



CENTRE DE REFLEXION POUR LE SAHEL

Working Paper

The impact of terrorism in Sahel Area

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I. Introduction

The Sahel region has become as one of the most dangerous areas in Africa due to the significant increase in terrorist attacks and the escalating situation. Various factors have impacted the stability and security of this region, which is home to some of the world's fastest-growing and most deadly terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State. Since 2015, the Islamic State has persistently conducted a violent campaign in the area.

Moreover, the instability in the Sahel region has played a crucial role in facilitating the emergence of various terrorist groups. Consequently, these groups pose threats to the governments in the area. Employing a range of terrorist activities, they indiscriminately target civilians and military installations, carry out attacks on public and private properties, and engage in the abduction of individuals.

It's worth mentioning that the issue of institutional weakness around inter-state borders has enabled such groups to flourish in the peripheries and border towns, targeting people in multiple countries at once. Such groups also take advantage of the low security along the borders between the Sahelian States, freely moving between neighboring countries.

The issue of instability in the Sahel region raises critical questions about the effectiveness of various governments and organizations in countering terrorism. In response to this inquiry, our study will concentrate on two key points. Firstly, we will explore the causes and perspectives of terrorism in the Sahel area. Secondly, we will delve into the efforts made by governments and international organizations to combat terrorism in the region.

II. Terrorism in Sahel Area: understanding the Causes and Consequences

When discussing the phenomenon of terrorism, it becomes evident that it arises from various causes and takes on different orientations. Moreover, its consequences ripple across multiple aspects of people's lives and affect the stability of nations. Consequently, our study will be centered on the Sahel area, which has been a longstanding target of terrorist attacks.

1. The Causes of terrorism and violence in Sahel Area

First of all, the causes of terrorism appear to be varied. There does not appear to be one lone factor that leads people to engage in acts of terror. Scholars have categorized motivations for terrorism to include psychological, ideological, and strategic causes.

Psychological perspective: individuals who engage in terrorism may be driven by purely personal reasons based on their own mental state. Their motivations can range from hatred to the desire for power, for example. In many cases, the terrorist seeks attention from others for their actions rather than pursuing a grand ideological or strategic goal.

Ideological Perspective: Ideology is defined as the beliefs, values, and/or principles by which a group identifies its aims and goals. Ideology may encompass religion or political philosophies and programs.

Strategic Perspective: Terrorism is sometimes seen as a logical extension of the failure of politics. When people seek redress for their grievances through the government but fail to win the government's attention to their plight, they may resort to violence. From this viewpoint, terrorism is the result of a logical analysis of the goals and objectives of a group and their estimate of the likelihood of gaining victory. If victory seems unlikely using more traditional means of opposition, then one might calculate that terrorism is a better option. For example, in South Africa, the African National Congress only turned to terrorism after political avenues were explored and failed. Of course, not just individuals may feel let down by the political process. States may use terrorists in the pursuit of their own strategic interests. States may sponsor terrorist groups, especially when the objectives of the state and the terrorist group are similar. For example, Libya used terrorists to explode a bomb aboard Pan Am 103 flying from London to New York in 1988, allegedly in response to U.S. and British bombings of Libya.

It is impossible to say for sure what causes terrorism. A person's psychological make-up will certainly play a role, but to what extent is unclear. Some may come to terrorism not out of any love for violence but rather to further their ideological goals. Others may be motivated to use terror simply because it appears to be a useful strategic alternative or may further the state's objectives. Indeed, terrorism may occur on psychological, ideological, and strategic grounds all at once. An individual may decide terrorism fits his or her own view of the world—that it makes sense. A group may come to use terrorism because it furthers and is supported by their ideology. Finally, groups or individuals may use terrorism because it fits with their strategic objectives and goals.

Also, the Sahel Area becomes the epicenter of violence and terrorism because of many converging and complex social, economic, political, and security challenges. For instance, The inability of several Sahelian governments to provide effective security has encouraged terrorist groups to continue their activities, making the Sahel increasingly violent.

2. Consequences of terrorism in Sahel area

There are many consequences of raising terrorism in Sahel area, such as growing of groups terrorists because of instability in the region, The consequence is the Sahel has seen the most rapid growth in violent extremist activity of any region in Africa. The region is also a nexus of criminal networks and illicit trafficking and has experienced a rise in farmer-herder violence. Moreover. The Sahel has the fastest population growth rate on the continent, despite being among the poorest and facing some of the most fragile environmental conditions. Consequently,

migrants from the Sahel constitute a significant share of those trying to cross the Mediterranean into Europe.¹

According to this the Sahel region, where local armed groups have embraced radical religious interpretations and formed alliances with terrorist groups born in the Middle East, is good proof of the need of multidimensional analysis and understanding. This region is a highly complex environment where a large variety of terrorist and violent extremist organizations continues to challenge the state authorities and international organizations for supremacy².

However, terrorist violence in the Sahel cannot be attributed solely to the presence of radical religious interpretations. Other factors have contributed to the emergence of violence and led to the region becoming one of the most volatile areas in the world.

III. Part II: against terrorism and the future of security and development in the Sahel area

The only way to understand the reel of instability in Sahel and their relation to terrorism is to understand how the security policies of the different countries in the region have been able to prevent all attacks by terrorists. As a response to this question, we will study two important points in this context: the first is about the fight against terrorist groups between eradication and containment, and the second is about the development and security strategies in the Sahel area.

