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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL  
1304<sup>TH</sup> MEETING (MINISTERIAL LEVEL)

30 SEPTEMBER 2025  
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

PSC/MIN/BN/1304 (2025)

**BRIEFING NOTE**

**UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN THE SAHEL REGION**

## UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN THE SAHEL REGION

### I. INTRODUCTION

1. This Briefing Note is submitted to appraise the Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) of the African Union (AU) on the prevailing situation in the Sahel region. The Briefing Note covers the current political, security, humanitarian and human rights situation, as well as the efforts being deployed by the AU Commission. It concludes with some key observations and recommendations for consideration by the PSC.

### II. POLITICAL SITUATION

2. Since March 2025, the Central Sahel region, and more specifically in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, is marked by increased political and security challenges. The region is thus undergoing a political realignment due to a democratic decline, which, according to those in power, is justified by the imperatives of the fight against terrorism. The restriction of political and civil liberties seems to be part of a process of recentralization of power, in a climate of insecurity and geopolitical competition and tensions. The three countries continue to strengthen their cooperation in several areas within the framework of the Confederation, created to politically reinforce the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). The recent adoption of an AES anthem and Passport illustrates their determination to strengthen their unity and forge a distinct political identity.

3. In Mali, recent decisions taken by the authorities confirm that the electoral process has been put on hold and will only be revisited when the country is completely secured. On 3 July 2025, at the initiative of the government, the National Transitional Council (CNT) adopted a bill revising the Transition Charter. This revision, which was done in accordance with the recommendations of the consultations between the “vital forces” on the review of the political parties charter held in April 2025, but boycotted by a large section of political actors, brings about some major changes in the framework of the transition in Mali, which has been ongoing since 18 August 2020.

4. The new provisions of the Transition Charter granted a renewable five-year term to the President of the Transition, General Assimi Goïta, from 2025, till peace is restored in the country. Thus, given the difficulties observed in ensuring peace in the country (a condition set by the authorities for the organization of elections), the prospect of restoring constitutional and democratic order in Mali is becoming increasingly remote. This is so because, in August 2025, the Malian government revised the 2025 budget and reallocated the funds that were initially earmarked for elections, to the defense budget. The current transition will therefore continue with no prospect of a possible return to constitutional order any time soon.

5. In the same context, with regard to respect for political rights, it should be recalled that on 13 April 2025, the transitional government dissolved the political charter of the country, and by implication, also dissolved all political parties and political associations. This decision, which was widely criticized internationally, was considered as a major obstacle to the restoration of democracy in Mali. The dissolved parties have taken legal action to challenge this decision, which they consider illegal and unconstitutional. Soon, the Constitutional Court is expected to rule on the request filed by the political parties concerning the constitutionality of this measure. It should be noted that in early August 2025, the Malian authorities arrested some people within the army, including a French national, with several civilian figures, believed to be involved. They were accused of “attempting to destabilize” the institutions of the Republic, and a trial date announced. The reporting period was also marked by the remand in custody of two former prime ministers, Moussa Mara and Choguel Kokalla

Maïga, considered to be among the few influential figures openly critical of the transition process. This has raised many concerns, both within Malian society and internationally.

6. **In Burkina Faso**, the political situation has been equally marked by an extension of the transition period following a “national conference” that granted the transitional president the title of President of Burkina Faso, with a five-year term to govern the country. On 1 April 2025, during the review of the first quarter of the year, the President of Burkina Faso declared that: “We are not in a democracy. We are in a progressive popular revolution. Everyone needs to understand this.” The authorities presented democracy as a culmination of the country's development process, which requires a patriotic renewal that they are working to build through a number of initiatives such as: the promotion of community service, the systematic patriotic immersion of new high school graduates, the creation of an agency for the promotion of community entrepreneurship, the organization of “Faso Mèbo holiday camps” for children with a view, according to the authorities, to educating, training, and preparing them to be patriotic leaders, among others. This political orientation was reaffirmed by the Prime Minister on 1 September 2025, when he declared that “the Progressive People's Revolution is a living reality” that will enable the construction of a “sovereign, peaceful, and united” Burkina Faso. Relatedly, in July 2025, the Council of Ministers adopted a bill dissolving the Independent National Electoral Commission. According to several observers of Burkinabe political life, this decision confirmed the extension of the transition period.

