

AFRICA DIGEST

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“Forget Democracy”: Burkina Faso’s Sovereignty Paradox under Ibrahim Traoré

“People need to forget about the issue of democracy. Democracy isn’t for us.” With these words, Burkina Faso’s military leader [Captain Ibrahim Traoré](#) has offered perhaps his clearest indication yet of the political direction in which the country is headed. Traoré, who came to power following a military coup in September 2022, has argued that Burkina Faso must pursue its own political path rather than replicate governance models imposed or promoted by external powers. His remarks come against the backdrop of an extended military transition, the dissolution of political parties and growing restrictions on political and civic space. The transition to democratic rule, initially scheduled to conclude in July 2024, was extended by five years, further consolidating military rule in the country.

Traoré’s rejection of democracy must, however, be understood within his broader political project centred on sovereignty, patriotism and self-reliance. Since assuming power, his government has sought to reduce Burkina Faso’s dependence on traditional Western partners, particularly France. French forces and diplomats have left the country, while Ouagadougou has diversified its external partnerships and strengthened security relations with Russia. Drawing inspiration from the revolutionary legacy of former President Thomas Sankara, Traoré has cultivated an image of a leader challenging Western influence and advocating greater African autonomy.

This narrative has resonated with sections of the population and attracted considerable attention across Africa, particularly among younger generations frustrated with the continuing influence of former colonial powers and the perceived failures of established political systems. Yet Burkina Faso’s pursuit of sovereignty abroad increasingly stands in contrast to the narrowing of political freedoms at home.

The government has justified restrictions on political activities and dissent partly through the country’s continuing security crisis. Burkina Faso remains at the [centre](#) of the jihadist insurgency in the Sahel, with armed groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State continuing to threaten communities and challenge state authority. Traoré has consequently emphasised military self-reliance and argued that Burkinabe themselves must assume primary responsibility for defending their country.

However, security and sovereignty do not by themselves resolve the question of political legitimacy. The dissolution of political parties, restrictions on the media and shrinking civic space raise questions about whether the rejection of external political models is also becoming a justification for limiting domestic accountability.

Burkina Faso therefore represents a broader dilemma emerging across the contemporary Sahel. Together with Mali and Niger, it is attempting to construct an alternative political and regional order centred on sovereignty and strategic autonomy. The Alliance of Sahel States embodies this shift

away from traditional Western partnerships and established regional arrangements.

Ultimately, the durability of this model will depend less on its rejection of democracy or Western influence than on its ability to deliver security, economic progress and effective governance. Traoré may ask Burkinabe to “forget democracy”, but the more consequential question is what political system will replace it and whether that system can provide citizens with security, prosperity, participation and accountability.

Sudan at Three Years of War: A Deepening Humanitarian Crisis and the Risk of Partition

Sudan’s three years of a devastating [civil war](#) has transformed the country into one of the world’s gravest humanitarian crises. The conflict, which erupted on 15 April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced around 12 million. With neither side able to achieve a decisive military victory, Sudan today appears increasingly divided into rival zones of control, raising concerns about the possibility of a prolonged de facto, or even formal, partition.

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been particularly severe. Millions of Sudanese have been uprooted from their homes, livelihoods have been destroyed, and hunger has spread across large parts of the country. Humanitarian organisations have also faced serious difficulties in delivering assistance, with aid workers, trucks and warehouses coming

under attack. The World Food Programme has warned that famine continues to threaten parts of Sudan and that humanitarian assistance remains the only lifeline for millions of people.

At the same time, the conflict has gradually produced a territorial division between the two principal belligerents. The SAF retains control over much of central, northern and eastern Sudan, including the Nile Valley and areas extending towards Port Sudan. The RSF, meanwhile, has consolidated its position across much of Darfur and parts of Kordofan. The capture of El Fasher, the last major SAF stronghold in Darfur, further strengthened the RSF’s position in western Sudan. With frontlines becoming increasingly entrenched and both sides relying more heavily on drone warfare, the conflict appears to have entered a military stalemate.

Sudan’s crisis has also become deeply intertwined with wider regional geopolitical rivalries. External actors, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Russia, have been associated with different sides of the conflict. Egypt and Saudi Arabia have generally supported the SAF, while the UAE has repeatedly faced allegations of providing assistance to the RSF. Such external involvement has complicated efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement and has contributed to the perception that Sudan is increasingly becoming an arena for competing regional interests.

