

Forum: Security Council

Issue: The Situation in the Sahel Region

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Introduction

The situation in the Sahel region concerns the ongoing attacks of the extremist Islamic militant groups, which has resulted in a raged civil war since 2011. Several jihadist groups who affiliated themselves to ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and Al-Qaeda operated attacks to especially the “ungoverned” areas such as Lake Chad, the lake borders of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Such affiliations and criminal acts in vulnerable regions conducted the embedment of the jihadists into local communities. The absence of a strong government further facilitates the activities of the extremist groups in the Sahel. Nevertheless, it is not correct to link the status quo to a single cause. Alongside the security concerns, the geographical features of the region leads to famine, such that there is currently a humanitarian crisis due to malnutrition and extreme poverty. “Youth unemployment is three times higher than adults,” (UNOWA) which leads to human trafficking and young workers in illegal sectors such as smuggling, as well as the recruitment by the extremist groups. The conflict in the Sahel concerns deeply the international community, as there are millions of refugees fleeing across Europe and neighboring Middle Eastern countries, leaving the region more vulnerable.

Definition of Key Terms

The Sahel Region: The Sahel Region is a narrow band in sub-Saharan Africa, which consists of countries from Senegal to Sudan. Since at least 17th century, the region has been experiencing drought. Therefore, food is extremely scarce in the region. Currently, Muslim majority population is present. The countries in the region such as Chad, Mali are the poorest countries in the world. Ethnic clashes are present among several groups such as the Fulani people and the Hausas. One of the most important fact about the Sahel is that there is not a strong presence of a government in the region.

Jihadist groups: “Jihadist” is a term to describe the groups which connect their terrorist acts to the teachings of Islam and a religious-political ideology to spread Sunni Islam around the world, causing a threat to Western existence.

SAM (Severe Acute Malnutrition): Severe Acute Malnutrition is the most extreme form of starvation. It is mortal and needs urgent treatment. More than 1.3 millions of children under five years age have been suffering from SAM in the Sahel (UNICEF).

Famine: Famine means extreme scarcity of food. The Sahel countries experience food and water shortages, which lead to a humanitarian crisis in the region. Although UN agencies have tried to send aids to the region, they cannot reach due to security concerns and not sufficient.

Forced Displacement: Forced displacement is the coerced mass movement away from a country due to security, economy, violation or climate issues. In the Sahel, -despite the lack of reliable data- roughly 391,000 refugees have escaped to the neighboring countries and Europe's shores (UNHCR).

General Overview

Aftermath of the Libyan Civil War (2011)

Following the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi and his government in Libya, the militant opposition groups were branched. A great number of rebel fighters moved to Syria, to combat against the loyalists of Bashar al-Assad. A vast majority of the remaining ones, who were called Libyan National Army, turned out to be linked with Al-Qaeda, according to an interview of Abdel-Hakim al-Hasidi, the Libyan rebel leader (Swami et al.).

In 2014, both the formation of the rebel fighters in Syria, which is called ISIL (Islamic State of the Levant), and the Al-Qaeda linked groups in Libya started to gain power since the ousting of the Gaddafi government left the people-smuggling routes unprotected. The smuggling network allowed these groups to exchange supplies and weapons. However, as they started to draw more attention in the international community and their militant activities increased, groups began to seek for recruitment. As the easiest way to obtain such recruitment was from the poorest nations; people of the Sahel region were offered high wages. Thus, the presence of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups in the Sahel region became permanent.

Establishment and Rising of Boko Haram

Formed in 2002, Boko Haram had attracted many poor and marginalized Muslim families in northern Nigeria, as it was a large religious complex. In 2009, they began their violent acts such as plundering villages and slaughtering people. In 2010, they started to target schools and became notoriously known after the Chibok kidnapping of school girls (14-15 April, 2014). A year after, Boko Haram declared its affiliation to the Islamic State (ISIS). After the formation of a task force in the region, backed by the United States of America, the United Kingdom and France, Boko Haram seemed to be expelled from the region. Yet, they displaced their focus from Nigeria to Lake Chad, an area in the Sahel which no government has a real presence.

As Boko Haram's violent acts started to accelerate, a group who was the Islamic State of West Africa (ISWA) separated itself. ISWA started to offer protection, food and water supplies to the villages that agree to pay taxes and exchange recruits. The lack of a strong government allowed these groups to expand along the Sahel region and access funding from the ISIS.

