THE SAHEL AS A NEW EPICENTER OF TERRORISM: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE CAUSES

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ABSTRACT

Following military defeats in Syria and Iraq, Islamic State (IS) shifted its attention to the Sahel, with deaths from terrorism rising ten times in the region since 2007. The Sahel has become the new epicentre of terrorism. Terrorism in the region is compounded by high population growth, lack of adequate water and food, climate change, and weak governments. Adding to the complexity, many criminal organisations are representing themselves as Islamic insurgencies. Despite the national and international efforts to curtail the high tide of terrorism in the Sahel in the past four years, there are still unprecedented attacks. Terrorism in the Sahel has a grave, uncountable socio-economic, humanitarian, and environmental implications. It is on this note, the study aimed to critically examine the cause of the prevalence of terrorism in the region. The study applied a descriptive method of content analysis. Data were gotten from secondary sources like magazines, internet materials, newspapers, and journals. The paper adopted the failed state theory to solidify the arguments in the study. The study observed that, factors like poverty, food insecurity, population explosion, availability of small and light weapons, endemic conflicts, and the failure of the governments of Sahelian states to perform their statutory functions. Particularly, the failure of the government to deliver good governance to its young population is the immediate trigger of terrorism in the

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Sahel. Apart from the uncountable loss of lives, a considerable amount of resources that would have been used to provide social infrastructure including social welfare are used for counter-terrorism. Thereby making life to be more difficult. The study recommends that governments should discard peripheral capitalist formation and adopt an economy of welfare. The economy will put the needs of the citizens first.

Keywords: Terrorism, Sahel, Failed State, Causes, Examination.

INTRODUCTION

The 2022 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) reveals that despite an increase in attacks, the impact of terrorism continues to decline (ReliefWeb, 2022). In 2021, deaths from terrorism fell by 1.2% to 7,142, while attacks rose by 17%, highlighting that terrorism is becoming less lethal. Two-thirds of countries recorded no attacks or deaths from terrorism – the best result since 2007 – while 86 countries recorded an improvement in their GTI score (ReliefWeb,2022). The number of deaths has remained approximately the same for the last four years. The Index highlights that terrorism remains a serious threat, with Sub-Saharan Africa accounting for 48% of total global deaths from terrorism (ReliefWeb,2022). Four of the ten countries with the largest increases in deaths from terrorism were also in sub-Saharan Africa most especially the Sahelian states: Niger, Mali, the DRC, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso. This has caused the region to become an epicentre for terrorism. Nigeria ranked number three in the world in the 2020 Global Terrorist Index, behind only Afghanistan and Iraq. Mali and Burkina Faso hold the 11th and 12th positions (ReliefWeb,2022). Jihad Analytics has disclosed that Nigeria is the second most attcked and terrorized country in the world with only Iraq being the first and Syria being the third (Kingsley, 2022) The disclosure which was made in its half-year report spanning January to June 2022 stated that while Iraq recorded 337 terrorist attacks, Nigeria recorded 305 attacks with Syria coming third following 142 terrorist's attacks (Kingsley, 2022).

Following counterterrorism efforts in the Middle East, terrorist activity shifted to the Sahel. Terrorist groups leveraged the regions' vastness, instability, and underdevelopment. Many groups and militias exploited existing ethnic tensions and gained influence among vulnerable populations. High levels of youth unemployment are vulnerable to recruitment by individuals and groups that promise opportunities for a better life. The implications of terrorism on the social fabric of the people and the entire region are very dire. Huge amount of money is usually spent to tackle the problem of terrorism in the Sahelian states. For instance, in Nigeria, a breakdown of yearly allocation to the security agencies showed that in 2015 a total of N626.39billion was allocated, in 2016, it rose to N978.72billion, in 2017 it rose to N1.12trillionn, in 2018 it rose to N1.26trillion, in 2019, it rose to N1.33trillion, in 2020, it rose to N1.71trillion, while in 2021 it rose to N1.87trillion (Kingsley, 2022). The proposed allocation for 2022 which has been submitted to the National Assembly is N2.27 trillion, which is an increase of 262.39 per cent from the 2015 allocation (Kingsley, 2022). Hence, the aim of the study is to critically examine the causes of terrorism in the Sahel. In order to unravel the causes, the prevalence of terrorism and pattern of trend of terrorism will also be explored.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Sahel Region

