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African Pressure Points: Sahel (situation review and future prospects)

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The Sahel region is characterized by ecological instability and limited arable land. In addition, the region is characterized by a high birth rate, gender inequality and an inefficient education system. The population of the region is constantly under attack by Islamist fundamentalist groups, suffers from threats and violence, and the level of security in the region is very low. Inefficient governance, incomplete and weak economic reforms, corruption at the state level lead to armed conflicts, internal instability and, as a result, impoverishment of the population and forced migration.

The authors of the report analyze the causes of economic and political crises in the region, consider the main actors of conflicts and suggest some ways to overcome crises.

The views and opinions of authors expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of RIAC.

The full text is published on RIAC's website. You can download the report or leave a comment via this direct link—russiancouncil.ru/en/report77

Table of Contents

Preface

Kortunov A. The international expert dialogue on the problems of the Sahel becomes more and more relevant 4

Aslanov I. The role of international humanitarian organizations in achieving sustainable results in the Sahel region 6

Part 1. Causes of the crisis in the Sahel region. Where to look for a way out? 7

Exploring the Drivers of the Conflict in the Sahel 7

Sahel crisis: causes and ways of overcoming 13

Part 2. The main actors of conflicts in the Sahel. Example of Mali 17

An appraisal of the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) 17

The Sun Sets on Françafrique 23

Actors in the Malian crisis 28

Part 3. Humanitarian consequences of armed conflicts and violence in the Sahel countries. Ways to overcome 37

Building resilience in the Sahel 37

ICRC's Contribution to Engaging Civil Society in Resolving Security Issues in Mali 42

About the authors 49

Introduction

The international expert dialogue on the problems of the Sahel becomes more and more relevant

Andrey
Kortunov

The Sahel is a huge tropical savanna belt in Africa stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the east, a natural buffer between the barren Sahara in the north and the more fertile lands to the south. The Sahel zone is typically described as one made up of ten or eleven countries with a population of over 300 million people. Since ancient times, the region has been home to numerous nationalities and ethnic and religious groups that have historically had difficult and sometimes hostile relations with each other.

The Sahel has long played a unique role in the life of the entire African continent. It serves as a kind of continental bridge connecting the vast expanses of Central Africa with the Mediterranean and beyond, namely, with the European civilization. Since ancient times, trade caravans, nomadic tribes and invading armies have crossed the Sahel from north to south and from south to north. The region has always served as a border of different, often conflicting but always mutually enriching, cultures and lifestyles.

Today, the Sahel is unfortunately one of the most unstable regions—not only in Africa, but around the world. In this respect, it quite resembles the Middle East, another highly unstable and explosive region. The Sahel is no stranger to armed conflicts within individual countries, while territorial disputes crop up from time to time and international terrorist networks step up their activities. Some states in the region are plainly inept at carrying out effective governance on their territory and can be categorized as “failed states.” Tribalism, being deeply rooted in the region, often gets in the way of countries forming a real national identity, which, in turn, provokes outbreaks of internal instability, feeds tribal separatism and keeps extremist political and religious movements afloat.

Experts differ in their assessments of the root causes of the numerous problems facing the region’s countries today. Some suggest that the Sahel has a destabilizing effect on the neighbouring North Africa, particularly that it had a hand in the ten-year civil war in Libya. Others focus on the ongoing climate issues and the progressive desertification of the Sahel, which has forced the northern nomadic tribes to migrate en masse to the south, disrupting the historically balanced ethnic and religious balances in many of the region’s countries. Still, there are some who point to the deteriorating socioeconomic situation caused by the global coronavirus pandemic and the recession it has largely brought about. Finally, there are those who trace the origins of the current instability to the legacy of the colonial past of the Sahel in the 19th–20th centuries, the spectre of which has not yet been banished completely.

In any case, the ramifications of instability in the Sahel clearly extend far beyond the region itself. It would not be a huge leap to suggest that a convergence of unfavourable circumstances could very well ignite the powder keg of the Sahel, which would be very dangerous for the African continent and for the rest of the world. However, with its rapidly growing demographic potential, natural resources and unique geographic location, the Sahel is also a very significant resource for the further development of Africa and the world economy as a whole.

This is why the international dialogue on the Sahel among experts is so relevant today. A dialogue needs to be fostered among experts from countries that deal with the region, if only to better understand the cause-and-effect relationships of the events that are unfolding there, assessing the scale and the dynamics of the ongoing changes, and developing forecasts of how the situation in the region's countries will evolve.

No less important is a comparison of the various points of view on the role that external factors could and should play in influencing the situation in the Sahel. Is the region doomed to remain the venue for geopolitical competition between the great powers? Or, on the contrary, should the Sahel become a model of how multilateral international programmes to ensure security and promote socio-economic development should be built? What role could international organizations play in stabilizing the situation in the region? Who could take it upon themselves to coordinate and run humanitarian aid projects in the Sahel? These are no simple questions for international relations experts to ponder—they have specific and applied political significance. These issues are especially important for Russia, which is not bogged down by a lamentable colonial history of interaction with the Sahel countries, remaining somewhat of a “geopolitical newcomer” in the region and, as far as we can tell, is still looking for its niche in the extremely complicated international interaction in this variegated and controversial region of Africa.

The way the situation in the Sahel evolves and the role external players play in the region were the subject of focused discussion at an international webinar of experts that was jointly held by the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in April 2021. In the course of the discussion, it became clear that the experts agreed on certain approaches to the analysis of the situation in the Sahel while clashing on others. They also outlined the potential positive effects of international cooperation in the region, noting the factors that impeded such work. The collective report presented here contains materials prepared by the participants of the webinar in light of the latest events and trends in the development of the situation in the Sahel.

Of course, this is only our modest contribution to the international dialogue on the problems in the region. I would like to hope that active international cooperation among experts in the analysis of events concerning this extremely troubled yet vital region will continue. All the more so as the Sahel will no doubt continue to present politicians and experts with many surprises.

The role of international humanitarian organizations in achieving sustainable results in the Sahel region

Ihtiyar
Aslanov

It is my pleasure to present you the report “African Sahel Region: Key Challenges and Effective Response”, based on the eponym discussion organised in partnership with the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), in April 2021.

The report tries to capture and reflect on the complex reality for the people living in the Sahel, affected by the accumulated effects of conflict and violence, but also C-19 and climate change. The Sahel is also the land of a noxious paradox, where people’s needs are escalating, basic public services are chronically scarce and the work of humanitarians increasingly constrained.

For a neutral and impartial humanitarian organization like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with a mandate to protect and assist people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence worldwide, the promotion of this discussion among practitioners, scholars and policy makers signifies also an attempt to mobilize support for initiatives aiming at developing a more sustainable impact, notably in this complex sub-Saharan region.

Part 1. Causes of the crisis in the Sahel region. Where to look for a way out?

Exploring the Drivers of the Conflict in the Sahel

Introduction

“*Extremely volatile*” is how Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, described the Sahel region in his address to the Security Council on 9 July 2020.¹ In a depressing presentation, he laid bare the human suffering as a direct consequence of the growth of terrorist groups like Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama’at Nusrat Al Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM) which is affiliated to Al Qaeda*.² Ambassador Ibn Chambas painted a bleak picture of indiscriminate attacks on civilians, kidnapping of young girls and the forced recruitment of children into the ranks of the militants. By June, 2020, 921,000 hapless Burkinabe citizens were forced to flee rampaging jihadists. The comparative figures for Mali was 240,000 and Niger 489,000. Meanwhile in Nigeria, 7.7 million people was in need of urgent assistance as they fled from home and work from marauding militias.³

Hussein
Solomon

Agreeing with this bleak assessment, the Russian Federation’s representative to this Security Council debate noted that terrorist activity did not exist in a vacuum—that it was closely intertwined with inter-ethnic and intercommunal conflict, narco-trafficking and organized crime across West Africa and that COVID-19 has served to further exacerbate conflict dynamics in the region.⁴ The nuanced picture sketched by Moscow’s Representative to the Security Council, is precisely what has been lacking for the past twenty years as violent convulsions wracked the length and breadth of the Sahel. The crisis in the Sahel has been seen in far too simplistic terms: a war against jihadi extremism and preventing a new front in the global war on terrorism from developing in the Sahel. Because the underlying conflict drivers were ignored, and the conflict misdiagnosed, this has become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Need to Contextualize Terrorism in the Sahel

Part of the reason for the penchant towards military-focused solutions, especially by foreign forces in the restive region, is an ignorance of the truism, that terror-

¹ Situation in West Africa, Sahel “Extremely Volatile” as Terrorists Exploit Ethnic Animosities, Special Representative Warns Security Council. Security Council Press Release SC / 14245. 9 July 2020.
URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14245.doc.htm>

* Designated as terrorist by the courts of the Russian Federation.

² Sahel 2021: Communal wars, Broken ceasefires and Shifting Frontlines. Armed Conflict and Event Data Project (ACLED). 17 June 2021.
URL: <https://acleddata.com/2021/06/17/sahel-2021-communal-wars-broken-ceasefires-and-shifting-frontlines/>

³ Situation in West Africa, Sahel “Extremely Volatile” as Terrorists Exploit Ethnic Animosities, Special Representative Warns Security Council. Security Council Press Release SC / 14245. 9 July 2020.
URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14245.doc.htm>

⁴ Ibid.

ism is not a post 9 / 11 phenomenon. Indeed, terrorism has deep historical roots in the region. Consider for instance the jihad embarked upon in the Senegal River Valley in 1673 as well as the jihadi roots of the various Fulani uprisings starting in Futa Jallon in 1725 and ending in Macina in 1818. The formation of the Toucouleur Empire of El Hadj Umar Tall from 1856 to 1861 also had its basis in jihad. The most impressive of these jihads was undoubtedly that of Fulani scholar, Uthman dan Fodio which began in 1804 and established a caliphate which endured until the arrival of the British in 1903.⁵ This brief historical overview is important for two reasons. First, the fact that jihad has emerged historically from within these societies suggest that it is not something alien to these societies and not necessarily imposed on them by global jihadis in the Middle East. Moreover, latter day jihadis in the form of Boko Haram look for inspiration from Uthman dan Fodio's jihad in the 19th century and deliberately seek to emulate his campaign in their struggle against Abuja.⁶

Beyond the historicization of the phenomenon, there is a need to understand identity politics throughout the region as alluded by the Russian Federation's representative when referring to inter-ethnic and intercommunal violence. Identity theorists whose work examines the manifold roles that identity plays in generating popular support for terrorist organizations, assists with the recruitment of new members as well as the types of attacks undertaken also support critical terrorist scholars' position on the central importance of identity.⁷ Research conducted by Schwartz, Dunkel and Waterman⁸ emphasize how terrorist groups could emerge where there is a confluence of different identities. Cultural identities which stress the collective over the individual coupled with a fundamentalist and literal interpretation of religious texts as well as a social identity based on sharp contrasts between the in and out group all contribute to terrorism. Consider here the case of the 4,000 strong Macina Liberation Front (MLF) which instrumentalizes religion (Islam) for reasons of ethno-centric nationalism. This is an ethnic Fulani (also called Peul) movement which seeks the revive the 19th century Macina Empire. There are 20 million Fulani spread across the Sahel and the MLF recruits from these.⁹ The same could be said of the Kanuri-dominated Boko Haram¹⁰ who recruits not only from the 7 million Kanuri in Nigeria, but also amongst the 1.1 million Kanuri in Chad, the 850,000 Kanuri in Niger and the 56,000 Kanuri in Cameroon.¹¹ In an effort to broaden their appeal, Boko Haram has also reached out to Hausa-Fulani peoples across the region, but the upper

⁵ Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos, "Jihad in Sub-Saharan: Challenging the narratives of the war on terror," *World Policy Papers*. World Policy Institute, New York, 2016. P. 15.

⁶ Walter Gam Nkwi, "Terrorism in West African History: A 21st century appraisal," *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy and International Relations* 4/8 (July-December 2015). P. 84.

⁷ Seth J. Schwartz, Curtis S. Dunkel and Alan S. Waterman, "Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32 (2009). P. 539.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 537-559.

⁹ Connor Gaffey, "Mali Hotel Attack: What is the Macina Liberation Front, Mali's Boko Haram," *Newsweek*, 24 November 2015. URL: <http://europa.newsweek.com/mali-attack-who-are-macina-liberation-front-malis-boko-haram-397727>

¹⁰ Zacharias P. Pieri and Jacob Zenn, "The Boko Haram paradox: Ethnicity, religion and historical memory in pursuit of a Caliphate," in James J. Hentz and Hussein Solomon (eds.) *Understanding Boko Haram: Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa*. (London, 2017). Routledge. P. 42.

¹¹ "Kanuri People," *Wikipedia* 2013. URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanuri_people

echelons of the movements remains Kanuri dominated. Far from have global jihadi organizations facilitating cooperation amongst the region's disparate Islamists, it is local kinship networks driving such cooperation. Moreover, far from forming some united Islamic front, the cooperation amongst Islamists sharing different ethnicities are often *"short-term, opportunistic alliances to ensure the continuation of the respective groups' activities rather than more substantive long-term bonds of affiliation"*.¹²

To compound matters further, the counter-terrorism policies of states in the region have served to further harden ethnic cleavages in society. The Malian armed forces have made use of Songhai ethnic militias in northern Mali as a force multiplier. These Ganda Koy (Masters of the Land) and Ganda Iso (Sons of the Land) militias however engaged in human rights atrocities which further incensed Tuareg and Arab populations in the north, preventing the emergence of a truly inclusive Malian state.¹³ To illustrate the point, one Ganda Iso recruit, spoke of what he learned at his training camp¹⁴: *"Lets' face it! Tuareg do not want to share a country with us. They feel that we are inferior. Before the 2012 crisis, we did not understand that this is our land that they want. Before they invented Azawad [Tuareg desire for an independent homeland called Azawad], this was the Songhai Empire, the Ghana Empire, and the Mali Empire. They would have to understand that we Black sedentary people, we are the owners of the land. The time when we are divided and controlled by enslavers [reference to Tuaregs historically enslaving Africans] is over. Before, we did not realize this. This is what I have learned here, as well as making good friends. And we are ready to die to defend our land against these narco-terrorists"*.

