



GAME *of* THRONES



AFRICA WATCH

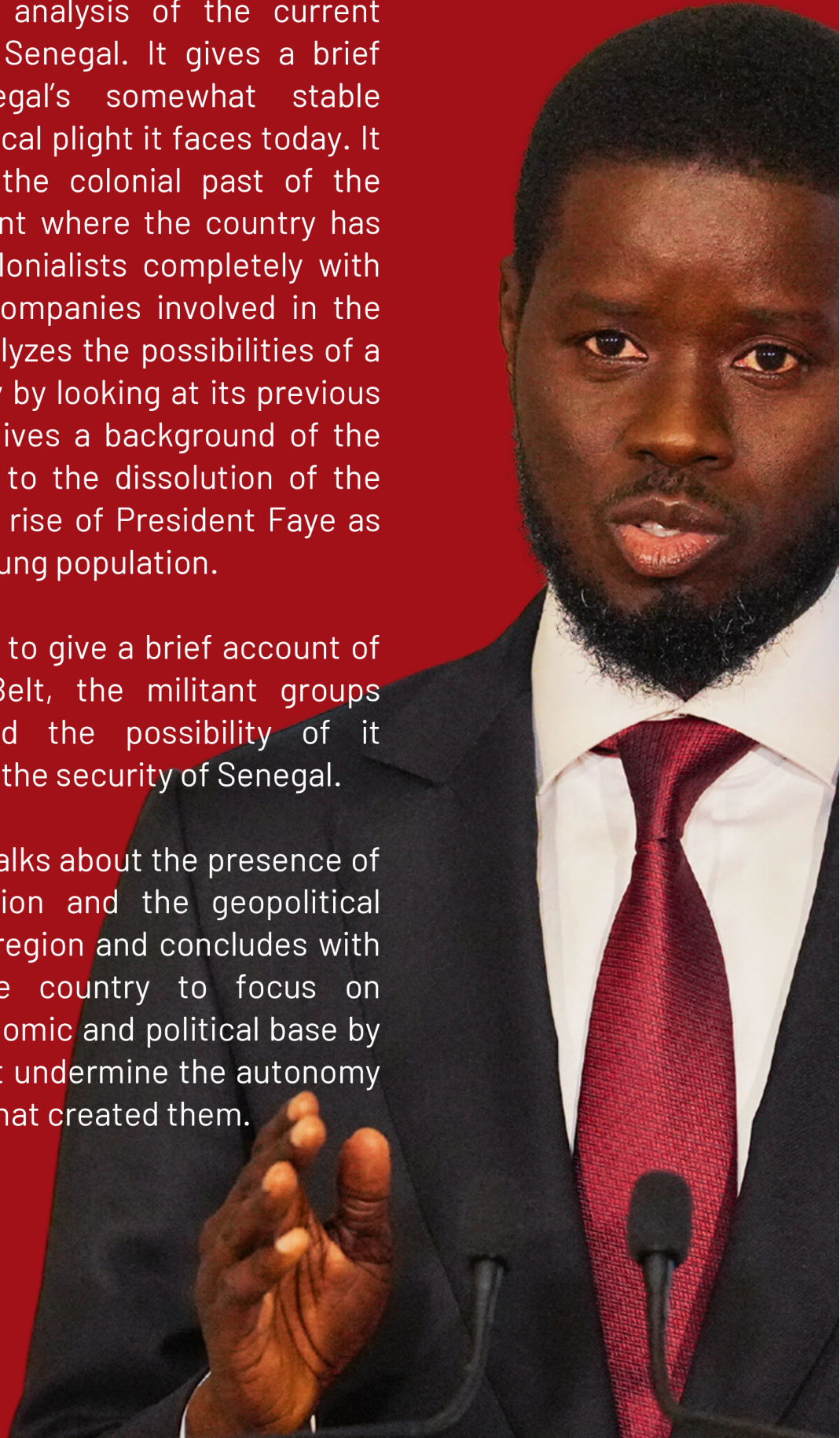


Executive Summary

This report is an analysis of the current political unrest in Senegal. It gives a brief account of Senegal's somewhat stable politics to the political plight it faces today. It takes us through the colonial past of the country to a present where the country has not cut off the colonialists completely with over 250 French companies involved in the Sahel region. It analyzes the possibilities of a coup in the country by looking at its previous failed attempt. It gives a background of the situations that led to the dissolution of the Parliament and the rise of President Faye as the leader of the young population.

The report goes on to give a brief account of the Sahel Coup Belt, the militant groups present there and the possibility of it adversely affecting the security of Senegal.

Finally, the report talks about the presence of Russia in the region and the geopolitical importance of the region and concludes with recommending the country to focus on building up its economic and political base by reforms that do not undermine the autonomy of the institutions that created them.





Background

In the western most region of Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania lies the semi-arid country of Senegal.