Diplomatic initiatives have so far struggled to produce a breakthrough. The United States has sought to coordinate with Egypt,

Saudi Arabia and the UAE through a diplomatic grouping aimed at bringing the conflicting parties towards negotiations. However, shifting international priorities and geopolitical crises elsewhere have reduced sustained diplomatic attention on Sudan. More fundamentally, international engagement has often been shaped by competing support for the rival factions rather than a unified effort to promote reconciliation.

Three years into the conflict, Sudan therefore faces a dangerous combination of military stalemate, humanitarian catastrophe and territorial fragmentation. Without stronger international coordination and a sustained political process that prioritises reconciliation over military advantage, the division of Sudan could become increasingly entrenched. Preventing the country's fragmentation and addressing its humanitarian emergency will require external actors to move beyond competing strategic interests and collectively support an inclusive Sudanese-led political settlement.

Guelleh Secures Sixth Term as Djibouti's Strategic Importance Grows

Djibouti's [President](#) Ismaïl Omar Guelleh has secured another term in office after winning the presidential election with 97.8 per cent of the vote, extending his nearly three-decade-long rule over the strategically located Horn of Africa nation. Guelleh, who has been in power since 1999, will now serve a sixth term, reinforcing his position as one of Africa's longest-serving leaders.

More than 256,000 voters were eligible to participate in the election, which saw Guelleh face Mohamed Farah Samatar, a former member of the ruling party and leader of the Unified Democratic Centre. With the opposition remaining politically weak and divided, Guelleh was widely expected to retain power.

The 78-year-old president's [participation](#) in the election followed a constitutional amendment in November that removed the upper age limit of 75 for presidential candidates. Guelleh had earlier indicated that he would step down, but the constitutional change paved the way for him to contest another term.

Throughout his campaign, Guelleh emphasised national unity and political stability. He called upon Djiboutians to transcend political and organisational differences and remain united around a shared national identity. His political message has centred on presenting himself as a guarantor of stability in a region that continues to face political tensions, armed conflicts and security challenges.

Djibouti's political significance extends far beyond its relatively small population of around one million. Located between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, the country sits close to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the narrow waterway connecting the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. The strait forms part of one of the world's busiest maritime trade routes, giving Djibouti considerable geopolitical importance.

The country has [capitalised](#) on this geographical advantage to emerge as an

international military and maritime hub. France maintains one of its largest military bases in Africa in Djibouti, while China, Japan and Italy also have a military presence in the country. Djibouti additionally hosts the United States' only permanent military base in Africa, which supports counter-terrorism operations across the region, particularly in Somalia.

The presence of both American and Chinese military facilities illustrates Djibouti's ability to maintain strategic relationships with competing global powers. At the same time, the country remains economically dependent on its ports and maritime infrastructure, which account for a substantial share of its economy. Djibouti also serves as the principal maritime gateway for landlocked Ethiopia, further strengthening its importance to regional trade and connectivity.

Guelleh's re-election therefore has implications beyond Djibouti's domestic politics. As geopolitical competition intensifies around the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, political continuity in Djibouti is likely to be viewed favourably by countries that depend on its military facilities, ports and strategic location. However, the overwhelming electoral victory and the limited political space available to the opposition will continue to raise questions about democratic competition and political succession. Guelleh's sixth term will consequently be shaped by the challenge of balancing domestic political stability with growing international interest in one of Africa's most strategically important states.

France's Strategic Pivot to Kenya Amid Its Retreat from West Africa

France's expanding defence partnership with [Kenya](#) marks an important shift in Paris's engagement with Africa. At a time when French military influence has sharply declined across parts of West Africa and the Sahel, Kenya is emerging as a significant strategic partner for France in East Africa and the wider Indian Ocean region. The development reflects both France's attempt to recalibrate its African policy and Kenya's growing importance in regional security affairs.

In October 2025, Kenya and France signed a bilateral defence cooperation agreement establishing a five-year framework, automatically renewable once. The agreement was subsequently ratified by Kenya's National Assembly. It covers several areas of cooperation, including military training, intelligence sharing, maritime security, peacekeeping and disaster response. For Kenya, the partnership is expected to provide greater access to French military expertise, technology and training, particularly as Nairobi seeks to strengthen its defence and maritime capabilities.

The growing military cooperation was demonstrated in March 2026, when around 800 French soldiers arrived at the port of Mombasa for joint training and security cooperation exercises. Kenya's geographical position gives the partnership wider strategic significance. Situated along the Indian Ocean and at the gateway to the Horn of Africa, Kenya occupies an important position in relation to maritime

security, regional trade routes and instability in neighbouring areas.