A similar dynamic is at play in the Lake Chad Basin. Concerned about the infiltration of Boko Haram in the area, N'Djamena has armed local ethnic militias. However, given the tensions over the fertile region whose territory supports agriculture, pastoralism and fishing, this has served to cause these tensions to escalate into armed violence. Some of these armed ethnic militias accused the Buduma ethnic group inhabiting the Basin of colluding with Boko Haram and promptly attacked them.¹⁵ This was clearly a case of local groups appropriating the discourse of global jihad to increase control of fertile territory. The cases of Mali and Chad remind us that governments in the Sahel need to think of the long-term consequences of arming local ethnic militias in the fight against jihadists.

There is also a need to unpack the entire security calculus. Despite the fact that human security has been in the lexicon of policy-makers since the early 1990s, this has hardly been translated into practice. State security (read regime security) has often been privileged at the expense of the human security of ordinary

¹² Cristina Barrios and Tobias Koepf, "Introduction and summary," in Cristina Barrios and Tobias Koepf (eds), *Re-mapping the Sahel: transnational security challenges and international responses*, Issue Report No. 19. (Paris, June 2014). European Union Institute for Security Studies. P. 6.

¹³ Marc-Antoine Boisvert, "Failing at Violence: The Long-Lasting Impact of Pro-Government Militias in northern Mali since 2012," *African Security* 8 / 4 (2015). P. 272–298.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁵ ReliefWeb, Chad: Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures. 8 March 2017.
URL: <https://reliefweb.int/report/fighting-boko-haram-chad-beyond-military-measures>

citizens. This, despite the fact that human security provides a better fit for the realities confronting Africa in general and the Sahel in particular. Security after all straddles politics and economics, law and the socio-cultural realm.¹⁶ This allows for a far more holistic approach to terrorism in the Sahel where context matters. Consider, the fact that much of Niger is dusty and infertile. Climate change has resulted in greater desertification, food insecurity and deteriorating economic conditions.¹⁷ Niger has a very youthful demographic profile with 67 percent of the population being under 25 years of age. The majority of these are unemployed. As a World Bank report has admitted, youth unemployment is contributing to social instability.¹⁸ These unemployed youth are especially vulnerable to recruitment into terrorist groups who pay a monthly stipend to the recruit as well as to his family. Neither is this confined to Niger only. In January 2018, the UN Security Council expressed concern for the negative impact on security of climate change in the entire Sahel region.¹⁹ Across the Sahel, the youth are especially vulnerable to radicalization. Only 56 percent of the region's children has access to primary school. A smaller percentage goes on to secondary school.²⁰ A UN study has found that those youth who are studying or working are least vulnerable to join extremist organizations.²¹ Clearly more effort needs to go to fixing the education system, thereby increasing employment opportunities.

So, what is to be done?

Having briefly examined some of the conflict drivers of terrorist violence in the Sahel, pressing question is what is to be done? How does one mitigate the threat, stabilize the region and enhance human security? I would proffer three areas: gender equality and a more liberal Islam, reduce conflict dynamics and genuine national building to create inclusive societies.

First, between 1979 and 2019, more than 160,000 lives were lost as a result of Islamist violence across the world. In an effort to understand Islamist rage, Arno Tausch provides deep insights on the social attitudes driving this phenomenon. Utilizing datasets from Pew as well as the Gender Social Norms Index, Tausch concludes that restrictive gender norms are the decisive factor leading to the support of terrorist activities.²² Tausch's pioneering research has direct relevance to policy makers and has resonance with scholars like Aneela Salman whose own research has demonstrated that "...females actual advancement and equality in

¹⁶ M. Neocleous, "Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance: Towards a Critique of Security Politics," *Contemporary Political Theory* 6 (2007). P. 133; J. Gunning, "Babies and Bathwaters: Reflecting on the Pitfalls of Critical Terrorism Studies," *European Political Science* 6, (2007). P. 236.

¹⁷ The eyes in the skies: Tracking West Africa's terrorists, *The Economist*. 26 November 2016. URL: <https://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/2170826-america-has-been-revving-up-its-efforts-against-terrorist-groups-taking>

¹⁸ "Boosting Youth Employment in Niger," *The World Bank*, 11 June 2013. URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/eng/news/feature/2013/06/11-boosting-youth-employment-in-niger>

¹⁹ "UN Security Council voices concern over security situation in West Africa," *Xinhua*. 12 January 2018. URL: https://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/12c_1368893314.htm

²⁰ "Africa's Sahel region can become hotbed for terrorist recruitment, UN official warns," *UN News Centre*, 25 November 2015. URL: <https://www.un.org/apps/news/story.aspx?NewsID=52656#>

²¹ United Nations Development Programme, *Journeys to Extremism in Africa*. UNDP. New York. 2017. P. 5.

²² Arno Tausch (2021), "Social Attitudes Fueling Islamist Terrorism," in Hussein Solomon (ed.) *Directions in International Terrorism: Theories, Trends and Trajectories*. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore. P. 187–218.

*education, employment and political representation are more effective in reducing terrorism...*²³ If we are serious, then, on putting the brakes on the Islamist juggernaut we will need to promote gender equality across the Muslim world. Such gender equality, cannot be embraced without promoting a more liberal Islam. Such a liberal Islam, in turn, will have to be in keeping with local traditions and should not be co-opted by local elites lest it lose its appeal and legitimacy in the eyes of the local populace.

Second, what is clear is that a close relationship exists between terrorism and conflict. In 2019, for instance, 96 percent of all deaths resulting from terrorism occurred in countries already experiencing conflict.²⁴ Terror groups exploit existing cleavages in their societies for their own ends. The socio-economic and political alienation of the Tuaregs and their fight for an independent homeland was exploited by militants linked to Al Qaeda^{25*} in the Islamic Maghreb. Similarly, Islamic State's penetration into various parts of Sub-Saharan Africa would not have been possible without the existence of already existing fissures and conflicts in society. This is borne out in by the fact that the top ten countries confronting the most amount of terrorist incidents have one crucial factor in common—they are experiencing at least one armed conflict.²⁶ Such a perspective would be in keeping with the sterling research done by Ariel Merari²⁷ who demonstrated that far from being a socio-political aberration, terrorism needs to be viewed as one mode of warfare in the arsenal of insurgents. Merari argues, *“Insurgents mode of struggle is dictated by circumstances, and whenever possible they adopt a variety of strategies. Terrorism, which is the easiest form of insurgency is almost always one of these”*.²⁸ What is needed, then, is not merely counter-terrorism narrowly defined as deploying force against insurgents, but reducing the conflict dynamics in a particular society. This latter point then leads us to the final point, genuine nation-building.

Third, and finally, given the fractious nature of identity politics as discussed earlier what is needed is greater emphasis on nation-building. Here an important caveat is required. Such nation-building should not deny the linguistic, ethnic or religious diversity intrinsic within a society. Inclusivity, and acceptance of multi-culturalism is imperative. This truism is especially important when one considers that only a paltry 20 states in the world are ethnically homogeneous.²⁹ What is needed is a celebration of diversity in unity. According to Stavenhagen this would entail, *“...redefining the nature of nation-building and enriching the complex, multi-cultural fabric of many states, by recognizing the*

²³ Joshua D. Freilich, Ashmini G. Kerodal and Michelle Galletta, "Introducing the Special issue on new directions in terrorism research," *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*. (2015). Vol. 39 No. 4. P. 278.

²⁴ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2020*. Sydney, Australia. Institute for Economics and Peace. 2020. P. 2.

²⁵ * Designated as terrorist by the courts of the Russian Federation.

²⁶ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2020*. Sydney, Australia. Institute for Economics and Peace. 2020. P. 2.

²⁷ Ariel Merari, "Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency," in Gerard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin (eds.) *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al Qaeda*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. Berkeley, 2007). P. 12–13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁹ David Welsh, "Domestic Politics and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival* (1993). Vol. 1 No. 1. P. 65.

*legitimate aspirations of the culturally distinct ethnics that make up the national whole”.*³⁰

Such nation-building is impossible without genuine power-sharing where the fruits of power is not dominated by members of a particular group at the expense of others. In the case of Mali, following several Tuareg rebellions various attempts at political devolution were attempted but ultimately failed to achieve genuine power-sharing since it took the form of elite co-option where only northern elites and those in Bamako benefited.³¹ This served to alienate ordinary Tuaregs who made common cause with Islamists such as Al Qaeda* in the Islamic Maghreb.

Power-sharing cannot be merely seen in political terms but also economic ones. In the context of less developed countries as in the case of the Sahelian states, economic exclusion plays a prominent role in contributing to popular alienation and antipathy towards the state. For this reason, Ryan has cogently argued, “...*a multi-ethnic state that is characterised by an uneven distribution of wealth is a state where antagonisms are likely to grow. Economic well being also contributes to a sense of security, and gives ethnic minorities a stake in the system”.*³²

³⁰ R. Stavenhagen (1996). *Ethnic Conflicts and the Nation-State*. (Great Britain: Macmillan Press, 1996). P. 86.

³¹ Hussein Solomon, *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Africa: Fighting Insurgency from Al Shabaab, Ansar Dine and Boko Haram*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). P. 67–84.

* Designated as terrorist by the courts of the Russian Federation.

³² Stephen Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations*. (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1995). P. 236–237.

The Sahel Crisis: Causes and Ways to Overcome it

Stanislav
Mezentsev

The Sahel is a vast strip of African land lying south of the Sahara that stretches from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, with Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger at its centre.³³ Like many regions on the continent, the Sahel zone is again facing a toxic mixture of escalating armed conflict and the chaotic movement of refugees suffering an increasingly serious hunger crisis and poverty. This humanitarian disaster is only made worse by periodic droughts and COVID-19.

Over the past few years erratic rainfall has led to a drastic reduction in crop yields, causing mass starvation among the rural population, who rely on food they grow themselves to survive. With less land to graze on and water sources drying up, livestock has been dying. While the amount of rainfall is expected to increase this year, it still may not be enough to eliminate the hunger that affects approximately 5.4 million people in the region.³⁴

According to the United Nations, the situation continues to cause great concern, and is steadily declining in some areas. The region is facing formidable challenges other than poverty and hunger, such as high unemployment, especially among young people; violent extremism; illegal migration; and human and arms trafficking. The proceeds from the latter are used to finance terrorist activities, which further destabilize the region. All this causes great damage, with ordinary people suffering the most. At the same time, it is important to note that while the Sahel region has dealt with these issues before (with the exception of terrorism), it has always had a reputation for being relatively stable by African standards. Despite occasional coups, revolutions and border clashes, the Sahel has somehow managed to avoid serious internal conflicts that would result in ethnic and religious genocide, something that we are unfortunately witnessing today.

The Sahel is currently one of the most problematic regions in the world in terms of migration, and the situation is deteriorating rapidly. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 2.7 million people in the Central Sahel (an area that includes Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) have been forced to flee their homes, and at least 13.4 million people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance.³⁵ There are also some 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers.³⁶ Analysts have described the humanitarian situation in the countries surrounding Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso as one of the fastest growing crises in the world, destabilizing the foundations of security in the region and complicating the domestic political situation to a great extent, putting millions of people on the brink of survival.

³³ The region includes 12 countries with a total population of approximately 300 million people.

³⁴ "You Should Know About What's Happening in the Sahel and Why It's Spiraling Out of Control."
URL: <https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/a-snapshot-of-life-in-the-african-sahel/>

³⁵ "Sahel Crisis Explained," October 29, 2021. URL: <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/sahel-crisis-explained/>

³⁶ "Central Sahel is Rapidly Becoming One of the World's Worst Humanitarian Crises."
URL: <https://drc.ngo/it-matters/current-affairs/2020/11/central-sahel-crisis/>

We should stress once again that the political, economic and social degradation of the once successful Sahel region began after the fall of the Muammar Gaddafi regime in Libya. Speaking on the situation in the Sahel countries, and in Mali in particular, Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya said during a meeting of the UN Security Council, “It will be easier to achieve a settlement in this country if the situation in the region as a whole is normalized. The Libya factor continues to play a negative role. The “link” between the terrorists operating in Mali and in the entire region is becoming increasingly obvious.”³⁷

We are not going to put the Libyan regime on pedestal here, but we can state with certainty that the ill-considered military intervention of the international community led to the breakdown of the system of checks and balances that had been built up over the course of several decades. Gaddafi’s regime was busy bolstering its influence in the Sahel region, among other things, through the “export of security”—a term that has gained a certain notoriety over the past few years. His approach was to first smooth out the most serious ethnic contradictions between the nomadic and sedentary tribes. This is and has always been the core problem in the region.