From being a former French colony, used as a base for slave trade across Europe to democratically electing the youngest President in the Africa, Senegal has had quite an eventful history.

In 1959 French Sudan and Senegal merged to form the Mali federation which disintegrated soon after gaining independence in 1960.

In 1982, Senegal teamed up with the Gambia to form the national confederation of Senegambia which dissolved in 1989. Senegal has been the most stable democracy in Africa which has seen only 5 Presidents till date.





Parliamentary Crisis

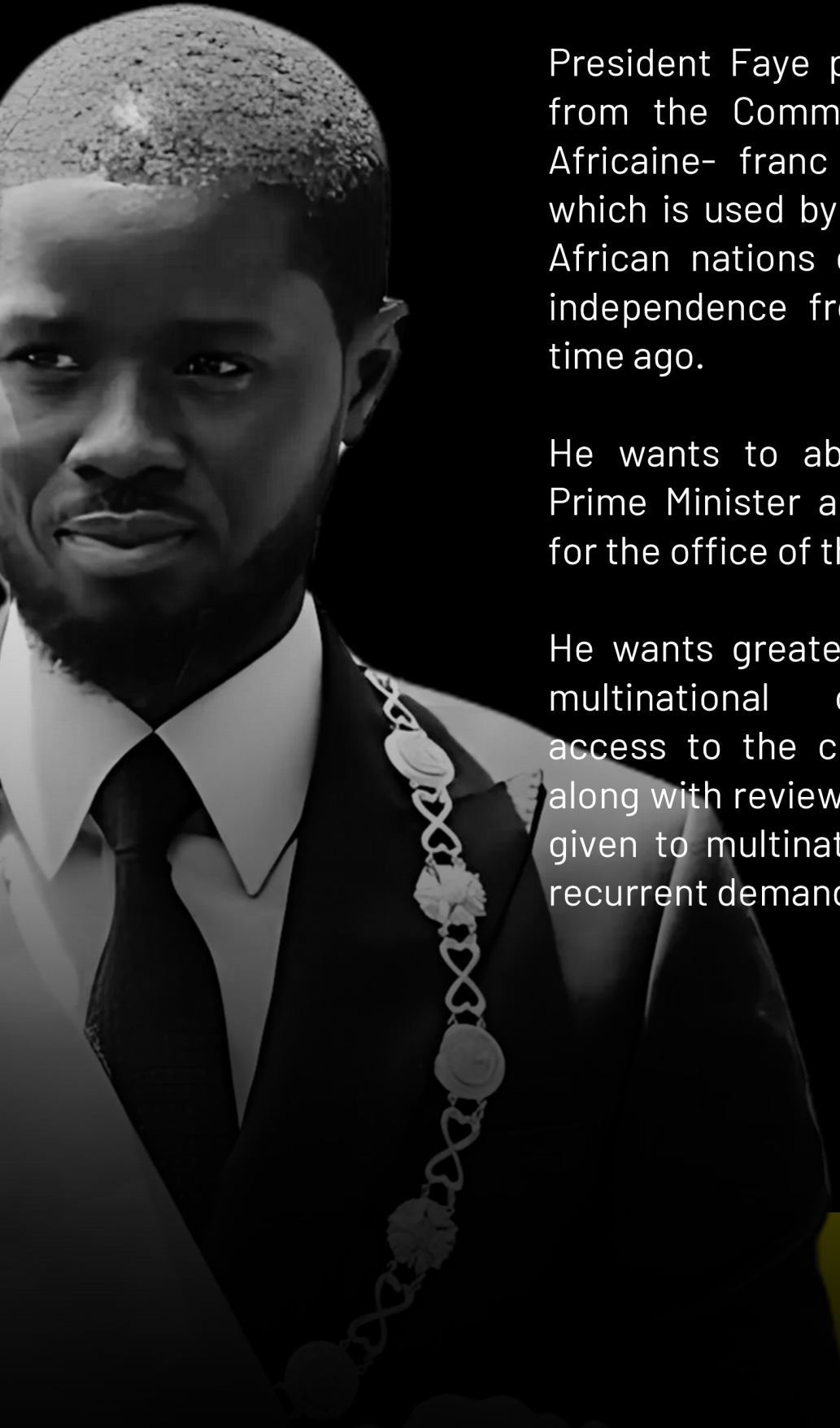
On 12th of September, President Bassirou Diomaye Faye announced the dissolution of the opposition led Parliament. President Faye and his Prime Minister Ousmane Sinko need a parliamentary majority to implement the policies owing to which they secured the popular opinion of the youth in their favor.

The President has blamed the delay in materialization of his promises upon the National Assembly which keeps on blocking his proposals. The dissolution gives way to SNAP legislative elections which are set to commence by 17 November, so that the Pastef party can gain a majority in the Parliament. The new legislature must be formed within a period of three months. The opposition bloc led by the former President Macky Sall has accused the current President of perjury.





