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The French Army as a European leader

The Sahel's securitisation and stabilisation



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This paper was drawn up by Enzo Falsanisi under the supervision and guidance of Mr Mario Blokken, Director of the Permanent Secretariat.

This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. All our studies are available on www.finabel.org

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INTRODUCTION

The Sahel is a region located to the south of the Sahara Desert stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in Mauritania to the shores of the Red Sea in Sudan and Eritrea. It covers Mauritania, Burkina-Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad, an area of three million square kilometres. It is a transitional biome between the arid Sahara and greener savannahs further south. Due to its harsh weather and desertification since the second half of the twentieth century, the region has become increasingly uninhabitable and has been characterised by famines, droughts, and social conflict.¹

The economy of the region is based on traditional pastoral activity and subsistence farming.² Sahelian states have suffered from chronic underdevelopment and a lack of infrastructure, public services, and state authority. These issues have resulted in low levels of human development and chronic poverty despite the Sahel being extremely rich in reserves of oil, uranium, and gold³. However, extractive activities have triggered social clashes with rural herding populations over land distribution, and resource – especially water – usage.⁴ More recently, these social phenomena have been exacerbated by climate change and poor governance.⁵ The extreme poverty rate at around 40 or even 50%⁶, and the difficulties

from the central authorities to provide public goods and services have further marginalised rural communities that are more likely to fall into extremism or embrace groups' causes rebelling against the central authority. The young are especially impacted by this marginalisation as many are unemployed or without vocational training.⁷ A high proportion of the population is young due to thriving growth rate which is expected to more than double by 2050: from 89 million in 2019 to 240 million.⁸ Organised criminals and illicit traffickers have hence no issue recruiting from the abundant pool of youth, as the state has no means to offer viable alternatives. Consequently, the Sahel has become increasingly unstable and suffers from violence.⁹

The Sahel is potentially one of the richest regions in the world in terms of natural resources: Mali is Africa's third biggest producer of gold, Niger sits on the fourth biggest deposits of uranium in the world. The Chadian economy relies mainly on petrol exploitation, Burkina Faso on gold and cotton, while Mauritania's economy relies on iron and copper extraction.¹⁰ The abundance of natural resources has attracted foreign interests to the region, and competition has emerged among great powers to access these resources. Natu-

1. Cooper, R., 2018. Natural Resources Management, Birmingham: K4D.

2. United-Nations, 2013. The Sahel: One region, many crises. Africa Renewal .

3. Cooper, Natural Resources Management

4. Turner, M., Ayantunde, A., Patterson, K. & Patterson, D., 2011. Livelihood transitions and the changing nature of farmer–herder conflict in The Sahelian West Africa. The journal of development studies, 47.2, pp. 183-206.

5. Raineri, L., 2020. When (fighting) climate change fuels terrorism - EU Institute for Security Studies, Luxembourg: EU Institute for Security Studies.

6. Cooper, Natural Resources Management, p.2

7. Arnaud, C., Ray, O., Tehio, V. & Grünewald, F., 2016. Youth in the Sahel: exclusion and integration, s.l.: Groupe URD.

8. Garenne, M., 2017. Le Sahel est une bombe démographique [Interview] (16 01 2017).

9. Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2020. A demographic threat? Youth, peace, and security challenges in the Sahel.

10. Cooper, Natural Resources Management

rally, Europe has had a strong presence in the region, but new actors have emerged in recent years, such as China, Turkey, and Russia¹¹. In contrast, the United States has kept a watchful eye on the geopolitical development of the region.¹² For over a century, France, which ruled most of the Sahel, is the most prominent external actor.^{13,14}

In recent decades, France has tried to normalise its relationship with its former colonies and remains ready to defend its allies in the Sahel.¹⁵ Today, as the Sahel progressively collapses into political instability and violence, France has sought to catch the attention of European partners by presenting the situation in the Sahel as a neighbouring region that could threaten European security. Indeed, Paris often describes the Sahel as a vector of integration for European common security.¹⁶ If the Sahel is a theatre in which the European Union is heavily involved, many European countries have kept their engagements to peacekeeping operations, training missions and support to state-building and developmental approaches rather than direct confrontation with jihadist and armed groups.¹⁷ This was, at least, before the 2020 Pau Summit which triggered an impetus for greater European presence on the ground in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.¹⁸

European armies have increasingly committed themselves to the region through greater multilateral coordination as observed with EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and, since summer 2020, through Task Force Takuba which operates under the French-led Operation Barkhane. Before dealing with the complexity of Sahelian security, the paper will seek to clarify the mandate and role of each of these channels. A second section will present the security environment in the Sahel, which has worsened, despite regional and foreign efforts to stabilise it. Then, a third section will analyse recent evolutions of the institutional framework built to tackle those challenges. More precisely, the paper will have a closer look at the Pau Summit and its impact on the overall doctrinal evolutions adopted. The paper will show that the French, Sahelian, and multinational armies' security interests have been merged with long-term developmental objectives to sustain counter-terrorism efforts and securitisation attempts. A fourth section will describe Task Force Takuba before analysing its implications for European defence and interoperability.

11. FPRI, 2020. Why Russia is a geopolitical winner in Mali's coup ? , s.l.: Foreign Policy Research Institute.

12. Foreign Policy, 2020. France and the United States Are Making West Africa's Security Situation Worse.

13. Erförth, B., 2020. Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the The Sahel. Dans: Journal of Strategic Studies, 43.4. s.l.:s.n., pp. 560-582.

14. Recchia, S. & Tardy, T., 2020. French military operations in Africa: Reluctant multilateralism. Dans: Journal of Strategic Studies, s.l.:s.n., pp. 473-481.

15. Erförth, Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the The Sahel.

16. ECFR, 2021. The lonely leader: The origins of France's strategy for EU foreign policy. Dans: European Council on Foreign Relations, s.l.:s.n.

17. Raineri, L. When (fighting) climate change fuels terrorism

18. Ministère des Armées, 2020b. BARKHANE : Un an aux commandes de l'opération Barkhane, rencontre avec le général Pascal Facon. [En ligne]

Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/brevets/barkhane-un-an-aux-commandes-de-l-operation-barkhane-rencontre-avec-le-general-pascal-facon>

[Accès le 2021 02 11].

EUROPEAN ARMIES AS SUPPORTERS OF STABILISATION OF THE SAHEL

France: an unavoidable partner in the Sahel

Operation Serval

In early 2012, Mali witnessed a spiral of violence after months of political instability with northern regions calling for greater autonomy and even independence. Such instability was already chronic. In the 90s, Tuareg and nomadic clans formed the People's Movement

for the Liberation of Azawad, grouping as irregular soldiers and fighting for autonomy. Despite peace treaties ratified in 1991, and 1995, to re-establish internal peace, and the integration of many Tuareg fighters into the Malian army, dissatisfaction grew until 2012.¹⁹ Then, violence erupted as the National Movement for Liberation of Azawad – or MNLA – secured a fragile alliance with local Islamist groups such as Ansar Dine, and received



Figure 1

By Thomas GOISQUE

<http://www.thomasgoisque-photo.com/site.php?page=reportages&spec=def&id=137>, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=37528557>

19. Leymarie, P., 2021. L'armée française doit-elle quitter le The Sahel ?. Le Monde Diplomatique, pp. 18-19.

assistance from the local branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).²⁰ The MNLA leaders sought to secure, not greater local autonomy, but the independence of Azawad which would have cut Mali in half.

Due to a lack of organisation from Bamako and its inability to stop the MNLA from advancing, the Army conducted a coup and deposed President Touré to create the National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State. This increasing instability in Malian politics, coupled with corruption at the state level and “even collusion with criminality in the north”²¹, allowed the MNLA to advance. Rebel success almost led to a tipping point when the very survival of the Malian state was at risk. The situation became critical when rebels succeeded in occupying the surroundings of Mopti – a pivotal city between the north and the south of the country.²² In the meantime, they attacked important urban centres, and succeeded in taking the most important government-held bastions in the north: Gao and Timbuktu.²³ Considering this, and the repeated military defeats by the rebels, the military junta had no choice but to seek international help. France was prompt to respond, as it was – and remains – present in the Sahel, despite a withdrawal after decolonisation in the 60’s.²⁴

The perception of danger between Paris and Bamako, emanating from this uncontrolled rebellion convinced then newly elected French President, François Hollande, to in-

tervene militarily. After rapid preparation, France launched Operation Serval, authorised both by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UN Security Council. France made clear the military intervention was in support of the African Union’s peacekeeping mission.²⁵ The coalition began operations against the rebels in January 2013 and, through concentrated efforts, retook the lost territories within months. Once the operation was complete, the democratic process was relaunched, and the integrity of the Malian state-guaranteed temporarily.²⁶

Peace-enforcement phase and Operation Barkhane

To stabilise the region, decrease violence in the Sahel and re-establish the Malian state’s authority over the entirety of its territory, it was necessary to devise a second operation. Thus, France launched Operation Barkhane in 2014, with the agreement of the main stakeholders in the region – the Malian state and the African Union – despite bypassing ECOWAS who had ambitions of conducting independent peacekeeping operations.²⁷ France sought to demonstrate its commitment to multilateralism, thus, Barkhane was conceived as a complement to international forces deployed in the region, and constituted a complement to MINUSMA, launched a year before.²⁸

France’s heavy financial and personnel commitments were made with more than 5000

20. Thurston, A., 2020. Northern Mali - Dialectics of Local Support. Dans: Jihadists of North Africa and the The Sahel . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 102-146.

