulation and becomes a zero-sum game. In such societies, as is the case with Africa, the political system is confronted with not only the problem of having to strive to maintain its institutions but more importantly, it has the added problem of how to contain diverse groups that intend to use arms and violence to acquire state power.

Our foregoing discussion clearly shows that there exists a positive relationship between the ability of, and the degree to which, a political system adequately fulfills its regulative capability functions and the extent to which order is maintained in the state. It, therefore, follows that states of the Sahel region have not been able to exercise their regulative capability function. As a result of this, military coups have become a recurring incident in the sub-region. In the main, our decision to adopt this regulative theoretical orientation for this paper is predicated on its explanatory capacity as it enables us to establish a causal relationship between the ability of the political system to respond to threats and the loyalty it gets from its citizens including its security forces (Chilaka 2022: 56)

1. 4. Literature Review

Most coups and attempted coups have taken place in Africa, and there is no absence of literature on the topic. Several theoretical frameworks have been introduced by scholars, and the tendency is to approach the topic by providing a detailed analysis of one aspect of the topic. Powell et al. (2016), for instance, focused on how coups can be limited through sanctions. Miller (2011) placed emphasis on fixing the economy and building strong democratic governments, whereas O'Kane (1993) applied a political economy approach to discuss how coups in Africa can be curbed. Johnson, Slater and McGowan (1984) analyzed the structural determinants of military Coups d'état within the states of Sub-Saharan Africa and made interesting findings on the diminution of attempted coups in African states that maintained some degree of political participation and pluralism. In this paper these frameworks will be adapted and applied, with a focus on the Sahel region.

The effect of French colonial rule on the (in)stability of the Sahel region has been of particular interest to scholars since 2020. Mann (2021), Guichaoua (2020) and McGiffin (2021) are some examples of scholars that published papers or articles on this topic within the last couple of years. Also when it comes to French, as well as Russian neo-colonialism there is no shortage of academic work that has been conducted recently. Amartey (2022), Engels (2023) and Diallo (2019) have conducted thorough research into French neo-colonialism, whereas Bokeriya et al. (2022), Issaev (2022) and Neethling (2023) delved deeper into Russian neo-colonial efforts in Western Africa and the Sahel region.

In summary there has been a lot of academic work in this field, offering different perspectives and angles on the many facets that Coups d'état have. However, as with many academic works on this topic there has been a very general approach, trying to cover the whole of Africa or West Africa. It must be pointed out that there might be different grounds and cultural intricacies that form the hotbed for Coups (attempts). As mentioned earlier this paper will analyze the originalities of the Sahel region.

1. 5. Limitations

Possible limitations for an analysis of Coups d'état in the Sahel region include the question which countries are in fact part of the Sahel region. According to the UN there are ten countries which are part of the Sahel, other sources count twelve. In this paper the focus will lie strongly on military Coups d'état in the Sahel region, many important theoretical frameworks, some of them mentioned above, had a strong focus on the whole African continent or Sub-Saharan Africa. The adaptation of these frameworks to the Sahel region could be a major challenging factor.

When it comes to the analysis of Coups d'état, it is difficult to assess the exact reasons of the coups, as it could have to do with concerns over security, the way in which a country is led, discontent with international allies or simply a power grab. Furthermore, due to the timeliness of events, there is continuous movement which makes the assessment of events in the near future difficult and hence an outlook for the long-term future almost impossible. With this work, an attempt is made in offering an overview of the background and current events and what might be next with the clear realization that a definitive answer to the posed questions is not possible and will be subject to further research in the future.

2. Overview of the Sahel region

Gaining a greater understanding of the composition and predispositions of the Sahel region is crucial in order to present a comprehensive study. Prior to delving into this study, we will offer a thorough examination of the dynamics and current occurrences in the Sahel region, emphasizing important elements related to coups d'état.

The Sahel Region extends more than 5000 kilometers from the Red Sea in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. The Sahelian states are fragile to differing degrees and are typically ranked near the bottom of global stability and development indices (Fund for Peace 2018). The region has one of the lowest levels of development in the world, with 40% of the population living below the poverty line.

According to Conkar (2020: 2), the Sahel states are also among the nations with the greatest employment rates in the agriculture sector. Sahelians also have humanitarian problems as a result of the region's violent extremism and military conflicts. Sahelians have been displaced and have migrated in huge numbers both within the borders of the United States and throughout the region as a whole, due to the continued hostilities and food shortages, which are fueled by both armed conflicts and climate change (Besenyo 2024: 765).

Despite being among the regions with the lowest CO2 emissions, the Sahelian region is among the most affected by climate change, which exacerbates the already precarious humanitarian conditions in the area (Besenyo 2024: 765). This dry region faces severe economic and humanitarian issues due to climate change. Since the informal sector employs over 90% of the labor force, both these workers and their families are extremely susceptible to natural or man-made shocks. The Liptako-Gourma triangle and other isolated, marginalized communities are home to populations that experience particularly severe social and economic disparities, which foster a persistent sense of grievance. The disparities in access to essential services particularly impact the tens of millions of pastoral farmers and nomads that live in the Sahel (Conkar 2020: 2).

Millions of civilians have been forced to escape their homes in several Sahelian countries due to ongoing conflicts between armed forces and armed groups in the region. According to the UNHCR (2022), a large number of persons who escape are

farmers who are unable to till their land, which exacerbates the already-existing food instability.

There are several active danger zones in the region right now, with the three states of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger being the most active. Between 2012 and 2019, there were 1463 armed conflicts in those states alone, resulting in 4723 civilian deaths at the hands of 195 violent armed groups in 1263 different sites (Raleigh 2023: 123). After creating new fronts in 2018, jihadi organizations including Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) strengthened their hold over multiple territories.

While self-defense groups, vigilantes, and community-based militias have been more deeply involved in counterterrorism activities, these groups have taken advantage of local ethnic divisions. Cycles of localized intercommunal violence have resulted from this, with communal self-defense organizations and Islamic militant groups engaging in tit-for-tat killings. Simultaneously, as players like the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda fight for control of the region, complex alliance structures reflect the conflict's global scope (Raleigh 2023: 124).

Since 2020 there have been coups in four West African nations. Two of which, namely Burkina Faso and Mali, will be subject to a closer analysis in a later part of this paper. At this current time, whenever scholars, policy makers, international organizations or other connected players talk about the instability and crises that have a tight grip over Africa they mostly speak about the Sahel region. In this paper a strong focus (but not solely) will lie on the former French West Africa or *Afrique-Occidentale française* (AOF), which broke up into nine current countries of West Africa, including: Niger, Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Benin and Cote d'Ivoire.

For the analysis of the resurgence of coups d'état in Africa, especially in the Sahel region, this paper will provide two case studies for an in-depth analysis, examining historical and contemporary instances of coups d'état. The aim is to provide real life examples of the interplay between structural and democratic difficulties, the role of anti-western and anti-French sentiment and the connotation with Russian neo-colonial tendencies.

However, before delving into the case studies, the following section will provide a historic overview of the coups during the last 60 years. When trying to analyze the deep rooted and multifaceted reasons for the prevalence of coups in the Sahel region, one must start with the contextualization of the historic events in the countries which suffered and still suffer from coups today.

3. Case Study 1: Mali 2012-2021

Mali, like many other countries in the region, has had a long history of conflict and instability. In the more than 60 years since their independence there have been a total of five successful coups:

- 1968 - Modibo Keita -> Moussa Traoré
- 1992 - Moussa Traoré -> Amadou Touré
- 2012 - Amadou Touré -> Diancounda Traoré (interim)
- 2020 - Ibrahim Keita -> Bah N'Daw
- 2021 - Bah N'Daw -> Assimi Goita

Meanwhile only once in the post-colonial history of the country has there been a peaceful transition of power. Before we delve into the most recent coups of 2020 and 2021 respectively, the next paragraph will be dedicated to offer a historical context to the events that unfolded in 2020/2021. A special focus will be on the coup of 2012 and the resulting establishment of the French counterterrorism missions Serval and Barkhane, as these missions, the 2012 coup and the coups of 2020 /2021 are directly casually related to each other.

3. 1. History of coups in Mali since 1960

Mali was a part of l'Afrique Occidentale Française (French West Africa or AOF), which was ruled by France after the late 19th-century Scramble for Africa. The Atlantic slave trade did not end until the early 20th century, when it moved northward into Malian territory. Large-scale agricultural development initiatives, the implementation of state administration and legal codes that still exist today, and other effects of French colonial control changed the political economy of the area. The borders of Mali, which date back to the colonial era, as well as the notable topographical distinctions between the

north and south (savannahs and riverine wetlands and deserts and scrublands, respectively), define the state (Cabelka 2021: 49).

After joining Senegal, Mali became independent of France in 1960 and became the Mali Federation. In September of the same year, it split apart to become the Republic of Mali (Wing 2018). Following its independence, Mali looked to the Soviet Union for military support. Nonetheless, France also supported Mali as an ally throughout the Cold War.

Since 1960, coup d'états have been used more frequently than orderly handovers of power. Eight years after Mali gained independence, in 1968, Moussa Traoré ousted Modibo Keita, the country's first president, and ushered in a more authoritarian government (Wing 2023: 77). Moussa Traoré's rule would endure for twenty-three years.

Strong authoritarian regimes ruled throughout the tenure of the first two Malian presidents, Keita and Traoré, despite the fact that both political figures sought favor with opposing sides of the Cold War. Despite Keita's efforts to forge close ties with the USSR and establish Marxism-Leninism as the official state doctrine, the Mali government's increasingly authoritarian and repressive rural socialism finally caused the regime to fall (Korotayev 2022: 192).

A wave of IMF (International Monetary Fund) austerity programs that particularly hurt the middle and lower classes caused the economy to become contradictory in 1991, when Mali was experiencing a Tuareg revolt in the country's north. What began as a tiny demonstration by a few female retailers spread to over 100,000 participants nationwide (Cole 2020). Instead of opening fire on crowds, soldiers joined the protesters. Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, also known as ATT, then commanded a paratrooper unit to arrest the president, as the military defected. After that, ATT suspended the constitution and demanded multi-party elections within two months. As a result, peace talks between the transitional government and Tuareg separatists were successful, and by 1992, the fighting in the north had subsided (Cole 2020).

The military regime was completely abolished and replaced with democracy in 1992. However, the state of security in the area continued to deteriorate. Conflict tensions in

the region have significantly increased as a result of poor relations between the government and the Tuareg, as well as the growth of Islamist terrorism spearheaded by warriors banished from Algeria and trans-Saharan smuggling (Cabelka 2021: 49).

Over the next two decades, Mali was perceived as a stable, democratic nation situated in a challenging region. Because he cleared the way for a sovereign national convention and a transitional government that eventually called for elections, ATT was hailed as a "soldier of democracy." After the establishment of Mali's Third Republic in 1992, Alpha Oumar Konaré was chosen to lead the country for two terms of five years each. ATT was subsequently formally chosen to serve as Mali's president in 2002. Since Mali gained its independence in 1960, there has only been one peaceful transition between elected officials, which took place in 2002 when President Konaré was replaced by President Touré (Wing 2018).

3. 2. The 2012 coup and Operations "Serval" and "Barkhane"

As outlined earlier, one of the aims of this paper is to shed light on the role of France when it comes to the prevalence of coups d'état in the Sahel region. It is essential to comprehend what occurred in 2012 and its aftermath in order to comprehend the events in 2020 and 2021. A more thorough examination of those incidents will be given in the section that follows.

The MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) led a Tuareg uprising against the Bamako administration in January 2012, with the goal of achieving independence for northern Mali. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Ansar Edine formed an alliance with the MNLA to support the uprising (Pezard 2013). Concurrently, mutinous soldiers overthrew then-president Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) in a coup d'état, further destabilizing the state because they were unhappy with the central control of the ongoing conflict (Raleigh 2023: 5).

The MNLA declared Northern Mali's independence on March 6th, and Dioncounda Traoré was named president in an acting capacity on March 22nd. However, the new order was short-lived, as in June 2012, the MNLA was turned upon by AQIM, MUJAO, and Ansar Dine, who drove its members from the cities and took control of northern

Mali in order to create a caliphate and impose Sharia law. For the remainder of 2012, the newly formed alliance maintained its hold on power and governed over northern Mali (Strnad 2022: 30).

In less than three months, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its allies had effectively taken control of two thirds of the country, creating an Islamic State and imposing Sharia Law, while an appointed interim government attempted to rule over the remaining portion of the country (Boeke 2021: 835). Although the country's descent into instability seemed to happen quickly, its reputation as one of Africa's leading democracies had been steadily eroding over time.

In January 2013, when Salafi-jihadist militants launched an unexpected attack on southern Mali, France launched Operation Serval, a massive military operation aimed at driving the terrorist groups from the north (Sheehan 2021: 293).

Operation Serval had three main objectives, which were later extended by the fourth according to the Rapport d'information (2013). Stopping terrorist aggression and their advance on Bamako was the primary goal. The Republic of Mali's necessity to maintain its existence and allow it to regain its territorial integrity was represented by the second purpose. With the deployment of the African stabilization force and assistance to the Malian armed forces in their recapture of the North, the third objective was to "promote the application of international resolutions." The liberation of French and other foreign hostages was the focus of the fourth goal, which was added afterwards.

