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**The Trajectory of Transnational Security in West Africa:  
Recalibrating the Elements of Regional Integration for Strategic  
Policy Options in the Sahel Region**

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**Abstract**

The instability and crises in West Africa and the Sahel have changed the security landscape in the region. There has never been a more urgent need for a more cooperative regional environment due to the increasing mobility of conflicts. Methodologically, qualitative and content analysis was employed. Findings revealed that the Sahel region as a whole is characterized by the challenges of establishing governmental authority and promoting development across large and sparsely populated areas in poor institutional environments. The study also revealed that the Sahel's illegal trade in commodities and people has generally suffered as a result of the violence, and many issues related to human security are transnational in nature. As a result, Mauritania's president, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, inspired the G5S to forge unity among governments with longstanding rivalries in order to combat the insecurity that has been perceived as a regional issue in 2014, while serving as president of the African Union (AU). The study concludes that, the social, ethnic, and religious heterogeneity of the region, the plurality of threats, and the permeability of territories that necessitate cross-border synergies make it exceedingly difficult to pursue a "comprehensive" approach or "integrated" response to terrorism in the Sahel, for previous approaches to the Sahel were likewise beset by a lack of cooperation in the formulation and application of response plans. There is a need for nations in the region to have the power to address the risks to peace and security, but first, they must all get over a number of internal challenges. Each nation has a stake in enhancing stability.

**Keywords:** Transnational Security; West Africa, Regional Integration, Sahel region, Strategic Policy.

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## Introduction

States have historically been unable or unwilling to offer security to their citizens; and Max Weber's idea of the state having a monopoly on legal means of coercive violence has never existed in many African situations. "Governance" is a better term to describe the dynamics of security and insecurity on the African continent than "government." Because the security sector encompasses both actors above and below the state, it is important to have a comprehensive grasp of it. As the final beneficiary of a reform or transformation process, it permits the engagement of non-state actors, especially civil society, and the mobilization of all three branches of government the legislative, executive, and judicial. The three inextricably linked pillars of transformation sound management and accountability, operational effectiveness and professionalism, and democratic control of the security sector—are all reinforced by these players (Kheira and Anab, 2021; Arieff, 2019). It is possible to bring up the numerous previous incidents of cosmetic changes in African security sectors, where soldiers who have just received new equipment return and terrorize civilian populations. On the other hand, "transformation" refers to a comprehensive shift and a government commitment to methodically coordinating security organization operations with democratic governance ideals. In parts of Africa, where elites have continuously duplicated harmful practices and there has been a chronic lack of a culture of good governance, compelling arguments have been made for the importance of a transformative SSR agenda. Thus, as part of Africa's democratic transition process, African intellectuals and activists have pushed for security sector transformation rather than reform (LIERL, 2022; Maclean, 2022).

A procedure of this kind needs to aim for two different sets of improvements. Improving the frequently tense relationships between the government, civic society, and the security establishment is one goal. The other aims to completely restructure security institutions in terms of their institutional cultures, relationships with civil authority, and organizational structures. Africa's plan for reforming the security sector was not prepackaged. The SSR discussion has progressed through three main phases since the late 1990s. Initially, the idea was just a reflection of Africa's Western allies' desire to see significant defense budget cuts made in favor of more spending on social programs like health and education and economic growth. Development partners have established a maximum of no more than 4% of the national budget on defense in an effort to guarantee this. Another feature of this

period was the lack of focus on placing these reforms inside a larger framework of democratic government (Moe, 2021; Murphy, 2020).

In terms of its political and social growth, West Africa is at a turning point. It has a lot of potential for growth and peace because of its natural resources, advantageous location, sizable market, and other attributes, but it also faces a lot of difficulties that make its post-conflict societies and frail institutions susceptible to violent conflict, economic instability, and political unrest. As seen by the start and aftermath of civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and Côte d'Ivoire, the Tuareg uprisings in Niger and Mali, and the insurgency in Nigeria's Niger Delta, one such threat is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) throughout the sub-region. The sub-region still faces significant intra-regional security challenges despite having one of Africa's most sophisticated peace and security architectures (Muhammed, Arshad and Humayra, 2022). Of particular concern are the links between the spread of SALW, violent conflict, and transnational criminal networks operating in the region and West African peace, security, and development. These networks are well-established in some West African nations, which are thought to be focal points for international criminal networks involved in illicit operations like smuggling, piracy, illegal mineral extraction, drug and people trafficking, and the spread of weapons. In some of the sub-region's countries, there are also accounts of criminals successfully breaking into the highest levels of border security and law enforcement. According to Amnesty International (2021), the infiltration is more common in nations with weak institutions and little ability to advance the rule of law. These cross-border networks can operate with impunity and thwart law enforcement initiatives thanks to their ties to public figures.

To promote collaboration and improved coordination amongst those responsible for regional security, the African Union (AU) introduced two initiatives in the region: the Nouakchott Process in 2013 and the AU Strategy for the Sahel Region in 2014. The goal of the AU Strategy for the Sahel is to support the region's advancement in development, security, and governance. In order to meet the complexity of the Sahelian crisis, this multifaceted approach is acknowledged in 15 additional Sahelian initiatives that have been put out by regional and international actors who are trying to lessen the issue. The headquarters of the AU's Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHHEL) has been created in Bamako, along with the appointment of a special representative for the region. However, these measures have shown very modest outcomes. The African

Union and its African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) are simply unable to stop the increasing violence and social unrest in the Sahel, despite their desire to offer a long-term structural approach for addressing peace and security challenges on the continent. 38. The Nouakchott Process aimed to foster collaboration and exchange across Sahelian security players, but the initial sense of camaraderie has mainly dissipated, and its most recent ministerial conference was held in 2015.

