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**Counterterrorism:**

*The G5 Response Efforts to Combat Terrorism in the Sahel region*

Presented by Ndeye Fatou NDIAYE

Spring 2020

Master's Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of International  
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*Barkep Sheikh Akhmadou Bamba Khadimou Rassoul*

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## Abstract

Africa's Sahel suffers from multidimensional challenges that require robust solutions to address the issues. The regional crisis is aggravated by multiple factors that include climate risks, poverty, unemployment, water shortages, weak governance, lack of rule of law, food security to cite a few. Thus, a combination of factors greatly contribute to the Sahel crisis, resulting in severe security threats. This study attempts to analyze the role of the G5 Sahel states and the international community in counter-terrorism efforts. However, the region has emerged as the new battleground for terrorism along with a growing threat of violent extremism and other organized crime. In response to the threat, regional leaders and the international community are working together to address the threat of terrorist activities in the area. This effort involves the Group of Five (G5) Sahel states (Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Chad). France, the U.S. and the United Nations have contributed, directly or indirectly, in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region. The UN Security Council established the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy/Office and passed relevant resolutions to prevent and counter terrorism. The question now is: have all the national and global counterterrorism strategies to combat terrorism in the Sahel been effective?

My hypothesis is that the use of force is necessary but not enough in addressing this threat. I argue that counterterrorism in the Sahel will fail unless the root causes of local recruitment are assessed and properly addressed. Rampant poverty and poor governance make vulnerable people easy targets for terrorist groups. Long-term peace, stability and security can only be achievable once the population is provided sustainable development and good governance. Indeed, the region is vulnerable due to the precarious conditions of the people on the ground, weak governance as well as the lack of rule of law that contribute to the vulnerability or motivation of the people in the Sahel to likely join extremist and Islamist movements.

This research employs a descriptive and analytical approach, relying on previous scholarly and expert sources to describe the role and challenges that face different actors involved in the counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel region before discussing about the root causes of the vulnerability of populations to recruitment by extremist armed groups in the Sahel. In doing so, this study uses violent extremism, extremism and terrorism interchangeably as a code name for Jihadists.

## Chapter I

### Introduction

The U.S. Code of Federal Regulations defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”<sup>1</sup> This present day, terrorism has become one of the major and troublesome issues of our times. Since the terror attacks of 9/11 in the United States, terrorism has become a global menace, threatening international peace and security. In response to this danger, member states of the United Nations (UN) established a global strategic and operational approach to coordinate and enhance national, regional and international counter-terrorism efforts. The goal of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is to resolve and strengthen global action necessary to combat and prevent the evolving threat of terrorism and violent extremism<sup>2</sup>.

The African continent has emerged as the new battleground for al-Qaeda and the Islamist State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria. North Africa, particularly, suffers from massive terror attacks escalated by the tremendous wave of migrating ISIS fighters while al-Qaeda recruits and adherents expand their influence in other states such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Niger.<sup>3</sup> The upsurge of ISIS has significantly influenced Boko Haram, a Sunni Islamic sect in Nigeria, to pledge allegiance to the leader of the Iraq/Syria-based Islamist State. The group launched deadly attacks and abductions in Nigeria and the borders areas of Chad, Niger and Cameroon<sup>4</sup>. As a result, the Multinational Joint

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<sup>1</sup> US Federal Code of Regulations (28 C.F.R. Section 0.85).

<sup>2</sup> Hanny Megally, “The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review,” Center on International Cooperation, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Wirtschafter, Karim John Gadiaga, “Africa is the New Terrorist Battleground for ISIS and al-Qaeda, USA Today, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Congressional Research Service, 2018.

Task Force MNJTF was launched in 2012 by four countries that include Cameroon, Niger, Chad and Nigeria to fight against the Boko Haram uprising in the Lake Chad basin.<sup>5</sup>

However, after the fall of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya became a destination for many fighters due to the availability of weapons and to provide possible support to ISIS. In addition, the Arab Spring along with the "ungoverned spaces" throughout the Maghreb and the lack of substantive border control enabled the rise of transnational connections between extremist groups like Ansaroul Islam, the Macina Liberation Front, Boko Haram, the Algerian Salafist group, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Mourabitoun, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). The above extremist groups like the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are classified and designated by the U.S as Jihadist militant groups and foreign terrorist organization, operating in the Sahara and Sahel.<sup>6</sup> The Sahel region became home to these violent extremist groups, witnessing critical security threats with a growth of radical and internationally connected movements who use violence to instill fear across the region.<sup>7</sup>

The Sahel region, which is made up of ten countries with a population close to 135 million inhabitants, encounters serious security threats along with other challenges that includes poverty, hunger, health and environment issues, poor education, corruption, weak governance as well as water scarcity. Truly, all these factors have greatly contributed to the worsening security situation, which could consequently fuel conflict and violent extremism in the region. The Sahel is emerging as an area of rising extremism infested with violent terrorist groups and jihadists moving from Iraq

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<sup>5</sup> The International Crisis Group, "Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force," Africa Report No 258, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Zachary Lamb; Jonathan Masters, "Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb," Council on Foreign relations, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Joshua Meservey, 2019.

and Syria. As a result, countries like Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have undergone deadly terror attacks, killing many civilians and soldiers.

Hence, regional leaders worry and express deep concern about instability and the growing insecurity throughout the Sahel. In response to this increasing security threat, five Sahel nations that include Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Chad with the support of the international community formed a new joint task force responsible for combating and preventing the spread of terrorism across the region through collaboration and sharing of resources, so as to facilitate a better response to the security threat as well as development challenges within the Sahel zone<sup>8</sup>.

Terrorism remains a problematic and worrying issue. It is essential to understand the causes and consequences in order to be aware of and respond to this global phenomenon. As stated above, a common definition of terrorism is the unlawful use of violence to intimidate civilians in order to instill fear which is motivated by an ideological, religious or political purpose. People around the world fear terrorism and the multiple terror attacks in different countries. No country is immune, meaning that no one is safe from the escalation of terrorist and violent extremist groups.

It is also important to identify the consequences and negative impacts that result from terrorist attacks. Terror attacks can engender massive civilian casualties and material damage that include loss of life for many people, the destruction of public property and other significant social effects. Moreover, terrorism-related acts can bring about other medical consequences such as causing loss of limbs and other disabilities, trauma, mental stress and sexual violence.

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<sup>8</sup> Jennifer G. Cooke, , "Understanding the G5 Sahel Joint Force: Fighting Terror, Building Regional Security?," Center For Strategic and International Studies 2015

In addition, terrorist attacks have negative effects on the economy by reducing production, investment, loss of tourism, market uncertainty and badly shaking the continuity of the businesses. Moreover, terrorism creates xenophobia, which can cultivate hatred among people or communities based on ethnic, religious or social differences.<sup>9</sup> Primarily, terrorism poses a direct threat to the security of citizens. Therefore, it is important to understand the problems related to terrorism and identify some of its causes and effects. Also, raising public awareness and alerting people to terrorist-related crimes is valuable.

Since its creation, the G5 Joint Task Force has several ongoing operations in the border areas of Mali and Mauritania, the region between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger as well as the Niger/Chad border area. The G5 Sahel Joint Counterterrorism Force is composed of 5,000 troops backed by 4,000 French troops, working with regional militaries. The Joint Force has received millions in financial support from regional and international donors to become fully operational and strengthen the capabilities of the G5 Sahel Joint force.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the G5 countries lack the necessary resources and competence to weaken terrorist groups in the Sahel zone. Funding becomes an issue, but logistics, intelligence and other challenges add up to the difficulties and constraints, which constitute obstacles to achieving successful operations.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the fact that the G5 effort is significant, the Joint Task Force is seriously underfunded and under-resourced. Even if there were to be greater funding along with equipment and intelligence-related resources, the effort is not getting at the root causes that need to be properly

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<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Safeer Awan, "Global Terror and the Rise of Xenophobia/Islamophobia: An Analysis of American Cultural Production since September 11," Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamic Studies, Vol 49, pp. 521-537, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer G. Cooke, "Understanding the g5 Sahel joint Force: Fighting Terror, Building Regional Security," The Center for Strategic and International Studies.