The January 13, 2013, start of the U.S.-French involvement in Mali is noteworthy for its prompt, methodical, and effective strategy. With the help of U.S. intelligence, aerial refueling, and strategic lift for heavy combat forces, some 4,000 French troops prevented the collapse of Bamako and successfully put an end to a separatist rebellion sponsored by jihadis. Operation Serval was successful in both minimizing its impact and avoiding the appearance of being a European occupation force (Sheehan 2021: 293).

Following the July/August 2013 presidential elections, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was formed,

deploying up to 12.000 personnel to support the peace process and aid the government in reclaiming its authority in the north (Boeke 2021: 835).

Two more years passed until a peace deal was finally completed in May 2015, under Algeria's sponsorship. Separatist claims were terminated by the Algiers Accord, from which the jihadists were barred. Among other things, it called for the restructuring of the territorial government and the revitalization of security governance by integrating former rebels into a reorganized army (Guichaoua 2020: 902). Secondly, to give the post-Serval Malian authorities the legitimacy they lacked, the interim government was still influenced by the junta, presidential elections were held in August 2013. As a result, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, a well-known figure in Malian politics, whose party is affiliated with the Socialist International, was elected. Thirdly, the European Union Training Mission, a massive initiative, was created to assist in the reconstruction of the Malian army (Guichaoua 2020: 902).

Though numerous national and international bodies took action, aspirations for a lasting peace were fleeting. The Islamic extremists did not vanish. Despite suffering significant losses at the hands of French soldiers, they were able to reorganize internally and reposition themselves in rural areas, initially in Mali and subsequently in nearby nations like Burkina Faso and Niger (Guichaoua 2020: 903). They created new fronts that greatly weakened the already precarious communal ties in rural regions and contributed to the unchecked growth of militias.

The jihadists were able to restore their lost military skills and become even more powerful than they had been in 2012 thanks to repeated strikes against army barracks. Their military tactics changed over time. Operations involving suicide bombings were first conducted right after Serval was launched and later became common. The employment of homemade explosives was progressively refined and organized. Additionally, Islamic militancy's geographic reach grew (Guichaoua 2016).

It became clear in the last months of Operation Serval that leaving Mali entirely was not the best course of action given the circumstances there. The notion to create a successor mission was prompted by the increasing number of attacks, the worsening situation in central Mali, and the concern that the conflict may spread to neighboring countries (Rapport d'information 2021).

Under French sponsorship, subsequent negotiations amongst Sahelian nations resulted in the formation of the G5 Sahel on February 26, 2013, comprising Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Mali, and Burkina Faso. It was decided that the entire G5 Sahel region would be covered by a new operation named Barkhane and a more regional strategy. As a result, Operation Barkhane succeeded both Chad's Operation Épervier and Mali's Operation Serval. To achieve their goals, it was essential to deploy soldiers throughout the entire region while simultaneously working with MINUSMA personnel that were already in the Mali region (Strnad 2022: 42).

Operation Barkhane's objectives were far more broadly specified than those of Operation Serval. "Bringing the terrorist threat within the reach of local forces" is the French Rapport d'information (2021) summarized goal, which should be achieved by two sub-goals:

1. A reduction in the power of armed terrorist organizations
2. The development and fortification of local troops

Additionally, despite the presence of forces, MINUSMA had struggled to protect its citizens, therefore there was an extra "unofficial" purpose to help and protect MINUSMA personnel (Wing 2016).

The implications of Operation Barkhane, which concluded in November 2022, are still being debated by academics and policymakers. Nevertheless, practically everyone agrees that the mission's goals were not achieved.

President Emmanuel Macron declared at the start of June 2021 that fewer French military would be stationed in the Sahel. The first plan was for a phased withdrawal of troops from 5100 to approximately 2500 (Olech 2023: 5).

The idea of altering the operational model had been discussed for a while due to the worsening circumstances in the area and the French military's helplessness. Mali, the nation most impacted by the actions of radical military groups, did not see an improvement in stability as a result of the strategies and framework employed at the time to combat terrorism. Emmanuel Macron was compelled to act by this course of action. According to Reuters, the unrest in Mali's political landscape, which included a coup d'état in May 2021, provided a perfect excuse to alter French forces' presence in the Sahel and ultimately reduce their numbers (Salaün 2021).

Burkina Faso adopted Mali's difficult course when the French military's presence there was outlawed at the close of 2022. Furthermore, the two states consented to welcome the Wagner Group, a private military group owned by Russian mercenaries, demonstrating the close ties between Russia and two Sahel nations. At that point, France was unable to completely operate on G5 territory, making it impossible for it to carry out its military operation against jihadists (Olech 2023: 6).

The real nature of Operation Barkhane was exposed by the modification in the military presence model. At the time, the narrative put forth by the French government claimed that it only had advantages. This turned out not to be true in practice. The increasing expenditure on military activities, which were meant to maintain stability, was another error. The resources, however, were out of proportion to the mission's results. Repetitive arguments like these from the decision-makers merely produced a nine-year illusion. The French government prioritized military operations over political and social issues, which made it impossible to identify any lasting progress and ensured that any triumphs were fleeting (Sheehan 2021: 295).

In the end, French forces were pulled out during 2022, and on November 9, 2023, Macron declared Operation Barkhane to be officially over. It should be mentioned that some French soldiers were expected to stay behind. According to a declaration made by French President Macron (2023), it was envisaged that the French armed forces' participation would be contingent on the actions of the special forces, who were entrusted with fighting organized terrorist groups in the Sabre operation.

Although France still intended to play a significant role in the area, the mission's original concept was given to a coalition of European armies that included French, Estonian, Swedish, and Czech forces as part of Operation Takuba. Italian, Danish, Greek, and Hungarian troops backed them (Sheehan 2021: 297).

It is important to emphasize that, following nine years of military operations in Barkhane, the French presence had a negative balance. While the French strategies can be deemed effective, there has been very little progress or stabilization in the area. In fact, the initial expectations were unduly optimistic, and the notion of an apolitical mission, which sprang from its anti-terrorist nature, became a de facto haven for the Bamako elite when Task Force Takuba was later established (Olech 2023: 7).

3. 3. The coups of 2020 and 2021

The next coup d'état occurred in 2020 while Operation Barkhane was still in progress. In the 60 years since Mali's independence, there have been four coups, the most recent being the removal of President Keita's democratically elected administration. As per Adetayo Adetuyi (2021), the coup was caused by weakening institutions, the government's inability to manage and end the uncontrollable insurgency in the country's northern region, and the Malian and Sahel governments' preference for security over the advancement of democratic institutions and the promotion of responsible governance.

Mahmoud Dicko, the former president of the Haut Conseil Islamique du Mali (HCIM), was joined by members of civil society and opposition political parties to form M5-RFP (Mouvement du 5 Juin–Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques), which organised large-scale protests in the capital city of Bamako in June 2020 (Wing 2023: 78).

The military participants in the 2012 coup, former Keita administration officials, and religious leaders, including the aforementioned Imam Dicko, came together due to dissatisfaction with the president's policies (Korotayev 2022: 192). Consequently, "The 5 June Movement, Rally of Patriotic Forces" (Mouvement du 5 Juin, Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques) was formed by the united opposition. Conflicts between the demonstrators and the police preceded the protests and quickly turned violent (Slim 2020: 214).

The 5 June Movement opposed the slow pace of reform implementation, the incompetent performance of public services, the deteriorating state of the educational system, and the presence of French forces in the nation. Keita attempted to compromise, offering to form a unity administration with representatives from the street-based political movements among its concessions, but the demonstrators rejected his proposals (Korotayev 2022: 205).

The demonstrations got violent in July 2020. By declaring the dissolution of the constitutional court, which was the subject of legal challenges due to a purportedly rigged parliamentary election in March, President Keita attempted to defuse the situation. Nevertheless, the attempt to defuse the situation failed, and violent altercations with the police ensued. More than 120 people were injured and eleven

people died as protesters stormed and set fire to the National Assembly of Mali building, occupied other government buildings, and blocked three major bridges in the capital (Diallo 2020).

Prime Minister Boubou Cissé and President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, also known as IBK, were taken into custody by troops acting as members of the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP) on August 18, 2020, in the hills of the garrison town of Kati. The soldiers were led by Special Forces Colonel Assimi Goita. The following day, Keita disbanded the government and resigned (Adetuyi 2021).

The majority of Malians expressed the opinion that the coup presented a chance to fix the nation's failing security and governance problems. Whitehouse (2021) hinted that the Malian people welcomed the coup, primarily viewing it as "a chance to free" the nation from "predatory rule."

The new leadership's spokesmen made public comments the next day, criticizing the state of affairs and pointing out that years of corrupt practices, nepotism, poor governance, and deteriorating security had made President Keita and Prime Minister Cisse's arrests justified. They denounced corruption in public affairs and political patronage, both of which were prevalent in the nation (Korotayev 2022: 206).

Although the coup d'état was enthusiastically welcomed in Bamako, external actors like ECOWAS, the African Union, France, and the European Union as a whole, unsurprisingly denounced it. Each organization released a statement denouncing the rebels and calling for President Keita's release. Additionally, Malian delegates were removed from ECOWAS's decision-making organizations, and the UN Security Council called an emergency session at which a resolution denouncing the coup was approved (Robert 2020). The fact that, since 2013, international partners have heavily committed time and resources in Mali, relying primarily on Keita's administration, has further alarmed France and its allies (both in Africa and beyond) (Mackinnon 2021).

A group of seventeen CNSP members nominated retired military veteran and former defense minister Bah N'Daw as the new president in September 2020. Both the general public and the opposition, which included leaders of "the June 5 Movement," welcomed the decision. During his inaugural address, N'Daw pledged to combat electoral fraud and corruption while upholding prior international accords. Additionally,

he declared that he would keep up the war against terrorist organizations and stop the Mali army from mistreating civilians (Diallo 2020).

In his own right, N'Daw was a good middle-ground candidate because, as a retired military man, he represented the military's increasing power in the nation while also satisfying calls from organizations like ECOWAS, the African Union, and others for a civilian to assume the presidency once more (Korotayev 2022: 206).

It was assumed that N'Daw would be the figurehead executing orders from the shadow military leadership surrounding Goita because Colonel Assimi Goita, the man who led the forces that arrested President Keita, was named as Vice President (Korotayev 2022: 207). But with France's help, N'Daw started to challenge Vice President Goita and Defence Minister Sadio Camara, two Committee members. Two groups emerged as a result of disturbances within the elite: Goita and Camara on the one hand, and N'Daw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane on the other. Regarding the country's development, these camps held somewhat different opinions; whilst N.Daw concentrated on France, Goita sought to work with Russia (Korotayev 2022: 207).

When N'daw and Ouane were taken into custody by the military in May 2021, tensions between the two groups reached a breaking point. N.Daw announced his resignation two days later. Goita, in turn, made an announcement to the country via video message that N'Daw and Ouane had been removed from office for their purported attempts to obstruct the handover of power to a democratically elected administration. Goita additionally declared that there would be elections in 2022 (Akinwotu 2021).

Goïta took over as chief executive and president of Mali following N'Daw's resignation. The National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP) was dissolved in January 2021, and the legislative branch's responsibilities were given to the National Transitional Council (CNT), which was established in December 2020. The Mali constitutional court acknowledged Goïta as the nation's president on May 28, 2021, implying that the judicial branch was now subservient to the executive branch (Korotayev 2022: 207).

Following the coup in 2021, the CNT's role expanded significantly. They closely followed the so-called National Refoundation Conference, which was supposed to produce a new national constitution. The international community, which has

demanding a civil government take control in Mali under fear of further sanctions since the August 2020 coup-d'état, identified reforming electoral systems as one of the primary difficulties facing the new Malian administration. However, some Malian elites saw little advantage in complying with the demand of the international community, which said that the new regime must hold presidential elections within 18 months in order to gain at least partial recognition of the new authority (Korotayev 2022: 208).

The election timetables put out by various parties during the final phase of the National Refoundation Conference in late December 2021 ranged from six months to five years, allowing for the possibility of holding the next elections in December 2026 (Le Point Afrique 2021). Following this suspension, Mali was subject to additional sanctions from ECOWAS in January 2022. These measures included the closing of the country's air and land borders, a prohibition on non-essential financial activities, and the freezing of state assets held by the Malian government in ECOWAS's central and commercial banks. Assimi Goita remained president at the time of writing in June 2024, and Mali was no longer a part of ECOWAS (Le Point Afrique 2021).

According to Morgan (2020), the Malian revolution promoted law and order by taking control of the region and creating a more equitable, corrupt-free society. He thinks that the events of 2020 in Mali could be seen as a revolution against the president, who had ties to France, because the country's problems with security, corruption, and nepotism were largely the result of citizen protests in the summer of 2020, when the military was in a position to seize control of the situation.

Morgan (2020) claims that the Malians had long suspected France of meddling in their multiparty democracy to help candidates that would best serve its interests win. The interests of the Malian people clearly did not align with those of the former metropolis. Ordinary Malians anticipated jobs, education, community-based healthcare, accountability, and basic security, while France was unrelentingly focused on implementing counterterrorism measures, curtailing migration programs, and upholding democratic procedures (Morgan 2020).

