

**Forum:** Security Council

**Issue:** The Situation in Sahel

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## Introduction



Extending from Senegal eastward to Sudan, the Sahel region encompasses northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Sudan (Lotha). Following the Libyan Civil War in 2011, an unstable atmosphere started reigning the Sahel region. Facing numerous attempts of coup d'etat and dire humanitarian conditions, the Sahel region receives regional and international efforts to address such concerns. Despite the national, regional, and international efforts, the Sahel remains plagued by cyclical instability, state fragility, and humanitarian crises.

Picture 1: The Sahel Region in the African Continent

The weak governance in the region and scarce public services make way to the offensives by terrorist and criminal groups (“The Sahel”). Armed Islamist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State operate across the Central Sahel -Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger- perpetrating widespread violence, including massacres, kidnappings, sexual violence, and war crimes (“Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger)”, “The Sahel”). In 2023 alone over 12,000 people were killed, while more than 2.8 million civilians were displaced, with Burkina Faso bearing the heaviest toll. Such militant groups systematically use sieges, block humanitarian aid, and destroy civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and food reserves. Secular education is a frequent target, with insurgents burning schools and abducting or killing teachers. Counterterrorism operations have also resulted in serious human rights violations, with Malian security forces implicated in war crimes (“Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger)”). In Mali, the Russian paramilitary group Africa Corps has been accused of summary executions, rape, and torture while collaborating with the Malian army. State-backed militias, such as Burkina Faso’s Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP), have committed abuses along ethnic lines.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Coup d'etat

Defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica, a coup d'etat is the *“sudden, violent overthrow of an existing government within a small group”*. A coup d'etat requires maintaining the utmost control of all armed forces such as the police and other military units.

### Food Insecurity

Food security is multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. The reduction of food quality, variety, and desirability are principal indicators of food insecurity (*“Food Security”*).

### Desertification

Defined by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, desertification refers to *“land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry subhumid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities”*.

### Famine

Famine is a severe scarcity of food, leading to extreme hunger and even starvation in a population (*“Famine”*). Despite the lack of reliable data, an estimated number of 391,000 refugees have fled to neighboring countries and the European coast, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

### Forced Displacement

Defined by the European Commission, forced displacement is the *“movement from a person’s region or country is involuntary or coerced, due to persecution, conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations or the adverse effects of climate change, environmental degradation, or disasters”*.

### Jihadist Groups

Jihadist groups are defined as *“the subset of particularly violent, conservative, and uncompromising Sunni groups, such as Islamic State and al-Qaida”* (Fraise).

## General Overview

The central Sahel states, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, are currently ruled by military juntas and continue to be engulfed in a prolonged jihadist insurgency. This conflict, which has persisted for over a decade, is primarily caused by individuals affiliated with Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State’s

Sahel Province (IS Sahel). These extremist groups have exploited weak governance, ethnic tensions, and resource scarcity to expand their control, particularly in rural areas. According to ACLED data, the security conditions in the central Sahel significantly deteriorated in 2023. Burkina Faso had the highest number of casualties, with over 8,000 deaths, making it the second most affected country in West Africa after Nigeria. Both states faced militant blockades, massacres, and ongoing clashes between jihadists and the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP), a state-backed militia.

### Conditions in Burkina Faso and Mali

Burkina Faso experienced an unprecedented surge in 2023, with the country nearing civil war-like conditions. Despite the military's attempts to counter jihadist advances through drone and helicopter-supported ground offensives, Islamist militants continued to launch large-scale attacks against security forces and civilians. The conflict witnessed territorial control, with areas such as Djibo witnessing alternating dynamics between government forces and jihadists.

In neighboring Mali, the government, supported by Russia's Wagner Group, launched a large-scale offensive in the north, directing the violence toward previously militant-held territories. This campaign reignited a rebellion by the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP), a coalition of predominantly Tuareg and Arab armed groups. Beginning in August 2023, fighting spread across the Malian cities, exacerbating the scale of the conflict.

