

Emergency session on the Situation in Burkina Faso

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On Monday (31 January), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will consider the situation in Burkina Faso as one of the agenda items of its 1062nd session.

The session commences with the opening remark of the Chairperson of the PSC for the month and Permanent Representative of Ghana to the AU, Amma Adomaa Twum-Amoah. AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is also expected to make a statement on the AU Commission's assessment of the situation. The representatives of Burkina Faso, as the concerned country and Ghana, current chair of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), are expected to make statements as per the usual practice of the PSC.

The session comes a week after the mutiny of 23 January by section of the national army, which evolved on 24 January into a full-fledged coup d'état overthrowing the democratically elected government of President Roch Marc Christian Kabore. Appearing on state television, army officers who call themselves the 'Patriotic Movement for Safeguarding and Restoration' led by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, announced that government and parliament are dissolved, constitution suspended, and borders closed. Burkina Faso is one of the coup-prone countries in Africa with the previous history of eight coups or attempted coups.

The military takeover of power however did not come as a complete surprise. Early signs of risks of serious challenges to the administration of President Kabore from the mounting discontents on the part of the army and the general public

were looming even months ago. Last November, one of the deadliest attacks on Inata Security post (near the Malian border), which claimed the lives of more than 50 Police officers, stirred anger within the security apparatus and the larger public.

The following month, President Kabore, in an attempt to contain the situation, fired his Prime Minister and reshuffled the leadership of the armed forces. On 10 January, the government arrested a dozen soldiers including Lieutenant-Colonel Emmanuel Zoungrana, who had been leading the anti-jihadist operations in Burkina Faso, over the plot to stage a coup. However, even this attempt to avert a coup did not last long. The situation quickly escalated when mutiny erupted in several army barracks including the Sangoule Lamizana camp in the capital, Ouagadougou, on 23 January. On the same day, protesters ransacked the headquarters of Kabore's ruling party in the capital.

In recent months, President Kabore was under enormous pressure for what is perceived to be his botched handling of the security situation in the country which has seen a significant deterioration. Indeed, Burkina Faso is the country that has experienced fastest rise in number of terrorist attacks and some of the deadliest attacks during the past few years. These attacks claimed the lives of approximately 7000 lives including more than 3000 civilians and displaced 1.5 million people during the past three years. According to ACLED, events of political violence (battles, violence against civilians, explosions and remote violence, riots and protests) almost doubled in 2021 (1489 events) compared to 2020 (751 events), resulting 2,331 fatalities. Allocation of more resources in the battle against jihadists, better treatment for the wounded and families of the dead, and change in the military leadership were reported to be among the demands of mutinying soldiers on 23 January. The coup in Burkina Faso highlights the potential of terrorism and violent extremism in

exacerbating existing political crises as well as problems in the security sector in a fragile context by widening the rift in the civil-military and state-society relations.

