

Study



**Jamal Ali**

June 2021

[www.dimensionscenter.net](http://www.dimensionscenter.net)

**Macron in Facing the Crisis of West Africa's  
Generals, Has French Policy Lost the Way  
within Sahara Region?**



## **Dimensions** for Strategic Studies

Dimensions Centre for Strategic Studies (DCSS) is think tank, dedicated to the study of the Middle East and North Africa affairs, provides the Arab readers with a substantive insight on the region's political, economic and social issues and dynamics.

The DCSS was founded in the United Kingdom on January 2020 ,1, and is headquartered in London.

Dimensions Center for Strategic Studies is interested in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) affairs in particular, addressing influences the region has and the effects of this region's interactions with the rest of the world.

We strive to provide an open and accessible space in order to inform relevant persons of experts and academic readers alike, in a simplified style far from the complexities brought by experts, technicians and academics.

We are keen to provide topics in an intensive manner that goes in line with the challenges of modern times and in brief way which can meet the needs of researchers and readers as well.



Shifting sands might have been a more apt title of the ongoing events happening to France's President in West Africa as matters began to worsen for Macron. Paris has the most significant influence in this region, the area in West Africa known as the Sahel and Sahara, which encompasses Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso, sometimes known as the G5 Sahel (Group of Five for the Sahel: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger).

Despite gaining independence decades ago, France retained much power and control over the fate and resources of the colonised states. Paris has been active in the G5 Sahel in the areas of politics, economy, and security. The region's states deposit %50 of their cash reserves at the French Central Bank, which has maintained the French economy's growth and stability in the past. In addition, the European country also controls aid sent to the Sahel and Sahara. There have been widespread rallies against the effects of French military presence in internal affairs.

Over the past two years, the historical relationship has gradually changed at the grassroots level and the level of government. In the recent Niger elections, France lost their ally, former Nigerien President Mohamed Issoufou, a political supporter, and a proponent of the French military operation (Barkhane). When Issoufou demanded the leaders of the five countries for a supportive and clear position on the military operation in the Sahel and Sahara countries, voices rose. The widespread rejection of these forces expanded, especially in Burkina Faso and Mali, as the public felt that these forces had begun to affect political and security stability in the region negatively. For the first time, popular rallies gathered on October 2020 ,15, in the heart of Independence Square in the Malian capital, Bamako, calling for the departure of the French forces and shouting slogans denouncing the French presence, chanting: 'France down!', 'Stop the French massacre in Mali!', and 'Barkhane base out'.



The protests are considered a major popular shift eight years after the French forces entered Mali, where the same square - Independence Square - witnessed the gathering of thousands of Malians, welcoming former French president, hailing Hollande a saviour weeks after France launched the military operation 'Serval' in February 2013 to combat jihadist groups in Mali.

France launched Operation Barkhane on August 2014 ,1, to curb the activity of armed jihadist groups that threatened stability in the region, avoid the growth and expansion of the groups' military power throughout the G5 Sahel, and satisfy French interests in the resources of the region.

Additionally, France took advantage of Operation Serval's capabilities in Mali, seeking to strengthen its military cooperation with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.

Before France could recover from losing Issoufou, its political ally in Niger, events in Chad changed dramatically. On April 2021 ,20, the Chadian army announced that Deby had died from injuries sustained in battles in the north of the country in the Kanem region while fighting against the Mohamed Mahdi Ali-led rebel forces coming from Libya. His death came only hours after the National Elections Committee announced that Deby had won a sixth term as president, winning %79.3 of the vote. He had been the most vital military ally in the fight against jihadist groups in the region. The Chadian army announced the formation of a transitional military council headed by the son of the late president, General Mohamed Kaka, set to rule the country for 18 months.



It also suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, dismissed the government, and imposed a state of emergency. The matter was considered by Chadian, regional and international political circles as a military coup against the constitution, which stipulates that the speaker of parliament assumes power in the country in the event of the president's death or his inability to carry out his constitutional duties within 45 days, after which presidential elections will be held to elect a new president for the country.

However, France, known for its support for military dictatorships in the region, could not keep quiet much longer and took the initiative to support the Chadian Transitional Military Council and legitimise its presence in the country of its most potent military ally in the battle against jihadist groups in West Africa. It also supported the Chadian army in preventing the opposition, the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) which does not show hostility to extremist jihadist groups in West Africa, from taking the capital, N'Djamena.

France took a step further and called upon Chadian political parties and the armed opposition to engage with the military council and negotiate a political settlement to prevent the country from slipping into war. In this move, France did not respect the values it has always advocated, freedom, democracy, and human rights, thus signifying that these values conflict with its economic interests in Africa. Such positions have become so apparent that some European governments have criticised Paris, such as Italy and Germany. They have both demanded that France stop supporting dictatorships in Africa on many occasions. Italy went even further in 2018 after the populist extremist government came to power in Rome. Relations between Paris and Rome deteriorated rapidly when the Italian deputy prime minister accused France of being responsible for the refugee crisis and that the government in Paris worked to 'impoverish Africa', control its resources and subsidise corrupt governments.



The Italian deputy prime minister also demanded the European Union impose sanctions against Paris, which, according to him, is behind the tragedy of migrants dying while trying to cross the Mediterranean.

From there, problems for France only got more complicated. On May 25, 2021, Mali's power-hungry, Col Assimi Goïta, overthrew the civilian president, Bah Ndaw, and the prime minister, Moctar Ouane, who was tasked with leading the country in a transitional phase. Col Goïta declared himself president, and the Constitutional Court of Mali subsequently confirmed his appointment as president during the transitional period. Goïta has also been reported as the leader of the August 2020 coup that removed President-elect Boubacar Keïta from power. A week after Bah Ndaw was removed from office, France suspended its joint military operations with the Malian army. Paris said that it would assess the situation and was "waiting for clarification of the mechanism of the political transition process in Mali."

For now, France no longer has the sensitivity to accurately anticipate changes in West Africa and cannot control political actors as it once did. Paris has lost credibility and political ethics in its handling of events in Africa, as highlighted by its contradictory positions in Chad and Niger.



 \DimensionsCTR

 \DimensionsCTR

 \dimensionsCTR

 \dimensionsCTR

---

[info@dimensionscenter.net](mailto:info@dimensionscenter.net)