On April 10, 2024, the Malian government issued an edict suspending „political party activities," and "associations of a political nature", "until further notice" and for "reasons of public order." The administration defended this action by stating that it was "creating the prerequisite conditions that need to be met in order to carry out the major activities

of the Transition, in particular the Inter-Malian Dialogue for Peace and National Reconciliation" in a press release that was published that same day. The next day, the High Authority for Communication (HAC), called on the media to stop all publication and broadcasting of political party activities, according to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) (2024).

3. 4. Part Conclusion

In conclusion Mali's intricate past is a tapestry interwoven with the strands of political instability, colonial legacies, and persistent security issues. After gaining independence from French colonial rule in 1960, Mali has had turbulent times as it has worked towards self-governance. Early authoritarian administrations led by figures like Modibo Keita and Moussa Traoré were characterized by their vacillating allegiance to Western and Soviet powers throughout the Cold War, but both eventually fell short of laying a strong political and economic basis.

The political, social, and economic climate of Mali has been permanently impacted by France's historical presence as a former colonial power. Mali's governance and territorial integrity have been shaped by the colonial era imposition of borders and administrative frameworks. Furthermore, throughout the Cold War, France and other major world powers influenced Mali, forming its military and political ties.

Recurrent coups d'état during the post-independence era were indicative of underlying problems in Mali's political and social structure. One small window of relief and some promise for stability came with the democratic transition of 1991, spearheaded by Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré. But there were still underlying tensions, especially with the Tuareg in the north and the growth of extremist Islamist movements. The Malian state's vulnerability and the intricacy of foreign military intervention were highlighted by the coup in 2012 and the French military actions that followed, particularly Operations Serval and Barkhane.

Although Operation Serval was initially successful in driving out Islamist extremists, it brought to light the difficulties foreign military interventions face when trying to address deeply ingrained local problems. Despite its stated goal of stabilizing the Sahel, Operation Barkhane was heavily criticized for its lackluster results and the ongoing

instability in Mali and its surrounding nations. A change in Mali's international alliances and a continuous fight for security and sovereignty were signaled by the ultimate evacuation of French forces and the invitation to the Russian Wagner Group.

France's engagement in Mali, especially in the form of alliances and military actions, emphasizes its significance as a major player in the security dynamics of the area. The perceived inability of Operation Barkhane to accomplish its goals, however, raises concerns over the viability and usefulness of external interventions in resolving Mali's internal problems and the effectiveness of French operations.

Furthermore, Mali's changing political environment, which includes multiple coups and ongoing governance problems, highlights the intricate interaction between internal and external forces. The underlying socio-political reasons that fuel instability in Mali require comprehensive, locally led solutions, even while France and other external actors may attempt to stabilize the region through military deployments.

The coups that occurred in 2020 and 2021 served as additional examples of how Mali's political unrest is cyclical. The removal of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and the installation of transitional leaders Bah N'Daw and Assimi Goita exposed severe rifts in the nation's government. A combination of economic woes, societal anger, and the military's persistent influence in politics resulted in a renewed push for democratic changes and improved governance.

The latest developments concerning the freedom of political party activity, that has been banned with the April 2024 decree, is a further cause for concern for the stability and the future of the country. As the presidential elections of both France and the United States are approaching at the time of writing, the War in Ukraine is still ongoing and China is still in preparation for a showdown concerning Taiwan. It is going to be an interesting period to see which direction Mali and other countries of the Sahel region are moving towards.

The long-lasting effects of colonial borders, the difficulties of post-colonial state-building, and the interaction of local, regional, and global influences are all demonstrated by Mali's history. The lessons learned from Mali's past emphasize the significance of inclusive governance, sustainable development, and tackling the underlying causes of conflict as the country navigates its future. While important,

foreign assistance must be in line with the goals and requirements of the Malian people in order to promote long-term peace and stability.

4. Case Study 2: Burkina Faso 2022

Burkina Faso, often known as the "land of honorable people" or the "land of the upright people," has a turbulent history. It was given this appellation in 1984 by Thomas Sankara, one of its most respected leaders. Upper Volta, which the French had claimed in 1896, was formally independent on August 5, 1960, after being incorporated into their vast colony of West Africa, Afrique occidentale française (AOF) (Phelan 2016: 108).

The nation was doomed to be impoverished and politically unstable from the start since it was landlocked, lacked resources for profitable export, was divided among its ethnic groups, and was firmly under the neo-colonial rule of France (Phelan 2016: 108).

Out of the nine nations that emerged from the AOF, only Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, to a lesser extent, were able to establish successful neo-colonial economies. The others, especially the landlocked countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, were viewed as backwaters during the colonial era; as a result, they received significantly less political and economic support and were consequently unprepared politically and economically when they gained independence. Since 1960, its political history has been characterized by coups, military governments, and semi-authoritarian civilian regimes (Phelan 2016: 108).

Eight coup d'états and multiple suspensions of the legislature and constitution have occurred in Burkina Faso since the country's independence in 1960 (Michalopoulos 2016).

- 1966 - Maurice Yameogo -> Aboubakar Lamizana
- 1980 - Aboubakar Lamizana -> Saye Zerbo
- 1982 - Saye Zerbo -> Jean-Baptiste Ouedrago
- 1983 - Jean-Baptiste Ouedrago -> Thomas Sankara
- 1987 - Thomas Sankara -> Blaise Compaoré
- 2014 - Blaise Compaoré (ousted by the people) -> Roch Kaboré (elected)

- January 2022 - Roch Kaboré -> Paul-Henri Damiba
- September 2022 - Paul-Henri Damiba -> Ibrahim Traoré

Burkina Faso had never, in its post-colonial history, undergone a transfer of power through voting until 2015. This has deprived the nation of a just and robust democracy. Since Sangoule Lamizana's first military takeover in 1966, Burkina Faso has been under constant threat of coups. The denial of civil rule and the foundations of a nation's development have been severely damaged by the frequent coups in this West African nation (Sawo 2017: 2).

The January and September 2022 coups represent the lowest point in the political history of the nation. Understanding Burkina Faso's problematic history with democracy and failed promises is crucial to comprehending how things got to this point. We shall delve further into Burkina Faso's post-colonial political history in the upcoming chapter.

4. 1. Short history of coups in Burkina Faso from 1960 to 1983

Under Maurice Yaméogo's direction, Burkina Faso became an independent nation on August 5, 1960. Originally known as Upper Volta, the nation was renamed Burkina Faso in 1984, as was previously mentioned. After establishing a one-party regime and suppressing the opposition, Yaméogo solidified his hold on power five years later (Grira 2014). This, however, lacked the authority of other nations because other leaders of the former AOF had formed their parties in the fight against France; Sékou Touré, for example, contended that the fight against imperial dominance did not allow the luxury of internal dissent, and his parties were born out of opposition movements (Camara 2020).

The multi-party democracy provisions of the constitution did not seem to require modification by the newly elected president. He liked the easier way, which involved harassing and detaining political opponents who dared to oppose him. He gained executive influence over the legislature in this way. "To allow the executive power to take, in complete calm and serenity, the measures needed for Upper Volta's progress, prosperity, and grandeur" was the speaker of the National Assembly's stated function (Engelbert 1998: 44). Yaméogo followed a path of democratic centralism, in which the

party controlled all social and political institutions, from the local to the national, and the national leader of the party controlled the party (Phelan 2016: 111).

Following Yaméogo's approval of an unpopular financial austerity plan, a public insurrection began in January 1966. All civil servants' salaries would be cut by 20% as part of this plan, and family allowances would also be drastically reduced. Then, in the midst of a nationwide workers' strike, he issued a state of emergency. On January 4, 1966, Yaméogo resigned because he was unable to quell the growing unrest among the populace. After the military seized control, Sangoulé Lamizana, a former chief of staff of the army, was named the new head of state (Gira 2014).

The nation's traditional and customary authority, who continued to be the most direct source of law and order, security, and order for Voltaic rural and semi-urban communities, had a resurgence in the years that followed. When about 170 chiefs from all over the nation gathered in 1968 at the Mossi Kingdom's ruler Mogho Naaba Kougri's palace in Ouagadougou, they asked Lamizana to grant them their former privileges back. Lamizana depicted chiefs as oblique local agents of the central government due to a lack of staff and resources (Aning 2023: 146). This meant that there was no official authority in Burkina Faso's rural areas, which made nation-building and fostering a sense of national identity challenging.

However, on November 25, 1980, a second coup d'état was carried out under the leadership of Colonel Saye Zerbo and the military junta Comité Militaire de Redressement pour le Progrès National (CMRPN), as a result of extreme food scarcity, extreme poverty, rural complaints, and intense popular unrest (Aning 2023:146). Blaise Compaoré and Thomas Sankara, two CMRPN members who worked with Zerbo, would go on to play significant roles in Burkinabé politics in the thirty years that followed.

In the lengthy history of military interventions in the nation, Zerbo's government is among the briefest. Zerbo had many positions in the army and was the Foreign Minister at one point. Along with single-party control, his predecessor Lamizana was accused of living an extravagant and extravagant lifestyle at the expense of the country. Nonetheless, Zerbo's takeover of Lamizana was successful and bloodless (Sawo 2017: 6).

Zerbo suspended the constitution and established the Military Committee of Recovery for National Progress (Comité Militaire de Redressement pour le Progrès National; CMPRN) as the highest governing body in the State. One of Zerbo's major reforms was the announcement of mandatory military service in May 1981, which sparked large-scale trade union protests. The trade unions were suspended, but the demonstration did not end. Zerbo became increasingly dictatorial, putting a halt to all protests and marches (McFarland 1998: 90).

The ongoing instability and discontent among the populace under Zerbo's rule led to another coup in Burkina Faso in 1982, this time headed by Colonel Garbiel Somé. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo, who subsequently became Burkina Faso's fourth Head of State, was a prominent member of the conspirators that established the Council of Popular Salvation (Conseil de Salut du Peuple, or CSP) (McFarland 1998 92).

There was fast change and promise at the start of Jean-Baptiste's rule. For example, on May 27, he pledged to free all political detainees and return to civilian governance in the future. Ouédraogo and other junior officers, such as Sankara, offered explanations that aimed to purify and revitalize the failed political and economic strategies of the previous administration (Sawo 2017: 8).

However, the administration's oppressive measures grew in contrast to his promises of a new constitution, a transition to a civilian regime, and assurances that Zerbo's incompetence would be avoided. He and the CSP persisted in outlawing political parties and groups. During his reign, political and constitutional structures were suspended, and institutions that allow for the expression of dissent, such elected assemblies, and a free press, were severely suppressed (Sawo 2017: 9).

There were several factions under Ouédraogo's reign, particularly in the army. One group comprises the proxies of Ouédraogo, while the other was composed of the "young socialist firebrand," led by revolutionary Thomas Sankara. The army was divided into groups because of the power struggle and ideological differences between the radical Sankara, who was deeply rooted in Pan-Africanism and nationalism, and the conservative, Ouédraogo. As a result of their intense competition, Sankara was detained after being removed from office as prime minister in 1982 (Welch 2002).

Shortly after his arrest, a military barrack in Po was taken over, engineered by the socialist faction of the military, led by Captain Blaise Compaoré, who demanded the release of his colleague and friend. Their resentment was evident in the factional rift over Thomas Sankara's incarceration. Along with the popular rebellion, the ensuing efforts and cunning resistance by pro-Sankara soldiers to free Sankara cleared the ground for yet another round of military coups that overthrew the conservative military administration of Ouédraogo on August 4, 1983 and installed Thomas Sankara as the new president of Burkina Faso (Welch 2002).

4. 2. Thomas Sankara, the 1987 coup and the presidency of Blaise Compaoré

Without a doubt, military takeovers have contributed to a pervasive political instability that has hampered long-term domestic growth and impeded the construction of essential infrastructure. The insurrection that installed Thomas Sankara in power in 1983 is arguably the most noteworthy coup. Known by many historians as the "African Che Guevara," Sankara is well recognized for his effective domestic programs that reduced infant mortality, promoted women's rights, and increased literacy rates (Haradou 2023).

According to Sankara, the coup was a "democratic and popular revolution" with the intention of raising the general populace. Sankara demanded in his inaugural speech that Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) be established right away, to disseminate the revolution's message and carry out its objectives (Sawo 2017: 10). In order to implement extensive economic and social reforms that limited the privileges and rights of the nobility and wealthy merchants, he allied himself with the peasantry, laborers, and youth (Prairie 2008: 20). Building public works such as roads, schools and homes was funded by his government. In order to try past leaders and high officials who are suspected of corruption, he also established revolutionary courts. He brought about enormous and remarkable changes in the fields of education, health, social services, agriculture, and the environment (Prairie 2008: 21).

