

WHAT PATHS IS AFRICA TAKING?

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When we look at the Normandy Index, which measures the vulnerability of peace in the world, the results are clear. An analysis of the level of conflict in 135 countries around the world, according to eleven threat levels (including climate change, cybersecurity, the democratic process, terrorism and violent conflicts), tells us that a large number of African countries are among the most hostile countries: Mali, South Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, the Central African Republic, etc.

These countries, in the grip of radical upheavals, coups d'état, health and institutional crises, have recently opted to reject their traditional Western partners in favour of new alliances with Russia and China. But other alliances within the African continent are also being called into question, starting with those between the Maghreb and Sahelian Africa, as explained by Abdelhak Bassou, researcher at the Policy Center for the New South. According to him, on

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the one hand, the Arab Maghreb Union, an economic and political organisation created in 1989 and consisting of Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania, has entered a deep coma, despite the recent appointment of a new secretary general. On the other hand, the G5 Sahel, which includes Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad, has been called into question completely since the deterioration of relations between these countries. 'These two entities lulled us into the hope of seeing this strategic geopolitical space of the Sahelian Maghreb being established. But they no longer exist,' said

MODERATION

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SPEAKERS

Abdelhak Bassou, Senior fellow at the Policy Center for the New South

Yvan Guichaoua, Independent researcher in conflict analysis, specialist in the Sahel

Medhane Tadesse Gebresilassie, Senior research fellow on geopolitics based at the Institut des Mondes Africains (IMAF)

Abdelhak Bassou regretfully. Diplomatic ties between Morocco and Algeria have been completely broken, so neither country sees a future in an alliance between Maghreb countries. So, all eyes are turning elsewhere: Morocco is now more interested in its Atlantic dimension than its Maghreb dimension. 'The King launched the initiative of an Atlantic Africa, a search for cooperation between 23 countries that extends from South Africa to Morocco. Another Moroccan initiative is moving in this direction, with the objective of opening up the Sahel countries. This ambition raises questions about Morocco's motivations for taking an interest in these countries, led by military juntas. Abdelhak Bassou, however, specified that these cooperations envisaged by Morocco are aimed more at the populations than at the regimes in place. 'When a regime is sanctioned, it isn't the president of that regime who suffers, but the population. So the philosophy of Morocco is to adopt these initiatives towards these people regardless of the regime.'

While Algeria is seeking to renew ties with Niger, the Maghreb countries, as a whole, are looking elsewhere. Libya and Tunisia were destabilised by the Arab Spring. Mauritania remains, juggling between Morocco and Algeria, according to a tradition of 'positive neutrality'.

In the Sahel region, the Confederation of Sahel States (CES) was formed, heralding the departure of these countries from the Economic Community of West

African States (ECOWAS). Other West African countries, such as Benin, Guinea and Chad, are also considering joining the CES. Since the coups d'état in the Sahel, ties with France have been severed, and we are witnessing the emergence of a new Russian influence. 'Mali is supported by the Russians and is fighting rebels in the north, who are supported by Algeria. It's becoming very nebulous,' explained Abdelhak Bassou.

On the Horn of Africa side, the situation is very different. The violence is regional, national and international. But how can we assess this violence when genocides in this region have gone relatively unreported in the West? 'Nearly a million people have been killed in two years in northern Ethiopia and Sudan, and we don't talk about it, while Ukraine and Gaza make the headlines,' noted Medhane Tadesse Gebresilassie, guest researcher at the Institut des Mondes Africains (IMAF). It shows the power relations in the world, where a few lives



Medhane Tadesse Gebresilassie

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Niagalé Bagayoko, Abdelhak Bassou, and Yvan Guichaoua

are more important than millions of others. The biggest humanitarian crises are here, in Africa.' Medhane Tadesse Gebresilassie anticipates a future contestation of borders in this region,

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Medhane Tadesse Gebresilassie

where nations could probably be built. 'Sudan no longer has a government. The state had militias, now the militias have a state, and it's all happened with the help of the Europeans.' Yvan Guichaoua, an independent researcher



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in conflict analysis and specialist in the Sahel, talked about democratic fatigue. A decline in democratic aspirations on the African continent has long been noted through opinion polls. But this questioning doesn't explain everything. 'We

shouldn't talk about democratic decline but about democratic systems that have never reached a satisfactory level of consolidation. The problem isn't democracy, but incomplete democracy, which has also been accepted by Westerners. In the Sahel, soft, undemanding and closed democracies have been established. This is the failure of democracy in name only.'

Moreover, a takeover by the military is not necessarily an automatic consequence of this democratic fatigue. The African continent has shown that it is possible to reform without going through a coup d'état, which is a particular political process, born from a combination of several factors including 'the encoding of social discontent. In the Sahel, discontent with the elites has also been exaggerated from outside, particularly by the Russians,' explained Yvan Guichaoua, who also mentioned Kenya and Nigeria, where the protests were led by young people opposed to tax laws and police violence. For the researcher, one thing is certain: it is not the West which will provide a solution to the crises in the Sahel, the Maghreb and the Horn of Africa. 'This soft and undemanding democracy that we were talking about is the product of the West. They've become inaudible because of their past in the region.' The only options will have to come from civil society.