The Sahel, a semiarid region stretching from Senegal on the Atlantic coast to Eritrea and the Red Sea, has been a dividing line in Africa for centuries (ADF Staff, 2021). It separates the Sahara to the north from lusher savannahs to the south and stretches 5,408 kilometers and covers 3,053,210 square kilometers. Its terrain includes plateaus and mountain ranges, grasslands and shrublands. There is little surface water. The region stays mostly hot and dry year-round with winds and sparse rainfall, usually no more than 200 to 600 millimeters between May and September (ADF Staff, 2021). As populations grew in the Sahel in the latter half of the 20th century, erosion and desertification increased. Farmers and town people began to fell trees and shrubs for firewood and clear land for crops. Livestock chewed away the remaining grass

cover (ADF Staff,2021) . Runoff from rain swept away top soils, leaving behind arid and barren land. Culturally, the Sahel marks a transition from North Africa, which historically has been aligned with the Middle East in terms of language, ethnicity, and religion . Sahel countries such as Mali and Niger have vast, ungoverned spaces in which Islamic nomadic Tuaregs roam. Terrain, climate, culture, religion, ethnicity, history, and tradition – the Sahel serves as a transitional boundary for them all. Along that line has strung an array of security challenges that find African and international security forces confronting militants and Terrorists from Mali to Chad (ADF Staff,2021). There are many different political definitions of which countries belong to the Sahel. A core group consisting of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, are gathered in an anti-jihadist alliance called the G5 Sahel and because of this alliance, some analysts strictly tagged the area containing these five countries as the Sahel. According to Muhammad, 2017 the Sahel stretches from Senegal on the Atlantic coast, through parts of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Sudan to Eritrea on the Red Sea coast. In this analysis, the Sahel region denotes the semi-arid region of western and north-central Africa, which comprises parts of ten countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal.

Terrorism

The European Union defines terrorism for legal/official purposes in Art.1 of the Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism (2002). This provides that terrorist offences are certain criminal offences set out in a list comprised largely of serious offences against persons and property which: given their nature or context, may seriously damage a country or an international organization where committed with the aim of: seriously intimidating a population; or unduly compelling a Government or international organization to perform or abstain from performing any act; or seriously destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Failed State Theory

The theory emerged during the tail end of the 20th century to describe the internal and external dynamics as well as the centrifugal forces that incapacitated some states like Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone even Nigeria in the 1990's to stop functioning responsibly as a state in the international system. A failed state is a political body that has disintegrated to a point where basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government no longer function properly. A state can also fail if the government loses its legitimacy even if it is performing its functions properly. For a stable state, it is necessary for the government to enjoy both effectiveness and legitimacy. Likewise, when a nation weakens and its standard of living declines, it introduces the possibility of total governmental collapse (Wikipedia, 2022). Common characteristics of a failed state include a central government so weak or ineffective that it has an inability to raise taxes or other support and has little practical control over much of its territory and hence there is a non-provision of public services. When this happens, widespread corruption and criminality, the intervention of state and non-state actors, the appearance of refugees and the involuntary movement of populations, sharp economic decline, and military intervention from both within and without the state in question can occur (Wikipedia, 2022). At the emergence of the theory, scholars tagged states that have collapsed institutions as failed states. But at the beginning of the 21st century, diverse failed state theory explanations came up. However, Rotberg's indicators of a failed state best capture the Sahelian states' scenario in this era. According to Rotberg (2004), a nation-state fails when it losses legitimacy. It nominal borders become irrelevant, groups within the nominal border seek autonomous control within one or more parts of the national territory (Yonmo, 2022).