Due to a lack of a defined division of labor among stakeholders and insufficient funding and manpower assigned to those in charge of its implementation, the 2014 Sahel strategy's implementation has met a similar end (Institute for Security Studies, 6/18). The African Union has included a wide range of nations, such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan, in its strategy, which has taken climate and environmental concerns into account. The AU extended its engagement with Algeria, Libya, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, and Senegal as the crisis' arc grew. Resolving conflicts in the Sahel required a more all-encompassing strategy that involved involving the main Maghreb players. However, as the initiative's scope was expanded, more objectives and aspirations emerged, causing it to lose focus. This made it more difficult to respond quickly to a crisis that was getting worse (Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 2019). Despite the AU's apparent coherence, there isn't enough political will or funding to support a mechanism that can deal with the underlying causes of regional strife. To handle the Sahelian problem more effectively, a more focused and targeted effort is required in the five most vulnerable countries of the region to address these issues (Baldaro, 2021).

The crisis in Darfur and the rest of the Sahel area is receiving more attention as a result of news organizations putting Africa on the front page. The governments acknowledge the significance of the continent in terms of geopolitics and strategy, given its abundance of natural riches and potential as a haven for terrorists. However, Africa still retains its ambiguity despite a great deal of attention and effort. The Sahel, which means "shore" in Arabic, is the region where the Sahara Desert finishes in the south. Over 4,300 miles long and ranging in width from 185 to 700 miles, the Sahel region stretches from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean (Brotten, 2021).

The Sahara Desert includes the northern regions of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad. In the Sahel, Black Muslims have blended Islamic teachings with pre-

Islamic customs and behaviors, a process known as the "Africanization" of Islam. Compared to North Africa and the Middle East, Islam is practiced here in a more moderate manner. The growth of criminal networks in the Saharo-Sahelian region has fueled corruption and seeped into the formal sector, despite the fact that it is frequently informal. Since the early 2000s, the region has developed into a significant hub for the worldwide smuggling of Latin American cocaine and other drugs, weapons, cigarettes, and people due to the state's absence. The most obvious way that criminal networks have raised money is through kidnapping foreigners. The landscape of regional security has changed as a result of crises and unrest in the Sahel and West Africa. Issues that were formerly distinct and easier to handle are becoming more entwined and prominent (Pye, 2021; Powell, 2021).

This study aims to demonstrate the security void that has been created in the societies of the Sahel region and Africa as a whole, and how security agencies have attempted to fill this vacuum from a practical standpoint. In order to do this, this might pique the government's interest in offering sufficient police services to both urban and rural areas, or it might alter and support security agencies in order to enhance security measures. As a result, it will inform stakeholders who are concerned about regional security in Africa about how to evaluate its prospects and difficulties and will offer strategies for handling the continent's growing insecurity.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Sahel is one of the poorest regions of the world. It faces simultaneously the challenges of extreme poverty, the effects of climate change, frequent food crises, rapid population growth, fragile governance, corruption, unresolved internal tensions, the risk of violent extremism and radicalization, illicit trafficking and terrorist-linked security threats. The states of the region have to face these challenges directly. The three core Sahelian states, and the focus of this Strategy, are Mauritania, Mali and Niger, though the geographical conditions – and therefore challenges – also affect parts of Burkina Faso and Chad. Many of the challenges impact on neighbouring countries, including Algeria, Libya, Morocco and even Nigeria, whose engagement is necessary to help resolve them. The current political developments in the Maghreb have consequences for the situation in the Sahel, taking into account the close relations between the countries of the two regions, a significant presence of citizens of Sahel countries in the Maghreb and the risks that arise from the proliferation of arms in the region. The problems facing the Sahel

not only affect the local populations but increasingly impact directly on the interests of European citizens (UNHCR, 2022).

In few areas is the inter-dependence of security and development more clearly. The fragility of governments impacts on the stability of the region and the ability to combat both poverty and security threats, which are on the rise. Poverty creates inherent instability that can impact on uncontrolled migratory flows. The security threat from terrorist activity by Al-Qaida in the Maghreb (AQIM), which has found a sanctuary in Northern Mali, is focused on Western targets and has evolved from taking money to taking life, discouraging investment in the region. AQIM resources and operational capacities are significant and growing. Deteriorating security conditions pose a challenge to development cooperation and restrict the delivery of humanitarian assistance and development aid, which in turn exacerbates the vulnerability of the region and its population.

The EU's development policy in the Sahel, drawn up in partnership with the countries concerned, is geared towards tackling the root causes of the extreme poverty and towards creating the grass-root conditions for economic opportunity and human development to flourish. But it will be hard for this policy to achieve a high impact unless security challenges are also tackled. The problems in the Sahel are cross-border and closely intertwined. Only a regional, integrated and holistic strategy will enable us to make progress on any of the specific problems. A reinforced security and law enforcement capacity must go hand-in-hand with more robust public institutions and more accountable governments, capable of providing basic development services to the populations and of appeasing internal tensions. Development processes, promotion of good governance and improvement of the security situation need to be carried out in appropriate sequence and in a coordinated manner in order to create sustainable stability in the region. This Strategy therefore proposes a framework for the coordination of the EU's current and future engagement in the region with the common objective of reinforcing security and development, thereby strengthening also the EU's own security. This study therefore aimed at investigating the prospects and challenges of regional security in Africa. A study of the Sahel region.