21. Ibid, p. 127

22. Erförth, Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the The Sahel.

23. Leymarie, P. L’armée française doit-elle quitter le The Sahel ?

24. Erförth, Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the The Sahel.

25. Recchia, S. & Tardy, French military operations in Africa: Reluctant multilateralism

26. Erförth, Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the The Sahel.

27. Wyss, M., 2017. France and the economic community of West African states: peacekeeping partnership in theory and practice. Dans: Journal of Contemporary African Studies 35. s.l.:s.n., pp. 1-19.

28. Recchia, S. & Tardy, French military operations in Africa: Reluctant multilateralism

soldiers deployed to operation Barkhane. This force constitutes the most important expeditionary force set up by France since the Algerian war.²⁹ This force succeeded, with the help of airpower, to secure important victories and neutralise important Tuareg and Islamists leaders, as recently shown by the neutralisation of Bah Ag Moussa, head of Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin.³⁰ Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin is a terrorist organisation created in 2017 from the merger of Ansar Dine, the local branch of al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Macina Liberation Front. It represents one of the biggest jihadist threats in Mali along with the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. Both have been targets of the French Army since the National Movement for Liberation of Azawad's weakening as a consequence of Operation Serval.³¹

Barkhane's assistance to The Sahel and The Sahelian forces

Operation Barkhane's goal is to prevent the implantation of terrorist and jihadist groups in The Sahel in general, while helping Mali to rid itself from the remaining threats across its Northern and Western territories. France has engaged in a large-scale counter-insurgency operation which embraced a regional rather than national approach. Indeed, the border porosity of Sahelian states allows clandestine groups to operate concurrently in multiple countries, making targeting a single country ineffective.³² The regional strategy was de-

fended by former Defence Minister, Jean-Yves le Drian, who announced his ambition to prevent jihadist and armed groups from finding havens in an "all-traffic highway" that would stretch from the Atlantic to Libya.³³ The constitution of such a corridor, where states have little control, would have given the possibility to armed mobile groups to regroup, replenish and keep attacking Mali and other countries in the region.

These trans-border threats pushed France and Sahelian states to collectively find a solution to the latent security threats. The G5 Sahel Joint Force is an ad-hoc institution combining forces from Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Niger, and Burkina-Faso, created in 2014 to increase cooperation among member-states. Its goal is to increase trans-border stabilisation by pooling efforts to enhance societal and economic development and deepen military co-



29. Latorraca, M., 2015. Operation Barkhane: goals and reasons why it could fail. *Geopolitica*, 16 01, pp. <https://www.geopolitica.info/operation-barkhane/>.

30. Ministère des Armées, 2020a. Communiqué: Florence Parly salue la neutralisation d'un haut cadre d'Al-Qaïda au Mali par les forces armées françaises. [Online] Available at: https://www.defense.gouv.fr/salle-de-presse/communiqués/communiqué_florence-parly-salue-la-neutralisation-d-un-haut-cadre-d-al-qaïda-au-mali-par-les-forces-armées-françaises. [Accessed 2021 02 12].

31. CSIS – Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018. Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM). [Online]

Available at: <https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threats-project/terrorism-backgrounders/jamaat-nasr-al-islam-wal-muslimin>. [Accessed 12 02 2021].

32. Ministère des Armées. BARKHANE : Un an aux commandes de l'opération Barkhane, rencontre avec le général Pascal Facon

33. France 24, 2014. Fin de Serval au Mali, lancement de l'opération «Barkhane» au The Sahel. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.france24.com/fr/2014/07/13-operation-serval-mali-france-barkhane-le-drian-defense-militaire-terroriste>. [Accessed 2021 02 12].

operation among Sahelian states. Each country supplies one or two battalions which are managed by a dedicated headquarters based in Bamako.³⁴ This joint force –or FC G5– collaborates with the command staff from Operation Barkhane to better tackle the regions emergent security challenges. Barkhane assists the joint force by training Sahelian state armies and increasing their operational capacity, while also supporting troops on the ground. According to major general Pascal Facon, former commander of Barkhane, up to 4000 Malian soldiers have benefited from a training made by Barkhane forces so far, these have participated in joint operations with their French peers. The *Détachement de Liaison et d'Accompagnement* (DLA, or Liaison and Accompaniment Detachment) oversees the training and operationalisation of the G5 Sahel's battalions while G5 soldiers are sometimes directly integrated into Barkhane forces such as with the *Sous-Groupements Tactiques du Désert* (SGTD, or Tactical subgroup for Desert environment) which conducts counter-terrorism missions.³⁵

The European Union as a regional stabiliser

European Union's first steps

European states, in general, are involved in the Sahel's securitisation through the EU. The Sahel rapidly took great importance in the then newly created European Union External Action Service which inspired more direct operations in the region. The EU Strategy for Se-

curity and Development for the Sahel – also known as The Sahel Strategy - was the first integrated geographic-focussed strategy published by the EU. This 2011 report stressed the necessity to bind security matters with development and called for an improvement of local governance.³⁶ The European External Action Services (EEAS) underlined the need for Sahelian states to adopt “more robust public institutions and more accountable governments”, which should be able to provide economic opportunities to its population and appease internal tensions.³⁷ Mali, in particular, was a recipient of a substantial assistance from the EU as it benefits from the EU's longest-standing effort to implement an integrated approach.³⁸ The EU's Sahel strategy calls for greater cooperation in security and development among the states of the region. This input made by the EEAS shaped the EU's first steps in the Sahel. It was later accompanied by a second phase, adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2015 as The Sahel Regional Action Plan. It defined the main pillars of the EU's relation with the Sahel. Four objectives were identified by the Council: prevent and counter radicalisation, tackle the issue of migration and mobility, help better managing borders, and assisting in proposing greater opportunities to the youth.³⁹

Security-focused civilian missions

These integrated strategies preceded and framed the modalities of the EU deployment of military advisers in Niger and Mali through the Common Security and Defence

34. Leymarie, P. *L'armée française doit-elle quitter le Sahel ?*

35. Ministère des Armées, 2020b. BARKHANE : Un an aux commandes de l'opération Barkhane, rencontre avec le général Pascal Facon

36. Pye, K., 2019. *A Means to an End or an End in Itself? The EU integrated Approach to Conflict in Mali*, s.l.: Collège d'Europe.

37. EEAS, 2011. *European Union External Action Service - Strategy for Security and Development in the The Sahel*, Brussels: s.n.

38. Pye, K. *A Means to an End or an End in Itself? The EU integrated Approach to Conflict in Mali*

39. EU, 2016. *Factsheet - EU relations with The Sahel countries - Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger*, Brussels: s.n.

Policy (CSDP). As noted previously, these interventions seek to stabilise the region by providing local governments the tools for gaining greater autonomy in the medium term, and for tackling emerging security challenge.⁴⁰ The EU's first intervention in the region, EU-CAP Sahel Niger, was launched after calling for help from Nigerien authorities to fight organised crime, terrorism and better confront regional security threats.^{41 42} The goal was to increase Nigerien security force interoperability (among police forces, the Gendarmerie, and the National Guard) and facilitate their capacity to fight terrorism, organised crime, and control migration flows across their borders.⁴³ A similar action was undertaken in Mali to the benefit of the Malian security forces. The EU's Council launched EUCAP Sahel Mali in January 2015 to give Bamako tools to maintain constitutional and democratic order while expanding and deepening the state's authority over its national territory. These missions aim to provide strategic advice to relevant security ministries and support the reform of the country's security sector. They also seek closer relations with G5 Joint Forces and expansion of their commitment to new regions, especially in the Three Frontiers regions near the border of Burkina-Faso, Niger, and Mali.⁴⁴ The two missions have focused on non-military training so far. This is a reminder of the EU's unwillingness to provide Sahelian states with the required power to completely control their territory, guarantee security

of their civilian populations, and enhance state legitimacy. Despite being non-military, their ambitions to strengthen police forces are linked with military objectives since organised crime, migration control and border surveillance often overlaps with armed or jihadist groups' illicit activities (arms smuggling, troops' displacement, attacks on civilians, insecurity).^{45,46}

The EU is present in the Sahel through a third mission: the European Union Military Training Mission in Mali (EUTM). This was launched in February 2013 to rebuild the Malian Armed Forces (MaAF) who were facing many difficulties countering Tuareg rebels and Islamist fighters. The mission's goal is to train Malian soldiers to immediately be deployed to northern regions, which, despite the Operation Serval, were still characterised by great turmoil.⁴⁷ The training of the Malian army by the EU is conducted through military expertise and advisors, especially regarding logistics, command and control, and humanitarian law. EUTM was also deployed to assist the Malian government and its army to implement the Peace Agreement's Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration clauses which aim to reintegrate former armed groups into the Malian army and government.^{48,49} The latter is part of the pacification processes, agreed upon through the successive peace treaties between the central authority and secessionist regions.