As we noted in the first part of our analysis, the Sahel is currently experiencing the consequences of a multi-level systemic crisis. But what is the main factor preventing the situation in the region from being stabilized? It is a systemic problem that is typical of all the countries in the Sahel without exception—poorly developed institutions of state power in the absence of a single national identity and community. The Sahel region is a vast territory where socioeconomic ties have historically been more important than state sovereignty. There are many reasons for this, primarily the way in which this region developed and the traditions that exist there. The Sahel has historically been the home of the freemen of the Tuareg—a people without a state. For many centuries, it was the Tuareg who controlled the most important regional trade routes, and not always in a legal manner. The militant Tuareg have always enjoyed close ties with the other key tribes in the region, namely, the Songhai and especially the Fulbe, who are the main suppliers of livestock. They received financial support through the Tuareg as a reward for their loyalty to the Gaddafi regime, which was the dominant military and economic power in the Sahara–Sahel zone. The Libyan regime deftly took advantage of the Tuareg and their military capabilities, retaining their services in the Libyan Army. Significant financial incentives were used to buy their loyalty and keep them in check, often exceeding the Tuareg’s proceeds from their traditional activities of trafficking and robbery. This helped iron out the issues between farmers and herders, so the question of divvying up land for pasturing and crops was resolved. Let us take some time to reiterate this point—determining land boundaries and the distribution of land has always been the most important issue in Africa, and will remain so for the foreseeable future. And we should note that this sensitive and socially significant issue in the stable system

³⁷ UN Peacekeepers in Mali Forced to Serve in the Most Dangerous of Conditions.
URL: <https://news.un.org/ru/story/2019/01/1346972>

of intertribal relations in the Sahel described above was untangled more or less peacefully.

The financial assistance provided was more economically and socially oriented with respect to the targeted allocation mechanisms. And no alternative appeared after the system—which for decades had been controlled and sponsored by the Libyan leader—was forcibly destroyed. The intervention of the Western coalition undermined the basis of this relationship. The task of restoring and restructuring the system was placed squarely on the shoulders of national institutions of power that were not ready for this. National governments started to actively build interethnic barriers and tried to strengthen transparent borders... However, the Tuareg and the tribes connected to them have never recognized the borders that have been drawn for them, and they likely will not do so in the new climate. The unchecked flow of easy-to-obtain state-of-the-art weapons into the region from Libya only boosted the military powers of those who opposed the establishment of national borders.

All this produced a result that was the exact opposite of what the Western coalition had expected after the destruction of Gaddafi's "dictatorship influence" in the Sahel and became the prologue of what we are witnessing in the region now. Now the population, divided on ethnic and partially on religious grounds, has been left to fend for itself, and remains extremely vulnerable. What we are essentially talking about is a Hobbesian "war of all against all". Drought, extremism and a pandemic with restrictive measures have significantly exacerbated an already turbulent situation. Nature abhors a vacuum, and, in the absence of state control, illegal armed groupings have occupied the vacuum, confidently occupying the niche of a regulator and guarantor. A broadly similar situation developed in Somalia following a series of outside interventions, with the state effectively ceasing to exist in 1991 after government functions were handed over to clan-based opposition groups, which terrorists of all persuasions quickly attached themselves to or hid behind—from the Islamic Courts Union and al-Shabaab to Al-Qaeda*, ISIS*, and so on.

The G5 Sahel was set up to resolve the situation, which was, by and large, a step in the right direction.³⁸ However, in our estimation, we should not expect any positive results in the short term. The G5 Sahel countries are too disunited, they differ greatly ethnically, geographically and politically, as well as in the level of army training and law enforcement agencies. There are also unresolved contrac-

* Designated as terrorist by the courts of the Russian Federation.

⁴¹ G5 Sahel was established in 2014 by the governments of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. That same year, the French Army launched its Operation Barkhane in the region, sending several thousand troops to help a number of states in their fight against terrorism. In early November 2021, President of France Emmanuel Macron announced that the French Army would be winding down the operation in the Sahel region, noting that "international forces" would carry out anti-terrorist tasks in the region moving forward. One of the security structures set up by the G5 Sahel was the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, established in 2017 by five of the countries in the region. In 2017, France, Germany and the European Union established the Sahel Alliance, which currently consists of 25 technical and financial partners. It was set up to increase the effectiveness of development assistance in the region and become a contact point for the G5 Sahel on issues of development. URL: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/ru/politique-etrangere/securite-desarmement-et-non-proliferation/actualites-et-evenements-lies-a-la-defense-et-la-securite/article/g5-sahel-pau-summit-statement-by-the-heads-of-state-13-jan-2020>; http://factmil.com/publ/strana/afrika/obedinennye_sily_sakhelskoj_gruppy_pjati_2019/166-1-0-1592

tions between them that hinder closer interaction and cooperation. Other than the prospects for umbrella cooperation, it is too early to talk about the possibility of the G5 Sahel working towards solving problems on the ground. And any analysis of the prospects for this must be approached with caution. The Sahel is seen as a conflict zone, which, unfortunately, means that the work of the G5 as a whole inevitably takes a military leaning. Economic and social problems recede into the distance.

As for French and international intervention and counter-insurgent military initiatives, we should note that they are also focused on resolving conflicts exclusively through military means. However, even the pacification and demarcation operations that are needed in the region will lead to casualties among the civilian population. This is why the image of a man with a gun in the Sahel is seen as a sign of trouble and carries a clear threat. The task of helping the drowning people is in the hands of the drowning people themselves, and despite all the contradictions of the conflict, the people want peace and are looking for ways to make it happen. We know, for instance, that some ceasefires have been achieved by the implacable farmers' defence units and the Islamist herder militias. The main task—in terms of bringing the region back to normal—is to restore peace and achieve reconciliation between ethnic groups that have close ties and have co-existed for years.

Finally, all participants in the settlement, both inside and outside the Sahel, must understand and recognize that the problem in the region is that simply winning the war is not enough. Peace needs to be restored, and this is something that is far more difficult to achieve. To make this happen, the rules of combat, and the language of war must give way to a deep analysis of the region, its economic ties, its history and ethnography, and its domestic politics. It is not simply a case of applying the techniques of political science. It needs to be a humanitarian mission carried out by people in good faith.

Given the current situation in the region, what is needed above all is humanitarian action that has absolutely no connection with military decisions. The initiatives coming from international non-profits, primarily those known for their non-partisanship and impartiality, for example, the International Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, and other NGOs with a proven track record in the humanitarian field, should be expanded, and they ought to receive greater support from the international community. Part of the costs of strengthening the military potentials of the Sahel states, as well as supporting international armed forces in the region, could be redistributed to help these initiatives, which would bring more significant and tangible benefits in terms of gradually bringing peace to the Sahel region.

Part 2. The main actors of conflicts in the Sahel. Example of Mali

An appraisal of the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S)

Glen
Segell

Introduction

In the West African region known as the Sahel, where the frontiers of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali converge, there are local multinational efforts with external assistance aimed at bringing law and order and stability.³⁹ One of these efforts, that this paper examines is the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) that was established in 2017.⁴⁰ It is by no means the only effort but as the most recent, it hasn't been as appraised as the others. As such an examination of it is innovative and not yet published.

The FC-G5S is the latest of many other regional multi-lateral and joint efforts some of which are ongoing whilst others have fallen by the wayside. These include the Algerian-led Joint Military Staff Committee of the Sahel Region (CEMOC),⁴¹ the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)⁴² and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).⁴³ There is an overlap as Niger and Chad are also members of the MNJTF and the FC-G5S.⁴⁴ That sometimes imposes limitations as there is insufficient military personal and equipment to deploy to both simultaneously.⁴⁵ Individual foreign state intervention has been led by France and the United States of America.⁴⁶

The FC-G5S is facing the same challenges that these encounters, and may as they, not achieve rapidly the security apparatus capable of putting a stop to illegal and terror activities. All efforts find that the causes and the resilience of the problems plaguing the Sahel have deep historical, environmental, cultural, and political roots going back centuries and that will not be resolved overnight. Leading these are the lack of effective governance. Consequently there has been an

³⁹ Laurent Bossard, *An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security*, OECD/Sahel and West Africa Club, 2014.

⁴⁰ Leonardo A. Villalón (ed). *The Oxford Handbook of the African Sahel*, Oxford University Press, 2021.

⁴¹ Victor Adetula, Benedikt Kamski, Andreas Mehler, and Henning Melber (eds), *Africa Yearbook: Politics, Economy and Society South of the Sahara*, Volume 17, Brill Publishers, 2015. P. 206.

⁴² Modupeola Irele, *The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)*, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 1990.

⁴³ Usman A. Tar and Bashir Bala (eds) *New Architecture of Regional Security in Africa*, Rowan and Littlefield, 2019.

⁴⁴ Marie Tremolieres, Oliver Walther, and Steven Radil (eds) *West African Studies: The Geography of Conflict in North and West Africa*, OECD Press, 2020. P. 99.

⁴⁵ Beder Dine El Khou, *The G5 Sahel: An Insufficient Organization for a Failed Region?* Old Dominion University, 2019.

⁴⁶ Samuel Ramani, "France and the United States Are Making West Africa's Security Situation Worse," *Foreign Policy*, 12 September 2020. URL: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/12/france-united-states-sahel-making-west-africa-niger-mali-burkina-faso-security-situation-worse/>

exponential increase in ethnic sectarian violence, territorial disputes, and illegal trafficking of all kinds (drug, weapons and human trafficking). Adding fuel to the fire has been the presence in the Sahel of over twenty known terror groups including the larger transnational jihadist terrorist groups Boko Haram* and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP).⁴⁷

The origins of the FC-G5S

A specific and significant incentive to form the FC-G5S was the fall of the Qaddafi regime in Libya in 2011, which opened the gate to a border-less North to West Africa with the Sahel in the middle.⁴⁸ The security situation progressively deteriorated and an intergovernmental cooperation framework was created on 16 February 2014 at the initiative of the Mauritanian Presidency of the African Union for five African states namely for Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger to consider an institutional mechanism for fostering increased security and the development of the region.⁴⁹

There was a logic for their cooperation for given the sparse climate, and desert landscape geography that is rural, arguably it is hard to define where the borders are or to defend them. There is no clear indication what separates these countries of the Sahel or even separates the Sahel from the rest of North and West Africa. Common and collective action clearly had a valid and valuable logic without arguing who had territorial authority over a specific area.⁵⁰

The initiative was endorsed by the international community. The United Nations Security Council welcomed its creation in Resolution 2359 of 21 June 2017, which was sponsored by France.⁵¹ The FC-G5S has also been endorsed by the African Union Peace and Security Committee.⁵²

The mandate of the FC-G5S

The members of the FC-G5S granted it a mandate that includes many tasks including fighting terrorism, organized crime, and human trafficking; restoring state authority; helping displaced persons to return home; contributing to humanitarian operations; and helping to implement development projects. At the

* Designated as terrorist by the courts of the Russian Federation.

⁴⁷ Kaan Devocioğlu, and Fuat Emir Şefkatli, *The Spread of Insecurity from North Africa to the Sahel and the Questioning of French Regional Presence*, Orsam Analiz Sayı Press, 2021.

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Grégoire, "The Sahel and the Sahara, between crisis and resilience," *Hérodote* Volume 172, Issue 1, 2019. P. 5-22.

⁴⁹ France, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, *G5 Sahel Joint Force and the Sahel Alliance*. URL: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/crises-and-conflicts/g5-sahel-joint-force-and-the-sahel-alliance/>

⁵⁰ Crises Group. "Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force," Report 258, 12 December 2017. URL: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/burkina-faso/258-force-du-g5-sahel-trouver-sa-place-dans-lembouteillage-securitaire>

⁵¹ United Nations Security Council, *Security Council Welcomes Deployment of Joint Force to Combat Terrorism Threat, Transnational Crime in Sahel, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2359 (2017)*, 21 June 2017. URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12881.doc.htm>

⁵² Natasja Rupesinghe, "The Joint Force of the G5 Sahel," *Conflict Trends* 2018 / 2, 18 September 2018. URL: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-joint-force-of-the-g5-sahel/>

heart of the rationale lies the same strategy as adopted by African Union Peace and Security Council.⁵³

Stemming from this mandate the FC-G5S officially has a peace-enforcement task rather than a peacekeeping one. The tactical work of the FC-G5S could be considered a counter-insurgency operation and not a classic United Nations (UN) peace-enforcement mission. Its rules of engagement fall within the realm of warfare and unlike UN forces they are armed.⁵⁴

From the mandate leads the operational missions and goals. These are multiple corresponding to the mandate. In a list of priorities the first is to shut down the smuggling routes that are being used by criminal organizations to smuggle humans, drugs, and weapons. That is to deploy forces to attain a securitization of borders. Attaining this could also prevent the infiltration of terror groups.⁵⁵

Clearly a military solution alone would not be enough to create durable peace and stability, and so a simultaneous action is to seek and obtain international community assistance and investment in addressing the root causes of the conflict and to support recovery and development. Namely to tackle the causes and not just the symptoms where an aim would be to target the lack of sustainable governance and to work on the development of the region tackling such issues as poverty and migration.⁵⁶

Implementation of the mandate

The FC-G5S faces a paradox; its member countries wish to take responsibility for their own security but need to rely on foreign financing backing and intervention. In doing so the FC-G5S has come to serve foreign interests more so than its own. For example France has invested in the region, and particularly in Niger because its uranium mines provide 20 per cent of the fuel needed for France's 58 nuclear reactors, which are in turn responsible for generating nearly 75 per cent of France's electricity.⁵⁷

The FC-G5S force has from the start followed a French-led plan. France is keen to get it off the ground because it views the force as a way of relieving some of the work that its own army does in the region. France hopes to mitigate jihadist attacks on its own soil by relegating the battle against terrorists to countries in the region before they depart for Europe.⁵⁸

⁵³ European Council on Foreign Relations, "The G5 Sahel." URL: <https://ecfr.eu/special/african-cooperation/g5-sahel/>

⁵⁴ Karolina Gasinska and Elias Bohman, Joint Force of the Group of Five, Försvarsdepartementet / Sweden Ministry of Defence, 2017.