### **Historical Background of the Sahel Region**

The structural logic of conflicts in Africa were either a part of the bipolar conflict or were "solved" by interventions from strong neighbors, superpowers, or former colonial powers. The majority of hostilities on the African continent, as

demonstrated by instances like those in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and more recently, Sudan and Chad, spread into neighboring nations or entice regional actors into what is frequently better defined as regional war-zones rather than merely "domestic conflicts." This tendency ultimately results in a far larger role for impacted neighboring countries, particularly regional institutions, to act, mediate, and intervene on a regional level. One of the primary driving forces behind the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) transformation into the African Union (AU) was the leaders' stated intention to "tackle African conflicts through African solutions." The international world, especially the Western countries, has likewise strongly backed this idea. Numerous other prominent African regional organizations, such as ECOWAS, IGAD, and SADC, have also established unique strategies for maintaining peace and security (Thompson, 2022; Arieff, 2019; Maclean, 2022).

In order to safeguard Africa's democracy, human rights, and sustainable economy, the AU was established in 2002. This was done, among other things, by establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) and ending intra-African strife. The OAU, which required rejuvenation, was replaced by the AU. Since its establishment in 1963, the OAU has served as the principal platform for discussing African unification and collaboration. All 53 sovereign states in Africa have joined, with the exception of Morocco, which withdrew in the middle of the 1980s as a result of the accession of Western Sahara. The African Union (AU) is driven by a set of fourteen goals intended to improve political cooperation and economic integration. These goals include fostering greater unity and solidarity among African nations and people, promoting democratic values and good governance, safeguarding human rights, and coordinating and harmonizing among regional economic communities (RECs) (African Center for Strategic Studies, 2022).

The AU shall operate in accordance with some essential principles, the fulfillment of which will require adherence to these goals. These principles include the following: allowing Africans to participate in Union activities; encouraging self-reliance within Union frameworks; advancing social justice and gender equality; upholding the sanctity of human life; forbidding the use or threat of force; establishing a shared defense policy; and denouncing and rejecting unconstitutional changes of government. The AU continues to uphold the ideals of Pan-Africanism as well as many of the broad guidelines and initiatives created by the OAU. While the AU is based on the EU, the OAU may be thought of as a regional version of the UN. The African Union (AU) is home to the Pan-African Parliament, which was

established in South Africa in 2004, as well as the Assembly of Heads of State and the Council of Ministers. The African Commission is led by the President of the Commission. It also envisions a number of financial organizations, including a central bank, monetary fund, and investment bank, as well as a Court of Justice to decide cases involving violations of human rights. In terms of economic integration and development, the AU is based on two primary mechanisms:

(i) The Abuja Treaty (1991), which calls for the AEC to be gradually established using the RECs as building blocks.

(ii) NEPAD. As previously mentioned, the AU and the former OAU have quite different approaches to economic integration and "development thinking." The prevailing opinion inside the OAU from the 1960s until far into the 1990s was that Africa suffered from its reliance on the North and former colonial powers.

The AU has the authority to order peacekeeping efforts, deploy troops, and monitor and intervene in disputes. By 2010, it intends to establish the African Standby Force, a stand-by rapid-reaction force. As a result, it is believed that the AU will be far more useful in responding to so-called "new wars," such as civil wars and complicated humanitarian crises that emerge in the wake of the Cold War and in the context of globalization. Nonetheless, there are two core issues with these advancements that suggest more involvement outside of Africa. One is the deficiency of resources African leaders are willing to allocate to cooperative security endeavors. The unsatisfactory relationship with the UN is the other. As seen by the Darfur crisis in Sudan, most African attempts involving security affairs are characterized by mistrust and hesitancy, despite the current catchphrase being "African solutions for African problems." The AU has some background in fostering and enforcing peace. However, the group that is frequently pressured by the international community focuses mostly on military conflict resolution through peacekeeping and peace enforcement, having already carried out missions in Burundi, Somalia, Sudan/Darfur, and Comoros. Typically, military actions are used to help break cease-fires between government and rebel groups or to oversee, inspect, monitor, and verify their implementation (The World bank, 2021; Relief Web, 2021).

In order to further solidify the peace process in Burundi, the mission in the country from April 2003 to May 2004 was to oversee, observe, monitor, and verify the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement, which was agreed in August 2000. The AU (ONUB) handed over control of the peacekeeping missions to the UN in



2004. In Darfur or Sudan, the African Union assisted in mediating a cease-fire between the Sudanese government and rebel organizations (AMIS). Due in large part to the economic rationale of escaping the limitation of tiny and fragmented economies operating in isolation, African nations have adopted regional security as a crucial element of their development strategy. The goal of strengthening economic, social, and political cooperation and integration in Africa has been pursued by a number of pan-African groups over time (Moe, 2021, Murphy, 2020). Nearly every African nation has adopted regionalism since the continent's independence. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was established in 1963 as a result of the larger goal of continental integration, which included a strong commitment to regionalism. The push for Pan-African political and economic unification has been greatly bolstered by the OAU's recent rebranding as the AU. The question of how the AU, regional and sub-regional initiatives, and the new continental framework may reinforce each other arises, though (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2022). Aside from the regional projects inside Africa, there have also been talks and suggestions for North-South integration agreements between developed nations or regions and Africa. These include the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that the European Union (EU) and four groups of African nations are currently negotiating. Nearly all African nations applied for or were accepted as members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) at the international level.