Additionally, The Wagner Group played a pivotal role in supporting Malian forces, employing drone-delivered explosives and explosive barrels, tactics previously unseen in the Sahel. However, Wagner forces were also accused of indiscriminate killings, civilian massacres, destruction of infrastructure, and mass displacement. As a result, civilians fled northern Mali, with many seeking refuge in Algeria and Mauritania.

On July 26, 2023, led by the presidential guard, overthrew President Mohamed Bazoum in Niger. Prior to the coup, Niger's security situation had been showing slight improvements; however, IS Sahel carried out concurrent offensives. In response, Nigerien forces adopted a more proactive strategy, conducting cross-border airstrikes and ground operations inside Mali to target IS Sahel strongholds. Despite these efforts, insurgents have continued their attacks, and the security situation remains fragile.

### Humanitarian and Environmental Conditions in the Sahel Region

The worsening conflict has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, with the Sahel region witnessing a dramatic rise in forced displacement. As of August 2024, nearly 5 million people had been forcibly displaced across Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and coastal West Africa, representing a 25% increase since 2020.

In addition to political instability, conflict, and terrorism in the region, climate change has exacerbated resource scarcity, increasing tensions over water, farmland, and livestock grazing areas.

Rising temperatures, torrential rainfall, and desertification have made survival more difficult, pushing vulnerable communities toward militant recruitment, migration, or intercommunal clashes. The combination of climate stress, jihadist insurgency, and weak governance continues to cause a complex cycle of conflict and displacement in the Sahel.

The Sahel crisis is intensifying, with jihadist groups expanding their reach, military juntas struggling to maintain control, and civilians caught in an escalating conflict. The growing humanitarian emergency requires urgent international attention, as displacement surges, violence escalates, and basic services collapse. With 2025 projected to bring further instability, the need for coordinated humanitarian efforts on an international scale, sustainable peace initiatives, and climate resilience has peaked.

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **France**

France is in the vanguard of the Sahel with its integrated diplomacy, defense, and development policy. It spearheaded international support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, backed flagship UN and EU missions like MINUSMA and EUTM Mali, and supported stabilization through its Crisis and Support Centre. France, as a founding member of the Sahel Alliance, implements over 800 development projects worth €11.6 billion in youth, basic services, and governance. Militarily, it is also the head of Operation Barkhane and co-launched the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel (P3S) and the Dinard Partnership, providing defense of regional security and state institutions.

### **United States of America**

The United States has played a leading role of assistance in the Sahel region by providing logistical assistance and advisory assistance to the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) as well as the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Its military presence in the region has grown with around 1,500 troops deployed and a drone base in Niger to conduct operations against extremist groups in West and North Africa. A high-profile incident occurred on October 4, 2017, when four American Special Operations soldiers were killed in an ambush by a group affiliated with the Islamic State in Tongo Tongo, Niger. In addition to security engagement, the U.S. remains a dominant humanitarian donor, still provides military training exercises such as Flintlock, and has supplied millions of dollars in weapons and equipment to assist regional forces.

### **Russian Federation**

Russia acquired in 2017 an exception to the UN Security Council embargo on arms in the Central African Republic (CAR) to provision quickly weapons and military instructors, predominantly from the Wagner Group. France had dominated political and military influence in CAR for a long time,

yet it had found limited success with regard to augmenting the country's security, governance, or economy. When France withdrew its forces the same year, Russia moved in, pushing while armed groups still controlled huge swaths of territory. Wagner's presence has stabilized the CAR government ever since, preventing rebel advances. It was a calculated move by Moscow to occupy the vacuum and become a new security partner. Wagner is presently the Kremlin's principal proxy in CAR, securing government protection, projecting Russian political influence, and acquiring access to lucrative mining assets. Mass violence persists, and the humanitarian crisis for civilians remains extremely concerning despite this.