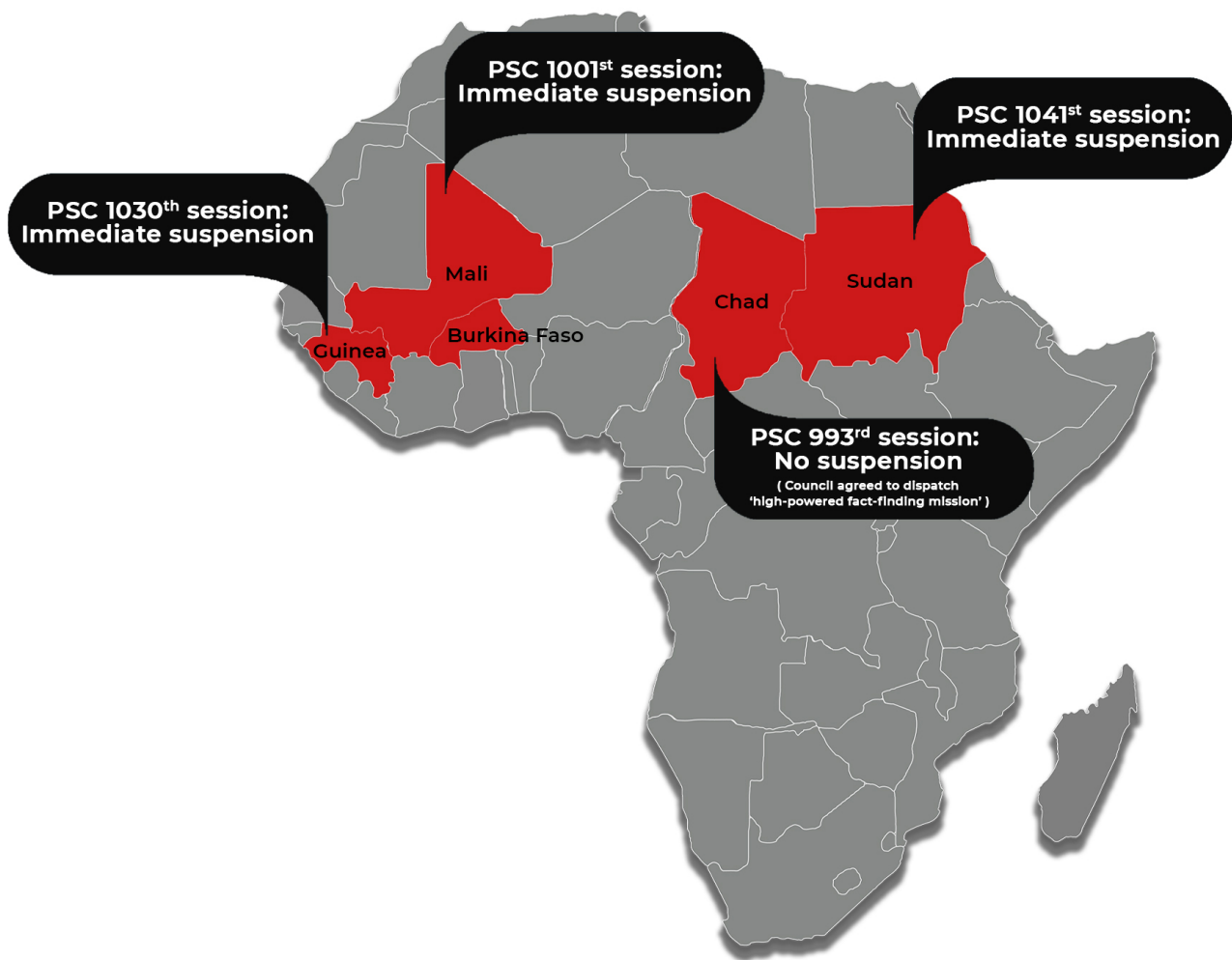
It is worth noting that apart from the impact of escalating terrorist attacks and the accompanying discontent of security forces, concerns are emerging about both the domino effect of coups in neighboring countries and the role of foreign security arrangements. Report has emerged that the coup leader maintains close relationship with the coup leaders of Mali and Guinea since their participation in a US led military exercise, Flintlock, in 2019 in Burkina Faso. Last November, discontents with the deteriorating security situation and the perceived flaws in the country's security relationship with France led to a protest that blocked for a week the French military convoy that was on its way to neighboring Niger. A report, quoting close aids of President Kabore, revealed that Colonel Damiba engaged the President on the need for using military support from Russia without success.

The mutiny and the coup that followed it triggered international concerns. ECOWAS and AU issued statements before the announcement of the coup, characterizing the event as an 'attempted coup'. ECOWAS expressed its concern over the unfolding events while condemning the act as a serious breach which cannot be tolerated under its relevant regulatory provisions. It further called on the military to 'return to the barracks, to maintain a republican posture' and favor dialogue with authorities. In his 24 January press release, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, who has been on a working visit to West Africa, condemned the 'coup attempt', further calling the national army and other security forces to 'strictly adhere to their republican vocation'. The Chairperson called on the army to ensure the physical integrity of the President and members of his government. On 24 January, the G5 Sahel also condemned the 'attempt to disrupt constitutional order' while expressing its concern