### **Armed conflict in the Sahel**

Ongoing clashes between armed forces and armed groups in the Sahel have forced millions of civilians to flee their homes in various countries within the Sahel region (UNHCR, 2022). Many of those who flee are farmers who can no longer till their land, thereby exacerbating an already existing food instability. As will be seen below, each conflict situation in the Sahel region is unique, with its own complex history and diversity in actors. However, even with such complex histories, international humanitarian law (IHL) must be respected. International humanitarian law is not merely a slogan, it is a responsibility.

Burkina Faso currently finds itself in a devastating state due to armed conflicts and other situations of violence, with various causes to the different conflicts. There was growing instability since the 2014 Uprising and subsequently from 2016 on, there were ongoing attacks against the Burkinabe military forces and civilians by extremist groups. These groups have had a strong presence in

Burkina Faso and neighbouring Mali. These various extremist groups have also had conflicts with each other due to the ideological differences of the groups they have pledged their allegiance to (i.e. Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State). Since 2015, over 2000 people have been killed and 1.5 million displaced due to violence attributed to extremist groups in Burkina Faso. Additionally, communal violence is prevalent in Burkina Faso, "which threaten[s] to destroy all hope of cohabitation between the communities" (ICRC, 2021).

Moreover, the weak presence of State institutions outside the capital of Ouagadougou and the distrust the population has in them has led to the proliferation of many self-defence groups in areas threatened by extremist armed groups and other criminal groups. These groups have themselves been parties to several deadly ethnic or communal conflicts. Although considered legitimate at their formation, many have questioned their activities in respect of which it has been argued they violate the human rights of the people in the region (Amnesty International, 2021).

Neighbouring Mali has been in a continuous armed conflict since 2012. With various peace agreements between the parties to the armed conflict failing to reach a decisive end to the conflict, it is estimated from May 2020 to June 2021, over 2000 people have been killed in the ongoing armed clashes in Mali (Kheira and Anab, 2021). The underlying causes of the conflict go back decades and are highly intricate. The lack of trust among various ethnic groups, horizontal inequalities among the people, and environmental concerns, added to the concentration of power in the hands of the few, are among the issues that have been festering for decades and continue to play out until this day.

The post-colonial Mali of the 1960s saw rebellions and uprisings from the ethnic groups in the North against the government in Bamako. Economic disparities and other inequalities in the North have led to Northerners distrusting the Central government and supporting the communal defence groups and armed groups in their regions. This led to what has been known as the "Tuareg Rebellions" with stiff resistance from the government. Although various peace agreements were signed in the past decades, none have quelled the armed conflicts involving the have pledged their allegiance to (i.e. Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State). Since 2015, over 2000 people have been killed and 1.5 million displaced due to violence attributed to extremist groups in Burkina Faso. Additionally, communal

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These conflicts were marred with international involvement of the French forces, the US military and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). By the end of 2021, there were over

350,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over 50,000 Malian refugees (UNHCR, 2021). Niger, with shared borders with both Burkina Faso and Mali, has faced the catastrophic consequences of armed clashes among State forces, armed groups and extremist groups over the last decade. Armed violence within the country and the spillover effects from the conflicts in neighbouring Burkina Faso and Mali on one side and Libya on the other side have contributed to the instability and increasing security concerns in Niger. In the first half of 2021 alone, over 540 conflict related civilian casualties were reported in Niger (Amnesty International, 2021). The armed conflict has had a devastating impact on children in Niger: of the 3.8 million people in need of humanitarian aid in Niger, 2.1 million are children and 1.6 million children suffer from malnutrition. (UNICEF, 2021). More than eighty children between the ages of 15 and 17 years living in towns on the Niger–Burkina Faso border have reportedly been recruited as child soldiers (Amnesty International, 2021). Over sixty children were killed in conflict-related violence in Niger in 2021 alone

Chad has also witnessed its fair share of violence and intercommunal tensions. The situation in this Sahelian country involves a complex, but devastating, political history. Armed conflicts and situations of violence due to politics, elections in particular, and land use between indigenous and nonindigenous people because of resettlement have been recorded in the past few decades (IPSS, 2021). In the Lac Province of Chad, which is in the Lake Chad Basin, the insecurity due to armed conflicts has had catastrophic humanitarian consequences. In 2021 alone, over 60% of the population of the province (more than 406,500 people) were internally displaced due to prevailing armed conflicts in the province (UNOCHA, 2021). In the same year over 1.8 million Chadians were affected by severe food insecurity. In addition, the spillover conflicts from other non-Sahelian neighbouring countries such as Libya and Central Africa Republic, and “terrorist” groups in other parts of the Sahel have also led to civilian casualties and displacement. Chad has been at the centre of violent operations of extremist groups, causing hundreds of civilian casualties, including in the capital N’jamena.