<sup>11</sup> "Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force," The International Crisis Group, 2017.

addressed. The G5 along with the UN and others need to find the best solution to resolve tensions and local conflicts in order to prevent recruitment and to promote and integrate inclusion as well as opportunities for the youth. Through effective regional cooperation, Sahelian countries must improve access to education and the creation of employment for young people and women in order to promote and sustain peace and security in the region. Therefore, the answer to the terrorist question in the Sahel is two-fold. In the short term, the G5 must use force to defeat the terrorist groups, but in the long term, these countries will have to address the underlying social issues and economic conditions in order to diminish the appeal of terrorist organizations.

My hypothesis is that the use of force is necessary but not enough in addressing this threat. The G5 Sahel group mandate will not sufficiently address the problem because of their lack of understanding or taking into consideration the root causes which include these three issues: (1) the vulnerability of the locals for recruitment, (2) the poor system of governance within Sahelian countries, and (3) the lack of rule of law throughout the region.

This thesis research focuses on important issues and urgent challenges to achieve peace and stability in the Sahel region. I will analyze the work of the G5 and examine the root causes of different local conflicts within the G5 countries in the region. Then, I will discuss the poor system of governance in these countries. Third, I will talk about the limited opportunities of the populations in Africa's Sahel region.

Methodologically, this research employs a descriptive and analytical approach relying mainly on secondary research sources and information, including data analysis. For the purpose of this study, this research particularly acquires information from articles, online databases of journals, books, interviews and reports issued by the United Nations. My study will rely on previous scholarly and expert sources already written to analyze and describe the root causes of conflicts

and extremist armed groups in the Sahel. This thesis intends to show the basic elements that contribute to the vulnerability or motivation of the people in the Sahel to likely join extremist and Islamist movements.

After a brief description, argument and methodology in chapter one, this thesis is structured as follows. The second chapter provides the literature review that summarizes previous research done by scholars and analysts regarding this topic. The third chapter offers an analysis of the terrorism problem in the Sahel. Then chapter four will discuss the creation of the G5 and its efforts that include (a) the coordination, (b) minimal resources, (c) French efforts and (d) U.S. involvement. Chapter 5 elaborates on (1) the conditions of the people on the ground, (2) the vulnerability of local people, (3) weak governance throughout the region and (4) the lack of the rule of law. Chapter 6 specifies the role and actions of the United Nations regarding the Sahel crisis. The last chapter will conclude and provide some policy recommendations.

## Chapter II

### Review of the Literature

Major research has been conducted on global efforts to combat terrorism. Experts from the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) assessed and reported on the strengths and weaknesses of the international counterterrorism regime over the past decade. The report states that the international community develops instruments and other strategic initiatives to better deal with the threat of terrorists. According to the experts, the counterterrorism regime lacks effective and coherent central coordination to better respond and prevent the global threat of terrorism. Further, the article argues that the UN Security Council passed numerous counterterrorism resolutions after the US 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, only a few member states implement UNSC resolutions or demonstrate attention in the fight against terrorism. The report talks about the important progress and the significant weaknesses that confront the global counterterrorism regime<sup>12</sup>.

In 2013, John Harbeson, a political scientist, asserted that the war on terrorism on the African continent started a decade before the 9/11 terror attack. The assault occurred in Sudan in the nineties and then in Nairobi at the U.S embassies. After these attacks, the U.S. focus on terrorism in Africa became noticeable with the deployment of more troops on the continent. John Harbeson argued that Africa is not exempt from terrorism due to its weak states, poverty, “ungoverned space,” ethnic and religious diversity, political instability, which constitute eminent factors to the growth of radical movements connected to terrorism. In addition, the article explains

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<sup>12</sup> “The Global Regime for Terrorism,” The Council on foreign Relations, 2011

how Africa's Sahel has become the new battleground and how terrorism has become serious problem in the region.<sup>13</sup>

In 2017, the UN Security Council welcomed and supported the deployment of the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel: Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Chad and Niger. The Council passed the Resolution 2359 (2017)<sup>14</sup> and recognized the group of five states for the Sahel to address, set up and ensure the protection of civilians and to combat the threat of terrorism. The UNSC also urged the G5 Sahel states, the MINUSMA and French forces to ensure effective coordination, exchange of information and to continue efforts towards sustainable and effective operationalization.

The author, Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, questions the G5 force's capabilities to achieve magic in Africa's Sahel region. She addresses the challenges faced by the Joint Force to include the lack of financial and logistical support from the United Nations and its members. In the article, Signe Marie relates the troop and financial support deployed by the European Union, but also the cut in peacekeeping expenditures by the Trump administration. According to her, the U.S hesitated for many reasons to authorize the G5 Joint Force, the financing for a new mission by the Security Council seems to be an excuse for resisting formal approval. In the article, the author insisted on the need of the regional as well as international forces to address and respond to the security concerns of local people in order to move forward toward peace and stability in the Sahel.<sup>15</sup>

Virginia Comolli, a Research Fellow at The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, explains, in her article, "Counterterrorism yearbook 2019: West Africa and the Sahel," why instability in the Sahel will likely continue and how the dynamics of the conflicts may

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<sup>13</sup> John W. Harbeson, "The War on Terrorism in Africa," in *Africa in World Politics*, 6th ed., Westview Press, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> UN Resolution 2359 (2017) Security Council

<sup>15</sup> Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, "Can the G5 Force Work Counterterrorism Magic in Africa's Sahel Region?" *The WORLDVIEWS*, Pass Blue, 2017

shift over the coming months. This conflict analysis describes how the region is made up of two epicenters of instability such as the Western Sahel including Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, which are home to multiple affiliates of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The second axis in the Lake Chad Basin comprises Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon, which are fighting against Nigerian Boko Haram today aligned with ISIS. The author reveals the multiple missions and foreign presence, each with its own priorities, which contribute to the coordination challenges. Additionally, Virginia Comolli argues how the international (Western) effort has taken up a focus on counterterrorism by implementing the Algiers Peace Accord in Mali, a crucial security and political solution to the conflict. Furthermore, the article reminds us that complacency is dangerous, but expecting significant improvement in short terms is impractical because the road to sustainable stability across the region remains tricky.<sup>16</sup>

An article by Lori-Anne Theroux and Baba Dakono, published by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), blames the escalation of violence in the Sahel region on intra-and inter-communal tensions, which is exploited by violent extremist groups. The article states that these tensions are often attributed to ethnic differences across the region. As a result, the extremist groups take advantage of these tensions and divisions to recruit and convince local communities to join their jihadi groups.<sup>17</sup>

In 2017, the United Nations Security Council Unanimously Adopted Resolution 2359, which reveals that the UNSC welcomed the deployment of the group of five (G5) Joint Force of the five Sahel states that would address the threat of terrorism and transnational organized crime in the

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<sup>16</sup> Virginia Comolli, "Counterterrorism yearbook 2019: West Africa and the Sahel," The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019.

<sup>17</sup>Lori-Anne Theroux-Benoni and Baba Dakono, "Are terrorist groups stoking local conflicts in the Sahel?" The Institute for Security Studies, 2019.

region. The Council also accepted the Joint Force's strategic concept of operations and intended to review the deployment in four months' time. In addition, the press release reports that the Council urged the Joint Force to have up to 5,000 military and police personnel, as well as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and French forces in the region to ensure adequate coordination and exchange of information regarding their operation.<sup>18</sup>

Robert Muggah, a Canadian political scientist, and Jose Luengo Cabrera, West African researcher specialist, argue that Africa's Sahel region is undergoing bloody inter-communal violence between farmers and herders, killing thousands of civilians from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Chad and Nigeria. According to both authors, climate change is partly responsible for conflicts. To be more specific, more than 50 million people in the Sahel depend on livestock to survive. Unfortunately, droughts and floods are more frequent, which jeopardize food production. As a consequence, Jihadist groups take great advantage of the unwelcome climate conditions and violence. In the article, Robert and Jose Luengo clearly assert that West Africa Sahel suffers from escalated climate risks, food insecurity as well as communal violence. In addition, the region's violent conflicts are spreading from one country to another, since national borders are open and insecure. They insist that Jihadists are taking over the region despite multiple foreign-supported counterterrorism operations which fail to contain the growing violent activities. In sum, they infer that climate change and organized violence will likely deepen in the next coming years.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> UN Resolution 2359 (2017) security Council

<sup>19</sup> Robert Muggah and Jose Luengo Cabrera, "The Sahel is engulfed by violence. Climate change, food insecurity and extremists are largely to blame," The World Forum, Igarape Institute, 2019.