over its likely impact on the democratic gains of the country. Similarly, spokesperson for the UN Secretary General, in a statement issued shortly after the coup announcement, 'strongly' condemned 'any attempt to take over a government by the force of arms'. The Spokesperson also urged coup plotters to 'lay down their arms', 'ensure the protection of the physical integrity of the President', and 'opt for dialogue'. European Union (EU) on its part called for the respect of the 'constitutional order and the release of President Kabore', through a statement issued by its High Representative Josep Borrell. Western countries such as US and France also condemned the act. But none of these initial reactions dissuaded the mutineers from elevating the situation into a military takeover of power. Of major relevance for tomorrow's session is the decision of ECOWAS to suspend Burkina Faso from the regional bloc during its most recent extraordinary summit, convened virtually on 28 January 2022.

The coup in Burkina Faso, which is further evidence of the trend of the resurgence of coups in parts of the continent, marks the fifth in the continent just in less than a year. Since April 2021, the military seized power in Chad (20 April), Mali (24 May), Guinea (5 September) and Sudan (25 October).

Map on military seizure of power in Africa during the past nine months and PSC's response



As the continent is witnessing risk of reversal of progress made in reducing the recurrence of coups, it is a high time for members of the Council to critically reflect on the existing legal and institutional frameworks that are in place and check their effectiveness to reverse the tide. In terms of preventive measures, the events in Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea highlight the urgent need to address not only the democratic governance deficit in state-society relationship but also critically the need for addressing the various capacity and governance issues afflicting the armies particularly of countries affected by terrorism. Equally important is how to address the adverse impact of foreign military presence on both state-society relationship and national security forces. In terms of response, there is a need for paying more attention to addressing the issues and grievances that precipitated the coup than the singular focus on timelines on restoration of constitutional order and the

convening of elections. It has thus become critical that sanctions against coups are used strategically as part of such comprehensive measures.

The PSC has considered some seventeen cases of UCG since its operationalization in 2004. Except in three occasions, the Council immediately suspended the country in all other cases of UCG. The sanction of suspension was delayed against the coup in Burkina Faso (2014) and Sudan (2019) while the Council failed to impose any sanction against Chad (2021). In the three most recent cases of UCG (Mali, Guinea and Sudan), the PSC also agreed to immediately suspended them until the restoration of a constitutional order.

The expected outcome of the emergency session is a communique. The PSC is expected to reject and condemn the military coup in Burkina Faso in line with the Lomé Declaration of 2000 and the African Charter on Elections, Democracy and Governance. The Council may echo the statement of the Chairperson of the Commission, which called on army to 'ensure the physical integrity of the President of the Republic as well as all the members of his Government'. The Council may also urge perpetrators of the coup to adhere to ensure that there is return to constitutional order in the country. Invoking Article 7(1) (g) of the PSC establishing Protocol, the Council is expected to immediately suspend Burkina Faso from all AU activities until the restoration of a constitutional order in the country. The PSC may also request the AU Commission to closely work and coordinate actions with ECOWAS and other international actors to help Burkina Faso find a peaceful path towards the restoration of constitutional order. The PSC may request that steps are taken for strengthening ways of preventing the occurrence of coups including by addressing the governance problems countries facing such risks and the capacity and other issues of national security forces. The Council may take the opportunity to call on the AU Commission to expedite the study on the 'root causes and impact of the

unconstitutional change of government arising from non-consensual and/or politically manipulated democratic processes', which was mandated during its 1030th session. The PSC may also call for a high-level meeting in the context of the AU summit in February 2022 for considering the resurgence of coups and the rising political consequences of the human and material costs of terrorism in Africa. On foreign interference, the Council may call on external actors to refrain from any interference in the internal affairs of Burkina Faso as it did during the session on Guinea (1030th meeting). Finally, based on its previous practice, the Council is likely to endorse the communique adopted by the extraordinary session of ECOWAS held on 28 January.