Once the state's capacity to secure itself or to perform in an expected manner recedes and once a little capacity remains is devoted almost exclusively to the fortunes of a few to a Favoured ethnicity or community, there is every reason to expect less and less loyalty to the state on the part of the excluded and disenfranchised. Rotberg further

stated that, when the rulers of a state are perceived to be working for themselves and their kinsmen and not for the state, their legitimacy and the state's legitimacy plummets, and the state would be increasingly conceived as being owned by an exclusive class or group with all others pushed aside. In effect, various set of citizens will cease trusting the state. Citizens then naturally shift their allegiance to their community where they are sure of solace in time of insecurity and economic opportunity. Thus, they transfer their allegiances to clan and group leaders, some of them become warlords. These warlords can derive support from external as well as indigenous supporters (Rotberg, 2004& Yonmo, 2022).

Terrorism in the Sahel: An Overview

The Sahel region faces many converging and complex social, economic, political and security challenges. The inability of several Sahelian governments to provide effective security has encouraged terrorist groups to continue their activities, making the Sahel increasingly more violent, with deaths rising ten times between 2007 and 2021 (Vision of Humanity Report, 2021). The Sahel is home to the world's fastest growing and most-deadly terrorist groups. Groups such as Islamic State (IS) continue to wage a violent campaign in the region, with deaths in the Sahel accounting for 35% of global total of terrorism deaths in 2021, compared with just 1% in 2007 (Vision of Humanity Report, 2021). Thus far, international and regional responses to the violence have failed to prevent rising levels of terrorism, made worse by the region having some of the highest population growth, significant increases in food insecurity and widespread displacement. Deaths and incidents increased across every country in the region other than Mauritania and Chad, and every country in the Sahel other than Mauritania and Chad recorded at least 40 deaths from terrorism in 2021. Total deaths recorded in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in 2021 was 732, 574 and 588, respectively (Vision of Humanity Report, 2021).

Niger

Niger had the largest increase in deaths from terrorism, with deaths more than doubling over the past year. This is the highest terrorism death toll in the country since 2007. Although the majority of deaths were attributed either to unknown groups or to unspecified Muslim extremists, it is suspected that these attacks could be the work of either Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) or Boko Haram who were active in the country in 2021 (Vision of Humanity Report, 2021). The rise in terrorist activity in Niger is part of a larger increase across the Sahel region, with similar surges seen in Mali and Burkina Faso over the past few years. One possible reason for the rise in violence in Niger is that Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati wal-Jihad (JAS) and ISWA appear to operate in those areas, whereas Ansaru seem to operate in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Cote d'Ivoire

There is also evidence of jihadi activity in the Cote d'Ivoire, aimed at fermenting religious and ethnic tensions. A small village along the border with Burkina Faso, Kafolo, had seen two major attacks in 18 months. Locals and the Ivorian government attributed the attacks to Fulani jihadis. The attacks led many Fulanis to leave the area, as they feared reprisals (adding to the already large displacement); and, second, it brought a large military presence which has discouraged villagers from going to the fields, as they fear being attacked (Vision of Humanity Report, 2021).

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso recorded 732 deaths from terrorism in 2021, its second highest number of deaths (scoring 8.270 on the Global Terrorism Index (GTI). Although the majority of deaths were attributed either to unknown groups or to unspecified Muslim extremists, it is suspected that these attacks could be the work of either ISWA or Boko Haram who were active in the country in 2021. There were 17 deaths attributed to Boko Haram and 349 attributed to ISWA in 2021. It is therefore unsurprising that Burkina Faso recorded the largest deterioration in

peacefulness on the 2021 Global Peace Index (GPI), falling 13 places (Vision of Humanity Report, 2021)

Mali

Mali in 2021 recorded its highest number of terrorist attacks and deaths since 2011. Attacks and deaths from terrorism in Mali increased by 56% and 46% respectively, when compared with the previous year, 2020 . This is the largest year-to-year increase since 2017, continuing an upward trend that began with the 2015 declaration of a state of emergency in the wake of the Radisson Blu Hotel attack in Bamako (Vision of Humanity Report, 2021).