Throughout his four years in office, he spearheaded campaigns for adult literacy and the mass immunization of children, championed the cause of women's rights, combated corruption, and prevented desertification brought about by the improper

farming methods that the colonial past had imposed. In just two years, vaccination rates rose and there was a notable decline in both child mortality and illiteracy (Harsch 2013). Furthermore, Sankara was adamant that the development of a national conscience, the ability of citizens to "rely on themselves" financially and materially, and the rejection of a logic of financial and technological dependence that led to debt and hunger were the first steps towards the decolonization of his nation. In addition, he declined to settle the foreign debt acquired by Burkina Faso's colonizers, contending that the burden borne by African colonists was sufficient (Miramonti 2024: 184).

To accomplish his objectives, he started campaigns to "consume Burkinabè," grow trees, and save rainfall in decertified areas (Miramonti 2024: 181). Moreover, Sankara chose to rename the nation from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso to break with the colonial past. Because of his unselfish example and unwavering resolve to impose change, quickly and drastically, he was able to alter a lot of things.

However, it has been argued by historians that the reforms imposed by Sankara, were imposed too quickly for a populace that had not got the sufficient time to completely embrace those reforms. Sankara desired to bring noticeable change to his nation in a short amount of time. He misjudged the complexity of development processes and the necessity to forge consensus on social change, even at the expense of slowing it down, because he was caught between the pressing need to improve the lives of the impoverished rural inhabitants and the resistance, he faced from both the outside and the inside. This blind hole was exploited by those who supported and profited from the existing status quo, who then set out to devour him (Miramonti 2024: 182).

On closer examination, nevertheless, Skinner (1988) argues that his presidency showed that his coup aided and abetted in the continuation of both political and economic turmoil. Under his direction, Burkina Faso experienced significant international isolation, and Sankara's recruitment of opponents was counterproductive for a nation trying to rise above subsistence level. Domestically, many Burkinabés felt alienated by the government's intrinsically highly centralized structure due to his purposeful contempt for the deeply ingrained power structures in a society driven by culture. Due to a Marxist ideology that trumped practicality, the Burkinabé state was

effectively marginalized, international aid offers were turned down, and relationships between neighboring African countries broke down (Martin 1987).

These failings, as well as, external and local causes culminated in the 1987 coup headed by Captain Blaise Compaoré, Sankara's erstwhile right-hand man. In the end, Burkina Faso remained a weak state vulnerable to insurgencies because of Sankara's failure to construct strong, stable, long-term political institutions to lay the groundwork for the state and his isolation from the outside world, according to the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2022).

Compaoré and Sankara were formerly brothers in arms, but their relationship soured when they disagreed about how to reshape Burkina Faso following President Ouédraogo's overthrow. While Sankara supported bureaucratization, militarization, and the exercise of personal power, Compaoré and his group believed that democratization was the best course of action (Rupley 2013: 108).

To preserve political stability, Compaoré was able to uphold a semi-authoritarian government that combined democratization with repression. Like in the previous regimes, the public's expectations were always high. Trade unions and other national groups longed for significant democratic reforms that would further Burkina Faso's growth (Sawo 2017: 12). To create a constitution with a multi-party system and a seven-year tenure, Compaoré ordered the formation of a constitutional review group. A referendum in 1991 approved the draft constitution, which strengthened several recently established and authorized political parties. During the nation's inaugural parliamentary election in 1992, Compaoré's Organisation pour la Démocratie Populaire/Movement du Travail (ODP/MT) secured a two-thirds majority despite the uneven electoral conditions (Sawo 2017: 12).

Due to his murky past and his acceptance to power, Blaise Compaoré's name was long linked to mercenary politics and political banditry on a global scale (Niang 2016: 5). Similar to how he fueled wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia and supported rebels, his dictatorship thrived on shady business practices outside of Burkina Faso. Nonetheless, Compaoré has proven himself as a Chief-Mediator-Diplomat in resolving disputes in the African sub-region despite all the accusations of being a troublemaker. He facilitated agreements and the resolution of disputes. In Northern Mali, for example,

he played a key role in the release of Westerners who had been kidnapped by armed groups starting in 2003 (Niang 2016: 5).

But as a tactic employed by all the past regimes, constant promises of reform have never materialized, and as a result, trust in the state has been lost, relationships with the public have been strained, and authority at all administrative levels has been undermined (Sawo 2017: 13).

2010 saw Compaoré win a second and, according to the constitution, final term as president. With the intention of extending his tenure past November 2015, he experimented with various alternatives to amend Article 37 of the constitution, which stipulates a two-term limit. Reluctant to take the dangerous path of a referendum, he planned to use the constitutional right of a 75 percent majority in parliament to immediately amend Article 37 (Frère 2015: 296).

After covert discussions, the Alliance pour la Démocratie and la Fédération-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (ADF-RDA) led by Gilbert Noël Ouédraogo finally gave him the required number of seats in October 2014. Consequently, the Council of Ministers declared on October 21 that the National Assembly would hold a vote on October 30 to alter Article 37 (Frère 2015: 295).

On October 26, the administration announced a one-week closure of all schools and institutions due to widespread protests. However, a lot of organizations quickly came together to oppose the government's action. Blaise Compaoré resigned in response to a combination of opposition parties, civil society organizations, youth, and cultural leaders attacking him relentlessly and after some of his military personnel defected (Frère 2015: 295). He was found guilty in April 2022 of killing Thomas Sankara and given a life sentence. But in 2014, he left the nation and has been residing in Cote d'Ivoire ever since (Miramonti 2024: 180).

Although Compaoré's downfall was sudden, the regime's gradual collapse had been evident for a few years due to the emergence of fresh opposition elements. The 1998 political fallout from journalist Norbert Zongo's assassination is responsible for the Compaoré regime's downfall. Widespread and persistent demonstrations followed Zongo's execution, which was most likely politically motivated as he was looking into deals made by the president's brother (Frère 2015: 299).

There was a power vacuum in the nation following Compaoré's abrupt departure because the president of the National Assembly was supposed to take over, but he had also left. Zéphérin Diabré, the leader of the official opposition, irritated his supporters by declining to consider seizing power in the absence of constitutional authority. Furthermore, several lawmakers lacked backing or were reluctant to run for office (Brett 2021: 281).

General Traoré assumed command of the regular army in October. However, leaders of civil society believed he was too close to Compaoré (Harsch 2017). Yacouba Isaac Zida, the second-in-command of the despised Regiment of Presidential Security (RSP), was their favorite candidate. But not all constitutionalists were ready to sacrifice law so cheaply for the sake of convenience. The army's appropriation of the rebellion and its disregard for military hierarchy were both met with internal opposition (Brett 2021: 282).

This was perceived by some in the public service union community as "just another military coup d'état" (Hagberg 2018: 25). However, the rebellion was set apart from Burkina Faso's other coups by its insistence on its (international) legitimacy. For starters, Zida had originally considered a transition that would have been entirely military dominated; however, this had led to protests and violent altercations with police. International organizations endorsed the demonstrators' stance, and Zida backed out of his scheme (Harsch 2017: 212).

Constitutionalists fiercely disputed the international designation of the events leading to President Compaoré's removal as an unlawful change of government. Zida gave in to internal pressure and reinstated the constitution he had earlier suspended when the ECOWAS met in November 2014. They also decided not to impose sanctions or insist on calling for the transfer of authority to the President of the National Assembly (Hagberg 2018). The first implicit acceptance in (African) international law that a popular uprising might be separated from an illegitimate change of government was gained by Burkina Faso's constitutionalists. They had created room for legality that was revolutionary (Brett 2021: 283).

The process of creating a Charter of the Transition took up the two weeks before November 16th, the day the constitution was reinstated. This text, which was meant to coexist with the soon-to-be-restored constitution rather than replace it, was the

result of careful compromise. The creation of a new system for the Head of State's succession was its primary goal. A group of political, religious, and military leaders would form a member committee to select a civilian President during the transition period. Zida became prime minister after retired diplomat Michel Kafando, the military's nomination, was ultimately selected (Brett 2021: 283).

ECOWAS and its international allies gave Burkina Faso a year of transition. The depth of the rifts between the various factions was revealed during discussions. The Constitutional Council was in charge of sorting this issue out. Remarkably, Zida had been convinced not to dissolve this body, unlike the Niger military authorities. The insurrection's unexpected winners were the Council's quiet judges, who disapproved of Compaoré's candidature and purportedly provided a technical opinion supporting the validity of amending Article 37 (Winter 2018).

The Council upheld the legitimacy of the new political system during its initial hearings following the restoration of the constitution. The decisions from early November, when the constitution the Council was interpreting was not even in effect, were invoked in a (tendentious) manner (Ouédraogo 2015: 26, see Brett 2021: 284).

The National Council for the Transition decided to change the electoral code in April, with elections scheduled for six months later. The new category of people disqualified from voting includes all those who:

‘Having supported anti-constitutional changes which are an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government, notably to the principle of limited presidential term limits and have led to an insurrection or to any other form of uprising.’

Naturally, some of the constitutionalists involved in the transition worked hard to craft this language, which was directly lifted from Articles 23 and 25 of the African Charter (Witt 2019: 115). As a result, there were conflicts between the camps since the opposition claimed that exclusion was unlawful. Burkina Faso was sensationally ordered by the ECOWAS Court on July 13, 2013, to remove "all obstacles" to "free participation" in elections. President Kafando agreed to the terms practically right away.

All the anxiety vanished on election eve when instability was restored by another coup. General Gilbert Diendéré, the commander of those who had shot Sankara, the former head of the RSP, Compaoré's closest collaborator, and the cornerstone of the transnational counterinsurgency in the Sahel, was the self-declared Head of State. Kidnapped and imprisoned were Zida, Loada, Kafando, and René Bagoro, an activist judge who later became the housing minister (Banegas 2015: 150).

A solution to implement international law could be established through negotiations with ECOWAS mediators. A combination of (selective) international pressure, junior army officer mobilization, and popular resistance aided by trade unions resulted in the coup's reversal within a week. The putschists received amnesty in exchange (Harsch 2017: 218).

Roch Marc Christian Kaboré of the People's Movement for Progress won the presidential election without the necessity for a second round of voting, having secured 53% of the vote in the first round. Only two civilian presidents have served the nation since its independence in 1960, including him.

Many, meanwhile, remained unconvinced of the election's legality. Engels (2022) claims that although the elections on November 22, 2020, took place in the midst of widespread internal displacement and a large number of polling places (926 out of 19,836) were unable to open owing to security concerns, Kaboré was elected president through "free and fair" means. 50.79% of voters cast ballots. With 57.87% of the vote, Kaboré won on the first try. This, however, speaks more to the perceived lack of options than it does to widespread acceptance and public content.

4. 3. The Coups of 2022

The Kaboré government had attempted to limit the actions of radical social groups and significantly restricted liberty. The state authorities imposed restrictions on fundamental civil rights, including the freedom of assembly, expression, and the press, in light of the security crisis. The country's criminal code was modified in June 2019 with the passage of a new law that makes it illegal to do anything that could "demoralize" the state security forces "by whatever means." Human rights

organizations claim that human rights activists, journalists, and bloggers are routinely intimidated and persecuted by the law (Engels 2022: 321).

Mali was replaced as the center of the terrorist problem in 2019 by Burkina Faso. After breaking new ground, the year before, jihadi organizations like Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) strengthened their position in a number of locations. While self-defense groups, vigilantes, and community-based militias have been more deeply involved in counterterrorism activities, these groups have taken advantage of local ethnic divisions. This has led to periodic bouts of localized intercommunal violence marked by hit-for-hit killings between communal self-defense organizations and Islamic militant groups (Raleigh 2021: 124).

Burkinabé's rural and semi-urban areas are experiencing a worsening governance crisis due to escalating violence, jihadist attacks, and political unrest. More terrorist attacks occurred in Burkina Faso in 2019 than in any other Sahel nation as the situation in its Center-North region progressively deteriorated. Due to a longstanding rift between the state and civil society, armed organizations exploited the frustrations of rural people, exacerbating the country's dire downward spiral (Aning 2023: 146). Moreover, the worldwide scope of the battle is evident in intricate alliance formations, wherein entities like the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda vie for supreme standing in the area (Raleigh 2021: 124).

Simultaneously, the Kaboré administration has utilized the frequency of terrorist attacks at that time to impose frequent and impromptu restrictions on the activities of human rights organizations and demonstrators. The application of the 2019 laws grew even more capricious, particularly after the right of assembly was restricted on December 31, 2018.

Over 120 attacks on schools have been reported since 2017, with half of these occurring in 2019, according to data gathered by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED 2022). The security situation has forced the closure of 2500 schools, which has had disastrous effects on students' access to education. There have been one million to one and a half internal displacements. Thousands are fleeing to neighboring Mali, a nation itself beset by crises. Although state institutions in Burkina Faso have been the subject of the majority of attacks, schools, churches,

and religious leaders are also becoming targets. In connection with the conflicts, nearly 2200 individuals died during 2019 and 2020, including members of non-state armed groups, state security personnel, and civilians. This is a horrifying rise from the 300 deaths reported in 2018. Thus far in 2021–2022, about 2800 individuals have been reported dead (ACLED 2022).

Considering this dramatic worsening of the security situation in the country, the government and President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré of Burkina Faso were overthrown by a military coup on Monday, January 24, 2022. In the space of 18 months, there have been four coups d'état in the region: one in Guinea on September 5, 2021, two in Mali on August 18, 2020, and May 24, 2021. Another coup attempt took place in Guinea-Bissau on February 1, 2022 (Engels 2022: 315).