In 2021, there have been over 300 casualties in these conflicts in Chad (Relief Web, 2021). The country’s political crisis and power struggles have also led to several incidents involving political violence during and after elections. The country’s socio-economic problems – 42% of the population lives under the poverty line (World Bank, 2021) have also caused indignation toward the

government. This indignation, in turn, has added fuel to recruitment efforts by non-State armed groups (NSAGs).

### Overview of Regional Security in Africa

A pyramidal approach was used to achieve regional consensus for a continental initiative with the establishment of the African Standby Force, an AU peacekeeping force with five regionally administered standby brigades with a combined capacity of 15,000 troops. The goals and logistics of both organs are outlined in the Policy Framework for the Establishment of the African Standby Force and the Military Staff Committee. A year later, it was adopted. The 2010 deadline for the African Standby Force, which is composed of the five Regional Standby Brigades (central, east, north, south, and west), to become operational was repeatedly pushed back. As of November 2014, the only force claiming to be in service is the East African Standby Force. In order to protect human rights, democracy, and a sustainable economy throughout Africa, the African Union was established in 2002. Its primary goals were to eliminate intra-African conflict and establish the African Economic Community (AEC). The OAU, which required rejuvenation, was replaced by the AU. Since its establishment in 1963, the OAU has served as the principal platform for discussing African unification and collaboration. The AU has the authority to order peacekeeping efforts, deploy troops, and monitor and intervene in disputes. By 2010, it intends to establish the African Standby Force, a stand-by rapid-reaction force. As a result, it is believed that the AU will be far more useful in responding to so-called "new wars," such as civil wars and complicated humanitarian crises that emerge in the wake of the Cold War and in the context of globalization. Nonetheless, there are two core issues with these advancements that suggest more involvement outside of Africa. One is the deficiency of resources African leaders are willing to allocate to cooperative security endeavors. The unsatisfactory relationship with the UN is the other. As seen by the Darfur crisis in Sudan, most African attempts involving security affairs are characterized by mistrust and hesitancy, despite the current catchphrase being "African solutions for African problems." The AU has some background in fostering and enforcing peace (Andrew, 2011).

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cease-fires between government and rebel groups or to oversee, inspect, monitor, and verify their implementation (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2022; Thompson, 2022). In order to further solidify the peace process in Burundi, the mission in the country from April 2003 to May 2004 was to oversee, observe, monitor, and verify the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement, which was agreed in August 2000. The AU (ONUB) handed over control of the peacekeeping missions to the UN in 2004. The AU assisted in mediating a cease-fire in Sudan/Darfur between the rebel groups and the government (AMIS).

### **Regional Security in Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad and Senegal**

Africa has been facing an increasing spectrum of violence and instability that includes issues with citizenship, election violence, polarization of the population based on religion and ethnicity, and the present violent insurgency against the government.

#### **Mali**

For the majority of 2012, Mali was experiencing a severe crisis. By August 2012, around 600,000 Malians had fled their homes due to a military coup and a separatist movement in the north, with many of them enduring extreme starvation and violence. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the AU led the push for UN-approved military intervention, which were two of the most aggressive reactions to this state of things from Mali's neighbors. The role that the AU and ECOWAS have had in resolving the issues in Mali is examined in this working paper. The three stages of the analysis are as follows: the beginnings and fundamental causes of the crisis; the crisis's escalation, political unrest, and the French-led intervention; and the UN's takeover of Mali from the African-led International Support Mission (AFISMA). A brief review of the state of protection and humanitarian requirements, as well as the role played by AU and ECOWAS humanitarian mechanisms in addressing them, is provided in the paper's conclusion.

On September 4, 2013, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, the recently elected president of Mali, took the oath of office. With his election, there is hope that the bloodshed, extremism, and instability in northern Mali could be turned around to democracy and development. Mali went through a separatist rebellion, a military coup, the implementation of Islamic Sharia Law in the country's north, and, in August 2013, an international military intervention to drive out the jihadists in the eighteen months leading up to his election. The Sahel region as a whole is characterized by

the challenges of establishing governmental authority and promoting development across large and sparsely populated areas in poor institutional environments. Known as the "Septentrion," this area in northern Mali, which includes Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao, is twice the size of Germany. Its population density of 1.6 people per km<sup>2</sup> is comparable to Mongolia's, the world's least densely inhabited nation. The region has historically experienced economic underdevelopment and a lack of investment, which has caused populations and regions to be marginalized. The growth of criminal networks in the Saharo-Sahelian region has fueled corruption and penetrated the legal economy, albeit one that is frequently informal. The most obvious way that criminal networks have raised money is through kidnapping foreigners (Africa Center for strategies studies, 2022; Arieff, 2019).

The local population has been subjected to increased oppression as a result of the growth of terrorist networks in the region, which has also hindered the flow of lawful funds from tourists and investors. The US military referred to the region as "the new front in the war on terrorism" because of the operations of Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) spreading from Algeria into neighboring countries and the growth of other terrorist and criminal groups in western Africa and the Sahel. Furthermore, an already volatile situation has been made worse by the movement of fighters and weapons from Libya into northern Mali following the overthrow of the Gaddafi dictatorship.