### **Boko Haram, Islamic State of West Africa & Al-Qaeda**

Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West Africa (ISWA) were originally one but later split into two separate groups, both still aligned with ISIS. Although they separated, they share the same ideology, which is that they oppose Western influences such as education, science, dress, and culture, which they consider to be corrupting Islamic values. On the other hand, Al-Qaeda seeks to overthrow Middle Eastern governments and establish governments subject to Sharia Law regimes. They regard the United States as their major adversary, blaming it for creating war and chaos in the region. Both organizations frame their actions as being part of a greater struggle against Western influence and the erosion of Islamic values.

### **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), created by the Treaty of Lagos in 1975, aims to advance regional economic integration, free movement of citizens, and co-ordinated policy among the membership. On 29 January, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, all dominated by military juntas, formally broke away from ECOWAS, citing the community's seeming alignment with global interests and the sanctions imposed on them when they are confronted with terror as illegitimate. Their retreat has raised legitimate concerns about the erosion of justice and accountability for human rights violations in these countries, as well as intimidation of democratic values. ECOWAS has, in turn, declared itself ready to engage again, urging member states to maintain open borders and continue to facilitate free movement and trade for ECOWAS passport holders.

### **G5 Sahel**

The G5 Sahel was institutionalized on 16 February 2014 in Nouakchott, Mauritania, as a framework to manage regional co-operation on development and security among five West African nations: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. It adopted its constitutive convention on 19 December 2014, with a permanent headquarters in Mauritania. The project aimed at linking economic development and regional security, particularly in the combat of jihadist groups such as AQIM, MOJWA, Al-Mourabitoun, and Boko Haram. The military coordination was managed by the Chiefs of Staff of each country.

However, a succession of military coups and junta governments caused cracks in the solidarity. Mali withdrew from the alliance on May 15, 2022, and Niger and Burkina Faso on December 3, 2023. The two remaining members, Chad and Mauritania, declared on December 6, 2023, that they would disband the alliance, marking the de facto demise of the G5 Sahel.

### Timeline of Events

<b>2002</b>	The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat of Algeria (GSPC) gains strength in the Sahel region.
<b>2003</b>	GSPC orchestrates kidnappings and offensives in the region, including kidnapping 32 European tourists and later releasing them for ransom.
<b>2007</b>	GSPC rebrands itself and changes its name to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Mahreb, spreading its operations to the neighboring countries such as Mali, Niger, and Chad.
<b>2011</b>	The Libyan Civil War was initiated between Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and rebel groups, causing instability and humanitarian concerns in the region.
<b>January 2012</b>	France launched Operation Saerval, aiming to oust Islamic militants from the Sahel region.
<b>February 2014</b>	G5 Sahel was formed to maintain regional security and stability.
<b>August 2014</b>	French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian launched Operation Barkhane to combat the rapid spread of terrorism and train the militaries of countries in the region for defense purposes.
<b>2019</b>	ISIS in the Greater Sahara started perpetuating organized crimes and offensives in Niger.
<b>April - May 2021</b>	In April 2021, following the 2021 Chadian presidential election, the Chadian rebel group Front for Change and Concord in Chad initiated a military offensive in Northern Chad, the Deby administration.

	Following in May, a coup d'état took place in Mali as a result of the building tension between the government and the military.
<b>January - September 2022</b>	On January 23, 2022, Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Damiba overthrew President Roch Kaboré, becoming the acting president of Burkina Faso.  Only 8 months later, on 30 September 2022, Captain Ibrahim Traore led a following coup, overthrowing the interim leader Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Damiba.
<b>July 2023</b>	A coup d'état took place in Niger on 26 July 2023, where the presidential guard seized power and detained President Mohamed Bazoum.

## UN Involvement

### World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO provides joint operational reviews (JORs) to the Sahel region through states' financial support. As a grand total, WHO received 8.6 million US Dollars as financial assistance later to mobilize this amount to fund emergencies, and establish an Incidence Management Support Team (IMST) simultaneously supporting its partners in the region ("Tackling the Sahel"). Although WHO effectively gathered 8.6 million US dollars to fund emergency humanitarian assistance in the area, these funds were not sufficient to address the dire humanitarian conditions in Sahel, which prompted WHO to encourage global cooperation for extra funding.