Shots were fired early in the morning and reports of President Kaboré's detention surfaced a few hours later. Later that day, the army declared on television that it had chosen to remove Roch Marc Christian Kaboré's authority in order to put the nation back on track. Not surprisingly, the fight against terrorism also played a significant role in the transition charter, which was led by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandogo Damiba, one of the highest-ranking military officers in the nation (Engels 2022: 316).

ECOWAS immediately suspended Burkina Faso. However, sanctions by the regional organizations or Western nations might push the country closer to a non-Western partner such as Russia, where sources in Moscow have already expressed support for the coup (Elischer 2022: 4).

Kaboré had been removed from office as president, the administration and parliament had been dissolved, and the constitution had been suspended. Kaboré submitted his resignation letter by hand. Mouvement patriotique pour la sauvegarde et la restauration (MPSR, the Patriotic Movement for Safeguarding and Restoration) is the name given by the putschists. According to the charter, which Damiba signed on March 1, 2022, the MPSR was to be dissolved after the transition period of 36 months, beginning with Damiba's inauguration as president of the transition (Burkina Faso 2022).

This military coup was not a coup from below, in contrast to other military coups in the area (Kandeh 2004). Instead, it was organized by non-commissioned officers who

were dissatisfied with the military's career options and the division of the armed forces along ethnic or regional lines. These officers were used as pawns by political, military, and business "big men," among others.

One of the big reasons for this coup has been the frustrations of the Burkinabé armed forces that felt isolated and ill-equipped, especially in the periphery, for the ongoing attacks of non-state armed groups and terrorist organizations. As mentioned earlier, the steep increase of attacks gave the army a sense of vulnerability and the feeling of not getting the necessary support by the government (Engels 2022: 317).

Coincidentally Lieutenant Colonel Damiba was tasked with leading anti-terrorism operations in the north of Burkina Faso just two months before the coup. Before becoming one of the leading figures of the Burkinabé military, Damiba studied at the École militaire in Paris, where he met Mamady Doumbouya who later led the coup removing Alpha Condé from the presidency in Guinea in 2021. Damiba also obtained a master's degree (in criminal science) and military certifications from prestigious French institutions, while also attending training programmes in the US. Additionally, he served in the Security Guard of Blaise Compaoré before he was ousted in 2014 (BBC 2022).

In the years leading up to the coup Damiba gained popularity in the military ranks due to his commitment to fight the security crisis. He famously called for the government to employ mercenaries from the Russian Wagner Group to combat the increasing security issues, a claim president Kaboré rejected firmly.

After a few months in office and following an attack by Al-Qaeda that claimed the lives of 37 people including 27 soldiers, Damiba sacked his defense minister to assume the role himself. It appeared to be a brazen attempt to tighten his hold on political authority. Citing the inability of Damiba to contain the terrorists from attacking the Burkinabé population, Captain Ibrahim Traoré removed Henri-Paul Damiba as president of Burkina Faso the 30th of September, in the second coup of 2022 (Folahanmi 2022).

Three interrelated aspects must be understood in order to comprehend the most recent coup. The first is the nation's internal power battles. The second is the connections that exist between these conflicts and the nation's high rate of violent extremism. The intricate entanglements of regional dynamics involving foreign state

players come in third. For example, Damiba had received support from France. However, Traore has stated that he is open to cooperating with Russia (Folahanmi 2022).

The African Centre for Strategic Studies (ACSS) (2023) reported that in the eighteen months preceding the coup in January 2022, the number of deaths from militant Islamist violence had climbed by 46%, and the general number of deaths due to internal conflict had nearly tripled. This pattern put Burkina Faso on the verge of collapse, along with the proliferation of extremist activity in the Ouagadougou region. As indicated earlier, this increase has been one of the main factors of Damiba and Traoré to remove their respective predecessors. Naturally, the first goal of Ibrahim Traoré was to stabilize the country and fight against jihadist extremism.

Traoré's second goal was to address the humanitarian situation facing the nation. With over 36,000 refugees and almost two million internally displaced individuals, Burkina Faso requires approximately US\$ 877 million to offer basic assistance, housing, healthcare, and support. However, there is still a financing imbalance, which has terrible effects on the poor, according to the Institute for Security Studies (Yeboah 2024).

Targeting political favoritism and clientelism in the public sector, the junta has enacted significant new legislation aimed at achieving the third goal of reconstructing the state and enhancing governance (Koné 2024). The former minister of transport, Vincent Dabilgou, and four other individuals who were sentenced to eleven years in prison for embezzlement and money laundering were apprehended as a result of anti-corruption activities. However, overall, the government's commitment to enacting reforms and fighting corruption has been called into question due to the poor pace of progress in these areas (ACSS 2023).

Traore took office as "head of state and head of the armed forces," just like his predecessor. Known as the "transitional president," he made a vow to put a stop to violent radicalism. However, Traore did not seem to have a well-thought-out plan to put an end to this violence, which had persisted unchecked. Ten Burkinabé soldiers

were killed and fifty more injured in a terrorist attack on an army post in Djibo, only one month after the country's coup (Folahanmi 2022).

Prior to Damiba's ouster, France was considering sending 15 million euros to Burkina Faso, in an effort to support the country against the jihadists. After his removal from office, Damiba fled to France where he is still located today. Traore, on the other hand, has indicated that he is prepared to collaborate with Russia in order to eliminate this enduring menace and has placed the blame for the jihadists' advances on France. Undoubtedly, Russia continues to be the most benefiting non-Western power from the most recent coup, which it has tacitly encouraged. Russia aims to cover the "policing gap" left by France's withdrawal from the region as a strategic player after Operation Barkhane was recently concluded. The fact that youthful supporters of the most recent coup hoisted the Russian flag and stormed the French embassy is particularly noteworthy (Folahanmi 2022).

The leaders of the two coups in Burkina Faso in 2022 cited similar justifications for their military takeovers: misgovernance in varied forms and instability. As stipulated in the coordinated transitional framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), both committed to restoring constitutional order by June 2024. Instead, Burkina Faso along with Mali and Niger withdrew from ECOWAS in January 2024 (Yeboah 2024).

Combating terrorism and reestablishing the nation's territorial integrity were Traoré's top priorities. The government hired over 10,000 army and navy officials, reorganized the defense and security forces, and purchased new military hardware. The army and the public had conflicting opinions on the deployment of 90,000 volunteers for the defense of the homeland because they had doubts about their long-term prospects, training, and supervision, all of which could increase instability. To encourage public participation in security initiatives, the government also established the Patriotic Support Fund. Multinational corporations, notably mining businesses, provided funds for the program (Yeboah 2024).

Although the ECOWAS pullout demonstrates, Burkina Faso's increased military and political collaboration with Mali and Niger has come at the expense of deeper regional

and, in many cases, global relations. These three nations united to join the Alliance of Sahel States in September of last year with the goal of thwarting terrorism and advancing trade. In the face of mounting pressure from ECOWAS and other regional institutions to meet their transition dates, the alliance provides them with political cover and support. But despite these efforts, Burkina Faso's security situation has gotten worse and is continuing to worsen.

Supervising democratic elections to reinstate constitutional and democratic rule was one of Traoré's promises. But with only a few months remaining before the agreed-upon transition with ECOWAS ends, both civil society and foreign organizations are concerned about the lack of urgency. Traoré stated that combating insecurity and defending the country came first, not elections, in an interview with state TV in September of last year.

Political parties expressed fear that this might cause a delay in the polls, particularly because the technical preparations had not yet begun. It's also possible to use the inadequate security situation as an excuse to put off the elections indefinitely. Considering that the election deadline was set in accordance with the regional organization, the departure of ECOWAS heightens these concerns.

The fact that political parties have demanded an end to their operations' suspension and lament the absence of communication is concerning as well. Several civil society representatives who questioned the government's security decisions were coerced into joining the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland after they denounced the harsh use of the April 2023 General Mobilization Act. The authorities refute claims of mistreatment made against personnel of the defense force.

The government claims that one of its strategies for combating Islamist organizations is communication control. However, the government shouldn't disregard requests for a more cooperative strategy that safeguards citizens, particularly since national unity is essential to both security and long-lasting state administration.

Beyond these worries, the nation has distanced itself even further from former foreign partners. Traoré has kept his connections under wraps, but the Russian military's increasing deployment, the landing of Russian planes, and a July 2023 visit to the Kremlin all point to increased ties with Russia.

4. 4. Part Conclusion

After the Berlin Conference in 1885, which sparked the Scramble for Africa, Burkina Faso was a French colony for 64 years. France left an enduring legacy of widespread brutality and exploitation in Burkina Faso after being terrorized, exploited, and robbed of its resources by the European power (Michalopoulos 2016).

After gaining independence in 1960, the country has been marred by instability, humanitarian crisis, and insecurity. As mentioned earlier there was only one peaceful transition of power in the post-colonial era.

The existence of France, Burkina Faso's former colonizer, has persisted. As a result of France's neo-colonial Franco-African policy, colonial rule still exists throughout the entire African continent. Examples of this include the French language's dominance and the resulting escalation of social hierarchies, as well as the direct control of uranium mines in Niger by French state-owned companies. Since direct colonization is no longer popular, this strategy keeps the European power able to reap the same economic benefits while bolstering its diplomatic influence through fuzzier means (Smith 2013: 165).

Prior to the 1980s, the majority of Burkinabé people had little to no interaction with state actors or institutions because social programs were primarily offered to national elites and urban dwellers. Because of the state's limited authority, legitimacy, and colonial background, the security and justice provisions put in place by French indirect control were maintained. In order to maintain public compliance in rural areas, colonial power depended on traditional chiefdoms. This resulted in a highly fragmented and decentralized countryside, where the post-colonial state administration was mostly nonexistent (Harsch 2017).

The difficulties of balancing political stability, security, and growth in the face of enduring internal and external problems is shown by Burkina Faso's recent history.

The country has been enmeshed in cycles of political turmoil from Blaise Compaoré's long-term, semi-authoritarian rule, marked by relative stability but also accusations of corruption and human rights abuses, to Thomas Sankara's revolutionary but contentious reforms in the 1980s, aimed at self-sufficiency and anti-imperialism. Significant changes were demanded for democracy, and the 2014 movement that toppled Compaoré reflected popular dissatisfaction. But in the years that followed, there was still a great deal of volatility, as evidenced by the military takeovers in January and September 2022, which further upended the democratic system and brought attention to the nation's chronic problems.

Severe security concerns, most notably the growing threat of terrorism from groups affiliated with ISIS and Al-Qaeda, have exacerbated these political upheavals. Significant internal displacement brought on by the conflict has strained already-feeble resources and exacerbated the humanitarian disaster. The formation of democratic procedures has frequently been subordinated to efforts to combat terrorism, resulting in a militarized strategy that occasionally ignores civil governance and human rights issues.

Burkina Faso's exit from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has further cut it off from the rest of the world, preventing it from utilizing regional economic cooperation and support systems. This action is indicative of a larger trend where national security is given precedence over democratic norms and regional integration. Even though security is important, the core reasons of instability—poverty, unemployment, and social inequality—which still feed discontent and unrest—have not been adequately addressed by the emphasis on security.

The road to long-term peace and security is still paved with obstacles, even in the face of tremendous efforts to address these urgent concerns. Long-term reform initiatives are hampered by the unstable political environment and the frequent changes of power. It is in this environment that inclusive government is even more vital. A sustainable future requires a dedication to democratic values and human rights, as well as real changes that tackle the underlying socio-economic problems.

Additionally, international cooperation is essential. To strengthen security, enhance governance, and promote economic development, assistance from international and regional partners can offer the resources and knowledge that are required. To

guarantee that outside aid promotes equitable and sustainable growth, such collaboration must be in line with the objectives and goals of the Burkinabe people.

Burkina Faso's path to stability will need coordinated efforts from all facets of society as it struggles to address these complex issues. The secret to resolving the current situation lies in the residents' tenacity and resolve, coupled with strong leadership and backing from abroad. In the end, creating a peaceful and prosperous Burkina Faso will require a well-rounded strategy that incorporates democracy, security, and development while tackling both short-term security risks and long-term structural problems.

5. The Role of Russia

Since the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990, Russia has reemerged as a major player in Africa. Russia's influence in Africa significantly declined following the fall of the Soviet Union, which had actively acted by supporting the Marxist national liberation organizations on the continent as well as its own client governments. Russia disbanded several of its diplomatic offices, drastically reduced its military support, and trimmed back on subsidies and aid programs in the 1990s as it battled an economic crisis and reoriented its foreign policy goals (Bartosiewicz 2023a: 1).

Following Vladimir Putin's election to office, the task of rebuilding ties got underway. Positive memories of Soviet Union involvement on the continent at the time, such as Moscow's backing of anti-colonial activities and its establishment of Soviet colleges as schools for future African elites, proved to be beneficial (Bartosiewicz 2023a: 1).

Accordingly, Russian economic, military, and technological might was growing by the middle of the 2000s. Russia is regarded as one of the fastest-growing trading partners in Sub-Saharan Africa, despite having very little political, military, or economic clout in the region when compared to other global players (Mureithi 2022).