The only way out of these problems is to make long-term investments in security and development measures in northern Mali and the surrounding area. Because the population is predominately rural, agro-pastoral activities have historically been the main source of income. In 2010, 20% of the country's rice was produced on the irrigated plains south of Timbuktu. Given the potential for irrigated agriculture, stability, and investment, this percentage could rise significantly and northern Mali could fulfill its potential as a source of food for the entire nation (Detti, 2021; Murphy, 2020).

The Saharo-Sahelian regions must be populated and valorized in order for stability to establish itself. Strategies for stabilization must center on pastoral livestock. Pastoralism does, in fact, have the dual benefits of being environmentally suited and making up for low population density. Pastoralism that travels does not end at the borders of the Sahel. Complex links are formed by mobility throughout a much wider region, which includes northern and central

Africa. It also affects trade links, which have significant political and economic potential, between northern Africa and the coastal nations.

Trade agreements can promote greater trade in agricultural products and ease North African investments south of the Sahara. One example of such an agreement is Morocco's with the West African Economic and Monetary Union. They also build stronger communities and a more resilient presence, and they aid in the construction of infrastructure like trans-Saharan roadways. Although North Africans have infinitely less water and arable and pastoral land than those in Sub-Saharan Africa, they are wealthy on average. These agreements present a win-win scenario that ought to be taken advantage of. Ultimately, to detect and impede the movement of money to and from trafficking, stricter international oversight and control over money laundering are required. Criminal networks will inevitably become weaker without access to financial services, which will lessen their threat to regional and international stability.

## **Chad**

Landlocked in Central Africa is the nation of Chad. Libya borders it on the north, Sudan borders it on the east, the Central African Republic borders it on the south, Nigeria and Cameroon border it on the southwest, and Niger borders it on the west. In terms of area, it is the fifth-largest nation in Africa. Chad is divided into three regions: an arid Sahelian belt in the center, a more fertile Sudanian Savanna zone in the south, and a desert zone in the north. Located in Chad, the largest wetland in the country is named Lake Chad, which is also the second largest in Africa. The major city is N'Djamena, the capital. In the Lake Chad Basin region, where food insecurity and malnutrition remain at catastrophic levels, insecurity continues to pose a threat to populations and livelihoods. Those who are vulnerable in the impacted areas keep running from the violence and instability, taking sanctuary in host communities whose little resources are severely depleted. In order to keep providing emergency food aid to those affected in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, WFP urgently needs USD 70 million (Klatt, 2022; Maclean, 2022).

50 percent of the population in northeastern Nigeria, who were estimated by the previous analysis in March 2017 to be facing the worst food and nutrition insecurity during the 2017 lean season, now have better levels of food insecurity, according to the October 2017 Cadre Harmonisé - Food Security and Nutrition Analysis, which was released on November 9th. This is mostly due to improved



security, increased government and humanitarian community support for humanitarian efforts, encouragement of livelihood activities, favorable weather for agricultural production, and a modest market recovery. In addition, the analysis predicts that from June to August 2018, 3.7 million people in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States will experience food insecurity and be classified as being in a crisis or emergency phase of food and nutrition insecurity (compared with 5.2 million in March 2017).

The current state of affairs in Mamdi, one of the departments of the Lake region in Chad, has been classified as a crisis by the Cadre Harmonisé, which is composed of the government, CILSS, WFP, and FAO. Of the two departments, 13 other departments in the Sahel, and the second department, 81,000 people are in phase 3 or above. Although the prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM) has steadily declined among the IDP population in 2017 (from 6 to 4 per cent, well below the WHO 15 per cent emergency threshold), the SMART reported concerning rates of GAM among the host communities throughout the Lake region, with a prevalence of 18.1%. In collaboration with IOM, WFP oversaw a biometric registration initiative on the WFP SCOPE platform in the previously hard-to-reach Tchoukoutalia region of Chad. There were about 4,000 registrations, and this activity will help identify the true number of IDPs residing at each location. According to the November 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), 408,000 individuals in the Diffa region would be among the 1.4 million people in Niger who are expected to experience food insecurity in 2018 (Pye, 2021; Murphy, 2020).

### **Mauritania**

There are a number of possible threats to Mauritania's national security. Aside from the battle in the Western Sahara, other issues have included Libyan intervention, Senegalese engagement in ethnic tensions, and Moroccan irredentist claims. From the seventeenth century throughout the twentieth century, Morocco posed a threat to Mauritania. The northern region of Mauritania was raided in 1956 and 1957 by Moroccan and Mauritanian troops of the Army of Liberation, the armed branch of the Mauritanian National Liberation Front, which has its headquarters in Morocco. The pre-independence transition administration appealed to France for assistance because it lacked its own armed forces to protect the borders. A coordinated Franco-Spanish land-air operation in February 1958

decimated the AL in the Spanish Sahara and prevented insurgents sponsored by Morocco from infiltrating farther south (Perovise and Mac, 2021).