### United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) works to meet the needs of vulnerable populations by providing emergency shelters, hygiene products and relief items, humanitarian services regarding healthcare and education, in addition to psychological support to victims of violence ("Sahel Refugee"). UNHCR is also collaborating with government officials of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger called the Bamako Process to strengthen the security and protection of vulnerable populations across the Sahel region ("Sahel Refugee").

### The United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS)

UNISS is a collective chapter of all UN agencies, funds, programmes, and UN Country Teams in the region. UNISS is led by the UN Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General chairs the UNISS Strategic Direction Group. The UNISS Steering Committee, co-chaired by UNOWAS and

UNDP Africa Bureau, guides the implementation of humanitarian projects across 10 countries of the region. The members include Regional Directors, Resident Coordinators, and representatives from the Special Coordinator's Office, UNOWAS, and the Development Coordination Office (DCO) ("About Us").

### **United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)**

Established in 2022, The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), is a political mission under the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. UNOWAS strives to prevent conflict, mediate political tensions, and support peacebuilding in West Africa and the Sahel region ("UNOWAS Mandate"). Collaborating with regional organizations like ECOWAS, the African Union, and the G5 Sahel, UNOWAS addresses security threats such as terrorism and organized crime. UNOWAS also promotes the rights of vulnerable groups and focuses on the impacts of climate change on regional security ("UNOWAS Mandate"). UNOWAS aids in implementing the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel to address root causes of conflict.

### **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) dedicated a specific office for the African region, the Regional Bureau for Africa. Specific for the Sahel region, UNDP orchestrates the Sahel Resilience Project. Funded by Sweden, the Sahel Resilience Project supports disaster risk governance in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. The project strives to enhance policies, frameworks, budgets, and recovery efforts to address disaster and climate risks while promoting urban resilience and sustainable development ("The Sahel").

### **United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)**

The OCHA-managed Pooled Funds, including the Central Emergency Response Fund, the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund, and the Regional Humanitarian Fund for West and Central Africa, have been crucial in supporting humanitarian efforts across six countries in the Sahel: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. Together, these funds have allocated \$148.5 million to the region, helping to combat hunger and malnutrition, prevent famine and disease outbreaks, and respond to climate-related crises (The OCHA Pooled Funds').

## **Relevant UN Documents**

- 1) Resolution 1778 (2007) adopted by the Security Council at its 5748th meeting on 25 September 2007
- 2) Resolution 2391 (2017) adopted by the Security Council at its 8129th meeting on 8 December 2017
- 3) Resolution 2056 (2012) / adopted by the Security Council at its 6798th meeting on 5 July 2012



- 4) Resolution 2071 (2012) adopted by the Security Council at its 6846th meeting on 12 October 2012
- 5) Resolution 2164 (2014) adopted by the Security Council at its 7210th meeting on 25 June 2014
- 6) Resolution 2085 (2012) adopted by the Security Council at its 6898th meeting on 20 December 2012

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

To address the situation in the Sahel region, the United Nations Security Council deployed peacekeeping forces to the region, particularly targeting the ungoverned areas that had become hotspots for conflict and insecurity. These forces were officially designated as part of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). However, efforts to provide adequate humanitarian aid faced significant challenges due to the absence of a long-term, sustainable framework to effectively address the crises. Without a structured and coordinated strategy, aid distribution remained inconsistent and largely insufficient to meet the growing needs of the affected populations.

Recognizing the limitations of unilateral military intervention, international actors and regional governments sought to enhance coordination through alliances and multilateral agreements. The G5 Sahel emerged as a crucial regional initiative aimed at counterterrorism operations, security cooperation, and economic development. Backed by the United Nations, the African Union, and the European Union, the G5 Sahel Joint Force was created to conduct cross-border military operations against insurgent groups. However, despite international financial and logistical support, the alliance struggled with inadequate funding, limited operational capacity, and internal political challenges, hindering its effectiveness in restoring stability.