Nigeria

Deaths in Nigeria decrease by 51% in 2021, following three years of successive increases. This decline was due to a reduction in deaths attributed to Boko Haram and ISWA, particularly in the Borno region where deaths decreased by 71%. ISWA overtook Boko Haram as the deadliest terror group in Nigeria in 2021 and, with an increased presence in neighbouring countries such as Mali, Cameroon, and Niger . This presents a substantial threat to the Sahel region. Counter insurgency has significantly reduced Boko Haram's activities, with the organisation recording only 64 attacks in 2021 (Vision of Humanity Report, 2021) . Deaths dropped by 92% from 2,131 in 2015 to 178 in 2021(Vision of Humanity Report, 2021). The decline of Boko Haram contributed to Nigeria recording the second largest reduction in deaths from terrorism in 2021, with the number falling by 47% to 448. One possible explanation for the decline in Boko Haram's attacks was the death of their leader Abubakar Shekau in 2021 (Vision of Humanity Report, 2021).

Jihadisation of Banditry

In the Sahel, over the last few years, the terrorism environment has gone through several changes, as new groups emerged, other merged, adapting to the local, regional and international counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations. This gave rise to what has been termed

the 'jihadisation of banditry as criminal groups look to use religion to defend their criminal actions. Some of the groups had chosen to join the al-Qaeda franchise or the Islamic State franchise, which may also explain the increase in violence. With its challenging terrain, distinct local practices, and porous borders, local leaders in the Sahel have tremendous autonomy; they operate as political entrepreneurs, making calculated decisions as to where to operate, how, and against whom. They exhibit greater willingness to negotiate or shift allegiances, as their principal goal is survival. This type of pragmatism is also present with those deemed as bandits, typified by the notorious Dogo Gide, a Nigerian bandit, known to cooperate with Ansaru, with the terrorists even supporting a raid against a rival gang (Vision of Humanity Report, 2021) . The implications for the security environment are substantial, as the head of a terrorist group may not be theologically wedded to the transnational jihadi networks.

CAUSES OF TERRORISM IN THE SAHEL

Lack of Well-Functioning Government

Across the region, states (systems) are very fragile, which creates a space for non-state actors to come and look to provide basic services. Issues with law and order have meant that militia groups are formed either for immediate defensive purposes or for more long term reasons. A good example of this is the proliferation of the Koglweogo in Burkina Faso (Kalfelis,2021) . Alternatively, as is the case in Northwest Nigeria, lack of governance has led to the proliferation of banditry, with some reports suggesting that there are as many as 30,000 bandits in the area, spread over 100 gangs (Barnett, Murtala & Abdul Aziz, 2022). Some gangs could have as many as 2,000 fighters (Barnett, Murtala & Abdul Aziz, 2022).

High Levels of Corruption

There are many examples as to the link between corruption and sustained conflict. Notably, the Sahelian countries' security services have faced countless allegations of corrupt practices, which not only emphasize low confidence in their abilities, but emphasize a strong

possibility that defense aid would be wasted. The situation is made worse by the fact that Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Nigeria have adopted a doctrine that identifies corruption as a strategic threat (Smith, 2019).

Low Levels of Human Capital

A skilled human capital base reflects the extent to which societies educate citizens and promote the development of knowledge, thereby improving economic productivity, care for the young, political participation and social capital. These are absent in the Sahel which mean that individuals need to look for ways to cater for their families, even if by indulging in terrorism.