7. **In Niger**, as in other countries in the central Sahel, it was decided at the “national conference on rebuilding the country” held in February 2025, that the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Homeland (CNSP) would remain in power for five years. However, it should be noted that this decision was taken without any real roadmap for a return to constitutional order. No clear timetable or commitment to democratic transition or elections has been announced, and former President Bazoum remains in detention. An advisory council for the overhaul was set up last June with the main task of providing advice and recommendations to the CNSP. The political situation is also marked by efforts to warm relations with the United States. This development marks a turning point, with a desire to diversify alliances while maintaining a sovereigntist stance in internal discourse.

### III. SECURITY SITUATION

8. The security situation in the Sahel has recently seen a renewed upsurge in violence linked to the activities of terrorist groups, with the use of aerial diapositives, particularly military drones. Terrorist attacks against defense and security forces positions have intensified in these three countries in 2025 (Timbuktu, Boulkessi, Diffa, Djibo), with violence spreading to new areas, causing more civilian casualties and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis (large-scale displacement of populations with a wide range of emergency needs). The security situation is also marked by the spread of terrorist acts to the coastal countries of the region.

9. **In Mali**, the period from April to September 2025 was marked by significant developments in the political and military, security spheres. Despite the colossal efforts of the defense and security forces, which include the strengthening of operational capabilities, and intensified counterterrorism operations, there have been continued terrorist attacks against the armed forces and civilians, targeting economic infrastructure, and blockades around certain localities. For example, between 23 May 2025 and 4 June 2025, military bases in Dioura, Soumpi, and Boulikessi were the target of coordinated attacks, according to a UN Security Council report. In the Sikasso and Kayes regions, several tanker trucks carrying hydrocarbons were set on fire, illustrating the ability of armed groups to attack economic infrastructures.

10. The security situation in **Burkina Faso** also remains volatile, characterized by regular terrorist attacks against the army and civilian populations, mass displacement, blockades, and human rights violations. Terrorist groups continue to besiege towns, depriving residents of food and other basic necessities, through imposed blockades, particularly in the town of Djibo.

11. In **Niger**, political instability and the presence of non-state armed groups are contributing to a heightened climate of insecurity and impoverishment. Despite the intensification of counter-terrorism operations by the government, the terrorist threat remains very high in several areas. For example, on 10 September 2025, 27 Nigerien soldiers were killed in two coordinated attacks in Tillabéri (in the southwest of the country). These attacks illustrate the persistence of terrorist threats, particularly in the border regions with Mali and Burkina Faso. Southwestern and western Niger, particularly the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, remain the most affected.

#### IV. HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

12. The human rights situation remains worrying in the central Sahel and has been largely characterized by the systematic ban on public demonstrations, suspension or dissolution of political parties, shrinking civic space; sustained violations of individual and collective freedoms, media and human rights organizations regularly threatened, civilians pay a heavy price through attacks and violations of the right to life and physical integrity, attacks on public and private property, and restrictions on fundamental freedoms among others. The security crisis is exacerbating the humanitarian situation. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to violence in the region. Food insecurity has reached critical levels, exacerbated by difficult access to certain regions affected by insecurity. For example, in Burkina Faso, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), more than 60,000 new displaced persons were reported during this period, 53% of whom were women and children, mainly due to insecurity.