Christina Murphy, a program associate for the Fund for Peace, describes how the Sahel region has become home to growing regional and international peacekeeping and counterterrorism operations. She follows by highlighting the many challenges that face Sahelian states and their capacity to effectively respond to these threats. According to Christina, it is important to prevent the spread of violent extremism, but the Sahel also faces other threats that expose and endanger current and future stability in the region. In the article, Christina indicates that undoubtedly Mali is ranked as the worst country in 2017 (FST) Fragile States Index.<sup>20</sup>

Further, she explains the conflict greatly impacts the Malian population and state security. Since the start of the conflict in 2012, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recorded hundred thousands of Malian refugees in 2017.<sup>21</sup> The Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria added to the massive displacement in the Lake Chad basin, in Niger, Chad and Cameroon. The cross-border attacks by Boko Haram also contribute to an increasing number of refugees in Chad, Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso, which place more pressure on these countries to meet their own populations' needs.<sup>22</sup>

Then, she emphasizes the Sahel's vulnerability to global climate change, its negative impact on livelihoods and food insecurity in the region. In fact, Christina points out that the Sahel goes through a veritable storm of social, economic as well as security challenges. However, to ensure future stability in the region, it will require more than only a military approach. In other words, to reduce the pressure on the countries in the Sahel, it is wiser to invest in education along with infrastructure, to address poverty, youth engagement, governance initiatives and family planning.

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<sup>20</sup> Christina Murphy, "Stability in the Sahel Region Will Require More Than Just Counter-Terrorism," The Fund for Peace, 2018

<sup>21</sup> United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees Government"-UNHCR/Mali situation

<sup>22</sup> Christina Murphy, "Stability in the Sahel Region Will Require More Than Just Counter-Terrorism," The Fund for Peace, 2018.

Governments in the region and their partners must get to the broader causes of violent extremism and insecurity in order to achieve a peaceful and stable future for the Sahel.<sup>23</sup>

Chapter 3 of the book “*Democratization in Africa: African Views, African Voices*,”<sup>24</sup> talks about democratization and governance in Africa. The National Research Council identifies the major reasons for poor governance and “bad” politics in most African countries. Political scientists in the Namibia workshop indicate that good governance requires efficient as well as effective cooperation between a state and its citizens. Participants in the World Bank workshop in Namibia emphasized that the concentration of power in the hands of the elites, the failure of the state to protect human rights, and the increasing problem of corruption contribute to poor governance and politics in African countries. In addition, it was pointed out that democracy, legitimacy, accountability, transparency and justice have been significantly impeded, which results in considerable disappointment. Participants noted that the economic crisis and human conditions cannot be resolved unless Africa’s people participate and contribute to the structures and political context of the socioeconomic development for a brighter future. Another challenge for Africa to achieve good governance is to develop transparency, equal opportunity and end corruption. This latter poses a profound threat to all systems of government. Corruption is considered as a way of life in many African countries and it constitutes a general problem for governments of developing countries anywhere in the world.<sup>25</sup>

Chester A. Crocker, a former U.S. ambassador, outlines in a journal article published by the Hoover Institution Press that conflict and governance are somehow linked in Africa. Crocker implies that the nature of governance depends on the legitimacy of the exercise of authority. And

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<sup>23</sup>Christina Murphy, “Stability in the Sahel Region Will Require More Than Just Counter-Terrorism,” The Fund for Peace, 2018.

<sup>24</sup>Published by the National Academies Press, 1992, pp. 30-85

<sup>25</sup>Published by the National Academies Press, 1992, pp. 30-85

a legitimate authority requires accepted laws and norms as well as unconstrained power of the rulers. In Africa for example, Crocker points out that Africa's conflict difficulty derives from different forms of violence, which sometimes gain support from criminal and traffickers' networks. In addition, religious militants along with local grievance activists make connections with terrorist groups. Crocker reveals that African nations with complex ethnic and geographic features are subjected to multi-sourced violence.<sup>26</sup>

The former U.S. ambassador mentions that the severity of the security challenges is accentuated by the collapse of Libya after 2011, the spreading of arms across the Sahel and the climate conditions placing pressure on farmer and herder relationships. Moreover, the dangerous proliferation of local ISIS and al-Qaeda in the Sahel is provoked by the ungoverned spaces in most areas of the region. As noted, Crocker observes the link between conflict and governance. For Crocker, African states need strong and responsive institutions since weak and fragile states do not lead to good governance. African political leaders should strengthen policies and laws that determine relations between farmers, herders, other neighbor identity groups, criminal networks, public officials, the lands and ordinary citizens. According to him, ethnic conflict is more often generated by bad governance and political entrepreneurs. Expressly, poor leadership can lead to weak capabilities to govern the local communities. Otherwise, countries with bad governance are menaced by corruption and other governance consequences.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Chester A. Crocker, "African Governance: Challenges and Their Implications," Paper prepared for Governance and the Emerging World Project, The Hoover Institution, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Chester A. Crocker, "African Governance: Challenges and Their Implications," Paper prepared for Governance and the Emerging World Project, The Hoover Institution, 2018.

### Chapter III

#### Description of the situation

Africa's Sahel is a vast region, which is made up of ten countries with 135 million inhabitants. This semi-arid region extends from the Sahara to the North and the Sudanese Savanna to the South, which covers the south of Mauritania, northern east of Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, south of Algeria, Niger, northern Nigeria, Chad and northern Ethiopia. However, countries in the Sahel suffer from poverty, food insecurity, poor governance, environmental degradation, political instability, inequality, insecurity and economic difficulties, to cite only several challenges. A number of these multiple factors greatly contributes to the vulnerability of its populations, which encourage them to join extremist and Jihadist groups. The extremist groups take advantage of the ethnic and economic conditions to influence local communities and drive recruitment mostly in countries like Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.<sup>28</sup>

As the terrorist networks increase, the Sahel faces serious security threats and experiences deadly terrorist attacks in countries like Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger where hundreds of civilians and soldiers are killed. Unfortunately, the diffusion of the threat becomes contagious and neighboring countries are not immune from terrorism within their borders. The extremist groups in the Sahel include Ansaroul Islam, the Macina Liberation Front, Boko Haram, the Algerian Salafist group, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Mourabitoun, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) all take advantage of the region's ethnic and economic grievances to drive new recruitment among local communities. These different groups are linked

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<sup>28</sup> Flore Berger, "Jihadist violence and communal divisions fuel worsening conflict in Mali and wider Sahel," The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019.

to Al-Qaeda or IS (Islamist State) and join forces by creating a larger and better coordinated organization.<sup>29</sup>

As stated, the Sahel faces widespread violence and the number of terrorist attacks has increased in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, killing more civilians and soldiers. However, Islamist groups including MUJAO, AQIM, and Ansar al-Dine thrive and gain strength over “ungoverned spaces” across the Sahel region. Militant Islamist groups control the northern territory of Mali and threaten the security of populations in neighboring countries. Most of their activities involve attacks on civilians, ambushes on military troops, bombings of popular markets, hotels, cities and restaurants across the region. The people struggle of extraordinary levels from forced displacement due to terrorist attacks. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) observes thousands of people fleeing across the region causing large scale population displacements.<sup>30</sup>

Africa’s Sahel region has emerged as the new battleground in the fight against terrorist groups.<sup>31</sup> In response to this growing threat posed by these militant Islamist groups, the G5 Sahel Joint Force was formed in 2017 to combat terrorism and trafficking threat across the region. The G5 Sahel states, which comprise Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Chad and Niger, were created so that the region’s leaders could take care of their own security by coordinating their efforts. The Joint Force has been endorsed by the African Union (AU) and strengthened by resolution 2359 (2017) of the United Nations Security Council, which urges the G5 Sahel to coordinate its efforts with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA) in Mali

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<sup>29</sup> Lori-Anne Thérout-Bénoni, Baba Dakono, “Are terror groups stoking local conflicts in the Sahel? The Daily Maverick, Institute for Security Studies, 201.9

<sup>30</sup> Richard Danziger, “Confronting the challenges of migration in West and Central Africa,” Africa Renewal, 2018-2019.