Climate in the Sahel

The 2020 Ecological Threat Register recognized the Sahel belt as one of three ecological hotspots, which include regions with increased environmental stress that are more prone to collapse (Vision of Humanity Report, 2020) . The Sahel climate is characterized by extreme temperatures with fluctuating periods of rainfall and intense drought. The area is particularly vulnerable to climate change, according to the United Nations, with temperatures increasing at 1.5 times the rate of the global average (Vision of Humanity Report, 2022). In recent years, droughts have been more frequent in the already-arid conditions and increasingly posing challenges for crop production. Years of land clearing and poor farming practices has resulted in widespread desertification in the region. Extensive soil erosion has degraded the land to the point of unproductivity. In Burkina Faso, one third of the country's territory, or over nine million hectares of once productive land has been degraded. Land degradation projects to expand by 360,000 hectares per year. Agriculture is one of the main sources of income and employment for the region. As land becomes baron, the ability to produce crops and raise livestock becomes difficult. Widespread desertification puts increased strain on economic livelihoods and food production, resulting in low social outcomes, food insecurity and the forced migration of communities.

WATER RISK, FOOD INSECURITY AND TERRORISM

Climate changes have led to more droughts and floods (OCHA, 2021). These undermine food production in the region, destroying diverse human settlements and causing widespread displacement (Blanco, 2020) Linked to the food risk element is the lack of land protection. Reportedly, in 2020, over 43 million people in the six Sahelian countries face food insecurity and almost 18 million people are in either crisis or emergency state (OCHA, 2021). One report looking at the water situation around Lake Chad highlighted that not only are there around 30 million people across Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon competing over dwindling water supplies but that Boko Haram exploit this situation (Nett & Lucas, 2020). For example, by controlling the water they can demand a tax for access, they can use it to demand that families provide recruits; or they can use the need for water to forcefully conscript individuals. Historically, food insecurity had motivated insurgencies and revolutions, but increasingly groups such as Islamic State, Boko Haram and al-Shahab used food in their tactics. One possible link between terrorism and food insecurity refers to the lawless environment that arises in areas affected by prolong conflict, which influences the cost of the production and distribution of food, market inefficiencies, and poor or the lack of proper governance. Food insecurity could also affect terrorist groups, as they would need to search for food too, as was the case with Boko Haram, which created a food crisis in Northern Nigeria and Lake Chad, which ended up affecting it, compelling it to head to Cameroon as it searched for food security (Kah,2017) A separate issue relating to food security is access or lack of, which could be a tactic, aimed at generating anti-government sentiments and create a political void that the group would seek to fulfil.

Rapid population growth

The region's growing population is placing further strain on the environment, according to the 2020 Ecological Threat Register VH Report, 2020). Countries in the Sahel maintain some of the fastest growing populations in the world. Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Chad and Mali are all among the top twenty countries with the fastest projected

population growth. Niger, with a current population of 24.2 million ranks number one in the world in this category. By 2050, Niger projects to increase population size by 175%, bringing its population size over 65 million. This level of growth drastically outpaces the region's economic development, resulting in a decline in living standards and greater competition for resources. The increase also puts an increased strain on employment and economic opportunity, particularly for the region's large youth population. Environmental stress and overpopulation can lead to high levels of food insecurity and water scarcity. Tumultuous floods and droughts in Niger caused a 12% decline in cereal production from 2019 to 2020 (VH Report, 2020). Around 83% of the population, or 17.8 million people, suffer from food insecurity. Its neighboring country, Chad, has the lowest percentage of population with access to basic drinking water in the world, equal to just 39% (Vision of Humanity Report, 2020). In addition, Chad has the highest mortality rate due to unsafe water at 101 people per 100,000 (Vision of Humanity Report, 2020). In comparison, the global mortality rate is 12 people per 100,000. As the population increases, along with economic development and shifting consumption patterns, in addition to the effects of climate change, stresses on water supplies will accelerate in the coming decades.

Rapid population growth could be a significant factor in facilitating terrorism activities as it adds to the overexploitation of limited resources and inhabitable spaces, which in turn intensifies socioeconomic differences and possibly gives rise to more violence and terrorism (Coccia, 2018). In the mid-2010s, Cameroon authorities claimed that high poverty rates, high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition encouraged many young Cameroonians to cross over to Nigeria. Reports indicate that Boko Haram sought to take advantage of the poverty and lack of opportunity with reports indicating that young men were faced with a stark choice, join Boko Haram or stay at home, do nothing, and put more pressure on the family, which was struggling to eat. Boko Haram offered between US$600 – US$800 each month,

whereas those lucky to get a job could at best earn US$72 a month (The New Humanitarian, 2015).