The dispatch of up to 700 military trainers to

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Tinti, P. & Westcott, T., 2016. *The Niger-Libya corridor - Smugglers' perspectives*, s.l.: Institute for Security Studies in partnership with The Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime.

43. Raineri, L. & Baldaro, E., *Resilience to What? EU Capacity-Building Missions in the Sahel*.

44. Ibid.

45. De Tessières, S., 2018. *At the Crossroads of The Sahelian Conflicts: Insecurity, Terrorism, and Arms Trafficking in Niger*. Geneva: s.n.

46. Contini, L., 2020. *Le G5 Sahel et le concept de sécurité-développement*. In: *Recherches Internationales* n°117. Paris: s.n.

47. Raineri, L. & Baldaro, E., *Resilience to What? EU Capacity-Building Missions in the Sahel*.

48. EU. *Facsheet - EU relations with The Sahel countries - Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger*.

49. Leymarie, P. *L'armée française doit-elle quitter le Sahel?*

the Sahel has created significant institutional innovations⁵⁰, by opening inter-agency cooperation and advancing security-development in tandem. This positive evolution results from the EU's commitment to developing its external action's arsenal by exploring and experimenting with new training methods and approaches. This gives the EU the required tools to become a geopolitical giant and a world-class stabilising security actor.

MINUSMA and Europe's strategic implication

MINUSMA: history and mandate

European nations are not only present in the region through direct involvement (Barkhane) or EU military and civilian operations. The extreme instability of 2012 and the security threats facing Sahelian states have pushed the United-Nations to act in the region and form a peacekeeping multinational operation in Malian northern regions. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was launched after the success of Operation Serval, and its ability to re-establish the sovereignty of the Malian state over the northern region. It serves as a complement to operation Barkhane.⁵¹ Indeed, the French Army is more interested in enforcing peace through kinetic operations and a large-scale counterterrorism campaign, the United-Nations on the other hand remained faithful to its long peacekeeping tradition.⁵²

UN resolution 2164 authorising MINUSMA was unanimously adopted in June 2014, allowed MINUSMA to send 15209 uniformed personnel to Mali.⁵³ The United Nation's objectives are to safeguard security, protect civilians, support peace and national reconciliation processes, and assist the reestablishment of state authority. The coalition is constituted, to an important extent, of African troops. Chad, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Senegal, Togo, Niger, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire are the top ten troop contributors as of November 2020.⁵⁴ However, European states contribute to MINUSMA, which happens to be the second largest recipient of European troops after the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNFIL) with more than 850 European personnel participating.⁵⁵ This involvement shows European states commitment to regional stabilisation, as organised crime, increasing migration and the spread of terrorism in the region directly impact European security agendas.

European high-ends low-risk strategy

If European involvement in MINUSMA remains modest regarding the number of troops deployed, it has provided high-end capabilities to the mission with Sweden, Germany and the United-Kingdom sending intelligence, surveillance and/or reconnaissance experts (in 2015, 2016 and 2020 respectively) while Norway, Portugal, Denmark, and Belgium have agreed to provide transport aircraft to the mission on a rotating basis. In addi-

50. Raineri, L. & Baldaro, E., Resilience to What? EU Capacity-Building Missions in the Sahel.

51. Erforth, Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the Sahel.

52. Ruffa, C., Rientjens, S. & Nygren, E., 2020. Resilience and Conflict Resolution: UN Peacekeeping in Mali. In: Projecting Resilience Across the Mediterranean. s.l.:s.n., pp. 189-203.

53. UN Peacekeeping, 2021. MINUSMA factsheet - United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation mission in Mali. [Online]

Available at: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minusma> [Accessed 12 02 2021].

54. Ibid.

55. UN Peacekeeping, 2020. Troop and police contributors. [Online]

Available at: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors> [Accessed 12 02 2021].

tion, Germany provided NH-90 transport and Tiger attack helicopters. Since 2014, the Netherlands has deployed special operations forces; Chinook and Apache helicopters, and intelligence units. MINUSMA is the mission in which the German Bundeswehr is the most active outside Germany.⁵⁶ MINUSMA, therefore, constitutes an impressive effort to stabilise the region and reinforce Mali against emerging security menaces which keep threatening Bamako.⁵⁷ If African nations have provided most of the personnel involved in the mission, Europe has adopted on the other and a high-end low-risk strategy and preferred to provide the specialised equipment necessary to the conduct of MINUSMA's mandate.⁵⁸

Furthermore, the United-Nations has also expressed its willingness to support the G5 Sahel Joint Forces by providing resources to Sahelian armed forces and promoting development policies. The coalition has focused on human rights protection and the respect of international justice and law in the region.⁵⁹ This follows already the European Union's strategy relying on the recognition of a security-development nexus, while stressing the need to restore Sahelian states capacity to provide public services, security, and justice to their populations. The UN also supports greater efforts to protect the cultural heritage of the region and humanitarian aids.

DETERIORATION OF SAHELIAN SECURITY AND CHALLENGES TO SECURITISATION

Large-scale guerrilla environment

Deterioration of the security environment in the Sahel

Despite the multiplication of counterterrorism, capacity-building and peacekeeping operations launched in Mali and Niger, and the extensive involvement of multinational coalitions to stabilise the Sahel; violence and instability have remained systemic. More worryingly, there has been a degradation of the regional security environment, as violence spreads to new regions, especially in the

Lake Chad Basin in Niger and Chad, and in the Liptako-Gourma region, which overlaps northern Burkina-Faso and Southern Mali and Niger (also called the Three Frontiers region).⁶⁰ This resulted from the dispersion to new regions and countries of armed groups, which were defeated in 2013 after the Franco-African coalition's intervention and Serval's success. By dispatching themselves to new regions, armed combatants could engage a large-scale asymmetrical war by adopting guerrilla strategy against overstretched French forces and underfunded Sahelian states.

56. Karlsruf, J. & Novosseloff, A., 2020. Doing less with more? The difficult return of Western troop contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping. Brussels: GGI - Global Governance Institute.

57. Ruffa, C., Rientjens, S. & Nygren, E. Resilience and Conflict Resolution: UN Peacekeeping in Mali.

58. Karlsruf, J. & Novosseloff, A. Doing less with more? The difficult return of Western troop contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping.

59. UN Peacekeeping. MINUSMA factsheet - United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation mission in Mali

60. Antil, A., 2020. The Sahel : le sommet de Pau est-il un tournant ? - RAMSES 2021 - Institut français des relations internationales. Paris, IFRI.

New warfare engagement

These insurgent battalions, also called *katiba*, are mobile, flexible and evolve in territories where Sahelian states have little to no control. If they remain away from urban centres and agglomerations, they can become well-established in rural and trans-border areas where goods, arms, drugs, combatants, and migrants move.⁶¹ This strategy allows armed groups to influence marginalised communities, recruit from migrants and unemployed youth.⁶² Due to their mobility and presence, they can develop influence over territories they do not have to manage directly.

This trend is observable through armed groups increased ability to engage Sahelian governmental forces, outnumber and flank them. Indeed, armed groups have begun attacking military bases and other Malian and Nigerien national armies' positions. On November 1st, 2019, a military base located near Ménaka, in the North-East of Mali, was attacked by a well-organised jihadist group from the Islamic State in Greater Sahara. The assault was led from three sides simultaneously and resulted in the death of around sixty Malian soldiers. Far from being an exception, other tragedies, costly in human lives, have occurred at the military base of In Ates near Niamey on December 10th, killing 71 Nigerien soldiers. On January 9th, 2020, 89 soldiers perished in an attack against the Chinagodrar military base in Niger.⁶³

However, practice has shown that greater coordination between Sahelian national armies and the foreign actors present in the region could play a positive role in shortening at-

tacks and rebalancing the outcomes in favour of the states. This was the case, for instance, in Burkina-Faso on December 24th, 2019, when allied Burkinabe and French airstrikes repelled attackers. This coordination served to limit the number of allied forces killed while enemy forces suffered from 80 casualties.⁶⁴ Military doctrines have been modified as a reaction to this sporadic deadly engagement, as shown in 2015, by the scheme drawn by French General Didier Castres: it is now useless to think solely about traditional Clausewitzian warfare, based on attrition, elimina-



Figure 2
By Magharebia - Al-Qaeda creates Touareg-led brigade | Al-Qaida crée une brigade dirigée par des Touaregs, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=23633229>

61. Leymarie, P. L'armée française doit-elle quitter le The Sahel ?

62. Peace Research Institute Oslo. A demographic threat ? Youth, peace, and security challenges in the The Sahel.

63. IFRI, 2021. Institut Français des Relations Internationales - Le Grand Basculément ?. Paris, s.n.

64. Ibid.

tion, and eradication; armies need instead to focus on flaws, networks, nodes and centres; they need to hit enemy replenishment networks, command chains, communication systems. Armies engaged in the war on terror must deepen their capacity to surprise the enemy with number, the location, and the time of the attack.⁶⁵

