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Global News Dispatches: 4 Stories

Note to Editors: This is a selection of news wire reports that have been edited to be relevant for audiences for the next two weeks. You are welcome to select and publish individual items or the whole stack.

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- **West Africa Peoples Organization Calls for Greater Unity as France Announces Military Reorganization**
- **About 700,000 Afghans Have Lost Their Jobs Since Taliban Takeover, Says UN Report**
- **U.S. Announces Fresh Sanctions Against Firms Involved in Iranian Oil and Petrochemical Exports**
- **Tunisians Mobilize Against Political Persecution and Government Failure to Address Economic Concerns**

[NEWS ITEM TEXT]

West Africa Peoples Organization Calls for Greater Unity as France Announces Military Reorganization

[295 words]

The West Africa Peoples Organization (WAPO), an “[anti-imperialist network that promotes regional unity across West Africa](#),” has welcomed a proposal for greater collaboration between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea, and has called for coordination and planning of production, trade, infrastructure, economic development, and defense

among these countries after the withdrawal of French military forces from the Sahel region.

This collaboration between these countries was prompted after the prime minister of Mali's transitional government, ChoguelKokallaMaïga, concluded a visit to neighboring Burkina Faso on February 26, and foreign ministers of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea proposed a "Bamako-Conakry-Ouagadougou" [strategic axis](#) for enhanced cooperation a few weeks before the visit.

Welcoming this visit, WAPO said in a [statement](#), "We recognize in it [the initiative] the undying spirit of Pan-Africanism that moved the founders of modern Africa even after three generations of neo-colonial repression." WAPO also said that there was a need to unite "to create the capacity to defend our territories and interests."

On February 18, Burkina Faso officially marked an end to France's military presence on its territory while in 2022, French troops withdrew from Mali after a nearly decade-long deployment in the country.

France's withdrawal from Mali and Burkina Faso took place in the aftermath of successive military coups since 2020, amid rising public unrest against France's military presence even as armed conflict has expanded in the region.

"The anger in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea is [also] a result of France establishing their regional economic policy. The reserves of the three countries [as well as many other Francophone countries] are kept in France. France also retains the right to confiscate their national financial reserves," Kafui Kan-Senaya, the secretary-general of WAPO and the research secretary of the Socialist Movement of Ghana, [told](#) Peoples Dispatch.

About 700,000 Afghans Have Lost Their Jobs Since Taliban Takeover, Says UN Report

[268 words]

An estimated 700,000 people have lost their jobs in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, "with the agriculture, civil service, and construction sectors the most severely affected," according to the latest [report](#) by the UN special rapporteur to Afghanistan.

The report, which covers developments in the country between July and December 2022, stated that around two-thirds of households in Afghanistan have [acknowledged](#) "difficulties in meeting basic food and non-food needs."

“[M]assive job losses, business closures, and the reluctance of foreign investors to engage in the [country’s] economy” have had catastrophic impacts on the lives of millions of Afghans, the report [said](#).

Afghanistan’s worsening economic decline—which stood at around [30 to 35 percent](#) in 2021-2022—has further worsened the [humanitarian crisis](#). “This crisis has been exacerbated by the unintended consequences of political cautiousness and overcompliance with [U.S.-imposed] sanctions, despite the humanitarian exemptions afforded by the Security Council,” the 19-page report that was submitted to the UN [said](#).

The report further [stated](#) that an “estimated 18.9 million people are experiencing acute food insecurity, a number which is expected to rise to 20 million, and over 90 percent of Afghans are suffering from some form of food insecurity, with single-parent female-headed households and children being disproportionately affected.”

The report also raised concerns about targeted killings of members of the former Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, allegedly by the Taliban. Similar apprehensions have been raised in another [report](#) that claims that the Taliban has gained access to biometric data, which they are utilizing in tracking down Afghans who formerly worked with the U.S. government.

U.S. Announces Fresh Sanctions Against Firms Involved in Iranian Oil and Petrochemical Exports

[228 words]

In yet another indication that U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration is reluctant to revive the Iran nuclear deal, the U.S. Department of State issued fresh sanctions against firms across the globe involved in oil and petrochemical trade with Iran on March 2.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken [claimed](#) that the “United States is committed to significantly reducing Iranian energy exports and will sanction those facilitating Iran’s petroleum and petrochemical trade.” He also warned that the U.S. “will not hesitate to take action against those who try to circumvent” existing sanctions on Iran.

Although the U.S. first sanctioned Iran in 1979, Iran has been subjected to increased economic and political sanctions ever since the Trump administration decided to unilaterally withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or Iran nuclear deal in May 2018. By imposing fresh sanctions, Trump pursued what his administration called a “[maximum pressure campaign](#)” to force Iran to renegotiate the deal and include its regional and missile policies under the deal’s purview.

The U.S. accused the sanctioned companies of “[knowingly engaging](#)” in the transport of Iranian oil and petrochemicals in violation of existing sanctions.

As per the sanction regime, the assets belonging to these companies in the U.S. will be blocked and any transactions with these companies will lead to the imposition of sanctions on others as well.

Tunisians Mobilize Against Political Persecution and Government Failure to Address Economic Concerns

[259 words]

Tunisians took to the streets by the thousands on March 4 and 5 to denounce President Kais Saied’s government for silencing the opposition with threats of arrest and intimidation and to protest against the administration’s failure to address basic economic concerns plaguing the people of the country.

Protesters [raised issues](#) such as government restrictions on unions, the rising cost of living in Tunisia, and the government’s move to reduce subsidies on essential commodities like food and energy.

The protests on March 4 were organized by the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) and the Tunisian Workers’ Party, among others. The protest on that day, which “appears to be the [biggest](#)” against Saied’s government so far, started from Tunis’s Mohamed Ali Square and ended at Habib Bourguiba Avenue.

More than a dozen activists, journalists, and judges have been [arrested](#) since February by the police in Tunisia. Some have been charged with “[conspiracy against state security](#)” and are being tried in military courts. The opposition said that this action by the government amounted to political persecution.

Those arrested so far include Issam Chebbi, head of the opposition Republican Party, two leading opposition members, Nouredine Boutar, a senior journalist, and [Anis Kaabi](#), a senior union leader.

Addressing the protesters, secretary-general of the UGTT Nouredine Taboubi [asserted](#) that “the workers are united, and we have chosen the path of struggle; struggle does not come cheap.” He said that UGTT was opposed to the persecution of political figures and the “intimidation of their families,” and was committed to the protection of freedoms in the country.