In addition to military alliances, diplomatic efforts were also pursued through pacts and agreements between the United Nations, regional governments, and international partners. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union played roles in conflict mediation, peacebuilding, and governance reforms. Additionally, the European Union launched initiatives such as the Sahel Alliance, which aimed to provide long-term development assistance to address socio-economic grievances fueling radicalization. While these measures represented important steps toward regional stability, they were often undermined by corruption and political instability.

Despite multiple initiatives and policy discussions, there was no concrete or sustainable approach to tackling the socio-economic issues. Without viable employment opportunities and economic alternatives, many young people remained vulnerable to radicalization and were drawn into extremist groups, further perpetuating the cycle of violence. Ultimately, the failure to implement

comprehensive and enduring solutions meant that the crisis in the Sahel persisted, with no clear resolution in sight.

## Possible Solutions

To deal with the Sahel crisis, an integrative and comprehensive approach is essential upon dealing with political, humanitarian, environmental, and security challenges. The initial step would be formulating an inclusive regional peace process that involves Sahelian governments, regional organizations such as ECOWAS and the African Union, and key international stakeholders such as the United Nations. A peace agreement should prioritize inclusive politics and governance, with the participation of marginalized ethnic and tribal groups, civil society, and women. In the face of increasing violence from jihadist groups like IS Sahel and al-Qaeda, a concerted counterterrorism strategy is required, including cross-border operations and intelligence-sharing among the affected countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, etc.), backed by international peacekeeping forces under the UN.

One of the key solutions to the security dilemma is revamping the G5 Sahel Joint Force, which has been underfunded and inadequately coordinated. Enhancing its capacity through additional funding, hardware, and command structures is vital. It should focus on securing borders, particularly between Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad, where terrorist groups exploit porous borders for constant activities. Moreover, it is critical that any such force is accompanied by human rights monitoring organs to ensure that counterterrorism measures do not have the unintended effect of increasing damage to civilians, as has occurred with recent action by state-funded militias and paramilitary units like Russia's Wagner Group.

On the human rights front, the increasing civilian displacement in the Sahel region, which currently affects over 5 million people, calls for safe humanitarian corridors and giving priority to the distribution of aid to conflict zones. The UNHCR and WHO need to take the lead in establishing safe zones for refugees and IDPs to receive basic services like food, clean water, healthcare, and education. This must be accompanied by a solid financial commitment from international donors to finance long-term relief programs, since the current funding is inadequate to respond to the escalating needs. The local NGOs and community-based organizations must be supported to deliver aid, with international partners providing logistical and financial support.

In order to counteract the underlying environmental drivers of conflict, the vulnerability of the Sahel region to climate change must be tackled through sustainable development programs. With the susceptibility of the region to desertification and famine, more such initiatives as the Great Green Wall—a tree planting campaign to prevent desertification—must be at the forefront. Further, agricultural investment through drought-resistant crops and sustainable agriculture practices can alleviate livelihoods and alleviate the economic pressures that drive individuals into the arms of insurgent groups. Additional financing for adaptation initiatives must be allocated to ensure the

long-term viability of vulnerable communities.

Inclusion of economic growth, particularly rural economic development, in the peace agenda is necessary. Employment development initiatives must be youth-focused since youth make up a significant percentage of the population vulnerable to extremist recruitment. By offering vocational training, creating local economic opportunities, and increasing market access, the region can begin to arrest the economic imbalances that are fertilizing instability. In addition, improved governance and anti-corruption policies must take pride of place in the development agenda, as corruption is a powerful engine for disenchantment and militancy within Sahelian states.

Altogether, international cooperation is the fundamental principle to the solution of Sahel's crises. The United Nations, the African Union, and the European Union must collaborate to come up with a coordinated strategy that brings together military, humanitarian, and development interventions. Peacebuilding, including mediation between opposing sides, community-based reconciliation processes, and efforts to build state institutions, is crucial for the achievement of durable peace. All measures taken to impede the spread of extremist ideologies must also be complemented by education programs, especially for women and girls, as empowered communities are the building blocks of durable peace.

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