The geographical location, vastness and lack of state authority also make the Sahel attractive for organized crime. The trafficking of drugs and weaponry, as well as human trafficking and migrant smuggling further contribute to destabilizing the region.

Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) proliferation is one of the major challenges in West Africa including the Sahelian states. The sub-region remains an area of considerable SALW proliferation because of their affordability, accessibility and availability; and porosity of the borders and legal frameworks legitimizing their use (Keili, 2008). As reported by Edeko Sunday (2011), West Africa and the Sahel hosts about 7 to 10 million of the world's illegal SALW as well as 8 million out of the 100 million circulating in Africa (Edeko 2011: 55–80; Kwaja 2012). Additionally, 77,000 of the small arms are allegedly within the control of West African insurgent groups including the Sahelian criminal cartels (Ebo and Mazal, 2003). The circulation of illegal arms within and across states has increased the proclivity of conflicts within the sub-region.

Small arms proliferation has contributed to the mobilization for coups d'état, undemocratic overthrow of governments, increasing casualties and violent inter-communal and intra-state conflicts in West Africa (Ero and Ndinga-Muvumba 2004). Since the 1960s there have been over 37 successful military coups in almost all the countries in West Africa often resulting in violent wars; killing millions and displacing many (Keili, 2008). Furthermore, small arms proliferation notably fuelled the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo (Keili 2008). For example, arms were supplied by governments to aid the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire (Keili, 2008). For instance, Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) was accused of supplying and distributing Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) with arms to fuel the conflict in Sierra Leone. The conflict led to

the death of over 50,000 people; 30,000 amputations; and the sexual violation of over 257,000 women (Ploughshares, 2002). Additionally, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebel group received weapons from the Guinean governments which they used to kill civilians in Monrovia during the conflict in Liberia (Keili, 2008). At the end of the various wars mentioned, there was proliferation of small and light weapons in the entire West Africa region and most of the Sahelian states are in West Africa.

Poverty

Poverty also stands to be one of the major setbacks in West Africa's Sahel and the continent of Africa. According to the 2016 UNDP Human Development report nearly half of sub-Saharan Africans live in poverty (UNDP, 2016). Consequently, the poverty that many endure across the continent can be seen to be one of the major contributing factors to the occurrence of violent conflicts in Africa. Like the rest of Africa, The Sahel states are among the poorest in the world, figuring in the Low Human Development category of the UN Development Programme. On the UNDP Human Development scale, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger rank 157, 175, 185, 186, and 187, respectively. All the development indicators (literacy, nutrition…) are considerably low (UNDP, 2016). This poverty and the dire socioeconomic conditions, such as high unemployment, weak educational and social infrastructures, and precarious agricultural resources, have created a propitious terrain for the expansion of illegal trafficking, such as drugs, irregular migration, cigarettes, gasoline, medicines, light weapons, vehicles, and automobile spare parts trafficking. Most times non-state actors in the Sahelian states Protest because of poverty. These agitations sometimes take violent forms and are seen as channels for punishing governments for their failure to alleviate poverty (ECOWAS, 2006). For instance, in research conducted by Vinck et al (2011), 30 per cent of the Liberian population indicated that poverty was one of the root causes of the Liberian civil war. Similar assertions have also been made with regards to the conflicts in Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau and Sahelian states (Voz di Paz and Interpeace, 2010; Ejibunu, 2007). In Voz di Paz and

Interpeace's 2010 report, poverty was stated as one of the major causes of the West Africa's Sahelian states conflicts, citing food insecurity, lack of infrastructure and access to basic social needs as some of the poverty indicators in the region (Voz di Paz and Interpeace 2010). Emphasizing the connection between poverty and conflict, there is an adage which states 'In homes where there is no bread everyone fights and no one is right' (Voz di Paz and Interpeace, 2010). Indeed hunger, starvation, lack of economic growth and development create a high likelihood of violent conflicts and civil strife.

