



Editor's Note, February 26, 2021

Senegal's president Macky Sall this week urged the international community and countries in West Africa's Sahel not to negotiate with Islamist militant groups in the region.

His comments, in an interview with French radio station RFI, come amid growing momentum behind the idea of talks with Jihadist to try and resolve years of conflict that have left thousands dead, and displaced at least 2m according to the U.N.

This includes the governments of Mali and Burkina Faso, two members of the so-called G5 Sahel group that also includes Niger, Chad and Mauritania. Even France, which is spearheading counterinsurgency efforts and has long resisted the idea, has shown signs of softening its stance.

Sall's dismay at the apparent caving in to terrorists is understandable, but those opposed to negotiating will struggle to offer an alternative.

A 5,100-strong French military contingent, part of a bigger international presence, and billions in aid pledges, have failed to provide basic stability. In 2019 alone there were 4,000 reported conflict-related deaths in the region, up from 770 in 2016, and there are legitimate fears about instability spreading to coastal economies.

The failure of military efforts is compounded by the Sahel facing some of the world's most extreme development obstacles.

Any meaningful resolution to the crisis will require a political settlement. It's becoming undeniable that this might have to include the same militants the world has spent years trying to defeat.

The shift towards negotiating is a good - if unpalatable - example of realpolitik. Like it or not, this is the Sahel's best bet right now.

This week's Picks

From The Continent

The African Export-Import Bank this week approved a \$2bn loan to help African countries secure coronavirus vaccines. The continent is playing catch up, with wealthy countries snapping up the bulk of global supplies. **More:** [CNBC Africa](#)

South Sudan has said it is in talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for financial support to help stabilize its struggling economy. The oil-rich country has been ravaged by civil conflict since it seceded from Sudan in 2011. **More:** [Bloomberg](#)

THE WEEKLY STAT

32.5%

South Africa's official unemployment rate in Q4 of 2020, a new record high. **More:** [Reuters](#)

The Global Perspective

India this week signed a free trade agreement with Mauritius, Delhi's first with an African country. The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) will cover over 300 goods in sectors including agriculture, textiles, and electronics. **More:** [Times of India](#)

French energy company EDF Group has acquired shares in two Kenyan companies - Econet Energy Kenya and Bboxx Kenya - expanding its solar and distributed energy business in Africa. This comes amid a push by the French government for more investment beyond its traditional focus on former colonies on the continent. **More:** [EDF](#)

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