The agreement, however, has also generated debate within Kenya. During parliamentary deliberations, lawmakers raised concerns regarding provisions governing foreign military personnel, particularly questions of legal jurisdiction when foreign soldiers are accused of committing crimes on Kenyan territory. These concerns have also been shaped by Kenya's experience with the British Army Training Unit Kenya, which has faced allegations relating to misconduct and environmental damage. The debate therefore highlights the sensitive balance between expanding defence cooperation and safeguarding national sovereignty and accountability.

The timing of the France–Kenya partnership is particularly significant. France has experienced a dramatic erosion of its military and political influence in the Sahel. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have expelled or forced the withdrawal of French troops while strengthening cooperation through the Alliance of Sahel States and expanding security relations with alternative partners, particularly Russia. Against this background, Paris appears to be diversifying its partnerships beyond its traditional Francophone sphere.

Kenya presents an attractive partner in this recalibration. Unlike several former French colonies in West Africa, it does not carry the same historical and political baggage in its relations with Paris. At the same time, Nairobi enjoys considerable diplomatic influence in East Africa and has positioned itself as an important security partner for Western countries.

The relationship is also expanding beyond defence. Nairobi is set to host the Africa-Forward summit on 11–12 May 2026, bringing together French and African political and business leaders. The gathering is significant as part of France's efforts to deepen engagement with Anglophone Africa.

France's growing engagement with [Kenya](#) therefore illustrates a broader transformation in Africa's external security partnerships. While the Sahel increasingly seeks alternatives to traditional Western security arrangements, East African states such as Kenya are strengthening cooperation with multiple external powers. Rather than representing a simple relocation of French influence from West to East Africa, the development points to an increasingly fragmented and competitive geopolitical landscape in which African states themselves are diversifying partnerships and exercising greater agency in shaping their external relations.

India's Maritime Engagement with Africa under MAHASAGAR

India's defence and maritime engagement with Africa has witnessed a visible expansion in April 2026, reflecting New Delhi's growing emphasis on security partnerships, naval diplomacy and capacity building across the Indian Ocean Region and beyond. These engagements, involving Tanzania, Kenya, Egypt and Morocco, form part of a broader effort to translate India's vision of MAHASAGAR—Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions—into practical cooperation.

On 2 April 2026, India launched the Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) SAGAR initiative with the departure of [INS Sunayna](#) from Mumbai. Carrying naval personnel from India and 16 Friendly Foreign Countries, the deployment seeks to strengthen professional exchanges, maritime training and collective operational readiness. The initiative was described as a practical expression of MAHASAGAR and India's emphasis on partnership-based maritime security. The deployment also comes against the backdrop of increasing challenges in the maritime domain, including piracy, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, narcotics trafficking and competition over critical resources.

India's engagement with Africa became more prominent on 3 April, when INS Trikanth arrived at Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, as part of its deployment in the South-West Indian Ocean Region. The visit focused on strengthening maritime cooperation between the Indian and Tanzanian navies through professional interactions and joint training activities. The programme also included community and cultural engagements, while critical stores brought from India were handed over during the visit. The port call demonstrated the growing importance India attaches to Tanzania as a maritime partner along the western Indian Ocean.

This was followed by INS Trikanth's arrival at Mombasa, Kenya, on 7 April. Coinciding with the visit of Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Naval Command, the port call included professional, cultural and social engagements with the Kenya

Defence Forces. On its departure, the ship was scheduled to undertake a Passage Exercise with the Kenya Navy to enhance interoperability and facilitate the exchange of operational best practices.

India's defence outreach simultaneously extended to North Africa. On 8 April, an Indian Army contingent departed for Egypt to participate in the fourth edition of the India-Egypt Joint Special Forces [Exercise Cyclone](#), conducted at Anshas from 9 to 17 April. The exercise focused on joint mission planning, interoperability and special operations in desert and semi-desert environments, underscoring the growing defence relationship between India and Egypt.

The [Kenya](#) engagement acquired an additional defence dimension when INS Trikanth concluded its Mombasa visit on 10 April. During the visit, INSAS rifles and ammunition were formally handed over to the Kenya Navy, alongside training in small-arms handling, maintenance and Visit, Board, Search and Seizure operations.

Finally, on 15 April, [INS Sudarshini](#) arrived at Casablanca, Morocco, under its Lokayan 26 transoceanic deployment. Discussions with Moroccan naval officials focused on expanding maritime collaboration and training exchanges. Taken together, these engagements demonstrate that MAHASAGAR is increasingly serving as an operational framework for India's defence diplomacy with Africa, combining naval presence, capacity building, military exercises and security assistance to deepen partnerships across the continent.