Exactions against civilians

Civilians casualties

In the unrest in the Sahel, civilians have been the first victims of increased violence. The number of casualties has risen from 700 deaths in 2017 to 4000 in 2019.⁶⁶ Armed groups have increased the number of attacks against civilians and local rural communities, killing dozens and sometimes hundreds, as seen with the massacre in the villages of Tchamo-Bangou and Zaroumdareye, killing 100.⁶⁷ As instability and violence rise, many observers have noticed an increasing ethnicisation of the violence. This can be seen in the massacre of 130 Malian Fulani villagers by Dogon militia in Ogossagou near the border with Burkina-Faso.^{68,69} These crimes provoke intraregional migration and worsen state legitimacy in the eyes of their populations as they do not feel protected by governmental forces, thus, further destabilising the region. These tragedies often trigger vicious cycles of violence as punitive expeditions are held

against local communities, jihadists, and other armed combatants suspected of coming from other ethnic groups.⁷⁰ This phenomenon was underlined by a 2018 report commissioned by the UN Secretary-General. The report sheds light on the exactions of armed groups (which are suspected of having committed crimes against humanity), it also signals important failures from the Malian armed and security forces who are accused of having perpetrated war crimes between 2012 and 2018 (the report's scope stopped in 2018, but exactions have likely worsened since then as the security environment in the Sahel collapsed). These exactions include "violence to the life and person of civilians and persons *hors de combat* suspected of being affiliated or cooperating with extremist armed groups".⁷¹ The report also calls for setting up courts specialised in prosecuting international crimes to guarantee justice and hold perpetrators accountable for their acts.⁷² Naturally, such atrocities are detrimental to the civilian population as they are victims of both sides. This erodes the trust that these populations have toward their states and their political authorities.

Reinforcement of armed groups

From an operational point of view, criminal impunity may also erode the legitimacy of the military campaign as local populations may cease to believe in the armies' capacity to pro-

65. Leymarie, P. L'armée française doit-elle quitter le The Sahel ?

66. Anil, A. The Sahel : le sommet de Pau est-il un tournant ?

67. UN Refugee Agency, 2021. UNHCR outraged at killing of 100 civilians in Niger attacks, hundreds flee on foot. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/11/5f2a9f93/unhcr-outraged-killing-100-civilians-niger-attacks-hundreds-flee-foot.html> [Accessed 2021 02 12].

68. Leymarie, P. L'armée française doit-elle quitter le The Sahel ?

69. Jezequel, J.-H., 2019. Centre du Mali : enrayer le nettoyage ethnique. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/afrique/The-Sahel/mali/centre-du-mali-enrayer-le-nettoyage-ethnique> [Accessed 2021 02 12].

70. Institut Français des Relations Internationales. Le Grand Basculement ?

71. France 24, 2020a. UN probe accuses Mali army of war crimes, armed groups of crimes against humanity - quotation from the UN International Commission of Inquiry. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/afrique/20201222-un-probe-accuses-mali-army-of-war-crimes-armed-groups-of-crimes-against-humanity> [Accessed 12 02 2021].

72. France 24, 2020b. UN calls for special court to prosecute Mali war crimes. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/video/20201223-un-calls-for-special-court-to-prosecute-mali-war-crimes> [Accessed 12 02 2021].

tect their communities. More importantly, the death of civilians can reinforce armed groups as citizens may want to avenge the death of a family member or a friend. As many have observed, an important portion of armed combatants do not fight national or regular armies for purely ideological or religious reasons, but as an act of resistance against foreign aggression and unpunished national armies.⁷³ Besides, by attacking civilians and fragile rural communities, the national armies may further erode regional and local socio-economic links, pushing many toward terrorist groups, rebel armed forces or organised crime.⁷⁴ These phenomena are likely to reproduce the cycles of violence which MINUSMA, the G5 Sahel or Barkhane seek to end.

The difficult necessity of maintaining the rule of law and strong standards of transparency were underlined recently. On January 5th, 2021, an investigation was launched by MINUSMA after a deadly airstrike by the French Air Force. The strike targeted a high-ranked jihadist chief near the village of Bounti in Central Mali. Still, local NGOs expressed concern as they said that a local wedding was hit instead, resulting in 19 civilian casualties.^{75,76} This enquiry must determine whether the strike was sufficiently prepared and consider the accountability of French decision-makers regarding laws of war. Independently of the result, this strike could deepen and legitimise terrorist propaganda according to which the French and Malian armies are engaged in a crusade against Islam. The terrorist' discour-

sive strategy is based on strong communication through social networks. Armed groups use it to gain influence, facilitate the recruitment of new fighters, and increase armed group reproduction and replenishment. The respect of international law is a key element in proving to local populations that foreign armies support the rule of law and justice. For Jonathan Pedneault, researcher at the Crisis and Conflict division of the Human Rights Watch, creating "credible and impartial investigation provided with necessary data" is the best way to "yield accurate findings and dissipate doubts and rumours".⁷⁷ By proceeding so, the population may be more confident in the Malian and foreign armies' capacity to ensure security, guarantee justice, and defend the rule of law.

Public denunciation of foreign intervention

Foreign armies' unpopularity

Despite efforts from the foreign actors involved militarily in the Sahel to guarantee the rule of law, their commitment to justice and call for a more democratic political governance, critiques of Barkhane or MINUSMA have increased over time. The presence of foreign armies in the region has resulted in suspicion among many. It has also led to resistance from both civilians and politicians. The progress made by the Franco-Sahelian troops security-wise has barely translated into any political power. War weariness has pushed the

73. Pérouse de Montclos, M.-A., 2018. L'Afrique, nouvelle frontière du djihad ?. Paris: Cahiers Libres.

74. Turner, M., Ayantunde, A., Patterson, K. & Patterson, D., 2011. Livelihood transitions and the changing nature of farmer–herder conflict in The Sahelian West Africa. *The journal of development studies*, 47.2, pp. 183-206.

75. Leymarie, P. L'armée française doit-elle quitter le The Sahel ?

76. Human Right Watch, 2021. Mali/France: Investigate French Airstrike Killing 19. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/21/mali/france-investigate-french-airstrike-killing-19> [Accessed 12 02 2021].

77. Ibid.

Malian population to increasingly disfavour foreign intervention on its territory, especially Operation Barkhane. This is fuelled by a difficult, shared, Franco-Malian history, and the spread of fake news.⁷⁸

This resentment is particularly observable in Mali, where protests have occurred against the former coloniser's involvement in regional politics. This is seen, for instance, by the planned protests against the French military presence, which were supposed to occur in Bamako in January 2020, before they were forbidden by authorities.⁷⁹ Mistrust is further developed by support from international forces to Sahelian armed forces, accused of having committed war crimes and deadly exactions against villagers. Fake news has also constituted a difficult challenge for the French Army and the United Nation's peacekeeping force. They are the target of hostile communication campaigns. The French Army is frequently discredited on social networks, after, for instance, the publication of a photomontage portraying French soldiers stealing Malian gold.⁸⁰

This negative stance toward foreign operations has also spread to parts of the local political elite, as seen with the Burkinabe Defence Minister, Moumima Cheriff, sharing his suspicions about France's real agenda in the region and wondering whether the French Army wanted to rid the region from the terrorist threat.⁸¹

Difficulties and inappropriate mandates

These criticisms emerge as the French Army struggles to exorcise the jihadist and secessionist threat from the Sahel. Their force operates in a territory twice as big as Metropolitan France. If military successes and victories help to win the war on the battlefield, they may be in vain considering the lack of strong communication with the population. Indeed, many precautions are made to guarantee maximum security to soldiers operating under Operation Barkhane. The heavily defended bases where French soldiers are stationed as well as the amount of personal protection they wear (gloves, masks, weapons) and armoured vehicles they travel in, reduce the ability for French soldiers to benefit from a reinsuring image toward civilians. MINUSMA likewise has been criticised for not doing enough to protect civilians. Their peacekeeping mandate is said to be inefficient and too passive to positively impact the security environment. Heads of state in the region have expressed their willingness to see the mandate of MINUSMA pass from peacekeeping to peace-enforcement, arguing that the MINUSMA's inability to act offensively and use lethal force other than in reaction to an attack is not effective in stabilising the Sahel and could discredit the international community.⁸²

Increasing political pressures both from the population and a segment of the Sahelian political sphere have also been accompanied by a series of accidents such as a helicopter crash killing 13 soldiers on November 26th, 2019,

78. Antil, A. The Sahel : le sommet de Pau est-il un tournant ? - RAMSES 2021

79. Ouest-France, 2021. Mali. Interdiction d'une manifestation contre la présence militaire française. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.ouest-france.fr/monde/mali/mali-interdiction-d-une-manifestation-contre-la-presence-militaire-francaise-7124521> [Accessed 13 02 2021].