Russia has significantly stepped up its policies in Africa since 2014, entering the competition for opportunities in national and local markets brought out by the continent's fast growth and transformation. Sukhankin (2020: 1) contends that

Russia's primary competitive advantages in pursuing its geopolitical and geoeconomic goals in Africa are military-technical cooperation and "security export" methods. The Russian side uses both legal and illicit means, such as private military corporations that are de jure outlawed in Russia but have been active in conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, and Libya, in addition to legal tools like arms/weaponry deals, training, and consultation.

The Wagner Group is a prominent figure when discussing the impact of Russian private military companies, also known as mercenaries. Wagner is an increasingly important tool in the Kremlin's foreign policy toolbox. Wagner may possibly be considered a Russian state operative and a proxy organization. Although it operates all across the world, controversy surrounding its activities has centered primarily on the African continent (Neethling 2023: 1).

The Group has become, in a comparatively short period of time, perhaps Russia's most (in)famous private military company (PMC). Wagner is well-known in the international community for giving pro-Russian actors protection in a number of conflict areas throughout the world. Wagner's close ties to the Russian military and intelligence services, as well as the Kremlin, have long been known, despite the Russian government's formal denial of his existence (Neethling 2023: 1).

Gagaridis (2022) claims that the Wagner Group is a collection of companies that include mining and energy companies in addition to security-focused enterprises. It manages separate businesses that work together harmoniously. Yevgeny Prigozhin, a well-to-do Russian businessman with strong connections to President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin, was behind the Wagner Group before his death in August 2023 in a mysterious plane crash, just shortly after what has been called an "almost mutiny". Because Wagner's leadership has access to Putin and the Moscovian political elites, it is in a better position to affect international relations politically than any of the other PMCs.

For the Wagner Group, Mali represents a significant military mission in Africa. Following the country's coup d'état in June 2021, the Wagner Group made its appearance as a foreign actor in Mali around the end of 2021. France terminated its collaborative counterinsurgency operations with the Malian state forces in February

2022, citing the coup, and lowered its military presence in Mali as a result (Neethling 2023: 14).

Although Wagner and other Russian groups are working in Mali, the government does not formally acknowledge their presence in the nation due to mounting evidence of Russian mercenary actions and atrocities. Approximately four hundred citizens were slain during an anti-terror operation that Wagner and the local military forces planned in the spring of 2022. Following blatant trends of the group's violence against local communities in the CAR, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine, civilian casualties in the nation have increased disproportionately since Wagner's arrival (Stronski 2023).

According to Issaev et al. (2022), field study shows that Mali (and other West African countries) have good attitudes towards Russia's return to Africa and its increased security role in the battle against terrorism. Parens (2022) claims that the Wagner Group followed "the same playbook" in Mali that the contractor had employed in Sudan and the Central African Republic. This tactic is related to Wagner's standard response when African governments indicate they require security support. In Mali's case, there was a perception that Western nations had not gone far enough to provide support in the form of regional anti-terrorism efforts and security cooperation.

U.S. officials have already voiced worry that Wagner aims to implement a similar strategy in Burkina Faso, where sympathy towards Russia and against France has increased during the last two years (Stronski 2023). The paramilitary organization known as Africa Corps was established by the Russian Ministry of Defense. In January 2024, the organization posted pictures of a deployment to Burkina Faso on its Telegram account. The post also included a statement stating that 200 military personnel from Russia would be added to the 100 soldiers who were already there to protect President Ibrahim Traoré (Lechner 2024).

According to Lechner and Eledinov (2024), this movement suggests that the Sahel is becoming the focal point of Russian operations in Africa, rather than the Central African Republic. Additionally, they contend that, primarily because of the Africa Corps' official government standing, the transition from Wagner to Africa Corps represents a new stage in Russia's security export to Africa. Prigozhin's business has mostly disbanded its informal and private elements, leaving a core expeditionary force in place. With this change, Russia's actions on the continent are moving from being

under the radar as a private initiative to being recognized as an official national endeavor.

In exchange for military, economic, and political cooperation, including the potential for a future Russian naval military base in the nation, Russia has been providing mercenaries and military equipment to governments since 2019 to aid in the fight against jihadists and insurgents in the Cabo Delgado province of northern Mozambique. These groups are linked to the terror organizations ISIS and Al-Shabaab (Sukhankin 2019).

Thus, with the rival French Total LNG (liquefied natural gas) project in Mozambique, Moscow might also outmaneuver them. Additionally, Russia was legally guaranteed to establish military bases in Mozambique, Sudan, Madagascar, Egypt, Eritrea, and the Central African Republic, according to a German intelligence dossier that was released by the Foreign Ministry and a German tabloid (Ersozoglul 2021).

This policy was validated by the inaugural Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi in 2019, which was co-hosted by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Forty-three African heads of state attended the event. Several treaties were the result of it, one of which was between Moscow and the African Union (Clifford 2021).

Benedict Oramah, President of the African Export-Import Bank, states that trade between Russia and Africa has increased since 2015 and is expected to reach \$20 billion annually in 2021. Russia imported about \$5 billion worth of African goods and services, while exporting \$14 billion worth of goods and services (Kohnert 2022: 6).

Russian investment and commerce in Africa have increased dramatically, especially in Egypt, Sudan, and the Maghreb (Paczyńska 2020). One explanation for this was the growing allure of the African oil and gas markets for Russian companies like Rosneft, Gazprom, and Lukoil. These companies saw this as a chance to influence pricing and market conditions in other nations, in addition to increasing production and having an impact on the global gas market (Shakhovskaya 2019: 706). Even more so in regard to the embargo on Western imports of petrol and oil that the US and the EU imposed in response to Putin's conflict in Ukraine. The advice made by Western politicians and media repeatedly that the European Union and its member states

should increase their imports of petrol from Africa has proven to be a mixed blessing in this regard (Whitehouse 2022).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the start of a conflict in Europe in February 2022 have reignited growing international concerns over Russia's military and political actions in Africa. Russia's increasing sway over Africa as a result of forging new connections and mending broken ones has been seen as an attempt to reclaim the geopolitical advantages that the former Soviet Union lost upon its dissolution in 1989. The West views the targeted acquisition of Russian military hardware and equipment, the financing of unpopular, illegitimate, or unconstitutionally elected officials, and the pursuit of mining concessions and natural resources as threats to democratic gains and stability on a fragile continent (Mensah 2022: 47).

Due to economic sanctions and the aggressor state's isolation from the US, the EU, and their allies, Russia was compelled to increase the scope of its foreign relations initiatives. The Russian Federation's new foreign policy concept, which was adopted in March 2023, mirrored this (Bartosiewicz 2023a: 2). Africa was given its own chapter; in the 2016 edition, it was referenced only a few times, and the northern portion of the continent was covered in the section on connections with the Middle East. Russian diplomatic effort in Africa increased significantly along with this change in objectives. The second Russia-Africa summit was held in St. Petersburg at the end of July 2023 (Bartosiewicz 2023b).

Even while Russia has long been present in West Africa and the Sahel and signifies the resumption of previously closed and inactive relations, the situation has been described in almost apocalyptic terms. Siegle (2022) argues that:

“Russia has been aggressively pursuing its strategic objectives in Africa in recent years, securing a foothold in the eastern Mediterranean, gaining naval port access in the Red Sea, expanding natural resource extraction opportunities, displacing Western influence, and promoting alternatives to democracy as a regional norm. Africa, thus, is a “theater” for Russia’s geostrategic interests rather than a destination itself, a perspective reflected in the means that Russia employs. Unlike most major external partners, Russia is not investing significantly in conventional statecraft in Africa, e.g., economic investment, trade, and security assistance. Rather, Russia relies on a series of asymmetric (and often extralegal) measures for influence,

mercenaries, arms-for-resource deals, opaque contracts, election interference, and disinformation” (Siegle 2022).

As Siegle previously stated, bilateral agreements based on arms sales and investments in energy and mineral resources have demonstrated Russia's position on the continent (Siegle 2022). The two processes that reinforce one other are what have brought Russian activity in the sub-region to the attention of the world. The first is Russia's massive incursion into Mali, followed by widespread calls from the Malians to sever relations with France, their former colonial overlord and master manipulator of internal politics, and replace it with Russia (Mensah 2022: 5).

The second has to do with the growing international apprehension regarding Russian military proxies operating in unstable Sahelian and West African states. These worries stem from past experiences in nations like Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR), where Russia's proxies have influenced elections, broken international law, and shielded unconstitutional rulers. But this is not to discount other actors, such as the French, who have previously carried out similar deeds in Africa (Mensah 2022: 6).

These days, Moscow is making the most of a similar confluence of circumstances in the Sahel. It has welcomed the military governments in Burkina Faso and Mali, offering them help for information operations, diplomatic backing, and security assistance (Stronski 2023).

6. The French Connection

There have been 45 coup attempts on the African continent since 2000, 23 of which have been successful. These triumphant takeovers transpired across fourteen nations. The remaining two were former Portuguese territories, ten were former French colonies, and two were former British colonies. 16 of the 23 coups that have been successful this century has taken place in former French colonies (Usman 2023). Abdoulaye Maigaat, the acting prime minister of Mali and a colonel, charged France with neocolonial, condescending, paternalistic, and revanchist politics following the coup in 2020.

The widespread meddling by France in the domestic affairs of its former colonies is one of the main causes of the prevalence of Francophone coups. This is "the most glaring example of ongoing neocolonialism in Africa today, serving as a pivotal mechanism that fosters dependency in significant parts of the continent," as Ian Taylor, a professor of international relations and African political economy at the University of St Andrews, put it (Usman 2023). France's management of the monetary policies of 14 of its former African colonies through the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) serves as an example of this involvement. It is mandatory for former French colonies to place at least 50% of their foreign reserves into an Operations Account managed by the French Treasury, located in Paris (Usman 2023).

Because of the Sahel's strategic significance and impact on the littoral states of Western Africa, Paris is keen to maintain its supremacy in the region. France considers the Sahel to be strategically significant due to its uranium resources. The French corporation Orano holds uranium deposits in Niger through its subsidiaries and ships uranium to France at a price much below market value. This uranium is used for military reasons alone, and one-third of France's uranium for peaceful applications (electricity generation) originates from Niger (Filippov, 2017).

Since Tuaregs make up around 10% of the population of Niger, instability generated by them poses a direct threat to French interests in the country. Moreover, instability in the Sahel could spread to nations like Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, which are crucial economically to France. Additionally crucial to the European Green Deal are rare-earth metals from Western Africa (Usman et al. 2021). Therefore, France secures the EU's strategic depth in addition to its own by maintaining supremacy in the Sahel.

With relation to the Sahara-Sahel region, France likewise possesses a flexible arsenal of foreign policy options. In addition to having a strong military presence, France is a major economic force in the Maghreb and Sahel, coming in first and third place, respectively, for foreign direct investment. Prominent French corporations, like Total, Bolloré, Vinci, and Orano, are widely dispersed over the area. The distribution of European developmental aid, which is particularly vital for the five Sahel states, is heavily influenced by Paris, a major international aid contributor (Nadzharov 2023: 187).

Because the Maghreb and Sahel regions are Francophone, France also holds a dominating cultural position. Lastly, the elites of the Sahel states, who stand to gain the most from the so-called *Françafrique* system of connections, have strong ties to France (Borrel et al. 2021).

Since the dissolution of the former French West Africa (including Mali and Burkina Faso, along with Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Benin and Niger), France has backed autocratic governments and disfavored elites in return for access to natural resources that are essential to the country's economy. The uranium obtained from Niger, which accounts for an astounding 80% of France's electrical generation, is very significant. This reliance highlights the breadth of France's strategic objectives and its readiness to form partnerships with governments, irrespective of their level of popularity at home, in order to gain access to these priceless resources (Usman 2023). Due to its long history with and in West Africa, France finds itself in close proximity to communities that are either facing severe security declines or substantial disparities in economic and developmental opportunities. France is a bogeyman because of its significant political and economic influence (Guiffard 2023).

Furthermore, France maintains a large military presence throughout Africa, which helps its Francophone allies receive aid through "operational cooperation" for peacekeeping and intervention efforts and "structural cooperation" for regular missions involving the assistance of other nations in establishing and maintaining their military establishments (Gryphon 2016: 900).

The primary reason for France's military presence in the African Sahel is the country's historical and long-standing interests in the area, which are unquestionably a holdover and logical continuation of French colonial policy in an area where French colonial rule was previously practiced (Chafer 2020). To retain a continuous military presence after the majority of France's empire in West and Central Africa was decolonized in 1960, France signed bilateral agreements for defense cooperation and military collaboration with its former colonies (Gryphon 2016: 901). Approximately thirty French military interventions have taken place in Africa in the three decades since political independence, earning France the title of "gendarme of Africa" (Vallin 2015: 85).

Alongside this tendency towards unilateral action was the practice of self-legitimation. To put it another way, interventions were carried out in accordance with French

conceptions of security, which involved defending African heads of state under danger against any threat to the French president's authority (Keese 2007). As a result, France set the terms of engagement and the amount of force used without consulting any outside agencies. The scope of its operations, which were usually conducted inside the boundaries of independent African states, was solely defined by France (Chafer et al. 2020: 8). The French military's presumption that they understood "their Africa" further supported this view.