Morocco persisted in backing irredentist factions in Mauritania during the 1960s, particularly the northern Reguibat Maures who professed loyalty to the Moroccan king. The French dispatched troops to the region once more after the Reguibat Maures' insurrection in 1962–1963. Shortly after Morocco formally recognized Mauritania in 1969, threats from the north decreased. Soon later, when Mauritania needed to request Moroccan soldiers to defend itself against Polisario guerrilla attacks, Mauritania's fears about Morocco were once again raised. There were suspicions that Morocco was attempting to revive its long-standing goal of a Greater Morocco by stationing Moroccan soldiers within Mauritania and offering military assistance. Furthermore, the 15,000–17,000 strong Mauritanian military took offense at being used as a reserve for the 10,000+ Moroccan soldiers who were stationed in Mauritania. Simultaneously, Mauritania was afraid that Moroccan troops would invade Tiris al Gharbiyya—the portion of the Western Sahara it claimed—and take away the area that served as a buffer between it and Morocco. When King Hassan II conquered Tiris al Gharbiyya in 1979, a few days after Mauritania signed a peace pact with the Polisario in August that concern was validated. As a result, Colonel Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidalla's administration once more turned to France for assistance. In order to protect Mauritania from a potential Moroccan invasion and to stop the Polisario from utilizing the neighboring area as a rear base for assaulting Moroccan military forces in Western Sahara, French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing dispatched a paratroop unit to Nouadhibou. Several Moroccan ambassadors were expelled by Mauritania, and MPs who supported Morocco had their passports revoked. As tensions between the two nations grew in 1980, Nouakchott rejected the defense agreement between Mauritania and Morocco and gave Morocco the order to remove its troops from Mauritania territory. At first, Morocco disregarded the order to evacuate and attempted to condition the evacuation of its final garrison, located in Bir Mogreïn, northern Mauritania, on the departure of Mauritanian soldiers from La Guera, in the Western Sahara. Refusing this request was Mauritania's belief that security depended on maintaining control of La Guera, which had easy access to the iron ore port at Nouadhibou (Thompson, 2022; Powell, 2021).

## Niger

Named after the Niger River, Republic of the Niger is a landlocked nation in Western Africa. Algeria borders Niger on the northwest, Burkina Faso and Mali on the west, Nigeria and Benin on the south, Algeria on the east, and Libya on the northeast. With a land area of almost 1,270,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Niger is the biggest nation in West Africa. Most of its land area is covered by the Sahara Desert. The 21 million or more Muslims that make up the country's population are concentrated in the west and extreme south. Situated in the southwest part of Niger is the capital city, Niamey. Since the fall of Gaddafi's dictatorship in Libya in 2011 and the ensuing escalation of insecurity throughout the Sahel, ruling elites in the region have come to embrace the notion that security is a prerequisite for growth. In the aforementioned speech, President Mahamadou Issoufou of Nigerien stated that the overall goal of security requires both immediate and long-term answers. The remark also implies that there may be conflicts between immediate and long-term stabilizing strategies (Berger, 2021; Brotten, 2021).

Lastly, the president of Niger is also requesting military and financial assistance from Western donors in this declaration, since these parties have been contributing more and more to Niger's security. A wider stabilization strategy that covers the so-called Sahel G5 (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger), led by France, the US, and the EU, has seen an increasing integration of security and development strategies in recent years by Niger's bilateral (e.g., France, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Japan, China, USA) and multilateral development partners (e.g., the EU and the UN). For Europe, the US, and the entirety of West and North Africa, the stability of the Sahel G5 is crucial from a strategic standpoint. External security actors view Niger's stability as essential to both regional and global security because of its location between nations that are impacted by conflicts. Concerns about Niger's "sandwich situation" were raised by external actors in response to the 2012 Malian conflict, the ongoing crisis in Libya, and the Jihadi group Boko Haram's insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. These actors fear that armed groups like Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the armed groups affiliated with the Islamic State (ex-Boko Haram) will establish a safe base on Nigerien territory, much of which is not fully controlled by state institutions. It is feared that they would use these facilities to control unlawful flows of people, money, and goods as well as vital resources like uranium and oil, which might be used to fund terrorist activities (Abdulyakeen, 2023; Klatt, 2022).

## Niger in the Post-Gaddafi Regional Security Context

Following the overthrow of Muammed Gaddafi in 2011, the Sahel experienced an unanticipated destabilization that had a significant impact on Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Mali, and Mauritania. The nature of local, national, and regional conflicts was significantly altered by the mercenaries that the Gaddafi dictatorship had employed returning to their home countries. It led to a fresh Tuareg uprising in Mali's north, demanding their right to self-determination. An increase in religiously motivated armed groups—including those connected to AQIM—and a military takeover of President Amani Toumani Touré's government ensued after this. Although the reintegration of former Gaddafi army mercenaries into Niger was largely well-managed, there were concerns that the Malian violence might spread to Niger. This hasn't occurred widely as of yet (Moe, 2021; Lierl, 2022).

### Observable impacts of the Sahel conflict

The challenges identified are at four levels:

- i. **Governance, development and conflict resolution:** The remote and isolated character of this sensitive region and the difficulties faced by the Sahel countries in providing protection, assistance, development and public services to local populations, the insufficiently decentralized decision making and the inequitable sharing of revenues of capital-intensive economic activities pose serious challenges. Lack of education and employment opportunities for young people contributes to tensions and makes them prone to cooperate with AQIM or organized crime for financial reasons or to be radicalized and recruited by AQIM. Weak governance, in particular in the area of justice, social exclusion and a still insufficient level of development, together with remaining internal conflicts and recurrent rebellions in regions affected by insecurity, render the Sahel countries and their populations vulnerable to the activities of AQIM and organized crime networks. The desert regions of all three countries have a history of de facto autonomy which makes government control hard to exert. Corruption also hinders the effectiveness in the fight against AQIM and the development of an effective security sector. Carrying out development assistance projects has also become more dangerous.
- ii. **Regional political level - challenges of coordination:** The security threats in the Sahel as well as their solution - are of a transnational nature, yet differ in intensity from one country to another. The sometimes differing perception of the threats and solutions by the three Sahel States and their three Maghreb

neighbours (Algeria, Libya and Morocco) and the absence of a sub-regional organization encompassing all the Sahel and Maghreb states, lead to unilateral or poorly coordinated action and hamper credible and effective regional initiatives. At the level of the international community (including the EU), coherent and systematic action linking political, security and development aspects is also insufficient.