80. Leymarie, P. L'armée française doit-elle quitter le The Sahel ?

81. Allison, S., 2019. 1 question France's motives, says Burkina Faso's defence minister. Mail & Guardian.

82. Leymarie, P. L'armée française doit-elle quitter le The Sahel ?

bringing the number of French casualties to 41 since 2013.⁸³ These dynamics, coupled with the rise of violence and the anti-French and anti-government sentiment engaged by local jihadist groups, have led to questioning the strategies used so far and called for a new dynamic of engagement in the region to find a solution to security problems. To mitigate criticisms, France has sought to reinforce its

commitment to multilateralism by reiterating her commitment to Sahelian states' interests and the G5 Sahel forces⁸⁴ and pushing Europe to play a more important role in the Sahel.⁸⁵ The Pau summit gave impetus and sought to develop a new approach to stabilise the region.

GREATER MULTILATERALISM AND COOPERATION: THE COALITION FOR THE SAHEL

The Coalition for the Sahel or the dawn of a new security framework

The current situation in the Sahel constitutes a complex set of local, regional, and international actors; each has its interests independent from the rest. Coordinating the operational efforts made across the region, and especially in Mali, has become a priority in recent years. This ambition became more concrete when French President Emmanuel Macron organised a summit in Pau, in the south of France, in January 2020, to “revaluate the terms of the legitimacy of our presence in the Sahel”.⁸⁶ The Pau Summit underlined the need to expand the trans-sectoral and inter-army cooperation in military, logistical, organisational, and developmental matters among all stakeholders

in the Sahel, and to better coordinate actions and synchronise operations.⁸⁷ This integration is expected to improve the quality of operational preparation and deployment, while reducing reaction time in case of emergency.⁸⁸ More importantly, the 2020 Pau summit ended with the creation of a large-scale coordinating framework, the Coalition for the Sahel, announced in a joint statement from the Burkina Faso, Chad, France, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, supported by the UN Secretary-General, the Secretary General of the Francophonie, the President of the European Council, the High Representative of the European Union and the President of the African Union Commission.⁸⁹ The Coalition for the Sahel was initially proposed and built by the G5 Sahel states while Paris played an im-

83. Lebovich, A., 2020. Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the The Sahel. European Council on Foreign Relations.

84. Recchia, S. & Tardy, T. French military operations in Africa: Reluctant multilateralism.

85. Erförth, Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the The Sahel.

86. France 24, 2019. L'opération Barkhane confrontée à l'hostilité contre la France au The Sahel.

87. Lebovich, A. Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the Sahel.

88. Ministère des Armées, 2020c. BARKHANE : Suite du sommet de Pau. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/brevets/barkhane-suite-du-sommet-de-pau> [Accessed 13 02 2021].

89. Coalition for The Sahel, 2021. Coalition pour le Sahel. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.coalition-TheSahel.org/en/coalition-pour-le-Sahel/> [Accessed 13 02 2021].

portant supporting role to make it concrete.⁹⁰ It plans to include every country and international partner involved in the region. The coalition is based on the idea that challenges emerging in the Sahel and spill-over into new areas can only be resolved by coordinating every actor's efforts and mandates.⁹¹ The coalition draws on the existing security-development nexus promoted by many actors in the region such as the European Union, the Sahelian states, the Sahel Alliance, and even by the French Army itself to some extent. The added value of the coalition is to increase cohesion and provide a common horizon to every pre-existing operation in the region.

The coalition's four pillars

The coalition for the Sahel sits on four pillars which altogether constitute the core of the stabilisation strategy in the Sahel. Two pillars focus on military objectives while two others seek to achieve civilian ones. The goal is to integrate governance, development, and security objectives to enhance the overall coherence of the many programs and initiatives launched in The Sahel. The Coalition for The Sahel is proof of stakeholders' strong willingness to increase operational efficiency and provide countries like Mali, Niger, or Burkina-Faso with a long-term stabilisation. Additionally, associating foreign armies with civilian and developmental missions may decrease Sahelian populations' rejection of Barkhane, MINUSMA and the EU. Finally, enhancing the security-development nexus gives greater

room for allied military forces to contest the influence of armed and jihadist groups in the region.

The fight against terrorism and armed groups.

Greater cooperation from Barkhane

Firstly, stakeholders agreed to increase pressure against jihadist groups in the region by focussing especially in Liptako-Gourma region, also known as the Three Frontiers. This increased pressure is illustrated by the deepened commitment of Paris after the Pau summit by sending 600 additional troops to the theatre, bringing the total number of French troops in the Sahel to 5100.⁹²

More importantly, greater efforts for developing interdependence among stakeholders, and increased interoperability were announced. A dedicated coordination platform, for instance, was established in Niamey, Niger. The Joint Command Centre (PCS) was inaugurated in March 2020 and gathered French and Sahelian officers to collect and share intelligence.⁹³ The centre was also created to prepare and maximise efficiency of future operations. There is a will to create complementarity between each army's respective expertise: French officers provide a well-defined intelligence through advanced methodologies and protocols, Nigerien officers, on the other hand, use their precise knowledge of the terrain to check and reinforce the provided intelligence, making it more precise and more reliable.⁹⁴

Efforts to enhance complementarity between

90. Lebovich, A. Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the Sahel.

91. Ibid.

92. Antil, A. The Sahel : le sommet de Pau est-il un tournant ?

93. Lebovich, A. Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the The Sahel.

94. Ministère des Armées. BARKHANE : Un an aux commandes de l'opération Barkhane, rencontre avec le général Pascal Facon.

French and Sahelian armies has been deepened and extended through the recent integration of Burkinabe, Malian, and Nigerien liaison officers in the HQ element of Operation Barkhane in N'Djamena. This link between the armies is expected to facilitate coordination, develop trust, and increase reactivity as a more advanced knowledge of the enemy's movement will be available. These liaison officers' duties will synchronise operations to obtain complementary effects on the battlefield. They will also improve the tactical evolutions of operations and guarantee the prompt sharing of intelligence and data. These efforts will guarantee greater operational effectiveness through joint planning and permanent inter-army dialogue.⁹⁵

This greater collaboration enabled a joint preparation between the French command and the FC-G5S in operations SAMA and MONCLAR, which lasted several months and combined thousands of troops from Barkhane and the G5 countries. These operations resulted in real operational progresses and increased the capacity to collaborate and cooperate on the ground, especially at the limits of the zones of which each army is responsible.⁹⁶

Progressive de-facto shift in MINUSMA's mandate

Coalition for the Sahel has also included MINUSMA in its pillar "fighting armed groups and terrorism".⁹⁷ The introduction of MI-

NUSMA to this pillar is a notable innovation as it has been mandated for peacekeeping missions. This shift results from pressure from both Sahelian states and Paris for more resources to pressure terrorist groups and ensure security in the region. This shift may also be an impact of European influence within the mission. Indeed, MINUSMA was initially created for peacekeeping and state-building operations.⁹⁸ But the presence of European in the UN coalition and calls from Sahelian heads of state for peace-enforcement operations have resulted in a shift toward greater on-the-ground counterterrorism engagements from MINUSMA.

MINUSMA's shift from peacekeeping to peace-enforcement was further strengthened by the deepening institutional bridges between MINUSMA, Barkhane and the national Sahelian armies. These greater interconnections have been developed through the sharing of intelligence, enabled by creating an explicit intelligence unit by the UN mission and an increased use of surveillance drones on a large-scale.⁹⁹ MINUSMA's open support to kinetic counterterrorism operations represents a challenge to the principle and doctrine on which peacekeeping operations are based. Indeed, "*the lines between peace enforcement and peacekeeping become even more blurred (for the local population, the spoilers, and their respective contributors)*" which may diminish "*the unique legitimacy and comparative advantage of UN peacekeeping while mak-*

95. Ministère des Armées, 2020c. BARKHANE : Suite du sommet de Pau. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/brevets/barkhane-suite-du-sommet-de-pau> [Accessed 13 02 2021].

96. Ministère des Armées, 2020d. BARKHANE : MONCLAR et SAMA, deux opérations coordonnées entre la force Barkhane et la force conjointe du G5 The Sahel. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/operations/barkhane-monclar-et-sama-deux-operations-coordonnees-entre-la-force-barkhane-et-la-force-conjointe-du-g5-The-Sahel> [Accessed 13 02 2021].

97. Coalition The Sahel, 2021. FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.coalition-The-Sahel.org/en/coalition-pour-le-The-Sahel/#pilier-1> [Accessed 13 02 2021].

98. EU. Factsheet - EU relations with The Sahel countries - Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger.

99. Ibid.

ing the UN a party to the conflict”.¹⁰⁰

These new developments are accompanied by other more modest elements which are highly symbolic. Many European states have been reluctant or have refused to paint the equipment they provided to MINUSMA in the white of the UN, due to the relatively high costs deemed unnecessary. This has caused a graphic dissonance with the rest of the UN equipment, painted in white with the UN’s logo, and may therefore have a symbolic effect on populations and enemy combatants as MINUSMA may give a feeling of increased military readiness. This is accompanied with a new reality in which MINUSMA is deeply associated with counterterrorism operations, along with the Coalition for the Sahel.¹⁰¹

The Sahelian and G5 reinforcements

Partnership for The Sahel

To further reinforce G5 Sahel joint forces and national armed forces capabilities, the Coalition for the Sahel has integrated existing frameworks into its pillar, especially the Partnership for Security and Stability in The Sahel (P3S). The partnership was proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, in August 2019 during the G7 Biarritz summit.¹⁰² (Lebovich, 2020). Supported by then chairman of G5 Sahel, President of Burkina Faso Marc Roch Kaboré, this initiative seeks to achieve multiple goals.