⁵⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Challenges and opportunities for the G5 Sahel force" 2017. URL: <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/challenges-and-opportunities-g5-sahel-force>

⁵⁶ European Union, The European Union's partnership with the G5 Sahel countries, Bruxelles, 18/06/2018 - 10:49, UNIQUE ID: 180618_6. URL: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_mn/46674/The%20European%20Union's%20partnership%20with%20the%20G5%20Sahel%20countries

⁵⁷ Henry Sokolski (ed), Nuclear Power's Global Expansion: Weighing Its Costs and Risks, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2010.

⁵⁸ Fergus Kelly, "Sahel Coalition: G5 and France agree new joint command, will prioritize fight against Islamic State," 14 January 2020. URL: <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/01/14/sahel-coalition-france-g5-islamic-state/>

The FC-G5S carried out its first operation in November 2017 with forces from the armies of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Yet ever since it has been defined more by what it lacks than by its actions. One of the failures is a missing part of the French plan, has been a lack of focus on domestic politics in the Sahel. Each of the five states that compose the FC-G5S have domestic issues of their own, and unless they are fixed first, devising a strong collaborative security apparatus is difficult if not impossible. Indeed, the security challenges that each of the five states differ.⁵⁹

In the opinion of the author of this paper, to answer any security related challenge is also to question the causes and here any military effort made to ensure Sahel regional security will be ineffective unless they are accompanied by sustainable development. To stabilize the region and prevent violent radicalization, any external assistance must also look to the conditions for economic development.

The facts and figures 2017–2021

The security challenges that are faced at the end of 2021, when this paper was written, are the same that gave cause for the FC-G5S' creation in 2017. With the FC-G5S coalition lacking coordination, and with forces short of experience, and lacking training and equipment, it is not surprising that the number of reported violent events linked to militant Islamic group activity in the Sahel has been doubling every year since 2017.⁶⁰

Terror attacks have increased five-fold in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger since 2017, with more than 4,000 deaths reported in the region alone in 2019. In Burkina Faso, extremist attacks over the same period have prompted 300,000 people to flee south. International legal and illegal migration from sub-Saharan countries has grown dramatically over the past decade, including to Europe and the United States.⁶¹

The facts and figures infer that very little has been accomplished in the last four years against organized crime, smuggling, kidnapping, trafficking, illicit trade, migration, and terrorism. This is to be expected since the causes cannot be tackled by military force. The FC-G5S cannot create alternative subsistence. Criminal activities for the main are the only means of subsistence and organized crime is the shortest road to rapid enrichment. Trafficking forms a backbone of parts of the Sahel economy. Many these illicit activities fuel terrorism as they are also a major source of income to the extremist groups rampaging in the region.⁶² The five countries of the G5 Sahel are plagued with high levels of corruption.⁶³

⁵⁹ Security Council Report, "Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force November 2021 Monthly Forecast," 29 October 2021. URL: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2021-11/group-of-five-for-the-sahel-joint-force-5.php>

⁶⁰ European Union, "Protecting civilians in war with the G5 Sahel joint military force: from theory to practice," 19 August 2021. URL: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/articles/protecting-civilians-war-g5-sahel-joint-military-force-theory-practice>

⁶¹ United Nations, "Unprecedented terrorist violence' in West Africa, Sahel region" UN News, 8 January 2020. URL: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1054981>

⁶² The Institute for Economics & Peace, "Global Terrorism Index 2017." URL: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Global%20Terrorism%20Index%202017%20%284%29.pdf>

⁶³ Matthieu Fernandez, "Looking for unity in the Sahel," Atlantic Council 10 December 2018. URL: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/looking-for-unity-in-the-sahel/>

The future viability of the FC–G5S

The FC-G5S is not the first initiative to take military action to foster security in the region. Looking back since its creation sees few achievements and scarce geopolitical gains against terrorism. The author of this paper in the research and examination of the FC-G5S in this paper has found that it has been more of a failure than a success for three main reasons.

The first is that the persistent challenges it is trying to tackle are very much caused by the lack of definitions. One definition is that of the borders between its member countries, as well as the ambiguity concerning the concept of the “Sahel” itself and what the area means both geographically (environmentally) and geopolitically speaking.

Leading directly from problems related to definitions is that conceptually the FC-G5S builds on the faulty Algiers Accord. That is an agreement signed in 2015 that has yet to be carried out fully, where a fundamental issue is the difference between the Malian and French governments’ views of who is a terrorist. That means there is no clear indication or consensus of which terrorist armed groups (TAGs) the force will target.⁶⁴ At the fore the FC-G5S could be better placed to succeed if there were to be a defined counter-terrorism strategy accepted by all its member states.

The second is that each of the member are suffering from different internal issues which significantly inhibits any effective collective initiative. That has led to a difference of opinion on the direction the FC-G5S should take going forward. As an interim measure it has increasingly used local militia and proxies. But it is uncertain whether all the member countries consider these militias as their allies. By the same token, national interests will continue to prevail over the common interest.⁶⁵

The third is that the force size is insufficient to tackle such a complex situation given its current personnel, financial and equipment capacities. The FC-G5S could consist at maximum of only nearly 5,000 personnel. This capability is too small for the defined tasks in the mandate and missions. A reason behind this shortage in military power can be found in the limits of the five states’ armies. The FC-G5S has even been unable to deter terrorists from launching attacks on Sahel cities.⁶⁶

Capability and the force size could be increased if Nigeria were to join. Nigeria’s absence is an anomaly from both a geographical and security-based map. Nigeria lies at the heart of the Sahel region. For a significant increase to any FC-G5S effort Nigeria’s involvement, as the largest military power in the region, is crucial. Its military consist of 181,000 troops, which is more than all the FC-G5S states com-

⁶⁴ United Nations, “Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from The Algiers Process.” URL: https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/EN-ML_150620_Accord-pour-la-paix-et-la-reconciliation-au-Mali_Issu-du-Processus-d’Alger.pdf

⁶⁵ Zoë Gorman, “Pursuing elusive stability in the Sahel,” SIPRI 26 March 2019. URL: <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2019/pursuing-elusive-stability-sahel>

⁶⁶ Lawrence E. Cline, “Trying to Coordinate Force in the Sahel: The G5 Sahel,” Small Wars Journal, 26 October 2020. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/trying-coordinate-force-sahel-g5-sahel>

bined.⁶⁷ Morocco, the rising power in the region with much influence on North and West Africa, could also bring significant results, if it were to be involved.⁶⁸

Looking to the future the FC-G5S will also have to coordinate with two major players in the Sahel-Saharan region: ECOWAS and Algeria. ECOWAS unofficially supports another structure, the Nouakchott process, which it considers to be more inclusive, effective, and sustainable than the FC-G5S.⁶⁹ Algeria goes even further by stating that any support for the FC-G5S would be conditional on its integration into the Nouakchott process, which it considers more legitimate, since it was initiated by the African Union. Algeria is also worried about the impact, whether positive or negative, of FC-G5S activities on the implementation of another process, the 2015 Bamako Agreement.⁷⁰

Conclusion

It is fair to state that an appraisal of the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) four years after its creation finds that it hasn't addressed the big issues needed to foster Sahel security. The FC-G5S remains as a work-in-progress effort or no more than the skeleton of a prototype for multinational cooperation towards regional security.

Although FC-G5S soldiers are daily sent to carry out missions, violence in the Sahel is spreading at alarming rates. Divisions in the FC-G5S stand in the way of coordination in response to the attacks launched by militants. There is continued deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the Sahel fueled by such factors as terrorism, transnational organized crime and conflicts between pastoralists and farmers. But its size is just too small to make a significant difference in a vast geographical area of around 5 million square kilometers for the five states' territories.

The work of the G5 Sahel Joint Force remains crucial, yet it is unclear what effect the force will have on regional security in the future, as the current allocation of human resources and equipment questions the value of military solutions to increasing serious security problems. Amid a persistently unstable security situation punctuated by alarming terrorist attacks, troops deployed to combat violent extremism in the Sahel region need more predictable funding and broader international support. If steps are not taken to improve the situation, the conditions for radicalization will amplify. Unless this transpires the bottom line of all scenarios (best, worst, and most likely) is that the FC-G5S is unlikely to be able to repel terrorism and organized crime soon.

⁶⁷ Embassy of France in Abuja, The Coalition for the Sahel: a collective and inclusive response, 18 September 2020.
URL: <https://ng.ambafrance.org/The-Coalition-for-the-Sahel-a-collective-and-inclusive-response>

⁶⁸ "What military role for Morocco against the Sahel jihadist threat?" The Arab Weekly, 17 February 2021.
URL: <https://theArabweekly.com/what-military-role-morocco-against-sahel-jihadist-threat>

⁶⁹ European Council on Foreign Relations, "Nouakchott Process."
URL: <https://ecfr.eu/special/african-cooperation/nouakchott-process/>

⁷⁰ Stellan Kwasi, Jakkie Cilliers, Zachary Donnenfeld, Lily Welborn and Ibrahim Maïga (eds) Prospects for the G5 Sahel countries to 2040, Institute for Security Studies, West Africa Report 23, 2019.

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The Sun Sets on Françafrique

François-Xavier Verschave was one of the founders of the French NGO Survie, which he headed up from 1995 to 2005. He was the first to introduce the portmanteau “Françafrique” into scientific circulation to denote the French model of neo-colonialism.

“The times they are a-changin’.” And so is the geopolitical situation in Africa. France is losing the clout it once wielded in the countries that were once part of its Empire, even though Paris still considers them to remain in its sphere of influence.⁷¹

New actors (primarily, China and Russia) exploring opportunities in Africa at the turn of the 21st century has caused African countries to reassess their economic and political inclinations. Emmanuel Macron, the Eighth President of the Fifth Republic, has seen the counter-elites, opposition forces and civil society in sub-Saharan countries of Africa turn their backs on the unwanted guardianship of Paris. We are largely referring to the opposition here, since power structures in most countries loyal to France were, until recently, formed with an active participation of the Élysée Palace and French special services.⁷²

The COVID-19 pandemic is another factor that has an impact on the situation in Africa and the regional balance of power, including the countries of the Sahel. In April 2020, as the world was becoming aware of just how dangerous the coronavirus was, President Macron convened an online conference attended by 20 African leaders who, albeit to varying degrees, remained loyal to Paris. The conference was held behind closed doors, and little is known about it. We do know, however, that the French weekly *La Tribune* published a report on April 1, 2020 with the ominous title “The Pangolin Effect: The Coming Storm in Africa”. It was prepared by the highly authoritative Centre for Analysis, Planning and Strategy (CAPS).⁷³ The report’s contributors called on Macron to brace himself for “a long-term destabilization” in Africa in anticipation of the “forthcoming crisis of societies and states.” Prominent French diplomats have voiced their legitimate concerns that the coming crisis could destroy “*fragile regimes*” in the Sahel and in Central Africa. *They believe that COVID-19 could become a “political virus that [...] will expose the inability of these states to defend their populations.”* At the same time, CAPS analysts pointed to the particular vulnerability of “some economically weak and politically unstable Francophone countries that are less reliable and structured than others.” The experts noted that “states with failing government policies (the Sahel and Central African states) do not compare favourably with other African countries that have stronger power institutions,” with Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso singled out in particular. Once it penetrates mass conscious-

⁷¹ Filippov V. The Elysée vs. the Kremlin: a fight for Africa? International Affairs. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2559>

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Cit. ex: F. Robin and J. Tilouine, “Coronavirus : les experts du Quai d’Orsay redoutent le « coup de trop » qui « déstabilise » l’Afrique.” URL: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/04/03/coronavirus-les-experts-du-quai-d-orsay-redoutent-le-coup-de-trop-qui-destabilise-l-afrique_6035470_3212.html

ness, the “comparison effect” can become an additional factor that triggers conflict, exacerbating the domestic situation in countries where political regimes are rather unstable, and leading to regime change.

Besides, the CAPS experts believed that the pandemic would bring about a fierce struggle for a redistribution of the spheres of influence, with China and Russia “seizing” Africa as a result.⁷⁴ Events, they argue, will likely unfold in a manner quite similar to what has been going on in the Central African Republic over the past two years. As the latest coup in Mali (the second in the past two years) has demonstrated, the conceptual provisions contained in the CAPS report turned out to be prophetic.

For many in the Élysée Palace, the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5S) is a grouping that will eventually take on the pacifier’s role in the region. While G5S has been around for a while now, it has failed to contribute to a better security in the region. Worse still, at the G5S Summit held in France in early 2020, the leaders of the Sahel countries had to admit that the French military presence in the region, as well as Operation Barkhane, had yielded few positive results. Quite the opposite: terrorist attacks in the region, which show no signs of abating, are becoming ever bloodier and more daring. The leaders of the Sahel countries insisted that France contribute more funds for counter-terrorism efforts, something that irked the French President no end. Currently, France has no money to spare, which is partly due to the coronavirus pandemic. Besides, there is visible opposition in the G5S countries to the presence of French troops, including in Mali and Niger.⁷⁵

By the summer of 2020, Mali had been mired in a systemic political, social and economic crisis. The country effectively split into two, with the government losing control of vast areas to jihadists and separatists. The traditional conflict between the country’s black population and the “white people of the desert” (Tuaregs and Arabs) has been exacerbated by the growing confrontation between various black tribes, with farmer-herder violence turning even bloodier. President Keita’s regime failed to coin a national idea to unite the citizens of Mali and consolidate society. The army was demoralized and unable to resist terrorist threats, separatism and inter-tribal conflicts effectively. At the same time, the Malian people have been growing increasingly frustrated with the French troops in the country,⁷⁶ realizing that the French Army’s primary purpose has always been to safeguard the interests of the Fifth Republic in West Africa and, above all, maintain control over uranium mines and gold deposits in Mali and Niger.