<sup>31</sup> Jessica Donati, Courtney McBride, “Terrorist Attacks Increase in Africa’s Sahel, U.S. Warns,” The Wall Street Journal, 2019.

and French forces in order to combat terrorism and prevent its spreading throughout the continent.<sup>32</sup>

Besides all the efforts and the presence of foreign troops in the region, Jihadist groups thrive and continue to pose a potential threat to Sahelian countries. African countries decided to take on the responsibility for their own security and engage in a “war on terror” to the extent of managing regional stability across the Sahel zone. Yet, can the G5 Joint Force alongside foreign forces present in the region defeat terrorists and organized crime in Africa’s Sahel region? The G5 Sahel Joint Force presents an opportunity to improve security cooperation among countries in the Sahel.<sup>33</sup> It also represents a good chance to enhance border control to better respond to the growing insecurity in the region. However, West African forces lack adequate resources, which include limited training, equipment, intelligence, financial and logistical support, and a commitment from the international community to counter asymmetrical threats. In response, the G5 Sahel Joint Force was created to combine a joint task force to better respond to the security and development challenges of the Sahel region. By doing so, the region’s leaders aim to take care of their own security.

Still, Africa’s Sahel region faces development and security challenges that include poverty, food security, health issues, and lack of education problems with access to safe water, weak governance, corruption, human rights abuses, black markets and other organized crimes. In fact, the spread of violent extremism or terrorism in the region has largely contributed to a worsening security situation and increased conflict in the Sahel zone.<sup>34</sup> Most extremist network groups are

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<sup>32</sup> UN Resolution 2359- 2017

<sup>33</sup> Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, “Can the G5 Force Work Counterterrorism Magic in Africa’s Sahel Region,” Pass Blue Independent Coverage of the UN, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Chester A. Crooker, “African Governance: Challenges and their Implications,” The Hoover institution, 2019.

linked to al-Qaeda or the Islamist State (IS), which join forces to create a well-coordinated organization. Overall, terrorist and extremist groups exploit the political emptiness, weak governance, the vulnerability of the locals and the freedom of movement across borders to initiate potential recruits and training opportunities.<sup>35</sup>

To sum up, the Sahel remains vulnerable and it demands robust regional and international responses to address the different challenges and the immediate security threat posed by violent extremism and terrorist groups. So far, the military efforts undertaken by the G5, French and the United Nations, in short, are perceived as inadequate since the Sahel continues to deteriorate, and the terrorist and extremist groups expand ambitions and capabilities. Therefore, addressing the root causes that contribute to the problem could have greater utility in containing the growing violent extremism, terrorism and security threats in the region.

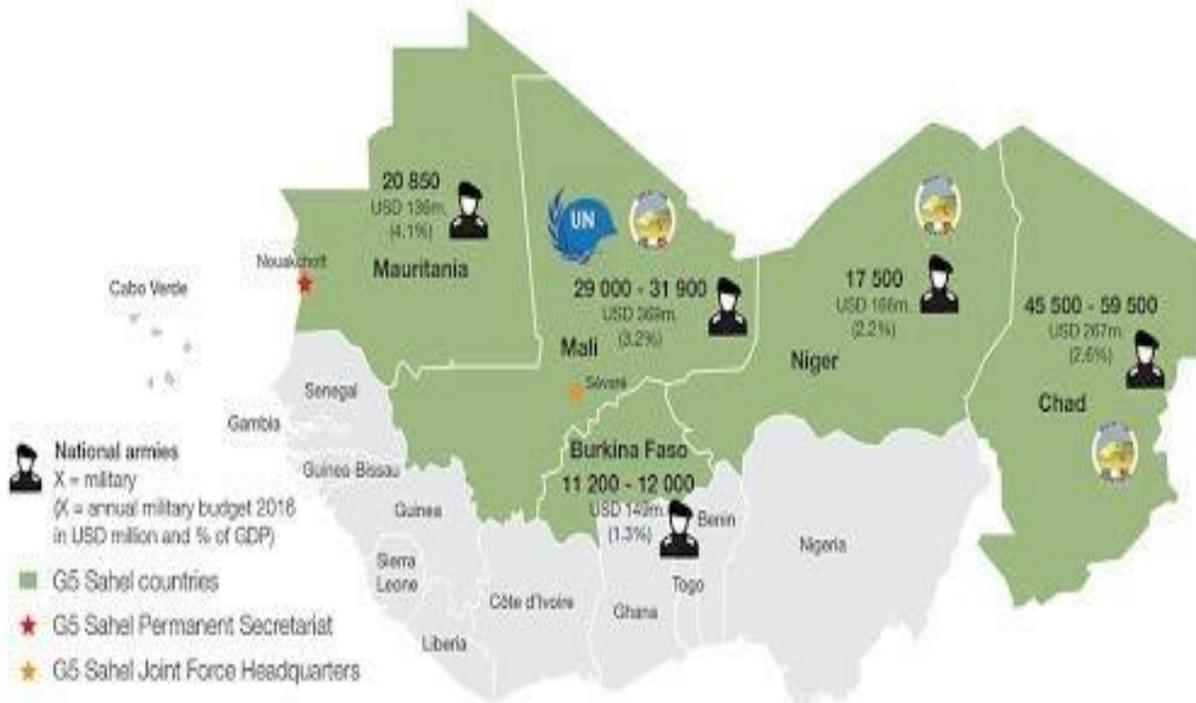
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<sup>35</sup> Donald Y. Yamamoto, "The Growing Crisis in Africa's Sahel Region," Committee on Foreign Affairs, Washington, 2013.

## Chapter IV

### The Creation of the G5 Sahel

## THE G5 SAHEL AND ITS JOINT FORCE



**G5 Sahel Joint Force**  
Objective: 5 000 military  
Start-up budget: EUR 450 million  
Starting from July 2017



**United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali**  
11 300 blue helmets (Dec. 2017) including 4 000 military from Burkina Faso (1 700), Chad (900) and Niger (1 400)  
Budget: USD 1 048 million (July 2017 - June 2018)  
Mandate: April 2013 - June 2018



**Operation Barkhane (France)**  
4 000 military  
Budget: EUR 365 million per year  
Starting from August 2014

Sources: Touchard (2017), African Armed Forces; SIPRI (2017), Military Expenditure Database; MINUSMA and French Ministry of Defence

© 2018. Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD)

In 2014, the regional leaders from Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania met in Nouakchott to form a regional body, the G5 Sahel in order to enhance regional partner's coordination through defense, strategies, security as well as policies within the Sahel. Three years later, the G5 officially launched its Joint Force and received support from the African Union and the UN Security Council, which unanimously adopted a resolution that authorized UN peacekeepers deployed in Mali to provide the Joint Force with logistical and operational support.<sup>36</sup> The G5 Sahel Joint Force seeks to improve security among countries who share borders along the Sahel by deploying joint patrols to block the flow of terrorists. The Joint Military Force, under the command of General Didier Dacko from Mali, is comprised of 5,000 soldiers.<sup>37</sup> The G5 presidency rotates and Niger currently holds the Presidency. However, its military headquarters is based in Mali. The Sahel Joint Force has an estimated budget of euro 450 million to cover operations and equipment resources. Unfortunately, even with the contribution of members, who each pledges euro 10 million along with contributions by international partners, there is still a budget deficit. While the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) remains a crucial joint force established to address instability in the Sahel region, the group still deals with several challenges related to its coordination and availability of resources.

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<sup>36</sup> UN Press Releases, Security Council, 6981st Meeting, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Staff Writer, "New G5 Sahel Joint Force commander moves HQ to Mali capital Bamako after June attack," The Defense Post, 2018

### **a) The Coordination**

The Joint Force of the G5 Sahel with the support of French counterterrorism forces conducted several military operations including operations “HAWBI” in 2017; and “PAGNALI” in 2018, and other ongoing operations in border zones between countries within the Sahel.<sup>38</sup> However, the Sahel (FC-G5S) still lacks effective coordination among member states as well as with other external forces present in the region. For instance, FC-G5S’s collaboration with MINUSMA remains problematic due to conflicting mandates/priorities. The UN mission’s mandate was to only help stabilize and support Mali’s political process, and not necessarily engage in stemming the flow of terrorists into the Sahel region. But, has MINUSMA succeeded in restoring stability in Mali? For now, it is still an ongoing process.