Furthermore, unilateralism was linked to the French military's substitution strategy for Francophone African forces. Throughout Francophone Africa, military technical assistants were stationed, and French soldiers were incorporated into African armies and sent to settle disputes independently of the host nation's military. French military equipment was supplied, and French officers frequently took a very direct role in dealing with African soldiers in any fight. In the end, most of the assistance was intended, intentionally or not, to continue relying on the French armed forces (Staniland 1987).

The 1994 Rwandan Genocide was a crucial turning point for France's paradigm of autonomous security strategy. The main foreign backer of the Habyarimana dictatorship, which carried out the genocide, was France. French forces gave the Rwandan army guidance, instruction, and weapons as part of Operation Noroit (Prunier 2004). Furthermore, many critics felt that the humanitarian relief operation Turquoise, which the French had successfully gotten UN approval for on June 22, 1994, was more about giving Hutus, a large number of whom had participated in the genocide, a means of escape into eastern Zaire (Democratic Republic of Kongo) than it was about saving lives (Chafer et al. 2020: 9).

Profound charges of French neocolonialism were made in response to these acts, which also sparked intense internal, regional, and worldwide criticism. The French military and policy officials were not blind to this widespread disapproval. Senior French military leaders have described Rwanda as a "traumatic" time for the French military, both militarily and politically, which emphasizes the critical aspect of this event (De Heusch 1995).

Consequently, the genocide in Rwanda served as a turning point, forcing a reevaluation of France's military strategy in Africa. It had proven ineffective to "send a

warning message" to the Rwandan Patriotic Front using traditional unilateralist means. Operation *Norôît*, followed by Operation *Turquoise*, severely damaged France's reputation for moral leadership and accountability in relation to Africa, making it impossible for France to continue its long-standing policies in the region (Utley 2002: 135).

According to Chafer et al. (2020), the Rwandan genocide and France's military interventions in the Sahel region from 2013/2014 have led to the replacement of the "old" French military policy of unilateralism with a "new" policy of multilateralism. Three presumptions form the foundation of their argument:

First, there was a move away from French self-legitimation and an acknowledgment that French interventions could no longer be carried out only on the basis of French standards and that they required authorization from both regional and international organizations, including the African Union and the United Nations.

Second, there was a departure from the custom of France deciding the scope of its mission without consulting anybody else. Rather, in a situation where outside assistance is required. France eventually came to accept new guidelines set by organizations like the UN, EU, and/or nations that sent troops, including the conduct of missions, duration of operations, and use of violence.

Third, the concept of "African solutions to African problems" replaced the earlier substitution of African forces with a new rationale. This entailed enhancing African forces' ability to conduct operations for peacekeeping and peace support. In line with this philosophy, the *Ecoles Nationales à Vocation Régionale* (ENVR), a network of military training institutions, was established in 1997 and currently consists of sixteen campuses throughout west and central Africa. Additionally, African troops are involved in peacekeeping missions that involve French forces.

However, there have also been issues with the paradigm shift, most notably in 1999 when the Ivory Coast was experiencing a developing crisis. By stopping the rebels in the north from seizing control of Abidjan, the nation was divided in two and the rebels in the north from the government forces in the south. This was an act of unilateralism on the part of France.

Then, in an effort to adhere to the multilateralism paradigm, France involved ECOWAS and the UN in an effort to secure a ceasefire, which was achieved, and to find a political solution, which was not achieved. Nonetheless, President Jacques Chirac unilaterally ordered the dismantling of the Ivorian air force in 2004 following the deaths of nine French troops in an air strike by an Ivorian military plane on a French military installation (Recchia 2020: 515).

However, Presidents Chirac and Sarkozy increased their efforts to multilateralize operations, exposing the European Union to a range of political and financial risks as well as costs when it came to France's peace and security initiatives in Africa. Three French-inspired military operations in Africa have taken place under Sarkozy: EUFOR DRC in 2006, EUFOR Chad/CAR in 2008, and Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2003. This tactic didn't last long since many EU members lost faith in the effectiveness of such interventions in African crises and were reluctant to send soldiers into conflict zones there (Dijkstra 2010: 402).

It is crucial to highlight the innovative aspects of the French strategy in the Sahel, which embodies a fresh kind of cooperation combining both local and foreign players operating in a hazardous region. An important development is that France has played a key role in facilitating the UN's gradual transition from a neutral presence at the outset to MINUSMA working with a military coalition to conduct kinetic operations (Chafer et al. 2020: 19).

In a sense, France has pioneered the novel post-1994 multilateral strategy while creatively modifying it. To assess the situation, legitimize it, and share the burden, a variety of actors have been brought in. These include the EU (for training support and security sector reform), the AU and ECOWAS (for approval and/or funded support), the UN (for peacekeeping and possibly also exit strategy), and support for African forces through the G5 Sahel to get them ready for front-line roles in peace support operations (which is also seen as part of an exit strategy for French forces) (Chafer et. al. 2020: 20).

Togola and Okur (2023) argue that despite the multilateralism initiative, France has never given up on its unilateral interventionism. They also use the French intervention in the Ivory Coast and in Mali as examples. Or as Erforth (2020) put it:

“French military intervention abroad embedded in the Western liberal tradition of interventionism is usually conducted with multilateral approval from the United Nations or regional bodies like the European Union.”

As was already established, a significant portion of the anti-French sentiment that exists today stems from Mali's disenchantment with Operation Barkhane.

It is important to keep in mind that most Malians initially embraced the French operation Serval, which was initiated in January 2013 and succeeded by "Barkhane" in 2014, as it resulted in the liberation of the country's north, which had been taken over by jihadist organizations (Haidara 2023: 1). When Islamic extremists advanced on Mali's capital, Bamako, the country asked France for military assistance, sparking the start of Operation Barkhane. Hailed as heroes, the French arrived shortly after. French soldiers engaged in combat shortly after arriving in Mali, and after several weeks, they successfully retook the northern cities of Timbuktu and Gao (King 2022: 3).

But over the next few years, the situation deteriorated rapidly, eventually spreading to central Mali in 2014 and, by the end of 2017, to Burkina Faso and Niger, two neighboring nations. Hence, the "failure" of international operations, in which France was a leader, is what gave rise to the current notion of "anti-French sentiment." This is especially true given that France forced its decisions on the nation (the total security approach), against the desires of the Malian people (the necessity of holding talks with the jihadists) (Haidara 2023: 1).

The multi-annual presence of international troops, the use of high-end military equipment and the training provided to the armies of the G5 Sahel countries have had a positive impact on the recapture of territory in Mali or Chad, however terrorists are moving into Niger, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Nigeria, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire (Olech 2023: 7).

Significant diplomatic tensions were made public in the autumn of 2019 between France and Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. President Macron of France invited his counterparts from other nations to a conference in southwest France in January 2020. Prior to an outright eruption, tensions had been steadily rising, reflecting the dissatisfaction caused by a six-year international military mobilization

headed by France that was unable to halt the worsening of the security situation in the region. In 2019, there were more deaths in those five nations as a result of jihadist attacks and warfare, than in 2013 (Guichaoua 2020: 895). Instead, the security situation in the Sahel region further decreased.

French armies battled military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea, Chad, and Sudan between May 2021 and July 2023 but failed to improve the stability and security situation in the region. After these continuous failures and the increasing discontent by local authorities as well as the people, the level of French military participation in the Sahel was drastically reduced, and Paris was no longer the top military and economic ally of the aforementioned nations. Due to terrorists' ability to carry out continuous attacks and the start of African juntas' cooperation with Russia, the French military were forced to leave the Sahel region after many years of trying to protect it (Olech 2023: 7).

In the latest sign of the difficult situation in the Sahel region, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger left the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in January 2024. The US and European allies of Africa are also at jeopardy from this rift. According to recent research published in the African Affairs magazine, the Nigerien military supported General Abdourahmane Tchiani's coup rather than that of elected president Mohamed Bazoum mostly due to dissatisfaction with the expanded French military presence.

France is confronted with a number of difficulties in the Sahel, primarily as a result of its diminishing economic and military prowess and misguided attempts to cultivate partnerships with local stakeholders. Due to its reliance on American logistical support during Operations Serval and Barkhane, Paris finds it difficult to conduct independent military operations in the area (Mahshie 2021). China has already surpassed France economically in terms of trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) (Stein 2021). Lastly, there is a great deal of hostility due to France's frequent neocolonial attitude (Guiffard 2023).

If other western nations don't change international institutions to take African concerns into account, they run the risk of being painted with the same neocolonial brush. In order to guarantee that the multilateral system serves the interests of small and/or

developing nations, they must hasten the reforms that are required to achieve this, according to Nicholas Westcott (2024).

7. Franco-Russian relations in Africa

Since Nicholas Sarkozy's administration, there has been a tough relationship between France and Russia. During his administration, France spearheaded the effort to overthrow the government in Libya, going against UN Security Council Resolution 1973. It also attempted to do the same in Syria, directly opposing Russian interests in both nations. Despite this, the cooperative spirit persisted: in 2015, Moscow and Paris convened in Syria to discuss coordinated counterterrorism measures. At one-point, Russian President Vladimir Putin gave the order for his warships stationed in the Mediterranean Sea to make "direct contact" with the aircraft carrier Charles-de-Gaulle and to "cooperate with the French allies" (Le Point, 2015).

The entrance of Russian military instructors in the Central African Republic in 2017 caused a blow to bilateral relations. The government of the CAR was forced to seek assistance from Russia due to the inefficiency of Western actors and international organizations. Unlike the EU mission, Russian military instructors educated Central African security forces and military personnel in combat weapons operation, and Russian special task forces took part in the army of Central Africa's anti-terrorist operations (Hayrapetyan 2022: 40).

By 2020, there was a considerable decrease in violence in the CAR thanks to the Russian military's vital role in stabilizing the nation (France24, 2022). On the African continent, where Paris and Moscow had previously collaborated, it was the first point of contention for Russian-French ties, as Russia supplied logistical support for French-led peacekeeping operations like EUFOR Tchad/RCA (Nadzharov 2023: 183).

2020 saw the start of the real crisis in Moscow and Paris's bilateral relations as Russia's influence in the Libyan conflict continued to rise. Paris had been a crucial ally of the Libyan National Army (LNA) prior to Marshal Haftar's unsuccessful offensive, which led to the latter's defeat (Harchaoui 2019).

As French influence in Libya waned, Russian influence started to seep into the Sahel nations. The Mali transitional administration began working with Russia on military issues in 2021. Private military firms from Russia started doing business there. Paris retaliated by initiating a massive disinformation operation against Russia (Siegle 2021).

It is feasible to discuss the Franco-Russian great power rivalry in the Sahara-Sahel region in light of media reports regarding Russia's potential reconciliation with Burkina Faso's transitional government and allegations that Russia supported the coup. It is crucial to remember that the Franco-Russian conflict in the Sahara-Sahel region is a major component in the ties between the two great powers as well as a new security dynamic in the region (Nadzharov 2023: 184).

The Sahara-Sahel region is made up of the Maghreb and the Sahel region connected by the Trans-Saharan security dynamics. The struggle in Libya serves as a clear illustration of the convergence of the Maghreb and Sahel. Following the fight, weapons from the Jamahiriya army stores were dumped into the Sahel, exacerbating the situation in Mali, Niger, Chad, and other regions. But during the last ten years, a reverse process has begun, with the Sahel now having a greater influence on the Maghreb, primarily as a result of migrant flows from the Sahel and the actions of international terrorist organizations (Rózsa 2022).

Even though they are both powerful nations, Russia and France clearly have distinct perspectives on the Sahara-Sahel region. Particularly when it comes to politics and the military, France is the dominating force in the area. It maintains a large number of military installations in the Sahel, including those in Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad (France abandoned its facilities in Mali in 2022) (Senat.fr 2023). In addition, France supplies Morocco with a significant amount of weaponry, and it works closely with both Rabat and Tunis on security issues.

France holds a prominent position as a strategic partner in the Maghreb. A major mediator between the Maghreb and the EU and the West in general, specializing in arms sales, energy, and infrastructure projects. Presenting itself as the only nation with the right to use force, France serves as the main security force in the Sahel. Paris thus seeks to maintain its primacy in the Sahel while being happy with its standing as a "great power" in the Maghreb (Nadzharov 2023: 186).

Russia, on the other hand, presents itself differently in the Sahara-Sahel as a rising (indeed, returning) force. First off, the phrase "Sahara-Sahel" is not often used in Russian geopolitical discourse. In Russian geopolitical discourse, the Maghreb countries are referred to as "North Africa," whereas the Sahel states are referred to as "Western Africa" (Nadzharov 2023: 188).

The tools of Russian foreign strategy are less adaptable. Although Moscow is a significant supplier of vital commodities and a weapons dealer in the region, it falls short in other respects. Algeria is Russia's principal trading partner, mostly as a result of the USSR and PDRA's long-standing collaboration. But Russia is behind France in trade and foreign direct investment. According to the OEC (2023), French commercial turnover with Algeria is double that of Russia, and with Morocco, it is three times that of Russia. Moscow, however, poses the greatest threat to French interests in the area since it aggressively intervenes in regional security matters in an effort to take advantage of the shortcomings and inefficiencies of French foreign policy.