Figure 3

By MINUSMA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fpp895kYpXo>, CC BY 3.0,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=64609504>

100. Novosseloff, A. & Sharland, L., 2019. Partners and Competitors: Forces Operating in Parallel to UN Peace Operations, s.l.: IPI - International Peace Institute, p.25.

101. Karlsruh, J. & Novosseloff, A., 2020. Doing less with more? The difficult return of Western troop contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping

102. Lebovich, A. Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the The Sahel.

Firstly, it was created to precisely identify the security needs of Sahelian states, and to increase the efficiency in upgrading defence capabilities and internal security.¹⁰³ The Partnership for Security and Stability in The Sahel supports enhanced international coordination. It is expected to serve as a base for reforming the Sahelian security sector by promoting accountability and transparency. The long-term goal of this security-focused approach is, to quote German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, to “*train and equip the security forces of the Sahel countries in such a way that they can independently ensure the security of the population and that people’s confidence in the authority and presence of the state grows once again*”.¹⁰⁴ As mentioned by German Foreign Affairs Minister, one of the underlying goals of this pillar is to support Sahelian states’ reconstruction and develop their ability to protect their populations, which should contribute to their re-legitimation. This goal is essential for the securitisation of the Sahel, and constitutes a cornerstone of the next pillar, which is centred on civilian matters.

Restoration of public and regular authority

Actors of interest

Like the second pillar centred on the training of Sahelian national armies, this pillar seeks to coordinate international efforts to train se-

curity forces such as the gendarmerie, police forces and the national guards.¹⁰⁵ The goal is to reinforce the states by helping them develop and sustain their regular functions. This state-building objective also seeks to extend the scope of Sahelian administrations to the entirety of their national territories, especially in the most fragile regions.¹⁰⁶ To do so, the Coalition for the Sahel envisages participation in implementing reliable security forces, coupled with the constitution of a fair and stable judiciary system. This non-military pillar is expected to reinforce the legitimacy of states and guarantee that efforts and gains extracted from counterinsurgency and peacekeeping operations are sustainable in the long term.¹⁰⁷ MINUSMA has been active in collaborating with local government for enhancing and maintaining peace and security. The UN, through this mission, supervises the implementation of the rule of law and the restoration of public order. Since the 90s, most UN peacekeeping forces are mandated to accompany a formation of police forces and other public services. MINUSMA’s police contingent comprises 1712 police officers whose goal is to train and upgrade Sahelian security forces.¹⁰⁸ The European Union has been another important actor in restoring the rule of law in the Sahel and building Sahelian administrative and legal capacities. As mentioned earlier, EUCAP missions were launched in Niger and Mali under the

103. France Diplomatie, 2020a. Joint Statement following the G5 Sahel-France Foreign/Defence Ministers Meeting of 27 April 2020. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/news/2020/article/joint-statement-following-the-g5-sahel-france-foreign-defence-ministers-meeting> [Accessed 13 02 2021].

104. Federal Foreign Office, 2020. Foreign Minister Maas on the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel. [Online]

Available at: https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/maas-security-and-stability-the-sahel/23526609---text-The%20Partnership%20for%20Security%20and%20Stability%20in%20the%20Sahel%20145_%E2%80%9Creturn%20to%20the%20State%E2%80%9D [Accessed 13 02 2021].

105. Coalition The Sahel, 2021. SUPPORT FOR THE RETURN OF THE STATE AND ADMINISTRATIONS IN THE TERRITORY. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.coalition-the-sahel.org/en/coalition-pour-le-the-sahel/#pillar-3> [Accessed 13 02 2021].

106. Lebovich, A. Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the The Sahel.

107. Bigot, C., 2020. Coalition The Sahel : 3 questions à Christophe Bigot. [Online]

Available at: [Video retrieved: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_CWAUAzsbk&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_CWAUAzsbk&feature=youtu.be) [Accessed 13 02 13].

108. MINUSMA, 2021. Police. [Online]

Available at: <https://minusma.unmissions.org/police> [Accessed 13 02 2021].

Common Defence and Security Policy. Their mission is to assist the reform of security forces, provide expertise and train the various police bodies (Gendarmerie, police, national guards). These operations have sought to deepen their ties with MINUSMA. They have started collaborating closely to increase efficiency and better accompany Malian and Nigerien security forces toward a stricter application of the law and accountability.¹⁰⁹ This pillar can play an important role in legitimising the presence of the UN and the EU – and to a lesser extent, France – as it is expected to prove to local populations the willingness from foreign assets to restore the rule of law and justice in the Sahel.

Economic and social development

The Sahel Alliance and the influence of the Agence française de Développement

The Coalition for the Sahel relies on a fourth pillar, which brings the final requirements for an efficient collaboration in the Sahel. This pillar is founded mostly on a previous initiative, launched in 2017, which constituted a first step toward large-scale cooperation in development. The Sahel Alliance was launched by the G5 Sahel countries, France, the EU, the African Development Bank, UN Development Program, the World Bank and Germany to bring together some of the most important international donors to better-coordinate development policies and programs.¹¹⁰ The alliance served as a framework merging security

objectives into a developmental approach.¹¹¹ This strategy follows the dual necessities of ridding the region from enemy forces while also proposing the population – especially the youth – a viable socio-economic environment to prevent marginalisation and reduce the influence of organised crime and extremist groups.¹¹²

The Alliance for The Sahel is founded on a development-security nexus in which the Agence Française de Développement (AFD, or French Agency for Development) in partnership with the French Army. This military-developmental cooperation relies on an inter-complementarity of each service's expertise. A military liaison, for instance, provides operational and military expertise at the AFD's crisis prevention and conflict cells based in Paris. At the same time, an AFD advisor is located at Barkhane's headquarters in Niamey to offer best practices and good development governance.¹¹³ In addition, each service seeks to integrate some of the other's missions into their daily tasks. For instance, military or security forces would gather intelligence on the ground by interacting with local populations. At this point, civilians may stress immediate social needs and formulate development project requests that armies would report to development agencies. The latter, in turn, would contact relevant local NGOs to launch the development project.¹¹⁴ This inter-service collaboration increases operational efficiency while increasing the local

109. Council of the European Union, 2021. EUCAP The Sahel Mali: mission extended until 31 January 2023 and mandate adjusted. [Online] Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/01/11/eucap-the-sahel-mali-mission-extended-until-31-january-2023-and-mandate-adjusted/>. [Accessed 13 02 2021].

110. Lebovich, A. Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the The Sahel.

111. European Council, 2020. Déclaration conjointe des membres du Conseil européen avec les États membres du G5 The Sahel. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/press/press-releases/2020/04/28/joint-declaration-of-the-members-of-the-european-council-with-the-member-states-of-the-g5-the-sahel/>. [Accessed 14 02 2021].

112. Arnaud, C., Ray, O., Tehio, V. & Grünwald, F., 2016. Youth in the The Sahel: exclusion and integration, s.l.: Groupe URD.

113. Lebovich, A. Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the The Sahel.

114. Ibid.

population's trust toward foreign assets and make the Sahel's stabilisation long-lasting and sustainable.

The Coalition for The Sahel: a game-changer for the region and stakeholders?

Emergence of integrated approaches

A notable innovation introduced by the European Union conceived to build an integrated approach to development was the Secured Development and Governance Pole (PSDG). Despite some initial difficulties to fully integrate security objectives, this developmental approach has become part of the Malian government's *Plan de Sécuritisation Intégrées des Régions du Centre* (PSIRC, or the Plan for an integrated securitisation of Central Mali).¹¹⁵ This consists of creating a security bubble around a local community through establishing protected self-sustaining positions for Mali's security forces. These would position security forces in secured locations that allow them to bind closer links with local populations, fight criminality and deter abuses. Thus, economic activity can be relaunched in the surrounding region and reduce the appeal of armed groups. The integrated approach also "includes stationed judges with expanded responsibilities to adjudicate on issues relating to land management or animal herding disputes".¹¹⁶ By this means, conflicts can be avoided, scarce resources better distributed, and state legitimacy and strengthened.¹¹⁷

This approach, or "Konna approach", supports every pillar of the Coalition for The Sahel simultaneously. It helps reinvigorate the economic and social life of fragile post-conflict territories (development-centred pillar) and reinforces the presence of the state that can apply legal and judiciary functions. This is required for the sustainability of peace-enforcing operations to fight terrorist and armed groups and to secure new regions.¹¹⁸ The Konna approach shows the importance of a functioning cooperation between all stakeholders in the region. This coordinated and integrated approach is expected to be reiterated in other parts of Mali and the Sahel despite the rather important maintenance costs required.

