

Mali: Yet another coup

On 24 May 2021, the Malian transitional government suffered a coup – the second in nine months – which cast a shadow on the transition process that should lead to a presidential election in early 2022. These developments risk further destabilising the Sahel and challenge the implementation of the new EU strategy in the region.

Background

On 24 May 2021, Malian soldiers arrested transitional President Bah N'Daw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane – appointed after the [August 2020 coup](#) – on charges that they were preparing a government reshuffle without informing [Vice-President](#) Colonel Assimi Goïta, in charge of security and defence. On 26 May, both men resigned while still in detention, thus clearing the way for Colonel Goïta to take over power. The same day, Choguel Kokalla Maïga, a politician from the [M5 RFP](#) party that took part in the 2020 coup, was [appointed](#) as the new interim prime minister; he then went on to launch a new civilian-military government coalition. N'Daw and Ouane were released [on 27 May](#). The following day, the Constitutional Court [confirmed](#) Colonel Goïta's new post as transitional president.

Figures 1 and 2 – Mali peace profile and threat comparison



Source: EPRS, [Normandy Index 2021](#) (forthcoming).

Regional and international reactions

A Local Transition Monitoring Committee was set up after the August 2020 coup. It is made up of the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UN Mission in Mali ([MINUSMA](#), whose mandate runs out at the [end of June 2021](#)), along with representatives from the EU, France, Germany, the UK and the USA. As early as 24 May, this committee condemned what it called 'the [attempted coup](#)' of the same day, as did the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) on the [following day](#), and the UN Security Council on [26 May](#). The G5 Sahel has not yet officially reacted, although it [condemned](#) the 2020 coup [led by Colonel Goïta](#). ECOWAS and the AU suspended Mali's membership on [30 May](#) and [2 June 2021](#) respectively. ECOWAS-led [mediation](#) is seeking to restore the constitutional order and make sure that a presidential election is held in February 2022. Using a softer tone, China and Russia called for [dialogue](#) between the parties to [resolve their differences](#). The US restricted its assistance to Mali after the 2020 coup; this time around it [suspended its support](#) to the country's security

This updates an 'At a glance' note from September 2020.

and defence forces. France suspended [joint operations](#) with the Malian military and later announced the [withdrawal](#) of Operation Barkhane. The World Bank [suspended](#) disbursements to Mali.

The EU, strongly involved in [the Sahel](#), quickly [condemned](#) the coup and the ousting of the transitional president and prime minister. It [expressed support](#) for the ECOWAS mediation efforts and [threatened](#) to stop its involvement in Mali if the following transition charter conditions were not respected:

... the immediate appointment of a new civilian Prime Minister; the formation of a new inclusive government to continue the transition agenda; compliance with the 18-month transition period; the date of 27 February 2022 for the presidential election, for which the President, the Vice-President and the Transitional Prime Minister must not be able to stand as candidates.

After the August 2020 coup, the EU [had suspended the activities](#) of its CSDP missions in Mali ([EUTM Mali](#) and [EUCAP Sahel Mali](#)) for a [few months](#), but decided not to do so this time around.

Outlook

Maliens had widely [welcomed](#) the ousting of President Keita in August 2020. However, the transitional government was not [able to address](#) the long-standing issues of corruption, economic and financial trouble, and insecurity – and the new coup demonstrates the [army's ambition](#) to play a decisive role in the preparation of the presidential elections. However, the appointment of a civilian – [Choguel Maiga](#), a figure from the M5 RFP movement in the protests that led to the ousting of President Keita in 2020 – as the new interim prime minister, aligns with [ECOWAS demands](#). Moreover, the new order in Mali might reshuffle the international presence in the region, where notably the French military involvement is increasingly [contested](#), while Russia is reportedly strengthening its [ties](#) with Mali's military rulers. The [quick reaction](#) of regional organisations proves that [coups](#) are no longer accepted as a normal path to power in Africa. However, they [imposed mild sanctions](#) this time, hoping that the military leaders would respect [Mali's commitments](#) to the international community, but *de facto* boosting their power at a time when violence in the country goes on unabated.

The Sahel remains highly politically unstable: the military takeover of the Chadian government in April 2021 and the developments in Mali are worrying signs of weak democratic governance structures in the region. This political fragility and the lack of government legitimacy has made the responses to the Sahel's security and humanitarian issues all the more challenging. The continued threat posed by terrorist armed groups, as well as rising intercommunal violence over land and resources, have led to both internal and cross-border displacement in Sahel countries, creating a severe humanitarian crisis. Since 2011, [EU efforts in the region](#) have been dominated by a military approach to tackling terrorist activity, despite efforts also to foster a developmental approach. These efforts have ultimately failed to achieve long-term regional stability. In April 2021, the Council of the EU presented a [new EU integrated strategy for the Sahel](#) seeking to make a shift towards a more comprehensive and contextual approach to addressing regional instability, while also prioritising action and oversight of the political level to strengthen governance structures. However, the strategy faces several challenges, including in the way it will be implemented and the Sahel countries' willingness to foster accountability both towards their citizens and the EU.

On 16 September 2020, the **European Parliament** adopted a resolution on EU-Africa [security cooperation in the Sahel region](#), West Africa and the Horn of Africa. Highlighting 'the important role that Mali plays for the stability of the Sahel', it expressed concerns regarding the 2020 coup. It called for an inclusive transitional government, able to prepare 'free and fair elections and a genuine level playing field for political parties'. More generally, Parliament stressed that security cooperation should go hand in hand with sustainable development and 'responsible democratic systems of governance'. In line with previous resolutions favouring [support to the security sectors](#) of third countries, 'including, under exceptional circumstances, [to] the military', the resolution has called for the EU to be allowed to provide 'military equipment to partner countries, including arms and ammunition', while making sure 'that any military equipment is not given to recipients that are committing abuses, atrocities and other harms against civilian populations'.

The [new European Peace Facility](#) will allow the EU to effectively equip its partners, however the latest coup in Mali [shows](#) that EPF usage will have to be thoroughly monitored, to ensure that no support is provided for abusive practices in the Sahel countries.