UN Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hassim Wane stated in a briefing that FC-G5S’s success greatly depends on effective coordination and a deeper regional partnership to make up a strong and operational military force.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, the Sahel region has welcomed several different forces, yet no effective plan or military operation has yet alleviated or weakened the spread of terrorism and Jihadist groups in the region. A coordinated response among forces is necessary in order to promote an effective operationalization, contain terrorism, and disband terrorist networks operating in the region. This zone continues to be highly threatened by ISIS, al-Qaeda and other militant groups. The French forces have been criticized over failing to fully cooperate with the G5 force.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the

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<sup>38</sup> Aissatou Athie, “Coordinated response Key to G5 Sahel,” The International Peace Institute, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases 8024<sup>TH</sup> Meeting, Security Council, 2017

<sup>40</sup> Joe Penney, “the G5 Sahel Force, Failing the region and Failing Itself,” Pass Blue Independent Coverage of the UN, 2018.

creation of the FC-G5S force would be useless without security collaboration and information sharing from regional forces, to include French forces, the United Nations forces and other external forces. Some analysts and officials warn about the future of the FC-G5S, dealing with minimal resources and lacking international support.

### **b) Minimal Resources**

For a fully operational force, FC-G5S requires sustainable resources and funding in order to fight terrorism and any other criminal networks in the Sahel region.<sup>41</sup> To be more specific, the FC-G5S lacks reliable financial support to be completely functional. Regional as well as the international community must be sufficiently generous and provide funds more than were initially requested to guarantee long-term funding to the FC-G5S. So far, each country in the Sahel pledged about 10 million euros plus other donors that had together pledged 2 billion euros in support of the FC-G5S. However, Niger's President Issoufou has alleged that only 18 million euros of a total of 414 million euros pledged had been received, compromising its ability to organize and deploy its soldiers across the Sahel region.

In addition, FC-G5S struggles with other challenges that include training, communications technology, lack of availability of heavy equipment, and camp protection. Indeed, the FC-G5S needs support and sufficient training to prevent terrorists from spreading across the entire African continent. However, as stated by Burkina Faso Foreign affair Minister, Alpha Barry, the FC-G5S is in the phase of building strength and dealing with functional difficulties, while terrorists have mastered the fabrication and use of explosive devices.<sup>42</sup> Nowadays, terrorists are equipped with

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<sup>41</sup> UN Press Releases Security Council, 6981st Meeting, 2019.

<sup>42</sup> UN Press Releases Security Council, 6981<sup>st</sup> Meeting, 2019.

high technologies and utilize popular technologies to communicate, recruit and to achieve successful operation. Therefore, the FC-G5S would require sophisticated sensors and surveillance equipment to monitor and constrain Jihadist groups' position and movements.

### **c) French Efforts**

As Former French colonies, Africa's Sahel countries deal with major developmental challenges, a growing threat of terrorism as well as other organized crime. Since the beginning of the crisis in the region, France has been committed to support the Sahel states in their efforts to deter and fight against the threat of terrorism across the Sahel area.<sup>43</sup> Hence, France remains a key player in the counterterrorism mission in Mali and the Sahel alongside FC-G5S.

In 2012, Mali's national integrity and security was severely threatened by terrorist and radical movements. According to the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France, under the request of the Malian government, started in 2013 operation "Serval" that aimed to expel and diminish the advance of Islamic militants in Mali. After liberating Mali's northern cities, French military forces stayed in the Sahel region. The battle against extremist/terrorist groups is far from the finish line. As a consequence, armed groups along with the Islamist State in the Greater Sahara conducted sophisticated attacks across Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso borders.<sup>44</sup> In response to the concerning insecurity in the Sahel, the French government launched in 2014 operation "BARKHANE" against Islamist groups in Africa's Sahel region. This ongoing counterterrorism operation consists of 5,100 French troops along with the armies of the region to guarantee long-term security from Mali to Chad.

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<sup>43</sup> Sylvia Kauffman, "France's Challenge in Africa," The New York Times, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Ruth Maclean, "Crisis in the Sahel Becoming France's Forever War," The New York times, 2020

Since its involvement in the Sahel crisis, French soldiers have eliminated more than 600 Islamist militants during different military operations. However, French forces have also suffered significant casualties to include soldiers engaged in combat with Islamist militants. Despite ongoing French efforts, the region continues to struggle with violent attacks against civilians and security forces. Consequently, the number of Jihadist attacks have intensified, killing 71 soldiers on a Niger military base. Moreover, the rise of anti-French sentiment has grown among the local population and intellectuals, especially in Mali. After years of failed military efforts, citizens began to grow suspicious of France's intentions, as the former colonial ruler. At a January 2020 summit held in France, and in response to the growing suspicious, the French President Emmanuel Macron urged the G5 Sahel leaders, at the summit on the situation in the Sahel region to address whether they still needed French partnership in the fight against Islamist militant.<sup>45</sup> After the conference, also attended by the UN Secretary-General, France and the G5 Sahel leaders decided to reinforce their efforts and coordination in the fight against the rising threat of Islamist fundamentalism.

#### **d) U.S. Involvement**

The United States has been slowly expanding its military presence throughout the continent of Africa. After the 9/11 terror attack, the U.S. began to focus more on terrorism in Africa by deploying a contingent of American troops. Prior to this particular deployment, the U.S. military had already deployed a contingent of 1000 civilians from the Department of Defense to train and conduct exercises with local forces.<sup>46</sup> In the aftermath of France's intervention in Mali to free the northern part of Mali seized by Jihadists, the U.S. established a base and provided training and logistical assistance to local armies that included peacekeeping and counterterrorism missions in

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<sup>45</sup> Benjamin Fox, "French forces face military trap in Sahel region," Euroactiv.com, January 2020

<sup>46</sup> Eric Schmitt, "Terrorism Threat in West Africa Soars as U.S. Weighs Troop Cuts," New York Times, 2020

Mali. However, the presence of the U.S. military involvement in the Sahel region was unpopular until the 2017 deadly ambush of four U.S. army soldiers in Niger.

Preceding that incident, the American military had a light footprint across the region, counting on European and African partners to carry out most counterterrorism missions across the region. The United States maintains continuous efforts alongside Western and African governments to eradicate the extremist groups. To be specific, the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) along with its partners, works to counter threats and strengthen security forces and address crises in order to promote U.S. national interests and regional security as well as stability. General Wald Hauser, the head of U.S. Africa Command informed the AFRICOM support team in providing training and equipment to the Nigerien armed forces and assisting the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership. The Pentagon claimed that 800 U.S. troops are present on Nigerien soil but do not have a direct combat mission. They are training Nigerien forces to defend and conduct counterterrorism raids. The ambush in Niger killing some U.S. soldiers has brought attention to U.S. involvement, raising many questions about its real mission in the region. General Wald Hauser declared later that the soldiers were playing a back-up role for Nigerien forces on counterterrorism missions but did not get involved in direct combat.<sup>47</sup>

In 2018, the Pentagon announced plans to reduce the number of U.S. forces conducting counterterrorism operations in Africa.<sup>48</sup> In addition to the decision to pull out of Africa, the U.S. planned to discontinue military support for French forces fighting against Islamist militants or ISIS al-Qaeda-linked groups. Unfortunately, the measure comes as the region's security situation is getting worse with escalated deadly attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. On one side,

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<sup>47</sup> Lara Seligman, "Shadowy U.S. drone war in Africa set to expand," *Foreign Policy*, 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Eric Schmitt, "Terrorism Threat in West Africa Soars as U.S. Weighs Troop Cuts," *New York time*, 2020.

American withdrawal would weaken and undermine its European allies. On the other, the G5 leaders characterized a U.S. retreat as a risk that could trigger future terrorist attacks in the Sahel region. Some critics alleged that the U.S. interests in Africa's Sahel are peripheral, driving its minimal involvement in the region.