The Coalition for The Sahel: a geo-strategic chance for Europe and France

The decision to create the Coalition for the Sahel not only responds to the necessity to draw upon integrated methodologies, enhance cooperation, and improve efficiency; the Coalition is also a way for France to share the burden of peace-enforcement in the Sahel. Indeed, Operation Barkhane costs France one billion euros every year.¹¹⁹ Additionally, the political burden of such operations has increased. This is because France has been one of the strongest drivers of political and operational integration in the Sahel, without yet succeeding to end the development of armed groups. The Coalition for the Sahel, and the Europeanisation of peace-enforcement and stabilisation processes are intended to spread

115. UN Info, 2020. Mali : le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU appelle à accélérer la mise en œuvre de l'accord de paix. [Online] Available at: <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2020/01/11060122> [Accessed 14 02 2021].

116. Lebovich, A. Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the The Sahel.

117. EUCAP The Sahel Mali, 2019. Communiqué: ICI ON A COMBINÉ SÉCURITÉ ET DÉVELOPPEMENT. [Online] Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=412150616148869> [Accessed 14 02 2021].

118. European Council, 2020. Déclaration conjointe des membres du Conseil européen avec les États membres du G5 The Sahel

119. Franceinfo, 2021a. Barkhane : stop ou encore ? Ce qu'en pensent les militaires de l'opération. [Online] Available at: https://www.franceinfo.fr/replay-radio/le-choix-franceinfo/barkhane-stop-ou-encore-ce-qu-en-pensent-les-militaires-de-l-operation_4279247.html [Accessed 15 02 2021].

the responsibility of difficulties away from the French state by diffusing collective responsibility to all region actors.

The political strains and high financial costs are further exacerbated by the French population's war weariness, expressed by a progressive erosion of support from 73% approval in 2013, to 59 % in 2019 and a historic low at 49% in February 2021.¹²⁰ This loss of support from the population is a reaction to the feeling that no victory can be won without significant long-term investment. To this, one must

add the human cost of operations, the French Army has lost 57 troops killed, in eight years.¹²¹ The Coalition for the Sahel serves as a way for France to step back and move away from the responsibility of organising the securitisation of the region – without fully disengaging. France would like to promote the joint force's action by providing aerial support, training, logistics and planning expertise instead.¹²²

Despite this lack of support, Barkhane is not to withdraw immediately, and the degradation of the Sahel's security environment



Figure 4

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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=42895921>

120. Kenouvi, G., 2021. Barkhane: l'heure du choix. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.journaldumali.com/2021/01/21/barkhane-a-lheure-choix/> [Accessed 2021 02 15].

121. Bariéty, A., 2021. En huit ans d'engagement au Sahel, l'armée française a perdu 57 militaires. [Online] Available at: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/faits-divers/en-sept-ans-d-engagement-au-sahel-l-armee-francaise-a-perdu-55-militaires-20201229> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

122. Antil, A. Sahel : le sommet de Pau est-il un tournant ?

calls for maintained pressure on armed and jihadist groups. This is why the Pau summit introduced an additional innovation: it created an *ad-hoc* European military formation gathering experienced elite European soldiers from various armed forces to support G5 forces in their counterinsurgency missions

and train Sahelian armies by providing expertise and joint exercises.¹²³ Thus, France hopes to enact a temporary Europeanisation of foreign counterterrorism operations in the Sahel to support a permanent Sahelisation of peace-enforcement.

FROM FRENCH-LED COOPERATION TO A EUROPEAN JOINT FORCE: THE CASE OF TASK FORCE TAKUBA

Post-intervention strategy

Toward a reduced intervention from France

The year 2021 is likely to be characterised by a decision from Paris to prepare a progressive withdrawal from the Sahel. Naturally, conditions that would allow France to leave the region are far from being met, as enemy armed groups are still present and active in the region. The N'Djamena summit, which took place in the Chadian capital from Monday 15th to Tuesday 16th of February 2021, was an occasion to discuss the direction of security in the Sahel, one year after the Pau summit.¹²⁴ For French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, if the Pau Summit set the time for a “military rebound”, then the N'Djamena summit aimed to provide a political solution to the spread of violence in the region.¹²⁵ Conse-

quently, Paris has pressured its Sahelian allies to take more responsibilities and work harder to bring public services (doctors, teachers, police forces) back to the region which kinetic peace-enforcing operations have freed from the influence of armed groups.¹²⁶ France has also made stronger commitments to apply the decisions agreed in the most recent peace treaties, which end up internal unrest and the Azawad liberation movement's rebellion.

As Macron called in January 2021 for a “re-adjustment of her effort” in the Sahel, France is to decide whether to reduce the number of military personnel in the region and increase pressure on Sahelian states to take ownership.¹²⁷ This follows the Pau Summit's temporary military effort consented by France, which, at the time, sent 600 additional troops to the Sahel to mark a “final push”. The Barkhane force is supposed to be relieved

123. Ministère des Armées, 2020e. Communiqué_Task Force Takuba : réunion ministérielle de lancement. [Online]

Available at: https://www.defense.gouv.fr/salle-de-presse/communiqués/communiqué_task-force-takuba-reunion-ministerielle-de-lancement [Accessed 15 02 2021].

124. Ministère des Armées, 2021. Actuedéfense - Synthèse de l'actualité hebdomadaire du ministère des armées. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/606360/710187252/Synth%C3%A8se%20de%20l'actualit%C3%A9%20hebdomadaire%20du%20minist%C3%A8re%20des%20Arm%C3%A9e%20du%2011-f%C3%A9vrier-2021.pdf> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

125. France 24, 2021. G5 The Sahel : un sommet avec la France pour préparer le passage de témoin. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20210215-g5-The-Sahel-un-sommet-avec-la-France-pour-preparer-le-passage-de-t%C3%A9moin> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

126. Ibid.

127. FranceInfo, 2021b. Opération Barkhane : Emmanuel Macron annonce un «ajustement» des troupes au The Sahel. [Online]

Available at: https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/mali/guerre-au-mali/guerre-au-mali-emmanuel-macron-annonce-un-ajustement-des-troupes-au-The-Sahel_4264253.html [Accessed 15 02 2021].

by a greater “Sahelisation” of the Sahel’s security politics, especially through a more coordinated G5 Sahel joint force.¹²⁸ This Sahelisation of security is yet to be accompanied and assisted by an internationalisation – more precisely, a Europeanisation – of armed and security forces operating in Mali, Burkina-Faso, and Niger. Therefore, this need justifies the creation of Task Force Takuba, which has already started operating alongside the Mali armed forces.

Setting up Task Force Takuba

Emergence of an idea

The Pau summit gave France the occasion to announce her willingness to build a task force with her European partners.¹²⁹ This decision intends to support ongoing military campaigns – especially Barkhane, assist the reform of the Malian army, and upgrade and deepen Sahelian troop training and strategies.¹³⁰ Task Force Takuba is a concrete illustration of France’s willingness to share the burden of counterterrorism in the Sahel and, at the same time, her ambition to reduce her direct involvement in the region.

Takuba is far from gathering participants from every European army yet, as only a few have contributed to so far: French and Estonian soldiers were the first ones to join.¹³¹ They were later joined by more, as Sweden contributed to the effort by sending 150 troops and

4 Blackhawk helicopters.¹³² Countries like Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Norway, and the Netherlands have also announced their willingness to commit to the task force.¹³³ However, time will be required for Takuba to reach its full potential and become fully operational. This is due to the lack of commitments from European nations to get involved in the Sahel.

Takuba’s operationalisation

Takuba’s troops will be sent to Ménaka, near Gao, to undergo initial training: The Initial Operational Capability (IOC). This is designed to accustom soldiers from different countries to work together and understand each other’s rationales and cultural particularities. This program is necessary to ensure that common knowledge of basic strategies is shared by all. The Initial Operational Capability is expected to build trust among soldiers, and to enhance exchanges of good practices.¹³⁴ Takuba presents a unique opportunity for soldiers to communicate and exchange with those from foreign armies and to bypass the language barriers by improving their level in English as briefings are made both in French and in English. The increased ability of soldiers and officers to communicate will develop Takuba task force’s overall efficiency.¹³⁵

The slow internationalisation of Takuba has not prevented it from becoming operational and ready to engage in the missions it was cre-

128. Berger, O., 2020. La voie du nord - L’opération Barkhane poursuit «l’internationalisation et la sahelisation» de l’effort militaire. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.lavoixdunord.fr/883337/article/2020-10-23/L-operation-barkhane-poursuit-l-internationalisation-et-la-Sahelisation-de-l> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

129. Ministère des Armées, 2020e. Communiqué Task Force Takuba : réunion ministérielle de lancement.

130. Ministère des Armées, 2020f. BARKHANE : Lancement officiel de la Task Force TAKUBA. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/brevets/barkhane-lancement-officiel-de-la-task-force-takuba> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

131. Ministère des Armées, 2021b. BARKHANE : Un an aux commandes de l’opération Barkhane, rencontre avec le général Pascal Facon.