Mali saw a military coup in August 2020, the fifth since the country’s post-independence history since 1960. The insurrection was orchestrated by two high-ranking officers of the Malian Armed Forces. What is remarkable here is

⁷⁴ Cit. ex: F. Bobin and J. Tilouine, “Coronavirus : les experts du Quai d’Orsay redoutent le «coup de trop» qui «déstabilise» l’Afrique.” URL: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/04/03/coronavirus-les-experts-du-quai-d-orsay-redoutent-le-coup-de-trop-qui-destabilise-l-afrique_6035470_3212.html

⁷⁵ Cit. ex: Sommet du G5 Sahel à Pau: Emmanuel Macron veut resserrer le front antijihadiste. URL: <https://www.france24.com/fr/20200113-un-sommet-du-g5-sahel-%C3%A0-pau-pour-resserrer-le-front-antijihadiste>

⁷⁶ Filippov V. The Elysée vs. the Kremlin: a fight for Africa? International Affairs. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2559>

that these officers underwent retraining in the Russian Federation in early 2020 before returning to their homeland a few days before the coup. The situation in the country never stabilized following the coup, though, due to little unity among its organizers and differences in how they saw the country's future and the choice of allies in foreign policy. A conflict was brewing between the radical forces that coordinated the August coup and the politicians who came to power in the wake of the elections in September 2020. Military elites believed they were marginalized in the country's power structures, claiming that their interests in determining the transitional government's domestic policy were not taken into consideration. What is more, the interim president and his cabinet failed to neutralize terrorist activities of the Islamists. Less than nine months into the August coup, the country spiralled into political chaos once again. The transitional government resigned on May 14, 2021, and interim President Bah Ndaw instructed Prime Minister Moctar Ouane to form a new cabinet.⁷⁷ This became a sticking point in building a new political system in Mali, as the military elite was quite unhappy with the proposed composition of the government. On May 25, 2021, the most radical officers in the Malian Armed Forces took advantage of the government crisis to seize power again.

It is still difficult to make any judgements about the coup. What we do know is that people have taken to the streets in support of the military as a way to express their dissatisfaction with the French military intervention and the fact that Paris is defending its own interests without fighting Islamic terrorists. Rallies lasting several days were held outside the Russian embassy in Bamako, with protesters supporting the new military authorities and appealing to President Putin to help return a sense of normalcy to the situation in the country. The Russian embassy confirmed that the demonstrators were calling for an expanded cooperation between Russia and Mali. In an interview with the *Daily Storm*, Evgeny Korendyasov, Russia's former ambassador to Mali and current professor at the Institute for African Studies under Russian Academy of Sciences stressed that the Soviet Union had been one of Mali's most important foreign partners since the country gained independence in 1960. He added that he had no doubt that the Malian people trusted the Russian Federation more than France, noting *"A survey conducted among the residents of the capital (and there are around two or three million) revealed that 80 per cent were in favour of asking Russia to send its military to help defeat the separatists."*⁷⁸

The fact that the United States suspended all assistance in support of the Malian security and defence forces following the May events indirectly proves that the military coup could be seen as pro-Russian. Moreover, the United States has announced that it is considering additional measures against the military leaders who took part in the military coup. And it goes without saying that the Élysée Palace was extremely concerned by the events.

⁷⁷ Mali's Military Arrest President and Prime Minister. URL: <https://ria.ru/20210524/mali-1733740474.html>

⁷⁸ "The West is Against the 'Lords of the Desert.' What is Happening in Mali, which Has Asked a Russian PMC for Help. Former Russian Ambassador and Current RAS Professor Evgeny Korendyasov Talks about the Situation in the African Republic." URL: <https://dailystorm.ru/detalii/zapad-protiv-vlastelinov-pustyni-cto-proishodit-v-mali-strane-zaprosivshey-pomoshch-u-rossiyskoy-chvk>

The events in Mali cannot be viewed in isolation from the general geopolitical context. The situation in the country on the eve of the coup was not too dissimilar from the present situation in West African countries. The military takeover, which was supported by civil society structures, was indicative of a deep crisis in France's African policy. We should also keep in mind the fact that the presence of various Islamist groups has proven to be a serious destabilizing factor in the countries of the Sahara-Sahel region. And they will surely try to use the political crisis in Mali to achieve their goals. We can also expect to see the conflict in Mali worsen in the foreseeable future over the lands claimed by the Islamic State of Azawad.⁷⁹

In this situation, the Élysée Palace is faced with a question: Whose side will the French soldiers be on now? After all, the list of groups hostile to them now includes the Malian Armed Forces and the Malian people in addition to the traditional jihadists and Tuaregs. To be sure, the topic of France's military intervention in the Sahel Region has been brought up with increasing frequency at opposition protests in recent months. Moreover, it has become clear to everyone in France and Mali that the French expeditionary counter-terror force has been wholly ineffective in resisting Islamist and Tuareg attempts to achieve political self-determination. And U.S. plans to pull most of its troops out of the country will clearly not help the combat effectiveness of the French forces.

How will the current situation affect relations between Moscow and Paris? Let us recall that the "Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Mali on Cooperation in Defence" was signed in Moscow on June 25, 2019.⁸⁰

The Agreement sets as one of its goals, "*the development of relations in the joint training of troops, engineering support, military education, military medicine, military history, military topography, sports, and culture.*" It also contains provisions on interaction in the fight against terrorism and other areas of cooperation by mutual agreement. And now the new military government has clear pro-Russian leanings. According to some French analysts, Russia will have an impact on Mali's political development moving forward, and the new government will be staunchly anti-France.⁸¹

The scenario that proved successful in the Central African Republic is likely to repeat itself in Mali before our very eyes. The political landscape in sub-Saharan Africa is shifting. Many analysts who write about Russia's penetration into Africa note that "Moscow has made itself invaluable in such countries as Sudan, Angola, Mozambique and Nigeria. It also enjoys close relations with Ethiopia and

⁷⁹ Filippov V. The Elysée vs. the Kremlin: a fight for Africa? International Affairs. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2559>

⁸⁰ Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Mali on Cooperation in Defence. URL: <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/560621130>

⁸¹ Filippov V. The Elysée vs. the Kremlin: a fight for Africa? International Affairs. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2559>

Zimbabwe.”⁸² There is increasing talk of “*Russian influence stretching from Sudan to Angola, from Khartoum to Luanda via Bangui and Kinshasa.*”⁸³ If the situation forces France to withdraw its troops from the Sahel countries, then Paris can say goodbye to its dominant positions in Africa forever. And there is reason to believe that the “Mali syndrome” could spread to other countries in the region.

⁸² Dietrich T. En Centrafrique, un parfum de guerre froide.

URL: <https://www.lopinion.fr/edition/international/en-centrafrique-parfum-guerre-froide-156731>

⁸³ Ibid.

Actors in the Malian Crisis

Denis
 Degtarev
 Anna
 Davidchuk
 Oumar
 Sidibe

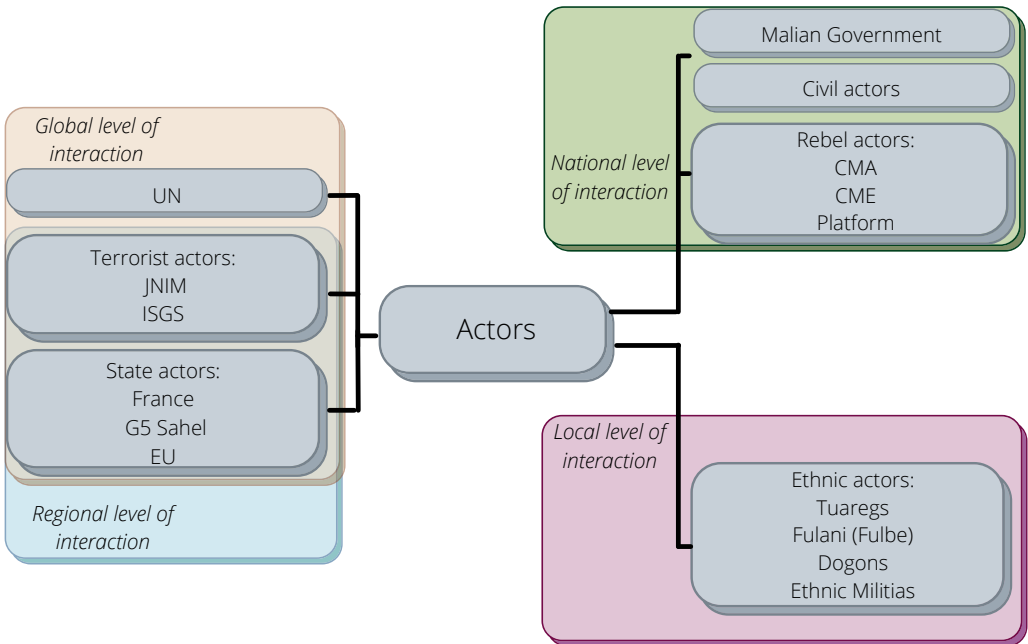
The political crisis in Mali is one of the most serious challenges to regional security in Africa. The number of casualties among members of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (UN MINUSMA) is one of the highest of all operations in other hotbeds of unrest.⁸⁴ A comprehensive analysis of the main actors in the Malian crisis, the structure of their relationships and, more importantly, the role that non-state actors play in this system of relationships is thus sorely needed.

Several approaches are used to analyse interactions between various actors in the Malian crisis: a multilevel analysis of actors; separating groups of actors into categories; and researching paired interactions between actors.

Four Analysis Levels

Participants in the Mali conflict were conditionally divided into four groups in accordance with the Paul Williams’ approach⁸⁵ and the actor classification system proposed by Professor Andrey V. Shabaga during the Situational Analyses held at the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia (RUDN):⁸⁶ global, regional, national and local (see Fig. 1).

Fig 1. Actors in the Malian Crisis: Four Analysis Levels



⁸⁴ "Fatalities Peacekeeping." United Nations. URL: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/fatalities>

⁸⁵ Williams, P. War & Conflict in Africa (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016). P. 79.

⁸⁶ RUDN's Comprehensive Interdisciplinary Methodology for Situation Analysis of International Conflicts. D. A. Degtarev, V. G. Dzhangiryan, V. A. Tsvyk, eds. (Moscow: RUDN Press, 2014). P. 15.

A more detailed actor taxonomy is offered in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis levels for Armed Conflicts in Africa

Level-of-analysis level	Descriptions
Local	Relations between individuals and their immediate (sub-state) politico- geographical context
National	Focused on the institutions of state power
Regional	Geographically coherent, sub-global security complexes which involve the agents of at least two states
Global	De-territorialized networks, structures, processes, institutions, or belief systems (with the potential to be global in scope)

Source: Williams, P. *War & Conflict in Africa* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016). P. 79.

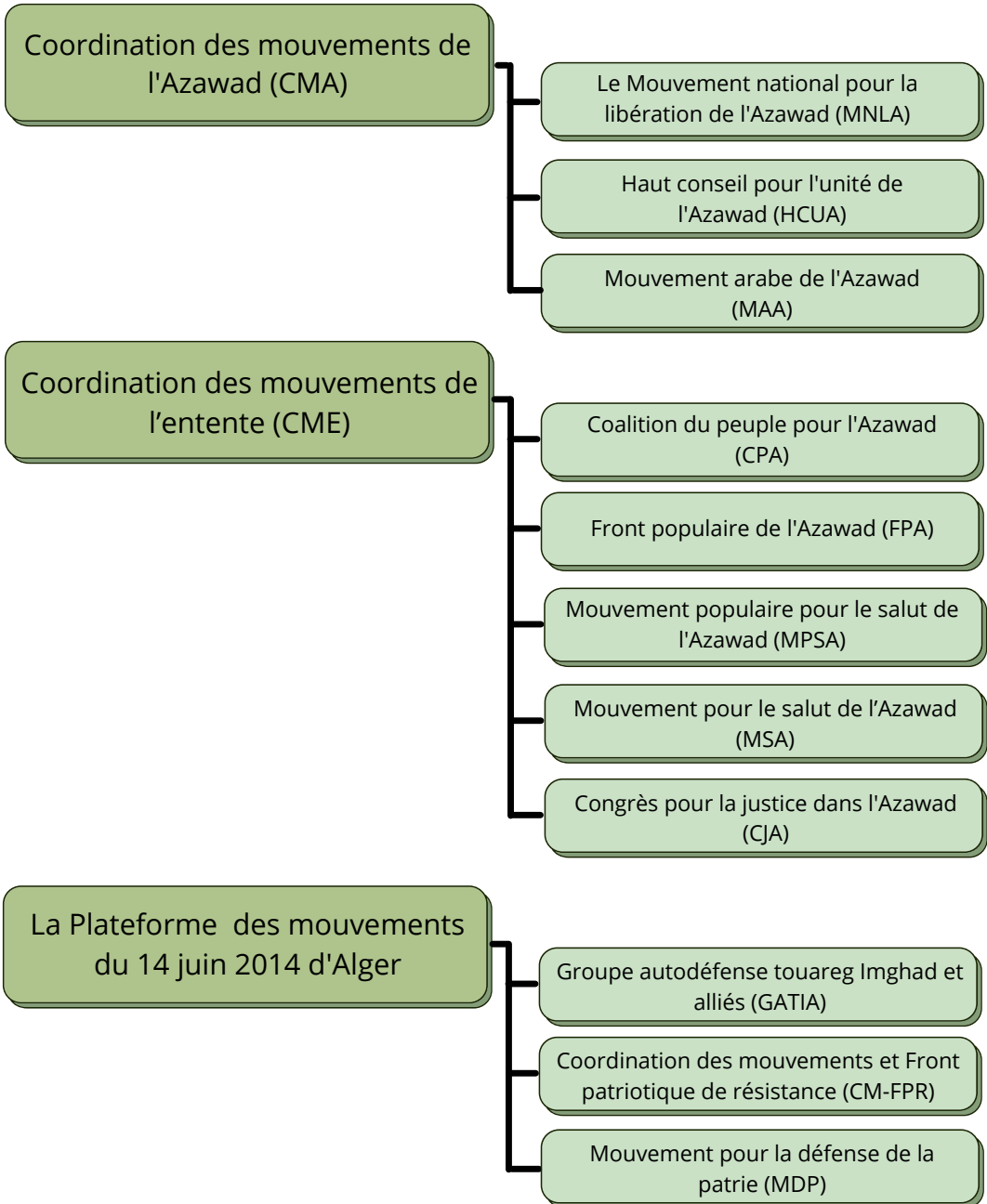
A distinctive feature of most conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel region is their polyethnic nature, which is related to the traditional tribal society system and clan-based structure of relations. It is clear that this factor plays an increasingly important role as one of the main instruments in shaping and changing the system of relationships between actors in the Malian crisis, which, in addition to its clearly pronounced ethnic contradictions, is characterized by insolubility, significant losses, and failed attempts at settlement. A special part is played by ethnic groups that form the political agendas of most actors (for instance, insurgent groups whose core is formed by members of various Tuareg tribes and classes).