## Chapter V

### Condition of the People on the Ground

Africa's Sahel is dealing with many development challenges and serious security threats across the region. So far, the approach has been focused on security and mostly military engagement to fight and prevent the spread of violent extremism. However, it will require more than a military response to ensure and maintain future stability. It will require addressing the root causes of the security crisis within the Sahel region.<sup>49</sup>

Africa's Sahel lies to the South of the Sahara desert, which exposes the region to harsh climatic conditions. The Sahel region is extremely vulnerable to climate change by experiencing high temperatures, poor rainfalls, frequent droughts, failed crops, and soil or land degradation. Explicitly, countries like Mauritania, Chad, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso are all dealing with environmental issues that involve periodic droughts, deforestation, soil erosion as well as dry and semiarid climate conditions.<sup>50</sup> The continued degradation of soil and water scarcity have negative consequences on agricultural production, livestock and food security throughout the region. As a result, these conditions threaten the lives of millions of people and jeopardize the supply of animals. To be specific, the region greatly depends on agriculture and livestock for survival and the climate constraints impact significantly farmers as well as pastoralists, contributing to food insecurity. In countries like Burkina Faso and Chad, agriculture remains the main labor source as it makes up 79% of Niger's economy.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Christina Murphy, "Stability in the Sahel Region Will Require more than Just Counterterrorism," The Fund for Peace, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/)

<sup>51</sup> [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/)

In addition, water shortages constitute another challenge that raise major health concerns, including poor hygiene conditions, diseases, epidemics, lack of access to safe water and malnutrition.<sup>52</sup> Hence, water scarcity in rural areas contribute to mass displacement in order to find drinking water, to cultivate or provide for the livestock. Consequently a number of factors such as chronic poverty, climate risks, failed crops, lack of pasturages gave rise to tensions and violence across the region.<sup>53</sup> Also, food insecurity becomes a severe threat thousands of people from Mali and its neighboring countries, which all struggle with food deficits. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, millions of people in the Sahel are food insecure, suffering from severe food insecurity.<sup>54</sup> The ongoing food crisis and regional instability have led to mass displacements, fleeing the conflicts.

### **1- Vulnerability of the people**

Countries of the Sahel are more vulnerable to the threat of violent extremism because of some “push factors” that include ethnic conflict, unemployment, and lack of resources for the youth. Historically, the region has experienced civil wars and armed conflicts, specifically in Libya, in Burkina Faso and in Mali. The above countries share common challenges that increase the risk of violent extremism in the region. However, the security situation was deteriorated within the region due to rising ethnic violence among Tuaregs (nomadic pastoralists) and other religious tensions or conflict inter community between the Fulani and Mossi ethnic groups.<sup>55</sup> As a result, many villagers were killed in northern Mali. Later, ethnic violence and conflict spread across neighboring

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Muggah and Jose Luengo Cabrera, “The Sahel is engulfed by violence: Climate change, food insecurity and extremists are largely to blame,” The World economic Forum, 2019

<sup>53</sup> Robert Muggah and Jose Luengo Cabrera, “The Sahel is engulfed by violence: Climate change, food insecurity and extremists are largely to blame,” The World economic Forum, 2019.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.care.org/emergencies/sahel-hunger-crisis>

<sup>55</sup> Augustin Loada and Peter Romaniuk, “Preventing Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso: Toward National Resilience amid Regional Insecurity,” Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2014.

countries where thousands of civilians from Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad Niger, Mauritania and Nigeria were killed over land degradation, water shortages, and livelihoods' crisis between farmers and pastoralists. Therefore, most of the factors that include displaced people alongside climate change, violent groups and the prevalence of weapons triggered intra-intercommunal tensions and later regional conflict.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, Jihadists from al-Qaeda and ISIS have been taking advantage by exploiting rivalry and tensions between ethnic groups to conduct recruitment or fuel violence by encouraging inter-ethnic conflicts. Under these circumstances, people fled and left their homes affected by the conflict and displaced within their own countries or became refugees in other countries.<sup>57</sup> Vulnerable civilians can be likely or unlikely targeted or exposed to recruitment into extremist groups.

Furthermore, the Sahel is experiencing a rapid population growth and has one of the youngest demographics in Africa. However, its population is expected to double in the next twenty years, meaning that the number of people in the G5 countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) could greatly be extended in the next years.<sup>58</sup> This phenomenon could add to major factors that challenge future generations in terms of providing education and jobs for these additional youth. Beside demographic challenges, most countries in the Sahel are affected by a high unemployment rate and poor literacy. The unemployment rate in Chad is 2.60 in 2020, Burkina Faso turned around 6.40% in 2019, Mali around 7.9% in 2017, Niger 2.60% in 2016, and Mauritania 11.70% in 2016.<sup>59</sup> According to the World Bank data for 2016, Unemployment is higher for youth and women in all five Sahel countries where female unemployment rates are

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<sup>56</sup> UN Press Releases, "Deadlier Conflicts, Climate Change Threaten Cross-Border Herding in West Africa," Economic and Social Council, Peacebuilding Commission, 2019.

<sup>57</sup> [www.care.org/emergencies/sahel-hunger-crisis](http://www.care.org/emergencies/sahel-hunger-crisis)

<sup>58</sup> [ideas4development.org/en/population-growth-sahel-challenge-generation/](http://ideas4development.org/en/population-growth-sahel-challenge-generation/)

<sup>59</sup> CIA World Facts Bookary

higher and many are seeking for employment but unable to find jobs.<sup>60</sup> Youth unemployment is rising, leaving young people with limited opportunities, no sources of income and lack financial resources and marginalized. Insecurity associated with unemployment triggers participation in insurgencies or rebellions, which can influence people to join violent extremism or Jihadist groups. Also, the literacy rate of the different countries within the region remain very low. To be clear, The percentage of people who know how to read and write was 19.1% in Niger in 2015, Mali 35.5% in 2018, Burkina Faso 41.2% in 2018, Chad 22.3% in 2016, , and Mauritania with the highest literacy rate reached 53.5% in 2017. Still, there are more females who are illiterate than males within the five countries in the Sahel. As a pivotal skill, literacy represents a key measure of a population's level of education.<sup>61</sup> Overall, women and young people in the Sahel region have become more vulnerable to terrorist recruitment due to unemployment, poor literacy/education, social and political marginalization, which all constitute factors that support recruitment into violent extremist or terrorist groups.<sup>62</sup> Hence, the G5 Sahel states must create economic opportunities, improve young people's access to education, develop training and facilitate youth employment in order to inspire them to stand up for their communities and combat economic driven migration and of course violent extremism.<sup>63</sup> African governments, particularly the G5 states have to examine the development challenges and socioeconomic factors that attract recruits or drive people to commit terrorist acts. To tackle and prevent violent extremism, the G5 states along with their international partners must address poor education, lack of employment

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<sup>60</sup>assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c6ad4b340f0b61a25854a4e/455\_Drivers\_Challenges\_and\_Opportunities\_for\_Job\_Creation\_in\_the\_Sahel.pdf

<sup>61</sup> Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina (2020) - "Literacy". Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: 'https://ourworldindata.org/literacy' [Online Resource]

<sup>62</sup> Jessica Trisko Darden Tackling, "Terrorist' Exploitation of Youth," American Enterprise Institute, United Nations report, 2019

<sup>63</sup> Javana Dunnom, Rudolph Granier, Aboudou Berthe, "Democracy Speak, Supporting youth leaders to bring change in the Sahel," 2018

opportunities, promote youth involvement and economic development in order to improve populations' living to achieve the combat against violent extremism in the region.

## **2-Weak Governance throughout the Region**

There is no doubt that most Sahel states have failed to address the root causes of vulnerability to Islamic groups that mostly involve economic and political fragility which makes the region susceptible to longstanding crises and conflicts. Indeed, this issue is exacerbated by the limited government presence and a plethora of many “ungoverned spaces” in the Sahel and North Africa. This resulted in the flow of dangerous weapons and well-armed fighters into the Sahel.<sup>64</sup> To be more specific, the Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali along with weak governance and corruption led to inefficient counterterrorism and facilitated extremist groups to seize control of Northern Mali. In response to the situation in northern Mali, its neighboring countries intensified efforts to block violent extremists and other criminal networks.

In fact, several states that have practiced bad governance are making signs of progress. However, they need to improve governance by implementing democratic institutions, promoting popular participation for local communities and ethnic groups, boosting transparency, ensuring accountability, and combating corruption. This latter issue constitutes a real threat to all systems of government. If truth be told, corruption is a general problem for developed and developing countries. However in most African countries the problem of corruption is viewed as a way of life.<sup>65</sup> Despite, anti-corruption and commitment efforts from the leaders in Africa, countries still ranked or had a high score on the 2019 corruption perceptions index. A country score indicates its

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<sup>64</sup> Donald Y. Yamatho, “The growing crisis in Africa’s Sahel region,” US Department of State, Washington DC, 2013

<sup>65</sup> National Research Council, “Democratization in Africa: Africa views, Africa voices,” The National Academies press, Washington DC, 1992.

perceived level of public sector corruption on a rating scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (Highly clean) in the world. The corruption perception index recorded a score of 29/100 for Mali, a score of 40/100 for Burkina Faso, a score 32/100 for Niger, a score of 20/100 for Chad and a score of 28/100 for Mauritania.<sup>66</sup> The problems of corruption in African states are caused by weak institutions, bad governance, and lack of transparency as well as accountability, conflict and weak justice. These several factors likely increase corruption, which can impede a country's economic and development growth.