132. Swedish Armed Forces, 2021. Mali (Task Force Takuba). [Online]

Available at: <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/aktiviteter/curent-international-missions/mali-task-force-takuba/> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

133. Campbell, J., 2020. EU Task Force Takuba in Mali. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/eu-task-force-takuba-mali> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

134. Ministère des Armées, 2020f. BARKHANE : Lancement officiel de la Task Force TAKUBA

135. Ministère des Armées, 2020g. BARKHANE : Entretien avec le chef de bataillon Aurélien, commandant la Task Force Takuba. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/brevets/barkhane-entretien-avec-le-chef-de-bataillon-aurelien-commandant-la-task-force-takuba> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

ated for. Indeed, soldiers have already started contributing to the Malian army's efforts to fight armed groups and secure Liptako-Gourma. In Summer 2020, Takuba was already assisting l'Unité légère de reconnaissance et d'intervention n°4 (ULRI n°4, or Light reconnaissance and intervention unit) in the Djebok-Imenas area. The first missions conducted by Takuba serve to familiarise soldiers with the terrain, new equipment, and vehicles. Takuba will further serve as a platform for deepening ties between individual soldiers and different national armies¹³⁶.

Geo-strategic implications for European defence

Development of a common European strategic engagement

This direct involvement of European nations in Operation Barkhane in *ad-hoc* formations and, more specifically, to Task Force Takuba illustrates some contemporary underlying trends within European armies. First, the plurality of countries involved in Takuba shows that no fundamental geopolitical divide separates Western European countries from their Eastern peers when confronted by a menace to European stability. Indeed, by sending troops to the Sahel, Estonia or Czechia show that they understand and feel the threat emanating from the development of terrorist groups in the region, and from the existential threats they put on Sahelian states integrity, when one could have thought that only Southern European countries would feel the

pressure of this unstable region instead. We have here proof of a European-wide security agenda shaped by security imperatives in the Sahel.

Institutional innovations

The wide variety of actors and usable networks to increase European interoperability through common training and operations is worth mentioning. In the case of the Sahel, as stated previously, the European Union is an institution through which European nations can provide support to Sahelian states. Indeed, the European Union is heavily engaged in Mali and Niger, through the CSDP's EUTM Mali and EUCAP The Sahel.^{137,138} European armies also can learn from each other and accustom themselves with working in a multilateral operational environment through MINUSMA, though the overall European commitment remains limited. NATO is an additional framework through which European armies occasionally train and develop a better knowledge of their allies. Other initiatives gathering European armies are possible outside the framework illustrated by Takuba. The task force is the proof that innovative ways for increasing interoperability among European nations is possible. It offers the possibility for European nations to increase their interoperability by engaging transnational cooperation in the field of. The modest size of Takuba will not immediately lead to systemic changes. This requires a more systematic use of multinational European expeditionary forces to increase troop and mil-

136. Ministère des Armées, 2020h. BARKHANE : Première opération conjointe pour les Forces spéciales (FS) françaises et estoniennes de la Task Force TAKUBA. [Online] Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/breves/barkhane-premiere-operation-conjointe-pour-les-forces-speciales-fr-francaises-et-estoniennes-de-la-task-force-takuba> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

137. Pye, K. A Means to an End or an End in Itself? The EU integrated Approach to Conflict in Mali.

138. Raineri, L. & Baldaro, E. Resilience to What? EU Capacity-Building Missions in the The Sahel.

itary command experiences with pan-European multinational, multilingual operational environments. Thus, one can expect a more fluid and efficient exchange of good practices and greater convergence of military doctrine while offering soldiers a concrete framework through which they apply their skills during their training.

Takuba's impact on European interoperability and capacity is further enhanced and multiplied by the European intervention initiative (EI2) announced on 26th September 2017 by French President Emmanuel Macron. This seeks to ease the "emergence of a European strategic culture and at creating the pre-conditions to conduct coordinated and jointly-prepared future commitment".¹³⁹ This initiative seeks to strengthen European capacities to shoulder military commitments abroad and strengthen the operations and institutions to which Europe is already a member (NATO, EU, and other *ad-hoc* projects including Barkhane). EI2 aims to foster strategic foresight, support for operations, scenarios of employment, and the doctrinal and operational lessons learnt during operations. The

initiative gathers Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom, all of whom ratified a letter of intent expressing their willingness to join the project at this stage, while others are welcome to join provided some broad elements (compatibility with NATO and the EU, capacity to contribute to autonomous European capabilities in the field etc.) are met.¹⁴⁰

There is little doubt that Takuba and peacekeeping/peace-enforcing operations in the Sahel provide European armies with valuable opportunities to exchange know-how and best practices through direct involvement on the battlefield. The Task Force Takuba, coupled with initiatives such as the EI2, will undoubtedly make European forces more capable and interoperable in other forms of conflict in the future. Takuba is also the proof that European countries can organise elements of their defence directly with their European partners, rather than having to depend on NATO or the European Union.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Political shortcomings

It is still too early to tell whether the Coalition for the Sahel and its subsequent increased efforts will positively impact the efforts made

by Sahelian and international stakeholders in the region. If tangible military advancements have been made, such as eliminating the head of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Abdelmalek Droukdel and Islamic State in

139. Ministère des Armées, 2020i. European intervention initiative. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/dgris/international-action/l-iej/l-initiative-europeenne-d-intervention> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

140. Ibid.

the Greater Sahara's high-ranked fighter, Mohamed al-Mrabat¹⁴¹, the lack of political solutions may cancel any progress. Indeed, suppose the military campaign is going in the "right direction", to quote French Defence minister Florence Parly, and is supported and reinforced by state-building efforts and development initiatives. In that case, all this will be vain without strong political leadership from the Sahelian states themselves. Yet, Mali suffers from chronic political unrest which peaked in August 2020 when Boubacar Keïta, in power since 2013, was ousted by his military.¹⁴² The new regime has reiterated its commitment to collaborate with international actors to stabilise the region. But the military will have to restore democratic order as soon as possible to provide the government with legitimacy. Malian executive power has no constitutional basis and therefore cannot project any long-lasting political solutions to the many crisis the country confronts today.¹⁴³

An additional impediment to the realisation of stability and peace in the Sahel relates to Sahelian army abuses and crimes. Indeed, efforts to rid the region of armed groups' influence will only pay off when Sahelian armies and security forces apply the rule of law. Their actions become more transparent and more respectful of civilians. As explained earlier, Islamist armed groups in West Africa have been exploiting local grievances against extrajudicial executions and abuses perpetrated by pro-government security forces and

militias.^{144,145} Many war crimes have been committed since the beginning of the violence in 2012. In April 2020, 31 men were allegedly killed by Burkinabe security forces in Djibo.¹⁴⁶ A short time later, the Malian government announced the opening of a case against its security forces who were accused of killing 43 persons – including women and children – in Binedama and Niangassadiou in South-East Mali.¹⁴⁷ In the year 2020, more than two hundred extrajudicial executions were perpetrated in some of the central regions of Mali.¹⁴⁸ Accusations also targeted Burkinabe forces. Because many individuals join armed groups and jihadist organisations to avenge the death of loved ones, greater efforts to guarantee the laws of war and punish war crimes from government or pro-government forces are required to effectively pacify the region.

A chance for European interoperability

Ultimately, the Sahelian theatre offers an important laboratory for European countries and serves as a key theatre for developing interoperability among European armies. Soldiers can learn from more experienced peers and exchange best practices. European armies have multiple channels to participate in re-stabilising the Sahel and gain valuable field experience. MINUSMA, despite largely recruiting from African armies, offers op-

141. Lebovich, A. Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the Sahel.

142. France Diplomatie. Mali - Statement by Jean-Yves Le Drian.

143. Financial Times, 2020. Mali is the epicentre of a growing extremist threat. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/ca97e89c-89f0-4a80-94b4-701f607b6a6d> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

144. Leymarie, P. L'armée française doit-elle quitter le Sahel ?

145. Pérouse de Montclos, M.-A. L'Afrique, nouvelle frontière du djihad ?

146. Dufka, C., 2020. Human Rights Watch - The Sahel: Atrocities by the security forces are fueling recruitment by armed Islamists. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/01/The-Sahel-atrocities-security-forces-are-fueling-recruitment-armed-islamists> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

147. Reuters, 2020. Mali orders investigation into killings of 43 villagers. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/mali-security-idAFL8N2D11ZB> [Accessed 15 02 2021].

148. Leymarie, P. L'armée française doit-elle quitter le Sahel ?

opportunities to accustom European armies to operating in a multinational environment. At the same time, EU military and civilian programs can serve as training tools for European armies in peacekeeping in fragile regions. As for Barkhane and Task Force Takuba, European armies should be able to develop their strategic autonomy and increase European solidarity, all the while contributing to a definition of a common European geopolitical action. These positive externalities on European defence capabilities are further supported by the creation of new secretariats and bureaus, such as the European Intervention Initiative

(EI2); or by existing bodies such as the European Army Interoperability Centre (FINABEL) or by developing new tools within the frameworks offered by the European Union or NATO.

European armies can advance more extensive knowledge of the doctrinal and strategic differences with their European peers. Thus, such experiences should accustom European armies and their political masters to engage themselves in multilateralism to tackle complex geopolitical events and collectively guarantee Europe's security.

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Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/video/20201223-un-calls-for-special-court-to-prosecute-mali-war-crimes>
[Accessed 12 02 2021].

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Available at: <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20210215-g5-Sahel-un-sommet-avec-la-france-pour-pr%C3%A9parer-le-passage-de-t%C3%A9moin>
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