The main national actors can provisionally be divided into two large groups: 1) signatories of the 2015 Algerian Accord (the CMA, the CME, and the Platform, see fig. 2); and 2) insurgent organizations that were not recognized as signatories of the Accord, namely, the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (Mouvement populaire pour le salut de l'Azawad, MPSA), the People's Front of Azawad (Front Populaire de l'Azawad, FPA), the Council for Justice of Azawad (Conseil pour la justice de l'Azawad, CJA), and the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA). Some of these movements, as well as some former supporters of the CMA and the Platform, dissatisfied with the course of the talks, formed the Coordination of Movements of Conciliation (Coordination des Mouvements de l'Entente, CME).⁸⁷ Of most interest here are the complex and dynamic relations that have developed between the three main northern Malian organizations (the Platform, the CMA, and the CME on the one hand, and actors from other groups on the other) since the signing of the Algerian Accord.

The regional level of the Malian crisis is most starkly reflected in the interactions between the actors in the field of security. Consequently, we applied the regional security complex theory proposed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver and previously

⁸⁷ O. Sidibe's field research: Tobie, A., and B. Sangaré. Rep. *Impacts Des Groupes Armés Sur Les Populations Au Nord Et Au Centre Du Mali*. Stockholm: SIPRI, 2019. P. 9.

Fig. 2. Main Political Groups



Source: Compiled by the authors

applied by one of the authors to the Sahel in our analysis.⁸⁸ On the one hand, at the regional level, Mali is part of the emerging West African security complex with its own specific range of threats.⁸⁹ On the other hand, the active involvement of France and the European Union as “mega-regional” actors and security providers allows us to talk about a “Euro-Africa,” where actors that do not geographically belong to the traditional West African security complex project power onto the region to counter common threats, primarily the spread of terrorism (including in European countries, given the large migration influx from Africa).

At the international level, we have transnational terrorist groups and the UN MINUSMA peace keeping mission. The distinction between the regional and international levels is provisional, since international actors are forced to take regional specifics into account, while such actors as the European Union and France manifest themselves in other global regions in addition to Africa.

The “four levels” theory is important for the analysis below, since the example of African crises allows us to see that the global level does not always dominate, and it is ethnic actors that frequently shape the overall fabric and dynamics of the conflict.

In this context, it is interesting to group actors not only by analysis level, but also by their type: state and international; insurgent; terrorist; civil; and ethnic actors (see Table 2).

Table 2. Principal Actors in the Mali conflict (2011–2021)

Actor type	Name (English)	Name (non-English)	Abbreviation
1. State and external actors	Malian Armed Forces	Forces Armées Maliennes	FAMa
	Forces of the Operation Coordination Mechanism	Mécanisme Opérationnel de Coordination	MOC
	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration initiative participants	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration	DDR
	Joint forces of the Group of Five for the Sahel	G5 Sahel	G5
	France (Operation Serval => Operation Barkhane)	Operation Serval => Operation Barkhane	Serval => Barkhane
	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali		MINUSMA
	European Union Training Mission Mali		EUTM
	Takuba Task Force		Takuba

⁸⁸ Idahosa, S. O., Degterev, D. A., and S. I. Ikhidoro, “Securitisation Initiatives and the Lingering Security Challenges in Sub-Saharan Sahel Region: An Appraisal,” *African Security Review*. 2021, online: 1–30. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2021.1970597>

⁸⁹ Buzan, Barry, and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). P. 25.

**AFRICAN PRESSURE POINTS: SAHEL
(SITUATION REVIEW AND FUTURE PROSPECTS)**

End of Table 2.

Actor type	Name (English)	Name (non-English)	Abbreviation
2. Insurgent actors	Coordination of Movements of Azawad	Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad	CMA
	Algiers Platform of the 14 June 2014 Movements	Plateforme des mouvements du 14 juin 2014 d'Alger	The Platform
	Coordination of the Movements of Conciliation	Coordination des mouvements de l'entente	CME
	Movement for the Salvation of Azawad	Mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad	MSA
	Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies	Groupe autodéfense touareg Imghad et alliés	GATIA
3. Terrorist actors	The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims	Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin	JNIM
	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara*		ISGS
	Ansar al-Din		AAD
	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb**		AQIM
	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa		MUJWA
	Al Mourabitoun		–
	Macina Liberation Front	Katiba Macina / Front de libération du Macina	MLF
4. Civil actors	Yerewolo: On the Ramparts	Yerewolo debout sur les remparts	Yerewolo
	The Front of Renouncing the Algerian Accord	Front de refus de l'accord d'Alger	FRA
	National Youth Council of Mali	Conseil nationale des jeunes	CNJ
	France Go Away! movement	Mouvement «France dégage!»	
	France-MINUSMA Go Away! platform	Plateforme «France-Minusma degage!»	
5. Ethnic actors	The Dogons (grain growers): Dan na Ambassagou (ethnic militia) / Dana Atem (movement)	Dan na Ambassagou / Dana Atem	–
	The Fula (cattle raisers)		
	Tuareg Kunta (an Arab tribe)		

Source: A. S. Davidchuk, D. A. Degterev, O. Sidibe, "Conflict in Mali: Relations between Principal Actors," *Aziya i Afrika segodnya (Asia and Africa Today)*, 2021 (12).

* Designated as terrorist by the courts of the Russian Federation.

Interconnections Between Levels

A distinguishing feature of the conflict in the Sahara-Sahel region is that the lines have been blurred to such an extent that it is unclear what we are dealing with—an ethnic clash, a jihad, or a political insurgency. Moreover, the key actors are heterogeneous, and their political weight is critically important for the conflict.

On the political map of Mali, there is significant overlap of the actors in the crisis and their constituent parts, belonging as they do to various levels of interaction. And this creates a comprehensive, unique, and sometimes paradoxical system of interrelations. For instance, the Fula people officially support the government's war on terror. In practice, however, many members of the Fula ethnic group are involved in committing individual acts of terror through their family or tribal connections. The actions of the Macina Liberation Front are aimed specifically at resolving the Fula ethnic question and restoring the Macina Empire, and it finds significant support among shepherds. Tuareg tribes and classes have been historically locked in confrontations, which resulted in the people splitting into those who form the core of insurgent groups supporting the government in its war on terror and those who are members of the JNIM group.^{**90}

The Dogons formed two diametrically opposed organizations: Dan na Ambasagou, which supports the government in its war on terror and has committed particularly brutal acts of violence against the Fula (whom members of the organization suspected of having ties to terrorists); and Dana Atem, which calls for an end to the bloody conflicts between the Dogons and the Fula.⁹¹ Terrorist groups and foreign participants blur the lines between the global and regional levels of analysis, since they are active on both. At the same time, the United Nations leans more towards the global level, while France and the European Union rather represent mega-regional actors.

In 2011, Paul Williams suggested that wars and conflicts in Africa are a complex social process that cannot be explained through a single cause or single international relations theory. Given the variety and the unique system of both state and non-state actors in African conflicts and wars, Williams claims that “the concept of distinct *levels* of analysis with rigid spatial divides between them paints an unhelpful mental image.”⁹² According to his theory, the levels are not fully separated in the African region, their boundaries are almost transparent, and there are “migrating actors” who may be active at several analysis levels.

Moreover, the Mali conflict contains almost all other specific features of African conflicts listed by Williams:

^{**} Affiliated with Al-Qaeda, which has been designated as terrorist by the courts of the Russian Federation.

⁹⁰ Guichaoua, Yvan, and Nicolas Desgrais. Rep. Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Mali Case Study. Stabilisation Unit, 2018.

⁹¹ Cissé, Koureïchy. “Sidi Ongoïba Président Du Mouvement DANA ATEM: 'D'Abord La Pacification Totale.'” Maliweb, June 20, 2020. URL: <https://www.maliweb.net/interview/sidi-ongoiba-president-du-mouvement-dana-atem-dabord-la-pacification-totale-2880950.html>

⁹² Williams, P., *War & Conflict in Africa*, (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016). P. 80.

- The Mali conflict is characterized by a **lack of clear boundaries between war and peace** and “pulsations” of violence. The crisis is made up of chaotic armed clashes over nine years;
- **The blurred lines between combatants and civilians** are particularly indicative of the social basis of terrorism, where Mali citizens (mostly farmers and shepherds) are involved in individual acts of terrorism through their family and tribal ties;
- The **state vs. insurgents** scenario that started in 2012 with the Tuareg uprising; Many actors in the Malian crisis (particularly non-state actors, including ethnic militias and terrorist groups) use **violence against civilians** and the so-called “**indiscriminate violence**” stemming from a broadly interpreted notion of “enemy” and thin lines between civilians and members of political, insurgent, or terrorist groups.

Additionally, Mali is witnessing a transformation of the traditional function of certain actors (for instance, terrorist groups partially abolishing violence). Natasja Rupesinghe, Mikael Naghizadeh and Corentin Cohen believe that jihadists are becoming so-called “governance actors” that develop their own governance systems existing parallel to the official governments.⁹³ Such systems are characterized by significant ideological and structural variety (in the absence of a single model and pattern) and the desire to establish “social” (that is, relying on a broad social base) as opposed to territorial control. Another important feature of the new actors is their appropriation of the monopoly on violence that legitimately belongs to the state only. At the same time, such groups as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)** and the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jamaat Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin, JNIM)** are still terrorists, characterized first and foremost by illegal violence against the state and civilians.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the conflicts that constitute the Malian crisis are caused solely by borders issues, ethnic contradictions or the lack of resources. Border issues only arise when a state does not have enough power and resources to secure and protect its borders (as we have said above, these borders are fairly provisional and transparent); ethnic conflicts have been exacerbated as a result of national groups evolving into political movements (such as insurgent groups and ethnic militias); and the struggle for resources is primarily a conflict between cattle raisers and grain growers over land resources and access to water. All the above factors are present in the Malian crisis, which allows us to view this case as, among other things, a particular example of the “war within war” concept.

The above examples of interactions between various analysis levels demonstrate that it would be an oversimplification to deconstruct actors solely by breaking them down by level. In practice, most actors, including those that represent

⁹³ Rupesinghe, Natasja, Mikael H. Naghizadeh, and Corentin Cohen. Working Paper. Reviewing Jihadist Governance in the Sahel. Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2021. P. 5.

** Affiliated with an organization, which has been designated as terrorist by the courts of the Russian Federation.

entirely different analysis levels, interact with each other to some extent. In this connection, we supplement multilevel analysis by researching paired interactions between all actors without exception. Our structured findings are presented in Fig. 3.

Fig. 3. Malian Crisis: Mosaic of Major Actors



Source: Denis A. Duganov, Anna S. Davidovskaya, Galina Grigoreva, 2021, "Malian Crisis Actors Mosaic," URL: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/8HMZ7G> Harvard Dataverse, V1, UNF:6:k3LSMLr8ajlBisoKrh1Mvw

With this purpose in mind, we analysed official statements and over 250 reports in Malian and international media, as well as Oumar Sidibe's field research and interviews with Malian political figures. Using our findings, we developed a cross-section of a complex system of interrelations between the main parties and actors in the Malian conflict. Green indicates friendly and allied relations, yellow indicates neutral relations that are not entirely trust-based, and red marks adversarial relations. Blue means low intensity of inter-actor contacts that have not been documented in the media or in research papers.