Moreover, the nature and quality of governance shape and determine the level of peace and stability in every country.<sup>67</sup> Historically, many African states dealt with multi-sourced conflicts or violence. Recently, Africa's Sahel region endured complications that involved the collapse of Libya in 2011, the gradual desertification, inter-communal tensions or ethnic conflicts, the spreading of arms and violent extremism, and the proliferation of local al-Qaeda and ISIS in the region.<sup>68</sup> The countries of the Sahel face tough choices to address and respond to the region's security challenges, opening the door to susceptible risks of corruption. Poor or bad governance cultivate more likely instability. Therefore, the countries of the Sahel should improve governance and strengthen their institutions in order to better respond to the chronic security, political and development challenges in the region.

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<sup>66</sup> [www.transparency.org/country/MRT](http://www.transparency.org/country/MRT)

<sup>67</sup> Chester A. Crocker, "African Governance: Challenges and Their Implications," Hoover Institution, 2019

<sup>68</sup> Chester A. Crocker, "African Governance: Challenges and Their Implications," Hoover Institution, 2019

### **3-The lack of rule of law**

A combination of factors has been ranked among the root causes that contributed to the Sahel's regional security crisis. These factors include but are not limited to poor governance, corruption, weak security institutions, discrimination, human rights abuses and lack of rule of law.<sup>69</sup> Most states in the Sahel are unable or do not have the capacity to control illicit drugs, illegal arms, human trafficking across their borders, fueling violence and instability in the region. The lack of rule of law within the Sahel region is confounded by the customary judicial system which suffers from corruption and politicization. As a result, it undermines the legitimacy, authority and trust in state courts. To be more specific, it was reported by the U.S. embassy in Bamako, Mali, that its judicial system was highly corrupt, accepting dirty money as a manner to influence the outcome of a case. It has been observed that the judicial system of most countries in the Sahel are not independent along with the inappropriate behaviors of some government's officials, which use public office for private gain.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, the culture of impunity has led to human rights abuses in the region. In Burkina Faso, the security forces conducted many executions and mass detentions. According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, the majority of the security force abuses were ethnic Fulani. These types of human rights violations or ethnic discrimination could result in mass frustrations. Consequently, as the report stated, this abuse encouraged most members of the Fulani community in the region to join extremist groups. The impunity of crimes that include human rights violations,

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<sup>69</sup> Mireille Affa-Mindzie, "Strengthening the Rule of Law and Human Rights in the Sahel" Stability Journal.org, 2013

<sup>70</sup> Erwin van Veen Diana Goff Thibaut Van Damme, "Beyond dichotomy: recognizing and reconciling legal pluralism in Mali," CRU Report, 2015.

rape, summary executions and torture negatively impact on the lives of civilians or local communities.<sup>71</sup>

The growing tensions and insecurity in the region is accentuated by corruption, impunity and the lack of rule of law and justice. Otherwise, the absence or ineffective response to crime and conflict that involve cattle theft, banditry, illegal detention, attacks on public places as well as other injustices committed by state agents worsen state legitimacy. Worst case scenario, it could raise violent extremism or breed ground for jihadist and organized crime groups.<sup>72</sup> In sum, it is critical to empower the rule of law and reform the justice system. In addition, implementing potential reform frameworks would lead to protecting human rights, the respect of law, and strengthening governance. In addition, a successful response to the Sahel crisis requires the Sahel regional governments to address widespread issues that contribute to tensions or conflicts. A strong rule of law demands an independent justice system, fair and transparent prosecution and ensures respect for human rights. Most importantly, the alleged perpetrators must be held accountable for the crimes committed in order to stop violence and restore peace in the region.

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<sup>71</sup> Human Rights Watch/World-Report/2020/country/ Mali

<sup>72</sup> The Sahel IDLO, <https://www.idlo.int/where-we-work/sub-saharan-africa/sahel>

## Chapter VI

### The Role and Actions of the UN Regarding the Sahel Crisis

According to the UN, terrorism refers to “criminal acts directed against a state and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons.”<sup>73</sup> Terrorism has become a global catastrophe to international peace and security. Specifically, terrorist organizations constitute a serious threat to peace, security and stability in the Sahel region. However, the United Nations strongly condemns the activities of terrorist organizations that includes MUJAO, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al Mourabitoune, Ansar Eddine, and associated groups such as Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, Ansaroul Islam and Islamic State in Greater Sahara and their affiliates such as the Front de Liberation du Macina (FLM), which continue to operate in Mali and constitute a threat to peace and security in the region and beyond.<sup>74</sup>

Once a French colony and a cultural hub of West Africa, Mali was overrun in January 2012 by a coalition of Tuareg and terrorist groups moving south towards the capital Bamako. After unsuccessful joint efforts by the African leaders of the Sahel region and France to resolve the conflict, the UN Security Council (UNSC) authorized the UN to deploy in July 2013 the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in order to help stabilize Mali and assist the country’s return to constitutional order.<sup>75</sup> MINUSMA was established by the UNSC resolution 2100 of 25 April 2013 to support the political process and help stabilize Mali. The Mission would operate under robust rules of engagement with a mandate to use all necessary means to address threats to the implementation of its mandate, which would include protection of

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<sup>73</sup> Article 1.1 of the League of Nations 1937 Convention for the Prevention and punishment of Terrorism.

<sup>74</sup> Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council Files-20th Supplement (2016-2017)

<sup>75</sup> [minusma.unmissions.org/en](http://minusma.unmissions.org/en)

civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, protection of United Nations personnel from residual threats, cooperation with the Malian defense and security forces.<sup>76</sup> In addition, the mission eases the political reconciliation process, monitors the implementation of ceasefire agreements, assists in the integration of displaced persons, delivers humanitarian assistance and works alongside Malian authorities to protect and promote human rights.<sup>77</sup>

In response to this global threat, all Member States of the United Nations agreed on a global strategy in 2006 to coordinate their counter-terrorism efforts. To be clear, UN Member States adopted by consensus the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. This strategic approach intends to enhance national, regional and international efforts to counter terrorism. In addition to sending a clear message that terrorism is unacceptable in all its forms and manifestations, the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was mandated Member States to take individually and collectively significant steps to prevent and combat terrorism.<sup>78</sup>

As a result, UNSC welcomed the decision of the States of the Sahel and Sahara to set up the FC-G5S on 19 December 2014. Under resolution 2359 (2017), the UNSC encouraged the G5 Sahel to address the impact of terrorism, transnational organized crime, and endorse the deployment of the FC-G5S throughout the territories of its contributing countries, with up to 5,000 military and police personnel, with a view to restoring peace and security in the Sahel region.<sup>79</sup>

It also welcomed the efforts of the French forces to support these operations and urged MINUSMA, the French forces along with the FC-G5S to ensure adequate coordination and

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<sup>76</sup><https://betterworldcampaign.org/u-n-peacekeeping/mali-minusma/>

<sup>77</sup> <https://Minusma.unmissions.org/en/history>

<sup>78</sup> United Nations Office of Counterterrorism- [www.un.org/counterterrorism/](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/)

<sup>79</sup> UN Resolution 2359 (2017) peace and security in Africa

exchange of information, through relevant mechanisms, of their operations. Nonetheless, the UNSC Resolution recalled that the G5 Sahel States have the responsibility to provide the FC-G5S with adequate resources and urged the G5 Sahel States to continue efforts towards the sustainable, viable and effective operationalization of the FC-G5S.<sup>80</sup> Later, on June 2017, the UN General Assembly established through the resolution 71/291 the creation of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) to assist Member States in implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Overall, the UN has classified the Sahel region as a top priority for peacebuilding efforts. The goal of the UN Support Plan for the Sahel is to foster human security, resilience to shocks and threats in the Sahel by strengthening local, national and regional authorities, and actors' capacities to enhance governance, ensure social service delivery and basic rights, restore and improve security, stability and resilience in cross- border regions.<sup>81</sup>