France and US Involvement

In January 2012, Northern Mali Civil War has broken out as Al-Qaeda declared the region as its caliphate for 10 months. Subsequently, following the French “Operation Serval”, which was the given name for the intervention, the militant groups were pushed towards the desert. The groups merged under Al-Qaeda and since then the violence in the region proceeds. In 2017, ISIS-linked militants ambushed the Special Forces of the United States in Niger and in 2018; Al-Qaeda organized an attack to the French Embassy in Burkina Faso.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

G5 Sahel: Officially launched in 2 June 2017, G5 Sahel consist of joint forces from five Sahel states which are under security threat (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger). The mission with the joint forces is to fight terrorism, eliminate cross-border smuggling network and cease human trafficking. The forces are in cooperation with UN and the peacekeeping forces of France and USA.

United States of America: The United States is supporting the G5 Sahel joint forces in the region. Alongside the funding up to 60 millions of U.S dollars, there are currently the Special Forces of the United States Army (colloquially known as the *Green Berets*) present in the region.

France: France has been deeply involved in counter-terrorism acts in the Sahel. They are supporting the G5 Sahel joint forces. There is currently an ongoing military intervention in Chad by France called “Operation Barkhane”, against Al-Qaeda.

Boko Haram, Islamic State of West Africa (ISWA): Formerly in unison, these two split groups affiliated themselves to ISIS. They are against any and all activities associated with the Western society such as Western education, clothing, science and culture.

Al-Qaeda: Al-Qaeda’s main mission is to oust the current governments in the Middle East and replace them with “true” Islamic administrations with the Sharia Law. Their primary enemy is the United States, which they see U.S as the root of the conflicts in the Middle East.

Timeline of Events

2012	Al-Qaeda declared a caliphate in Mali.
11 January 2013	Operation Serval was started by France.
2014 February	G5 Sahel cooperation was formed.
2014 July	Operation Barkhane was started by France.

2015 March	Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS.
2015 April	5 African countries (Niger, Benin, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon) backed by US, UK and France formed a task force to battle Boko Haram.
2016	ISWA separated itself from Boko Haram, offering help to those in need.
4 October 2017	An ISIS-linked group ambushed US Special Forces in Niger.
2 March 2018	Islamists attacked the French Embassy in Burkina Faso causing at least 16 deaths.

UN Involvement

The United Nations has been deeply concerned with the Sahel conflict and has taken several humanitarian and military measures. In 2013, The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established by the Security Council in order to provide stabilization in the region. In an effort to solve the urgent food crisis in the region, humanitarian aid kits were sent to the Sahel. However, as the funding was 65% insufficient, UN would not be able to solve the issue. Along with African Development Bank, the Sahel Alliance was formed. Yet, none of the solutions helped to resolve the conflict.

Relevant UN Documents

Deployment of G5 Sahel Force-UN Security Council Resolution (21 June 2017, S/RES/2359)

Establishment of MINUSMA-UN Security Council Resolution (25 April 2013, S/RES/2100)

Treaties and Events

The Sahel Alliance

In July 2017, European Union has launched an international platform in cooperation with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and African Development Bank in order to provide stability, funding and aids to the region in an effort to contribute to the development of the Sahel. Since 2017, Denmark, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg and Netherlands have joined the alliance.

The Community of the Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)

Established on 4 February 1998, CEN-SAD became a regional political and economic platform. The community seeks for cooperation among the Sahel-Saharan states to ensure stability as well as promoting collective work against terrorism. There are two objectives of the community: regional security and sustainable development.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The United Nations Security Council decided to send peacekeeping troops to the Sahel, especially the ungoverned regions. The peacekeeping forces were named under MINUSMA. Humanitarian aids were insufficient since there was not a sustainable framework to tackle the issue. Although the US and France sent troops and military equipment to the region, this strategy further increased the conflict as other parties were added. Militarization of the zone caused more instability and insecurity in the region. Moreover, the plans to eliminate youth unemployment and recruitment to Islamism remained inconclusive.

Possible Solutions

There are many aspects to this issue and therefore, the solutions should aim both providing security and development to the region. Diplomatic solutions are much preferred than the military actions considering the previous attempts of the United States of America and France. The main focus is to prevent the instability in the region. Thus, the support of the local community is important. The solutions should be inclusive of the civil society, religious and tribal leaders. Since the lack of government further increases the tension in the region, the involvement of the state and UN institutions is essential. Delegates should seek for the solutions, which will promote cooperation among the nations and institutions. In order to resolve the migration issue, which the international community is deeply concerned, the humanitarian crisis must be addressed. Famine is one of the main reasons of the current crisis that stimulating economic growth could be a possible approach. However, since there is no government control, the population of the region relies on aids from other states. A sustainable economic framework could be created which encourages youth employment.

Although the issue is discussed in the Security Council, humanitarian solutions are also essential. However, not just band-aid solutions which have effects in the short run (such as sending aids) would be efficient. Nonetheless, just long-term solutions would not resolve the issue as the crisis is ongoing and urgent. Therefore, the clauses should be the combination of both band-aid and long-term solutions.

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