- iii. **Security and the rule of law:** These states have insufficient operational and strategic capacities in the wider security, law enforcement and judicial sectors (military, police, justice, border management, customs) to control the territory, to ensure human security, to prevent and to respond to the various security threats, and to enforce the law (conduct investigations, trials etc.) with due respect to human rights. This is notably reflected in the insufficiency of legal frameworks and law enforcement capacity at all levels, ineffective border management, lack of modern investigation techniques and methods of gathering, transmitting and exchanging information, as well as obsolete or inexistent equipment and infrastructure. State control of the desert regions in the North of Mali and Niger.
- iv. **Fight against and prevention of violent extremism and radicalization:** In the Sahel region the simultaneous interaction between various factors such as poverty, social exclusion, unmet economic needs and radical preaching bears the risk of development of extremism. The situation in Mauritania is particularly worrying in terms of risks of radicalization and recruitment of youth by AQIM. There is a clear and longstanding interest both for the countries of the regions and for the EU in reducing insecurity and improving development in the Sahel region. Strengthening governance and stability within the Sahel countries through the promotion of the rule of law and human rights as well as socio-economic development, in particular for the benefit of the vulnerable local populations of these countries, is crucial.

An urgent and a more recent priority is to prevent AQIM attacks in the Sahel region and its potential to carry out attacks on EU territory, to reduce and contain drug and other criminal trafficking destined for Europe, to secure lawful trade and communication links (roads, pipelines) across the Sahel, North-South and East-West, and to protect existing economic interests and create the basis for trade and EU investment. Improving security and development in Sahel has an obvious and direct impact on protecting European citizens and interests and on the EU internal security situation. It is therefore important to ensure and strengthen coherence and complementarity between internal and external aspects of EU security.

## Conclusion

The instability and crises in West Africa and the Sahel have changed the security landscape in the region. There has never been a more urgent need for a more cooperative regional environment due to the increasing mobility of conflicts. As a group, the nations in the region have the power to address the risks to peace and security, but first, they must all get over a number of internal challenges. Each nation has a stake in enhancing stability. The Sahel region as a whole is characterized by the challenges of establishing governmental authority and promoting development across large and sparsely populated areas in poor institutional environments. The Sahel's illegal trade in commodities and people has generally suffered as a result of the violence, and many issues related to human security are transnational in nature. As a result, Mauritania's president, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, inspired the G5S to forge unity among governments with longstanding rivalries in order to combat the insecurity that was now perceived as a regional issue in 2014 while serving as president of the African Union (AU). Named after the Niger River, Republic of the Niger is a landlocked nation in Western Africa. Algeria borders Niger on the northwest, Burkina Faso and Mali on the west, Nigeria and Benin on the south, Chad on the east, and Libya on the northeast. Given that this requires a reassertion of nation-states, the social, ethnic, and religious heterogeneity of the region, the plurality of threats, and the permeability of territories that necessitate cross-border synergies, it is exceedingly difficult to pursue a "comprehensive" approach or "integrated" response to terrorism in the Sahel. Previous approaches to the Sahel were likewise beset by a lack of cooperation in the formulation and application of response plans.

## Recommendations

The Strategy focuses primarily on the countries most affected by common security challenges: Mali, Mauritania and Niger, while being placed in a larger regional context, reaching towards Chad, the Maghreb and West Africa. The Strategy is articulated around four complementary lines of action:

- i. **Development, good governance and internal conflict resolution:** to contribute to the general economic and social development in the Sahel; to encourage and support the internal political dialogue in the countries of the region in order to enable sustainable home-grown solutions to remaining social, political and ethnic tensions; to enhance transparent and locally accountable governance, to promote institutional capacity; re-establish

and/or reinforce the administrative presence of the state, particularly in the north of Niger and Mali; to help create education and economic opportunities for local communities; to open up the regions affected by insecurity through key road and social infrastructures; and to mitigate the impact of climate change effects.

- ii. **Political and diplomatic:** to promote a common vision and a strategy by the relevant countries, to tackle cross-border security threats and address development challenges through a sustained dialogue at the highest level; to engage with partners (including Maghreb countries, regional organizations and wider international community) on a reinforced dialogue on security and development in the Sahel.
- iii. **Security and the rule of law:** to strengthen the capacities of the security, law enforcement and the rule of law sectors to fight threats and handle terrorism and organized crime in a more efficient and specialized manner and link them to measures of good governance in order to ensure state control.
- iv. **Fight against and prevention of violent extremism and radicalization:** to help enhance the resilience of societies to counter extremism; to provide basic social particular the youth vulnerable to radicalization; to support the states and legitimate non-state actors in designing and implementing strategies and activities aiming at countering these phenomena.

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