Poster Boy for Reforms



President Faye promised a retreat from the Communauté Financière Africaine- franc or the CFA-franc which is used by many of the West African nations even after gaining independence from France a long time ago.

He wants to abolish the post of Prime Minister and create a space for the office of the Vice President.

He wants greater control over the multinational oil corporation's access to the country's resources along with reviewing fishing permits given to multinationals. This was a recurrent demand of the voters.



Political Baggage

It was the former President, Abdoulaye Wade who reduced the President's tenure from seven to five years and yet had tried to run for the third time. President Sall, keeping in with the legacy, tried to run for the third time as well. He tried to postpone the elections in order to extend his term and consolidate power in his hands- a constitutional coup of sorts.

This instigated a nation wide protest as the young population has gone through a process of disenchantment, they see the leaders for who they truly are, civilians trying to create a political dynasty. The former president was corrupt and there are reports of him accepting bribes through his brother's company in return for granting offshore gas block licenses. He mismanaged and embezzled the COVID-19 funds.



Political Doppelganger

Ousmane Sonko, the former mayor of Zinguichor and political guru of President Faye has been a lawyer and has worked as a tax inspector like him. Ousmane Sonko rose as the leader of the opposition. He formed the Pastef Party with the incumbent President and the latter has publicly called himself as a proxy of the former. They were both in jail until 2 weeks before the Presidential elections of Senegal.

Protests began in 2021 when Sonko was first accused of rape and then jailed under defamation charges in 2023. This was used by President Sall to bar him from being a Presidential candidate in the elections.

He tried to stall the elections by using 'investigation on charges of corruption over Presidential Candidates' as a justification but the court ruled against it. The military intervened and removed him from the Parliament.





COUP

Coups in Sahel

Africa's Sahel region is a breeding ground of jihadist insurgency and military coups. Since the year 2020, Africa has experienced eight successful coups, six of them have been in the francophone West Africa. Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Guinea are under this belt. The civilian governments were ousted and the military had the support of the people because people were fed up with mismanagement and subsequent abuse of power. There is no fixed method of starting a coup. For instance, in Niger it started due to mistrust between the President and one of his generals, who was about to get sacked. It is difficult to stabilize the region because the military has seen what wielding power and abusing it without having to face any consequences feels like. Until political stability is established in each of these countries, one can never rule out the possibility of a military coup in other regions surrounding them.



Coups in Sahel

The regions susceptible to a coup in the region share a few attributes like - being former French colonies, incompetent government and being infested by terrorism.

- The government is corrupt and there is undeniable income inequality. Even though Gabon and Chad have oil, Niger and Mali have uranium, Burkina Faso and Guinea have gold, the population predominantly remains poor.
- Al- Qaeda and ISIL are present in the Sahel region.
- France has been exploiting the region for ages. First through colonialism and now, through baiting aid and extracting minerals and resources like Uranium for its own use in nuclear power plants. France has about 200 companies or subsidiaries in Mali, 45 in Burkina Faso, 30 in Niger.



Coup Trap in Senegal ?

Though there is always a possibility of unresolved issues spilling over and disrupting harmony in the neighboring areas, Sahel may retain its civilian led government. In 1962 Prime Minister Momadou Dia attempted a coup but failed because the military did not support him.

The military in Senegal has chosen to stay out of politics, they are disciplined and believe in the Republic nature of their country. Senegal does not have a presidential guard corps or any such special unit which makes the possibility of a coup less.

The ISIL affiliated- Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen (JNIM) operates in Burkina Faso and Mali's Kayes region, which shares a border with Senegal. The presence of a political military keeps the threat at bay. The country is comparatively less open to jihadists because of the secular nature of the nation and because the country has stronger democratic and legitimate institutions.





Russia in Senegal ?

Russia has been wooing the region since the Cold war period and has over time managed to gain influence in Africa. Wagner, a Russian military service providing company, received logging and gold mining rights in the CAR.

Mali's leadership forced the French troops out and brought in Wagner to provide military support.

Russia has been vocal about ending neo-colonialism in the continent of Africa so there is a possibility of Russia filling in the vacuums left by France.





Conclusion

A change of government does not ensure stability, it is about reforming an institution without taking away or suppressing its autonomy. The period till the legislative elections are filled with uncertainty. The 44-year-old President seems to have the good opinion of the young population that forms the majority of the population. The young people are staunch supporters of the Pastef Party and the core value it presents to them.

Economic and political reforms are ideas that resonate with the population that is dipped in poverty and unemployment. The elections will most likely end with the Pastef securing the majority in the Parliament. Senegal needs to follow through with its history of not falling prey to military coup and build up its economic and political base.





GLOBAL

EYE

INTELLIGENCE

AFRICA WATCH