Sahel-Based Militant Groups

The geography of Sahelian nations and the remoteness of their capitals and large cities create large swaths of territory essentially ungoverned. Such is the case in Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. In some cases, particularly Mali and Niger, national boundaries separate culturally and ethnically similar groups. The borders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are hotbed of extremist activity in the Sahel. Several extremist groups make their home in the Sahel. Many of those have morphed and merged with others, aligning themselves with larger, global terrorist groups. Three types of terrorist groups operate in the Sahel. Firstly, there are the transnational jihadi groups with official links to al-Qaeda (AQIM, JNIM) or the Islamic State (ISWA, ISGS). The second type of group focuses on local issues; framing their actions through an ethnic-nationalist-religious paradigm (Global Terrorist Index, 2022). The third types of groups emerge as a response to specific situations and events such as the Dan Nan Ambassagou Association. The Association appeared around 2016, claiming to provide self-defence to Bambaras who have a grudge against the Fulanis (Global Terrorist Index, 2022). Another example are the Koglweogos (Mooré: kogle 'to protect'; weogo 'territory') operating mainly in Burkina Faso of whom there are around 50 (Global Terrorist Index, 2022). The most prominent — past and present terrorist groups are

Boko Haram

Boko Haram and the Islamic State-West Africa Over the past decade, violence between government forces and Islamist insurgents based in the northeast has killed an estimated 38,000 people in Nigeria and displaced over three million throughout the Lake Chad Basin region comprising parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (Council of Foreign Relations, 2020). Founded in the early 2000s as a Salafist Muslim reform movement, Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal Jihad (JAS), known as Boko Haram (Western education is forbidden in Hausa language), has evolved and expanded since 2009 to become one of the world's deadliest terrorist groups. It espouses an "exclusivist" interpretation of Islam that rejects as sacrilegious the more moderate Islam practiced in much of northern Nigeria, and has attracted some supporters by stoking a sense of state persecution and victimhood (Tomas & Lauren, 2020) . In 2015, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau pledged loyalty to the Islamic State (IS, aka the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, (ISIL), and Boko Haram subsequently rebranded as the Islamic State's West Africa Province (IS-WA, aka ISWAP or ISIS-WA). An ensuing leadership dispute fractured the group; the Islamic State ultimately recognized a different leader of IS-WA,while Shekau's faction reassumed the group's original name. (Observers generally refer to Shekau's faction as Boko Haram.) In contrast to Shekau's Boko Haram, which gained notoriety for its indiscriminate assaults on civilian centers and use of female and child suicide bombers, ISWA has focused attacks primarily on security forces and other state targets. IS-WA also reportedly has sought to provide basic services and law enforcement in its areas of operation, building ties with local communities that could further complicate counterinsurgency efforts (Tomas & Lauren, 2020). As of late 2019, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) estimated IS-WA to have roughly 3,500 members, and Boko Haram to have 1,500 (Tomas & Lauren, 2020). In August 2020, the U.N. Secretary-General's report on global Islamic State operations noted that IS-WA "remains a major focus of ISIL global propaganda" and described it as "one of the largest and most conspicuous of [ISIL's] remote 'provinces" (Tomas & Lauren, 2020). Boko Haram and IS-WA

are based in northeast Nigeria, though each remains capable of mounting cross-border attacks in the wider Lake Chad Basin region (Yonmo, 2022).