#### V. KEY AU INTERVENTIONS

13. Several strategic actions were carried out by the African Union as a contribution towards addressing the situation in the Sahel as a demonstration of solidarity with the people of the region affected by the current situation. On 27 May 2025, the Chairperson of the AU Commission held a consultation with the Permanent Representatives of some of the countries of the region to the AU, namely, Burkina Faso and Mali, and Niger, who expressed their appreciation for the continued constructive engagements with the AU. The meeting provided an opportunity for exchanging views on the political situation in their respective countries, including challenges that need urgent attention. It was also an opportunity for exploring possibilities for expediting the political transition processes towards facilitating the restoration of constitutional order, in line with AU decisions. In addition, from 15 to 20 June 2025, a High-level delegation of the Chairperson of the AU Executive Council visited Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger to encourage dialogue and to AU's express support for efforts towards the return to democratic governance in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

14. Furthermore, the appointment by the Chairperson of the African Union, H.E. João Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola, of H.E. Évariste Ndayishimiye, President of the Republic of Burundi, as his Special Envoy for the Sahel region, to spearhead the renewed African Union's high level diplomatic support and collaborative efforts aimed at addressing the prevailing security and humanitarian challenges in the Sahel. In addition, the Chairperson of the AU Commission has appointed Dr Mamadou Tangara, former Foreign Affairs Minister of The Gambia, as his Special Representative for Mali and the Sahel and also as Head of MISAHEL Office in Bamako, Mali, to maintain

continued presence and visibility of the AU and also to scale up engagements with all stakeholders in the region.

15. Furthermore, despite particularly difficult circumstances, MISAHEL has maintained contact with the authorities in Mali and Burkina Faso. In 2023 and 2024 the AU provided kits for income-generating activities for internally displaced women, donations of food and non-food items to a school canteen, drilling to facilitate the supply of drinking water and the development of market gardening. In general, the countries of the central Sahel region believe that the African Union could provide them with better support by demonstrating more active and increased solidarity.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

16. In view of the prevailing situation in the Sahel region, Council may wish to consider the following recommendations:

- a) The AU should advance its role as a robust regional actor, demonstrating that African-led solutions remain viable and effective in the Sahel, as anywhere else in the Continent. An assertive mix of diplomacy shared innovative security solutions, human-rights safeguards, and secure funding will not just lead Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger towards stable democratic governance, but will also potentially contribute towards further strengthening collective security in the wider Sahel and West Africa region as a whole, thereby setting a prototype model for the effective prevention, management and resolution of future conflicts and crises on the African Continent.
- b) Call on the transitional authorities of the three countries to redouble their efforts to ensure inclusivity in the management of the political transition and to facilitate the creation of conducive conditions for internal dialogue; including nationally owned dialogue platforms that include political parties, civil society, traditional and religious leaders, women, and youth;
- c) Encourage the transitional authorities of the three countries, namely, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger to respect fundamental rights and freedoms of their people, in accordance with international law and their national legislation;
- d) Underscore the need for scaling up resource mobilization of predictable adequate and sustainable resources to finance initiatives supporting peace, mediation, strengthening the rule of law and national security institutions, humanitarian aid, and strengthening regional cooperation;
- e) Emphasize the need for enhanced collective security approaches in the region towards effectively fighting terrorism in Sahel and West Africa, given the cross-border nature of the threat;
- f) Appeal for the scaling up of humanitarian funding and assistance, and access to secure predictable financing via international partnerships, to prioritize timely humanitarian assistance, safe access for aid workers, to tackle existing humanitarian challenges and insecurity;
- g) Underline the need for modernizing security approaches to integrate emerging risks such as cyber threats into protocols; build state capacity for intelligence and prosecution while ensuring human rights compliance in operations; and

- h) Call for a field visit by the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission, followed by the visit by the Chairperson of Commission, to the three countries with a view to collective first-hand information and initiating a direct dialogue with the authorities of the transitions, particularly information relating to the political transition processes, the challenges to be urgently addressed, the assessment of needs, and the practical support provided by the AU. This will secure clear commitments on transition/political roadmaps, identify priority needs, and define concrete areas where the AU can provide targeted technical and financial support.