The conflict between Paris and Moscow is primarily the result of France's foreign policy's shortcomings and ineffectiveness in the area, which Russia tries to take advantage of for its own political and economic gain (Nadzharov 2023: 181). Russia realized that in order to further its agenda as a significant global actor, it needed to forge new alliances and revive old ones in Africa as a result of its growing isolation from Western countries and awareness of its declining influence abroad.

8. Discussion

Based on the evidence shown in this paper, it can be argued that the involvement and influence of France in the Sahel region is a reason for discontent among the local population and parts of the policy making apparatus, as well as the military establishment. France's history of meddling in internal affairs, the security apparatus of the respective countries and the backing of unpopular rulers, to protect their national interests and against the will of the general population and the military establishment has laid the ground for coups d'état. It can be argued that the effects, established in the early years of the independent nations of the Sahel region, are still affecting the region today.

However, it can also be argued that France is not the “main reason” for the resurgence of Coups d'état in the Sahel Region, but rather (a big) contributing factor. Nonetheless, it cannot be disputed that the, still persisting, influence of France in the economic and military-security realm of the Sahel states has laid the ground for the many coups that happened throughout history. The historical examples that have been discussed in this paper are another important factor in the appearance of coups of recent years. One example of this trend could be heard in 2020 when Abdoulaye Maigaat, the acting prime minister of Mali and a colonel, charged France with neocolonial, condescending, paternalistic, and revanchist politics following the coup in 2020.

The reemergence of coups in the Sahel region are directly correlated with the disillusionment of the population with the failure of a coalition of western forces, including UN troops under the umbrella of MINUSMA and French troops in the Operation Barkhane. The inability to contain the multiple extremist organizations in the region, as well as the fact that their influence in the region in fact increased, led to public officials calling for the withdrawal of European and US troops, to be substituted by military personnel of the infamous Wagner Group. The deteriorating security situation and the need to get it under control has been stated by every post-coup (interim) President of the region.

Economic mismanagement, corruption, poverty, and violent extremism (especially of Terror Organizations) are prevalent in the whole region, which leads to instability that

is being exploited by a diverse group of players longing for power. This leads to an endless cycle that proved to be impossible to break up until today. The corruption, mismanagement and poverty lead to instability and discontent in the population which lead to military uprisings, coups d'état and the willingness of people from remote and poor areas to join extremist organizations, which in turn leads to violence and armed clashes, which leads to instability and so on.

In regard to the systems capability framework of Almond and Powell (1966), which addresses the issue of the capacity of the political system to penetrate and exercise control over individuals and groups, it is clear to see that the political system of the Sahel states has failed to ensure and defend the society against external aggression (against violent extremist groups) and internal insurrection (against coups by the military establishment). The meddling of France within the security apparatus of these states has without question contributed to this failure.

The findings of this research confirm the observations made by most scholars that were engaged in the topic in recent years. Mann (2021), Guichaoua (2020) and McGiffin (2021) have all analyzed and concluded a negative impact of French (neo)colonialism on the ability of the states of the Sahel to establish and maintain peace. Amartey (2022) and Engels (2023) have also contributed to this view with their research. Furthermore, our research supports the findings of Issaev (2022) and Neethling (2023) that concluded that the involvement of Russia contributes further to the continuous instability in the region. We argue that it is not in the interest of the Russian Federation for the Sahel Region to have peace and stability, as an important method to gain geoeconomic influence, and sources of income would dry up if there was to be peace.

Furthermore, the conditions for spillover effects in the region are more prevalent than in any other region in the world. In most cases, uprisings, protests and subsequently coups are limited by the border. In the Sahel region this is not the case, as can be seen by the fact that the reemergence started in Mali in 2020, where French flags could be seen to be burned by protestors, the same happened in subsequent coups in Burkina Faso and most recently in Niger in 2023. One reason for this is the unity in discontent towards France that each country shares. As was pointed out earlier, France shifted its policy from unilateral action to multilateral engagement, mostly with

the United States and the United Nations. However, it can be disputed that this change in policy was anything less than the realization of France that they did not have the necessary economic and military means to be able to uphold the status quo from the immediate post-independence era.

The reemergence of coups d'état in the Sahel Region is a major challenge to the stability of the whole continent of Africa and Europe as well. France, the United States and the European Union have a longstanding interest in the region for various reasons. Apart from historical reasons in the case of France, mineral resources and investment opportunities in an evolving market, the Sahel region plays an important part in the European Security structure. Due to the proximity to the Maghreb region in Northern Africa, which borders the Mediterranean sea, the stability in the Sahel is an important building block in the European strategy against irregular (and unsafe) migration.

The failures of Operation Barkhane and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which were terminated in 2023, led to a skyrocketing Anti-French and Anti-West sentiment in the Sahel region. The perpetuation of Wagner in Mali, and the newly established Alliance of Sahelian States (ASS), a defense pact created in September 2023 by the military juntas of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, is likely to change the security dynamics in the Sahel. Particularly, both partnerships operate with strong opposition to "traditional" Western interventions and defend a sovereigntist discourse in the region.

Another important factor in the assessment of coups d'état in the Sahel region and their frequency is the historical prevalence of interventionism of the powers of the west, especially France. As discussed earlier, France has a long history of unilateral action in their former colonies of the AOF. The signing of bilateral agreements for defense cooperation and military collaboration has happened from a position of power, contrary to the position of weakness of the newly established states that followed after the dissolution of the AOF in 1960.

Unilateral action was also applied in the French military's substitution strategy for the Francophone forces, meaning that French soldiers, French officers, French equipment, and French military technical assistants took a very direct role in the Sahel regions defense structure. This led to an overreliance on the French armed forces and to an inability to combat attacks carried out by violent extremist organizations like ISIS,

Boko Haram or al Shabaab, further contributing to the prevalent security crisis in the region.

The practice of unilateralism, paired with the practice of self-legitimation, in the form of (military) interventions against any threat to African heads of state that enjoyed the backing of France, has significantly contributed to the Anti-French sentiment that occurred and skyrocketed in recent years. These tendencies have without doubt played a part in the instability in the region and subsequently to the occurrence of coups d'état. Additionally, France used to support whoever represented the interests of their country regardless of the needs and will of the general population.

Another party that has realized the importance and potential of the region is the Russian Federation. Especially since the start of the Ukraine war and the resulting isolation of Russia in (western) international markets, Russia has increased their efforts. One indication for an intensification of their efforts are the two Russia-Africa summits that were held in 2019 and 2023, in which 43 African states took part and a multitude of trade agreements were established. A contributing factor in the good relations between Russia and states of the Sahel, are the good relations established during the Soviet Union era during which independence struggles were supported and educational institutions were established.

A major actor in the endeavors of Russia in the Sahel is the infamous mercenary Wagner Group. It is important to point out that although the economic cooperation between Russia and the Sahel increased significantly in recent years, the primary way for Russia to achieve its geopolitical goals in the Sahel is through military-technical cooperation and security export methods. Furthermore, it is also crucial to point out that in the cases of Burkina Faso and Mali, the assistance in restoring stability following their coups and the subsequent unrest, was specifically requested by Burkina Faso and Mali, while at the same time both countries asked French (and in some instances American) troops to leave their country.

The change in policy of secrecy, in the form of the Wagner Group, to openly providing security services, in the form of the Africa Corps, can be described as a major shift and one that is going to be of interest for future analysis on the matter. Russia now openly provides military assistance to some of the states of the Sahel region, while the

leaders of those nations pronounce their will to cooperate, also in the future, with the Russian Federation

This is important to understand the difficulty in the current situation for France and their Western partners. Through historical and recent experience, there is a perception of unilateral action for the benefit of themselves when it comes to France and the western world, whereas with Russia the perception is that they intend to help facilitate stability and security in the region. It will be a difficult act to reverse these perceptions, but an act that needs to occur if the Western World does not want to lose their influence in the region.

Concerning possible solutions to the prevalence of coups in the region, it is of course important to state that it is easier said than done. In the short term it is crucial to stabilize the crumbling security situation in the region. To achieve this the threat of terrorist organizations must be eradicated, either by military or diplomatic means. Taking into consideration what the different organizations might demand in terms of influence in the region and the religious values that they might want to implement, the military option appears to be the more achievable one from the outside.

A significant point of contention about the military option is of course the fact that attempts have already taken place and failed to achieve its target. Based on the evidence presented in this paper, one can argue that an error has been made with the use of international troops rather than training and equipping the local armies. It is a difficult undertaking to establish a military strong enough to defend the country but not strong enough to overthrow the government. Considering the experience made in the military realm, it must be argued that a diplomatic solution has to be found. Even though it will be difficult to achieve, painful compromises must be made and it being a big risk to take, we argue that it is a risk worth taking if it increases the possibility of peace.

One line of argumentation by the post-coup rulers in Sahel nations is that France and the United Nations have tried to tell African states how they should conduct their policies and how they should try to advance economically, mostly being interested in their own agendas and their own gains. The phrase "African solutions to African problems" has been used on multiple occasions. This forms the basis of another solution that needs to be considered.

The time has come when the policy makers of the global west should engage with their African counterparts in a sincere and meaningful way, trying to find solutions that firstly benefit Africans and increase the chances of lasting peace and stability, even if it comes at the cost of an unfavorable ruler being in charge of the respective country. Due to the historical experience of most countries in the region, any act of trying to influence the people in power will be seen as an interference by foreign forces.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the stability and security situation in the states of the Sahel region is bleak. The United States Institute of Peace (n/A), writes that in recent years, military juntas have taken control of numerous African nations, from on the Red Sea to Guinea on the Atlantic Coast. As U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has termed it, this “epidemic of coups” accelerates cycles of violence in nations already plagued by war, fosters further instability, and threatens democratic advancement and human rights (UN News 2023).

Multiple factors are driving the rise in coups in the Sahel, including economic mismanagement, corruption, poverty, violent extremism, and the failure of overwhelmed governments to resolve grievances over resources and progress social justice (Mahmoud 2023). The prevalent Anti-French sentiment has without doubt contributed to the escalation of tensions as well.

However, by taking advantage of strategic rivalry between great powers, putschists are increasingly able to avoid pressure from the International Community, where in the past they would have been denounced and prosecuted, according to the United States Institute of Peace (n/A). In the military - security realm, this strategic competition plays out most prominently between the historically important power of France and the reemergent Russia.

The influence and failures of France in the region have helped establish the so-called “Anti-French sentiment” in the region. Through unilateral action after the independence of the former French West Africa (AOF), and multilateral action without the involvement of African state actors, the attitude towards the western world has become hostile.

Due to the decrease of French involvement in the security apparatus of the Sahel States, after the termination of Operation Barkhane in 2023, and the (already existing) discontent that increased considering the military presence, France was forced to withdraw their troops from the region. This left a vacuum behind that especially Russia has been trying to fill. Due to their involvement during the Soviet Union Era, in which

they supported many countries' independence struggles and financed learning institutions, attitudes towards the Russian presence have mostly been positive.

The involvement of Russia was mostly through their proxies, especially the Wagner Group, yet in 2024 we could see a change in that policy with the newly formed, or rebranded, Africa Corps, which was officially formed by the Russian defense ministry and thus has direct and official links to the Russian Duma (Russia did not acknowledge the Wagner Group as a state actor).

This shift could signify a major change in the Africa policy of Russia, away from being under the radar as a private initiative to being recognized as an official national endeavor. Considering the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS, the replacement of French troops with Russian troops in Niger and the aforementioned change in the Africa policy of Russia, there is mounting evidence that the Sahel region is moving away from their western partners and ever more closer to Russia.

A further important factor in the future endeavors of the global west in the Sahel are the 2024 elections in the United States and France. At the time of writing the respective elections are still a couple of months away but based on what we know about the most probable people in power at the end of the year, assumptions can be made.

In the United States the next president will be in his second term, whether it will be Joe Biden or Donald Trump is almost impossible to predict. Same goes in the French elections of this year where current president Emmanuel Macron and party leader of the right wing "Rassemblement National" Marine Le Pen are frontrunners.

In both countries nationalist candidates (Le Pen and Trump) have gained traction by pronouncing that their respective country will be at the center of their concern, instead of international cooperation. It can be argued that in case of election victories for Le Pen and Trump, the engagement and financing of African endeavors will decrease considerably and thus have a negative impact on the efforts of the United Nations and France alike. Therefore, the room to maneuver for Russia and other interested parties like China will increase and give them the opportunity to influence policy making and the security architecture in Africa for years to come.

The international community around the United States and the European Union, in this case especially France, must come to the realization that it has to work together with

their African partners at eye-level and assist in finding and applying “African solutions for African problems”. In the short term, due to the historical and modern failures to provide security and stability, many African nations have opted to ask for Russian assistance. Due to the international isolation of Russia by the western world, this endeavor has and, in the future, can be even more beneficial for both sides. In the long term, France and their partners need to learn from past mistakes, otherwise there will be no way back into the sphere of influence of the Sahel region.

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