

The security landscape of West Africa in a changing regional and international context

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After being a theatre of major insurgencies in the 1990s, West Africa was perceived in the early 2000s as a recovering region, also due to the extensive involvement of the UN in peacebuilding and the growing assertiveness of the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS) in addressing crises. However, since the outbreak of the 2012 insurgency in Mali, the region is experiencing new forms of instability that existing institutions seem unable to address effectively. New conflicts affecting the Sahel and, to some extent, the coastal countries, involve a variety of insurgent groups, including jihadists affiliated to Al Qaeda and the Islamic state. Communal conflicts often feed into, and are at their turn exasperated, by insurgencies. Meanwhile, coups d'état have made a comeback. Military regimes in Mali, Burkina Faso in Niger have left ECOWAS and have rejected help from long-term security partners, turning instead to new actors like Russia for military and political support. This panel reviews the changing security situation in West Africa, looking at how the emergence of new actors, geopolitical changes and climate change are affecting the region. It also examines the responses of West African governments and their international partners to new forms of insecurity.

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