



Committee: UNSC

Topic: Rise of Violent Extremism in the Sahel Region

Overview of UNSC

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was established in 1945 as one of the six main UN organs for maintaining international peace and security. The Security Council is mandated to address conflicts all over the world, acting on threats to peace, and taking measures to prevent further violence. Unlike all other UN agencies, the Security Council is mandated to endorse binding resolutions, impose sanctions, and authorize military interventions, thus being the most powerful organ in the UN system on matters of international security.

The mandate of the UNSC involves peacekeeping, disarmament, conflict prevention, and counter-terrorism. It can intervene in a crisis, send peacekeeping troops, and sanction economic and military sanctions to uphold international law. The Council also collaborates with regional bodies such as the European Union (EU) and African Union (AU) to coordinate international security operations effectively. Though its primary mandate is responding to actual security challenges, the UNSC also realizes that economic instability, political exclusion, and human rights violation are some of the contributory factors resulting in the escalation of conflicts, e.g., armed extremism in the Sahel.

The Security Council has 15 member states, ten elected for two years by the General Assembly as non-permanent members and five permanent members with a veto (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States). It requires a minimum of nine positive votes, but a permanent member can veto a resolution, which to a great extent dominates world security policy. The Council convenes regularly to identify security threats and determine the response, generally deploying UN peacekeeping troops or embarking on diplomacy in an effort to suppress war zones.

Emergence of Violent Extremism in the Sahel Region

The Sahel, a wide semi-desert belt stretching across Africa, is one of the most unstable areas on the planet today after extremist violence gained ground. Terror groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) have increased their influence over the past decade, taking advantage of weak governance, economic marginalization, and ethnic fragmentation.

It intensified following the 2011 Libyan Civil War, which had proliferated arms and armed militia in the country. Tuareg separatist and jihad fighters occupied northern Mali in 2012, precipitating French-backed military intervention in 2013 under Operation Serval. Militancy reached Burkina Faso and Niger in 2015-2017, with mounting attacks on civilians, soldiers, and aid personnel. Political instability further exacerbated the crisis as Mali army coups (2020, 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) undermined regional unity and watered down the international peacekeeping troops' numbers.

The war has caused over 2.5 million people to lose their homes, and over 33 million people are in a state of food insecurity. It is difficult for humanitarian organizations to access them due to security reasons. Growing instability has also hampered trade and development efforts, entrenching poverty and the cycle of violence.

Different Sides/Perspectives

Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, currently under military governance, have increased support for their agendas to military initiatives in trying to fight extremism by dropping former security alliances with Western leaders and resorting to Russian-controlled alliances. Their premise has been that interventions from outside powers, especially France, do not work. These countries need sovereignty whenever counterterrorist actions are taken and have turned to seek security services from private security groups, like the Wagner Group.

On the other hand, Chad, Mauritania, and West African coastal countries Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Côte d'Ivoire favor a more integrated approach, which combines military intervention with good governance reforms and economic investment. They would rather have AU and ECOWAS-led initiatives for improving regional security while maintaining relations with the European Union and the United States.

Western nations, particularly France and the European Union, were initially leading the charge against counterterrorism through operations such as Operation Barkhane and the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Political pressures and resistance at home to foreign military intervention had their direct intervention crashing by a large margin. The players now use diplomatic pressure,

economic aid, and government reforms, arguing that stability in the long term requires responsible governments and compliance with human rights.

The United States is committed to development assistance and security assistance but has raised alarm over democratic setbacks in the Sahel. The United Nations, African Union, and ECOWAS have persisted in advocating for a multi-dimensional strategy, weighing security against political stabilization, humanitarian assistance, and economic development.

Russia has extended its reach into the region by offering military aid and security training to Sahelian nations. Moscow is asserting that Western intervention has failed and presenting itself as a better option for governments seeking alternative security assistance. China, while not as explicitly involved in military aid, is involved in economic and infrastructure development, presenting its intervention as a means to create long-term stability through development.

Possible Pathways to Solution

Some agents consider that there should be an improvement in governance and the rule of law to facilitate the rebuilding of public confidence and the reduction of local grievances that are drivers of radicalization. ECOSOC can notably assist efforts to make democratic transitions more transparent in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger so that these countries build inclusive governments. These bodies also stipulate that anti-corruption and judicial reforms must be undertaken to enhance state legitimacy, particularly in rural areas where extremist forces exploit the absence of government authority.

Many stakeholders also believe that improvements of employment opportunities and economic development are essential to prevent radical recruitment drives and promote stability. This could be done by the increased investments in roads, water systems, green energy hubs; in entrepreneurial skills training and vocational training improvement; and in improved agricultural methods.

Humanitarian aid and social services are often seen as a priority in meeting the immediate needs of the victims and vulnerable populations. We can notably note as some of the most prominent propositions expanding access to medicine and food, but also investing in education as a counter-radicalization tool.

Several agents also put forward the idea of accelerating regional and international coordination to obtain a unified reaction to the crisis. For instance, ECOSOC could organize conversations between Sahelian governments, ECOWAS, the African Union, and international donors to harmonize security and development policy. Accelerating intelligence-sharing deals between regional actors could fortify anti-terror campaigns. Cutting extremist funding by breaking up illegal commerce rings, money laundering, and weapons flows is just as necessary as annihilating insurgent networks.

Mediation and reconciliation processes can also be reinforced to reduce intercommunal violence and allow for the reintegration into society of ex-combatants. Community dialogue initiatives that include local authorities, religious leaders, and tribal leaders can assist in the resolution of grievances and promote conflict resolution. It is important to note that disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs must be tailored to the Sahelian context to provide sustainable alternatives to former members of extremist groups.