The structure of relations between the actors in the Malian crisis differs significantly from similar structures in other hotbeds of unrest around the world and is characterized by the possibility of rapidly rebranding organizations and groups, the low level of loyalty, the fact that the majority of actors have their own political agendas due to the many unresolved socioeconomic problems, blurred boundaries between actors, and the key importance of the ethnic factor. Non-state actors

that had not been particularly visible on the political arena previously—such as the Fula and Fulani ethnic militias, civilian organizations, terrorist groups—are playing an increasingly larger role. The connection between actors as shown on the authors' mosaic (see Fig. 3) proves and supplements the theory of analysis levels being interconnected. Ethnic nationalism, which significantly affects international relations, places itself in opposition to civil nationalism, becoming a seminal factor for all participants and permeating all areas of the Malian crisis.

Part 3. Humanitarian consequences of armed conflicts and violence in the Sahel countries. Ways to overcome

Building resilience in the Sahel

Zachariah
Maiga
Tristan
Ferraro

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is deeply concerned about the situation in the Sahel region where communities are reeling from successive crises caused by armed conflict, criminality, poverty and climate shocks. As a result, according to estimations, approximately 12 million people are facing a humanitarian crisis in the Sahel countries⁹⁴. Armed conflicts and violence are a primary reason of people's hardships, however, as Peter Maurer, President of the ICRC put it, *"peace and security will not be established by focusing on military and security measures to curb conflict and violence. Those most at risk must be at the center of our concern and an urgent priority."*

If the humanitarian situation in the region does not improve and there is no boost to its development, the consequences will be grave, creating fertile breeding grounds for radicalization and extremism.

Complexity of the humanitarian crisis

In the countries of the Sahel where it is present (including, among others, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad), the ICRC offers emergency and sustainable humanitarian response to increasing needs.

Unfortunately, since 2013, the situation has deteriorated, due to armed conflicts, violence by criminal groups and inter-communal tensions. In the first 6 months of 2020, over 4,660 people died from violence in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, which is 62 % higher compared to the previous year.⁹⁵

The violence causes continuous displacement of unprecedented scale for the Sahel affecting both the displaced and hosting communities, unable to cope with the increasing flow of migrants. By UNHCR (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees) and IOM (International Organization of Migration) estimates, there are over two million internally displaced in the sub-region.⁹⁶ Until recently, most migrants from sub-Saharan Africa going to Europe travelled through the city of

⁹⁴ Overview of humanitarian needs and requirements—Sahel crisis // Relief web. Published in May 2020.
URL: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HNRO%20Sahel%20May%202020.pdf>

⁹⁵ Central Sahel: Spike in violence leads to higher deaths, more than 1 million fleeing homes // ICRC website. 14.09.2020.
URL: https://www.icrc.org/en/document/central-sahel-spike-violence-leads-higher-deaths-more-1-million-fleeing-homes#_ftn1

⁹⁶ See: Grim milestone as Sahel violence displaces 2 million inside their countries // UNHCR website. 22.01.2021.
URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2021/1/600a92e4125/grim-milestone-sahel-violence-displaces-2-million-inside-countries.html>; IOM Response in the Central Sahel // IOM. Published in October 2020.
URL: https://crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/default/files/uploaded-files/Sahel%20factsheet_Final.pdf

Agadez in Niger. But now their numbers have dropped sharply due to shifts in countries' migration policies, and some migrants have ended up stuck there.

Food insecurity has also increased a lot, affecting about five million people in 2020, while only in June–August 2021 (lean season) 6.5 million people were projected to face food insecurity.⁹⁷ Military confrontation and forced displacement are increasingly limiting access to agricultural fields, depriving households reliant on agriculture of sources of subsistence. In addition, the Sahel countries, which are at the bottom end of the world's human development index, are facing degradation of basic services and healthcare infrastructure, in particular, in many rural areas. Conflicts and insecurity further limit access to basic services and economic opportunities, keeping millions of people trapped in extreme poverty.

Since 2020, the pandemic has further weakened and strained resources, complicated access, and restricted supply chains. Availability of healthcare services is essential amid conflict, even more so during a global pandemic. However, for example, in Mali, an estimated 20 % of healthcare centres are partially damaged or destroyed, and in Burkina Faso, 14 % of them are closed or working at limited capacity.⁹⁸

Another negative element is the global warming, which in the Sahel belt is accelerating 1.5 times faster than elsewhere in the world. It brings lives and livelihoods of millions of people who depend on arable and livestock farming, under threat, shrinking the land that can be farmed and making water increasingly scarce. To be noted, access to water has dropped by 40 % over the past 25 years in the region.⁹⁹ Climate shocks most strongly impact people living in conflict-affected countries with low adaptation capacity. In addition, record hot spells and floods tend to exacerbate inter-communal tensions and violence. ICRC's recent study "When Rain Turns to Dust" draws on people's experiences in Northern Mali as one of three case studies. Farmers in this area have been more frequently affected by natural disasters, depriving them of their homes and harvest, and are forced to move to other regions or cities.

A legal dialogue to avoid misconceptions

If the integration of international humanitarian law to counter-terrorism frameworks prompts numerous discussions, for the ICRC, the Sahel has been a laboratory for a fruitful legal and operational dialogue with all stakeholders involved in the fight against terrorism, and an occasion to engage into discussion with non-state armed groups, including those, designated by States as terrorist. The ICRC considers that some situations of violence in the Sahel countries have reached the threshold of a non-international armed conflict, governed by international humanitarian law (IHL). Active on the ground, dialoguing with State and non-

⁹⁷ Food Security Highlights, World Food Programme publication. West Africa. Issue 2, May 2021 // FSC website.
URL: https://fsccluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/food_security_highlights_issue_2_june_2021.pdf

⁹⁸ COVID-19: ICRC response to the coronavirus in Africa // ICRC website. 30.03.2020.
URL: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/covid-19-icrc-response-coronavirus-africa>

⁹⁹ The Sahel. 01.2016. Converging Challenges, Compounding Risks. A Region Under High Pressure // Relief Web.
URL: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Sahel%20Info%20Sheet%20Jan%202016.pdf>

State entities, the ICRC had the chance to clarify that IHL application not only does not prevent counter-terrorist operations, but remains an efficient body of law to quell the threat emanating from groups, designated as terrorist, while providing effective protection to civilians and other persons placed *hors de combat*, such as people deprived of liberty, the wounded, and sick.

The Sahel paradox: more needs, less humanitarian space

While people's needs are escalating, the work of humanitarians is being increasingly constrained for different reasons: direct attacks, criminality, imposition of armed escorts, or limitations of domestic counter-terrorism legislation.

In response to security threats, States have been tightening existent security measures and developing new ones. They also conduct counter-terrorist operations, and the ICRC does not challenge the necessity states to take action to protect the population under their jurisdiction. The fight against terrorism can take different forms, including an armed conflict. In most cases in the Sahel, States take counter-terrorist measures against non-state armed groups in the context of non-international armed conflicts. The latter entails that they use force under a conduct of hostilities paradigm. This is the case in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, where non-international armed conflicts are taking place with the involvement of foreign countries, for example, France, and with the support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in Mali.

The UN Security Council has requested States to include very comprehensive anti-terrorism laws into their national legislation, which criminalize any form of support to those labeled "terrorists". The problem is that this provision is broadly interpreted so it can also apply to principled humanitarian action authorized under IHL. To find the right balance, the ICRC has engaged with some Sahel countries to ensure that they include into their anti-terrorism criminal legislation standing and well-framed humanitarian exemptions.¹⁰⁰ This aims at excluding from the scope of counter-terrorist offences exclusively humanitarian activities carried out by impartial humanitarian organizations in accordance with IHL. This means that activities of impartial humanitarians, such as ICRC, would not be criminalized. There are very positive examples, like in Chad, one of the first states that passed a counter-terrorism legislation while preserving such humanitarian space.

The ICRC calls for governments, as both donors and development actors, not to abandon remote and unstable areas, such as the Sahel, suffering from protracted conflict whose impact goes beyond its borders. Against the background of the on-going humanitarian crisis, the ICRC has been appealing to the international community for financial and political commitments to meet the challenges of the region. It would mean, among other things, a fundamental change of behavior of belligerents for better respect of IHL, investments in sustainable responses and greater protection of humanitarian activities.

¹⁰⁰ ICRC calls on States to ensure counter terrorism measure do not negatively impact humanitarian action // ICRC website. 08.10.2021. URL: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-calls-states-ensure-counter-terrorism-measure-do-not-negatively-impact-humanitarian>

Resilience of the affected population, paving the way for long-term solutions

In protracted armed conflicts such as the ones in the Sahel, the emergency response is not enough. There is a need for mid-term, even long-term solutions. Facing the increasing needs, the ICRC redesigns its response, acting beyond emergency assistance. In this way, the ICRC hopes to contribute to building systemic resilience that will have a positive impact on the local communities. It uses the same approach trying to build resilience to climate shocks and looking at what can be done in anticipation before a crisis breaks up.

For example, in Niger, the ICRC works with local authorities to reinforce urban water supply systems. Across the region, the organization is putting in place income generation projects, such as support to animal vaccination campaigns. In the Sahel, most people are farming or have livestock, so it is an important asset for the population. In Burkina Faso, the ICRC distributes seeds and tools to support livelihoods. Because of the conflict, farmers could not cultivate land, they did not have seeds, so for the ICRC, it was important to ensure that they could take care of themselves. In Mali, ICRC helped rehabilitate an old and destroyed irrigation infrastructure so that beneficiaries could have enough water to produce rice. Additional technical advice on harvesting, as well as training in post-harvest conservation and access to markets help strengthen the adaptive resilience capacity. In the long-term, training and technical advice is important for people's quality of life and well-being.

The ICRC does not work alone. Traditionally, in many countries it works in partnership with national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and now the ICRC is also partnering with the private sector and other international institutions. The cooperation with the Tony Elumelu Foundation based in Nigeria is a good example.¹⁰¹ The main objective of this partnership is revitalizing the economy of conflict-affected regions, providing employment and strengthening social cohesion at the local level. Since 2018, the ICRC has supported 117 entrepreneurs with cash grants delivered in two installments equivalent to 5,000 USD for each. From 2018 till 2019, 260 entrepreneurs have received cash grants amounting to 1,800,000 USD for mainly livestock production and agriculture, but also services, trade and crafts. It illustrates how in some conflict-affected areas there is still an opportunity to provide support to launch different types of business activities and create jobs.

Another important partnership is with the African Development Bank, which will help implement a multi-country project for economic empowerment of vulnerable women in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. This project will mainly focus on income generation targeted at increasing the income of women and youth by up to 20 % by capacity-building (financial and professional training) and revitalization of socio-economic activities.

¹⁰¹ For more information on the ICRC-private sector partnerships, please see the article "Nigeria: Private sector partnerships restore hope to conflict-affected communities" // ICRC website. 23.01.2018.
URL: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/nigeria-private-sector-partnerships-restore-hope-conflict-affected-communities>

The ICRC is also exploring partnership opportunities with the World Bank, trying to foster synergies between the areas of expertise of both organizations, including the ICRC's long-standing humanitarian experience in countries affected by armed conflict. However, as an example to build on, since 2019, the ICRC has developed partnership with the World Bank in South Sudan, which has helped to provide healthcare in remote areas.

While COVID-19 has created strong constraints because of the difficulties to travel and other restrictions, impacting trade and business activities, there will hopefully be more opportunities to partner with the private sector in the future, especially in the Sahel.

ICRC's Contribution to Engaging Civil Society in Resolving Security Issues in Mali

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The International Committee of the Red Cross, while an independent organization, is simultaneously part of a three-tier structure of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement that includes the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which is in charge of providing humanitarian aid to persons affected by natural or man-made disasters; and National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which implement the seven fundamental principles locally.¹⁰²

National Societies as the Key to Interacting with Civil Society

As part of its activities, the ICRC is sometimes forced to make use of the resources of National Societies to provide a more coordinated, rational and rapid response to the humanitarian needs of people who have suffered as a result of an armed conflict. For instance, local branches play a particularly important role in the matter of re-integrating women and children into society, since these branches are immersed in local realities, are mostly staffed by locals, and are capable of developing the most efficient response strategy.¹⁰³ Such a form of partnership is highly beneficial since employees at National Societies are locals who have continuously been employed in the given territory and, consequently, are fluent in the languages and dialects of the country and are well-versed in the local traditions, culture and confessional specifics of a given society. Moreover, they frequently know the members of a specific community, which makes establishing direct contacts easier. Such programmes are particularly relevant now, and they have already been implemented in West and Central Africa.

Nevertheless, it is imperative to note the status of National Societies under International Humanitarian Law (IHL). They are equally vested with rights that are not accorded to other NGOs outside of the Red Cross. National Societies are the main subdivisions of the Red Cross movement and are in charge of supporting national government bodies and, under the provisions of the Geneva Conventions,¹⁰⁴ providing aid to victims of armed conflicts. Although legally these national societies are often registered in their respective jurisdictions as regular NGOs, their privileged ties to governments and unique standing in

¹⁰² Ian McAllister, "Relief, development and peacekeeping: fragile connections: Perspectives Drawn from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent," *Peace Research*, No. 3, 1998. P. 15–40. URL: www.jstor.org/stable/2360716

¹⁰³ *Coopération avec les Sociétés nationales*. October 29, 2010. URL: <https://www.icrc.org/fr/doc/what-we-do/cooperating-national-societies/overview-cooperation-national-societies.htm>

¹⁰⁴ Convention (I) de Genève pour l'amélioration du sort des blessés et des malades dans les forces armées en campagne du 12 août 1949. URL: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/dih.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=D491030A9BB6E16EC12563140043A96A&action=openDocument>; Convention (II) de Genève pour l'amélioration du sort des blessés, des malades et des naufragés des forces armées sur mer du 12 août 1949. URL: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/dih.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=4EE20B2B36D570F6C12563140043A999&action=openDocument>; Convention (III) de Genève relative au traitement des prisonniers de guerre du 12 août 1949. URL: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/dih.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=4946170FCA7C6F87C12563140043A9C0&action=openDocument>; Convention (IV) de Genève relative à la protection des personnes civiles en temps de guerre du 12 août 1949. URL: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/dih.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=87DBEB6A73B8E8D0C12563140043A9F3&action=openDocument>

relation to IHL often accord them a quasi-official organizational capacity that other NGOs might not have.¹⁰⁵ The ICRC and its employees frequently operate under agreements that grant them certain privileges and immunities that naturally cannot compare to full diplomatic immunity (regulation is determined by a special plan and depends on the consent of the given state). It is also apparent that such rights are not granted to regular NGOs, which enjoy general protection accorded to civilians under IHL.