Despite regional and international response efforts, terrorism continues to pose a serious security threat across Africa's Sahel region. Experts warned about terrorist groups emerging strength regardless of special operations led by France, the U.S. and the UN. Unanimously, the UN adopted resolution 2462 (2019) under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter that calls upon UN Member States to combat and criminalize the financing of terrorists and their activities, reaffirms principles contained in UNSCR 1373 (2001) — adopted in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States. It also demands all Members States to ensure that their counter-terrorism measures are in compliance with their obligations under international law.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> UN Resolution 2359 (2017) Peace and security in Africa

<sup>81</sup> UN Support Plan for the Sahel - the United Nations- [www.un.org](http://www.un.org) › sites › [www.un.org.africarenewal](http://www.un.org.africarenewal) › files

<sup>82</sup> UN Press Releases Security Council 8496<sup>th</sup> Meeting (2019)

Unfortunately, the security situation in the Sahel region of Africa is deteriorating with rising terror attacks claimed by Islamist militants against civilians and military targets have particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas, stated during the biannual presentation the Secretary-General's latest report on the UNOWAS Office, that the region has experienced a "devastating" surge in terrorist attacks against military and civilian targets, with alarming humanitarian consequences.<sup>83</sup> According to the head of UNOWAS, protecting civilians in the region requires a fully integrated response led by the concerned governments.<sup>84</sup> In the subsequent debate, the UNSC expressed deep concerns about the spread of terrorism, organized crime, intensified intercommunal violence in Burkina Faso and central Mali, and humanitarian conditions in the region. Council members roundly condemned attacks against civilians, security and defenses forces, as well as peacekeepers, stressing that intercommunal and sectarian violence is jeopardizing regional growth, and requires development-focused political and security approaches to tackle poverty, unemployment and other underlying causes of instability.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> UN Press Releases Security Council 8698<sup>th</sup> Meeting (2020)

<sup>84</sup> UN Press Releases Security Council 8720<sup>th</sup> Meeting (2020)

<sup>85</sup> UN Press Releases Security Council 8720<sup>th</sup> Meeting (2020)

## Chapter VII

### Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Africa's Sahel region faces multiple and evolving political, economic, security and humanitarian challenges. The Sahel remains vulnerable due to unpredictable weather patterns, severe droughts, reduced rainfalls and land degradation that threaten the livelihoods of highly vulnerable communities. Consequently, climate-related shocks contribute to persistent food insecurity across the region. In addition, the Sahel has a significant population close to 135 million inhabitants which continue to grow beyond the region's capacity. Truly, Africa's Sahel confronts major challenges that include but are not limited to poverty, hunger, health and environment issues, malnutrition, poor education, unemployment, corruption, weak governance as well as water scarcity, lack of rule of law and serious security threats. The combination of these factors has greatly contributed to the worsening security situation, which could consequently feed conflict and violent extremism in the region. In fact, historical intra- and intercommunal tensions between pastoralists, semi-pastoralists, and sedentary populations involving armed violence is worsened by militant Islamist groups.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, the extremist groups take advantage of the ethnic rivalries, economic conditions and the vulnerability of the Sahel countries to influence local communities and perform recruitment among vulnerable populations in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso and so on.<sup>87</sup> Undoubtedly, militant Islamist groups trigger social conflict and exploit intercommunal violence in order to establish their own governance space and present themselves as social regulators capable of providing

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<sup>86</sup> Laurence-Aïda Ammour, "How Violent Extremist Groups Exploit Intercommunal Conflicts in the Sahel," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2020

<sup>87</sup> Laurence-Aïda Ammour, "How Violent Extremist Groups Exploit Intercommunal Conflicts in the Sahel," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2020

security in the region.<sup>88</sup> However, the prevailing insecurity has exposed the Sahel countries, which were already struggling with structural fragility due to their weak states. Indeed, the Sahel states have failed to address the root causes that mostly involve economic and political fragility which makes the region more susceptible to longstanding crises and conflicts.<sup>89</sup> Hence, this security situation is also aggravated by the limited government presence and a plethora of many “ungoverned spaces” in the Sahel and North Africa. As the terrorist networks increase, the Sahel continues to struggle with severe security threats and experience deadly terrorist attacks. Sadly, the diffusion of the threat has become contagious and threatened the Sahel and their neighboring countries.

To respond to these security concerns, regional leaders raised concern over the deteriorating security situation across the Sahel region. Therefore, they set up the G5 Sahel joint force (FC-G5S), a joint project undertaken by the five countries of the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad) to stabilize the region. The force was welcomed and backed by the UNSC, which urged the FC-G5S, the French forces along with MINUSMA to enhance cooperation, ensure adequate coordination and exchange information in order to achieve effective operationalization. According to the UNSC resolution 2359 (2017), the G5 Sahel States have the responsibility to provide the FC-G5S with adequate resources. The FC-G5S for the Sahel accomplished significant steps and major efforts in countering terrorism and other organized crime across the region. However, their counter-terrorism efforts have been insufficient and ineffective. So far, the efforts of the FC-G5S to counter the activities of terrorist groups and other organized criminal groups remain unsuccessful due to many problems that involve inadequate coordination and lack of

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<sup>88</sup> Laurence-Aïda Ammour, “How Violent Extremist Groups Exploit Intercommunal Conflicts in the Sahel,” Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2020

<sup>89</sup> Judd Devermont, “Politics at the Heart of the Crisis in the Sahel,” The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019

availability of resources. The FC-G5S lack of appropriate resources along with weak coordination between the different forces present in the region led to ineffective operationalization. Following my hypothesis, the use of force is necessary but not enough in addressing this threat, meaning that taking into consideration and addressing the root causes of the Sahel crisis. In other words, military as well as humanitarian efforts will fail unless there are better actions on climate risks, sustained development, improved governance and the conditions of the people on the ground. Countries of the Sahel possess limited capacities to respond to extremist/terrorist threat and deal with the multiple and complex challenges alone. Therefore, it would require strong national leadership together with effective international support to better address and tackle the regional crisis. In addition, the international community along with regional leaders need to provide the FC-G5S with sufficient funds and adequate resources necessary to defeat terrorist organizations. Most importantly, Africa's Sahel needs national governments along with the UN and the Western powers to find greater solutions to poverty, demographic pressures, governance failures and environmental worries intensified by climate change. So, addressing development, security challenges and root causes must be the primary resolution in response to the Sahel crisis. These challenges urgently need to be resolved to avoid or weaken the capacity of militant Islamist groups to recruit vulnerable populations.

It is also necessary to examine the number of factors that affect or shape the behavior of marginalized people who are confronted with violent extremism. Clearly, social marginalization constitutes a critical factor that could influence people's decision to join violent extremist or terrorist groups.<sup>90</sup> The Sahel crisis will definitely need more than a military solution. It should include peacebuilding initiatives, outreach and inclusion of local communities, and better efforts

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<sup>90</sup> Kaley Fulton and Benjamin P. Nickels, "Africa's Pastoralists: A New Battleground for Terrorism, 2017

to engage dialogue with militant leaders across the region. An investment in peace and stability will be required to maintain stability in Mali and its neighboring countries because instability is contagious. It is in the interest of the global community to unanimously address the Sahel security crisis since it threatens international peace and security. Terrorism has become a phenomenon that necessitates universal cooperation to combat this serious threat.

### Policy Recommendations

These are some proposals that would have a significant impact on the Sahel crisis:

- Creating long-term solutions needed to address climate, social, economic, environmental as well as political conditions to tackle the challenges faced by the Sahel vulnerable populations
- Building human capital by investing in education and health (promoting equal access)
- Raising the age of marriage to allow the girls and young women to go to school and participate in their countries' development
- Establishing framework policies that help create better skilled jobs for the youth
- Creating more jobs in order to create earnings and to boost economic growth
- Promoting good governance that ensures equity, transparency, development benefits that will improve quality of life
- Extending social services to rural families
- Strengthening rule of law and institutions
- Building up citizens' trust in justice

- Ending abuses and growing impunity for parties responsible for violence against civilians, killing or other crimes that involve pro-government groups or security forces, jihadist groups, bandits, and militias
- Deepening intercommunal dialogue and engaging in more peacebuilding efforts to avoid intra-intercommunal conflicts and prevent further worsening security situation
- Committing to fight corruption to free Africa from corruption
- Including women/youth in political participation in the Sahel region
- Ensuring willingness to address the violence
- Promoting Human Rights by protecting people any against abuses

These policy proposals are complex and require significant resources, but countering terrorism will not be fully effective without addressing the needs of the people of the Sahel.

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