1.Fight against terrorist groups between eradication and containment

In recent years, the Sahel has experienced an unprecedented increase in terrorist violence. Exploiting the instability, the rivalries between the different groups, the poor governance, the large extensions of land without the control of the authorities and the porous borders, international terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and, more recently, the so-called Islamic State, have increased their influence in the region, through their respective affiliated groups.³

The security situation in the Sahel is also affected by the instability in its immediate surroundings, whether in the north due to the influence of instability in Libya, or in the south due to the violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in Nigeria.

Further The Sahel region has experienced a devastating surge in terrorist attacks against civilian and military targets. Terrorist groups are present across borders and repeatedly target communities and national institutions through coordinated attacks, taking advantage of porous and extensive borders.

¹ -Terrorism in the Sahel: Overview, available on this website, <https://africacenter.org/in-focus/the-sahel/> on 27th December 2022.

² - Yonah Alexander, The Consequences of Terrorism— An Update on al-Qaeda and other Terrorist Threats in the Sahel & Maghreb, The International Center for Terrorism Studies, January 2011, p 3.

³ - the root causes of violence in the Sahel, available on this website, <https://global-strategy.org/> on 30th December 2022.

Therefore, against terrorist groups in Sahel area there are institutional initiatives to address these regional issues jointly, such as the G5 Sahel group, composed of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina-Faso and Chad, counting on the support of the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations, and the World Bank, among others.

However, the international interest in the Sahel also reflects the emerging geopolitical importance of the region. Although it is traditionally perceived as a predominantly French domain of control and influence, recently there has been a wider range of European states involved in it, including Central and Eastern European countries, such as Czechia or Estonia, showing that the stabilisation of the Sahelian countries has become an all-European issue and a matter of priority.

In addition, counter-terrorism efforts have been pursued also by the US, which under the Biden administration promised to step up support for the French forces and its general involvement in the region. There are also growing concerns of a direct geopolitical competition between the EU and its competitors. Russia has made limited steps in Mali and retains an influence in the information sphere as well as on the fringes of the region in Algeria and the Central African Republic. On the other hand, China has established itself in the Sahel much more strongly with its contributions to MINUSMA, financial support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and infrastructural, humanitarian and development projects and its economic role is forecast to be accelerated by the pandemic.

1. Security and the future of development in Sahel Area

The Sahel is one of the poorest regions of the world. It faces simultaneously the challenges of extreme poverty, the effects of climate change, frequent food crises, rapid population growth, fragile governance, corruption, unresolved internal tensions, the risk of violent extremism and radicalisation, illicit trafficking, and terrorist-linked security threats⁴.

In this context the countries of Sahel area they face different challenges such as the issue of development, for this reason we will focus on the strategies that has been made to achieve the goals of development in Sahel area, especially the International Regional, and National Response Strategies.

The primary focus is on formulating and implementing comprehensive strategies at two different levels: international and national. The international community provides humanitarian aid and development assistance to alleviate poverty, address food insecurity, and improve access to education and healthcare. Regional cooperation through initiatives like the G5 Sahel alliance

⁴ Journey to extremism in Africa: pathways to recruitment and disengagement programme, 2023, p 14.

allows countries to pool resources and intelligence to combat terrorism and organized crime while also fostering economic growth⁵.

At the national level, governments are working on strengthening institutions, promoting good governance, and combating corruption to enhance their capabilities to deliver public services effectively. Investments in education and vocational training aim to empower the youth and create economic opportunities that counter radicalization.

The path to development in the Sahel is challenging, but not insurmountable. Through the combined efforts of the international community, regional cooperation, and national commitment, progress is being made in addressing the multifaceted issues that hinder development. Sustainable solutions that take into account the specific needs and aspirations of the Sahel's people are critical in achieving lasting peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. Only through a holistic and collaborative approach can the Sahel overcome its obstacles and embark on a path towards a brighter and more secure future for its people.

IV. Conclusion

The Sahel region faces immense challenges related to security and development, with terrorism being a significant driver of instability. The rise of terrorist attacks and the presence of extremist groups in the area have had severe consequences for the safety and well-being of the local population. These challenges have been exacerbated by factors such as weak governance, porous borders, and socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Understanding the causes and perspectives of terrorism in the Sahel is crucial for formulating effective responses. The motivations for engaging in terrorist activities range from psychological and ideological factors to strategic considerations. The convergence of various social, economic, political, and security challenges in the region has contributed to the emergence of violence and the growth of terrorist groups.

In the fight against terrorist groups, efforts should be made at the international, and national levels. Institutions like the G5 Sahel group, supported by the African Union, European Union, United Nations, and other international partners, aim to address regional issues collectively. The involvement of various European and other states in the region reflects the growing geopolitical importance of the Sahel. Counter-terrorism efforts have become a priority for many nations due to the implications of instability and extremism.

⁵ - how to support the Sahel countries to face terrorism the economic, social and cultural approaches, Euro Magreb center for strategic researches and studies, 2019, p 53.

Addressing the security and development challenges in the Sahel requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. International assistance, regional cooperation, and national commitment are all essential elements in achieving progress. By strengthening institutions, promoting good governance, investing in education, and fostering economic opportunities, the Sahel can work towards lasting peace and stability.

Despite the difficulties, there is hope that the Sahel can overcome its obstacles and build a brighter future for its people. With sustained efforts and a focus on the specific needs of the region, the Sahel can strive towards security, development, and prosperity for its communities, ultimately diminishing the threat of terrorism and violent extremism.

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