The Movement's institutions coordinate their activities on the basis of the Agreement on the Organization of the International Activities of the Components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Seville Agreement of 1997)¹⁰⁶ and the Movement Strategy (adopted by the Council of Delegates in 2001),¹⁰⁷ while the Committee itself distinguishes four aspects of cooperation with national societies:

- Prompt cooperation includes implementing joint initiatives locally, providing medical aid, distributing resources, evacuating the wounded, etc.;
- Coordination of the Movement's institutions among themselves, because, in times of armed conflict, the ICRC automatically assumes the leading role in the structure (in other words, ensuring complementarity through mandate delimitation). It should be noted that the Committee has the exclusive right to negotiate with the parties to a conflict;
- Sharing experience on strengthening IHL globally, restoring family ties, and mine action;
- Developing the Movement's overarching policy (jointly with all the institutions).¹⁰⁸

Be it as it may, cooperation with national societies results in the establishment of a dialogue with states where these societies function. This fact is of particular importance for interactions of the first type since, pursuant to the above-stated provisions, it can be extended to national societies beyond the country affected by the conflict. These are national societies that intend to conduct humanitarian activities abroad. They could contribute to protecting civilians by sending financial and material donations (the latter include foods, clothes and equipment), seconding some of their personnel and, crucially, managing, individual projects within the recipient state that have been delegated to them by the Committee.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Bruno Demeyere, "Turning the Stranger into a Partner: The Role and Responsibilities of Civil Society in International Humanitarian Law Formulation and Application," Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, Harvard University, 2007.

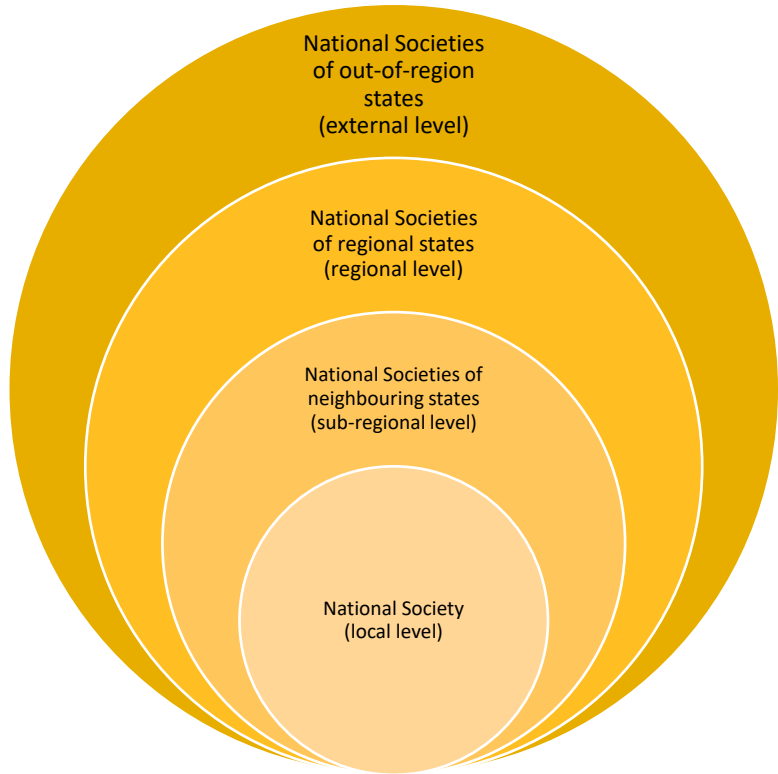
¹⁰⁶ The Seville Agreement on the Organization of the International Activities of the Components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement dated November 26, 1997.
URL: <https://www.icrc.org/ru/doc/resources/documents/misc/sevilleagreement-cooperation-261197.htm>

¹⁰⁷ Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Seoul, November 16–18, 2005) in *Mezhdunarodny zhurnal Krasnogo Kresta* (International Red Cross Journal), No. 860, 2005.

¹⁰⁸ *Doctrine relative à la coopération entre le CICR et les Sociétés nationales*, International Committee of the Red Cross, 2003. P. 679–695. URL: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-review-of-the-red-cross/article/doctrine-relative-a-la-cooperation-entre-le-cicr-et-les-societes-nationales/EE3688F72D7C8CAB8F3B4E0013906617>

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

We can thus propose a classification of cooperation between the ICRC and national societies by type of actor.



Source: Compiled by the authors

1. At the local level

As a rule, a local national society is directly interested in the conflict being speedily resolved and in providing aid to the suffering population. In this case, interaction may include not just material support, but also the deployment of joint programmes and projects intended, for instance, to uncover cases of child exploitation or to educate the population on the negative impact of early marriages on the development of society as a whole. The key advantage of such cooperation is rapid response and an understanding of the specifics of a country and its ethnic identity, which properly contextualizes activities in Africa.

2. At the regional level

Regional actors (in our classification, this category includes neighbouring states, that is, states that have a common border, as well as other states on the African continent) have a certain interest in putting an end to violence. Given the ethnic and religious component or, to be more specific, the fact that geographic bor-

ders differ from ethnic borders, one could suppose that such interactions may help eliminate the language (dialect) barrier in both engaging in talks with the opposition and in establishing a dialogue with demobilized children. This factor also makes it possible to re-integrate victims of sexual violence into a community where they will not be stigmatized and at the same time share a set of traditions and religious beliefs, which will minimize the consequences of the act of violence and reduce the embedding time. Such cooperation may also play an important role in implementing programmes for working with refugees, searching for missing family members and repatriating them. Additionally, this type of cooperation may help to uncover and combat human trafficking, whose principal outposts are scattered throughout the continent.

Additionally, taking into account the current security systems in place at the regional level, we can conclude that this cooperation assists in developing unified mechanisms for combating specific problems in the peace and security area.

3. At the external level

It is also common practice for the national societies of countries that are not regional actors to provide aid to African states. Foreign programmes are largely developed by European and Latin American countries. France, the United Kingdom, Canada and Switzerland demonstrate an unquestionable interest in the African continent. There are several interaction formats. The first is the most direct and essentially consists in sending money or humanitarian aid to a specific country. The second consists in implementing integral projects. An analysis of financing has allowed us to identify a certain regularity in the contributions of countries and national societies. The top five is always made up of the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden (always in this order). The United Kingdom retains its position in terms of the donations of national societies, where Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands in particular stand out.¹¹⁰

Of particular interest at the external level are the activities of the Canadian National Society of the Red Cross, which implements a West African partnership. The purpose of this partnership is to increase the potential of Red Cross Societies in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Mali in developing and implementing programmes that will make local communities stronger, healthier and more stable. The Canadian government financed several projects via the Canadian Red Cross, including the Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health (MNCH) project to provide healthcare to rural communities in the Sikasso and Koulikoro regions. The project emphasizes better maternal, infant and child health and includes a partnership with the Centre for Global Child Health in Toronto, which improves the monitoring and evalua-

¹¹⁰ ICRC Annual Report. 2017: the official text // Finance and administration.
URL: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/annual-report-2017>;
ICRC Annual Report. 2018: the official text // Finance and administration.
URL: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/annual-report-2018>;
ICRC Annual Report. 2019: the official text // Finance and administration.
URL: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/annual-report-2019>;
ICRC Annual Report. 2020: the official text // Finance and administration.
URL: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/annual-report-2020>

tion of current activities. The project's overall budget was USD 19.5 million. The Canadian Red Cross contributed US\$3 million, with the Canadian government financing nearly 85 per cent of the project (US\$16.5 million).¹¹¹

ICRC Influencers

Each case considered involves primarily engaging the local civil society in the humanitarian space with a view to achieving security goals with greater success, since several areas of the ICRC's activities require not so much material solutions, as a transformation of the public consciousness and certain orthodox paradigms. In this connection, individual persons and/or establishments that are capable of shaping public opinion acquire the status of "influencers" with the ICRC.¹¹² These actors might include public and religious figures, members of youth and non-governmental associations and organizations, academic institutions, etc. The instruments and methods that the ICRC uses when working with civil society are of particular interest here.

On the other hand, their involvement contributes to the establishment of more reliable and confidential channels of communication for providing feedback to the Committee. This area is of key importance in detecting, responding to, and assisting in the provision of relief after violence has been perpetrated against civilians (for instance, in handling the problem of sexual violence amid armed conflicts). Some ICRC delegations have set up special contact centres to strengthen interaction with the population in response to appeals. These centres help collect and perform statistical analyses of data ranged by sex, age, gender, disability and other context-shaping factors with the purpose of, among other things, identifying the negative consequences of their own activities.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has had a constant presence in Mali since 1982. A regional delegation has been working in Bamako since 2013. To carry out its Mali mandate, the ICRC engaged in a dialogue with a wide range of actors whose involvement was crucial for advancing the safe and timely delivery of humanitarian aid, protecting the health and humanitarian workers, and preventing illegal acts. These activities were carried out with due account for restrictions in accessibility and security, including the grave situation caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic. It is important to note that the Mali National Society and the ICRC signed a framework partnership agreement that was in effect in 2020–2024. Currently, one can distinguish the following forms of interactions with civil society:¹¹³

- Significant work on compliance with IHL norms conducted through interaction with members of the armed forces, including master classes, workshops,

¹¹¹ Maternal, Newborn and Child Health in Mali. Canadian Red Cross. 2021. URL: <https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/international-programs/maternal-newborn-and-child-health/long-term-maternal-newborn-and-child-health-programs/maternal-newborn-and-child-health-in-africa/maternal-newborn-and-child-health-in-mali>

¹¹² ICRC Annual Report, 2020: The Official Text. URL: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/icrc-annual-report-2020-1.pdf>

¹¹³ ICRC Annual Africa Report, 2019: The Official Text. URL: <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/annual-report/icrc-annual-report-2019.pdf>; ICRC Annual Africa Report, 2020: The Official Text.

round tables and negotiations, including with the so-called “arms bearers,” meaning regular armed forces, police, paramilitary units, armed opposition groups, and private military and security companies;

- Members of civil society, including secular and religious institutions, are also involved in the process of assimilating humanitarian norms. For instance, the “Humanitarian for Africa” forum was first held in 2019 in Bamako. This platform is a space for discussing current humanitarian issues involving humanitarian, diplomatic, academic and military circles;
- Interaction with religious figures: regular meetings held by the ICRC make it possible to engage in collaboration with religious leaders. Of special interest is their interaction within the framework of identifying common foundations between Sharia law and IHL. In November, the Ministry of Religious Affairs held a national workshop on Islamic law and IHL. One of the speakers, a religious leader, took an IHL course abroad (in Tunisia) with the ICRC’s support;
- Work with “influencers,” something that is popular in the business environment, is also gaining traction. In the context of humanitarian activities, this means primarily involving young people, particularly journalists and bloggers, in “informational propaganda,” by which the authors mean disseminating information via social networks and other media platforms on the Mali Red Cross and the ICRC in the context of existing mechanisms for assisting the civilian population. Special attention was given to COVID-19 and hygiene issues. This practice is extremely effective when working with today’s generation, focusing on building awareness, trust in individuals instead of the media, and uniting people by interest group on the internet;
- Successful work is being carried out on introducing IHL disciplines into the curricula of local universities and colleges. However, last year, only one higher education institution included a course based on ICRC materials (a 20-hour programme).

Therefore, the involvement of civil society in ensuring humanitarian security stems from the effectiveness of the local population’s participation in resolving problems that require both public attention and changes to established world-view paradigms. In this connection, the International Committee of the Red Cross collaborates directly and indirectly with members of non-governmental organizations, associations and clubs, and with religious and youth leaders. By indirect collaborations, the authors mean cooperation via the National Red Cross Society in Mali, including financing and implementing large projects involving local communities and activists. These projects include holding master classes, lectures, meetings with associations, setting up support groups for victims of sexual violence, organizing street patrols and ensuring information accessibility. The key resources of National Societies are their knowledge of traditions, religion, languages and dialects, which allows them to earn the trust of the local population and draw their attention to current problems. Moreover, National Societies become venues for monitoring and assessing the current situation with a view to providing further response. It would be logical to include those mecha-

nisms of communication with civil society and its elements that do not require the use of outside platforms in the category of direct forms of interaction: these mechanisms include engaging young people and public activists in providing an accessible information environment; interacting with religious leaders in order to use education to softly introduce IHL values and personal security into the established culture; and participation in the educational environment. All these forms allow the ICRC to engage in preventive activities by eliminating potential acts of violence and circumstances that may provoke violence in the future. The authors consider the use of these practices in Mali to be worthwhile and successful, as they create the opportunity to respond to problems while simultaneously preventing them from reoccurring in the future.

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The International Committee of the Red Cross

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance.

Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles.

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AFRICAN PRESSURE POINTS: SAHEL (SITUATION REVIEW AND FUTURE PROSPECTS)

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