African Defense Forum Magazine (ADF, 2021) listed a quite number of terrorist organizations operating in the Sahel. These are:

Jama'at Nusrat Al-Islam Wal-Muslimin (JNIM)

Formed in March 2017, JNIM is a coalition of several militant groups: Ansar al-Dine, Macina Liberation Front, Katiba Serma, AQIM Sahara and Al Mourabitoun. Ansar al-Dine's leader, Iyad Ag Ghaly, assumed leadership of the coalition. The group, whose name means "Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims," intends to expel non-Muslim "occupiers" from West Africa, particularly French forces and participants in the United Nations peacekeeping Mission in Mali. JNIM adheres to Salafist Islamic teachings and wants to bring the region under Shariah. The group is part of al-Qaida's network and had between 1,000 and 2,000 fighters as of September 2018. The group is most active in Mali, waging attacks from Bamako to as far north as Taoudenni. JNIM also have attacked places in Burkina Faso and Niger.

• **Ansar Al-Dine** — Iyad Ag Ghaly founded the group in November 2011 after he failed to become leader of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which pushed for secession from Mali in 2012. The Islamic militant Tuareg group operates in the region around Kidal. The Salafist group, whose name means "Defenders of the Faith," was among the affiliated organizations that took over northern Mali in March 2012 after a military coup, according to Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation. In July 2012, Ansar al-Dine made headlines when it destroyed seven mausoleums honoring Sufi saints in Timbuktu, claiming that the shrines were idolatrous. When operating, the group was thought to have between 100 and 1,000 members.

• **Macina Liberation Front (FLM)**

Amadou Koufa founded the group, which operates in the Mopti region, in 2015. FLM, also known as Katiba Macina, claimed it would try to "reinstall the Islamic Macina Republic," a reference to the Macina Empire, a theocratic society that lasted from 1818 to 1863 in Mali's

Mopti, Ségou and Timbuktu regions, according to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS). The empire primarily was composed of ethnic Fulanis, and it applied Islamic rule. The FLM uses this historical narrative in hopes of gaining popular support to take over central Mali. Some believe the group includes former members of the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa.

• **Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)**

Ahmed el-Tilemsi and Hamad el-Khairy formed MUJAO in 2011, splitting it off from AQIM. MUJAO announced itself by kidnapping three European aid workers in Tindoug, Algeria, in October 2011, according to Stanford. MUJAO, composed mostly of Tuaregs, wanted to establish Shariah in the region. During the 2012 Malian crisis, MUJAO occupied the area around Gao. About a year later, the group merged with the Al Mulathamun Battalion and formed Al Mourabitoun. It is possible that a few MUJAO fighters still operate under that name.

• **Katiba Serma**

The group is a semi-autonomous arm of the FLM and is led by Abu Jalil al Fulani, according to ACSS. It operates in the Serma region between Gao and Mopti.

• **Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)**

This group has its roots in the Algerian Civil War. It sprang from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), which participated in the war, in 1998. When it emerged from the GIA, it was called the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat. The name changed to AQIM in 2006 when it formally aligned itself with the global terrorist organization. AQIM is active in the trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans, and it often has kidnapped Westerners for ransom. In 2017, the group's Sahara branch merged with Al Mourabitoun, Ansar al-Dine, the Macina Liberation Front and Katiba Serma to form JNIM.

• **Aqim Sahara**

This is al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb's branch in Mali and the southwest corner of Niger. It once was led by Djamel Okacha (also known as Yahya Abu al Hammam), who is now dead.

• **Al Mourabitoun** — The name means "The Sentinels." The group formed in August 2013 after the merger of MUJAO and the Al Mulathamun Battalion. It operates in Mali, primarily around Gao, and pledged its allegiance to al-Qaida in mid-2015. Its aim is to establish Shariah, unite Muslims and attack Westerners in North Africa . Despite flirtations with the Islamic State, the group stayed allied with al-Qaida, although operating with autonomy. In early 2017, Al Mourabitoun merged to form JNIM. One estimate, from 2014, put the number of fighters at 100.

Ansaroul Islam

Malaam Ibrahim Dicko, now deceased, founded the group in 2016. It is based in Burkina Faso's Soum province, which borders southern Mali. The jihadi group is the first such organization to arise in Burkina Faso, which before had seen no significant militant jihadi violence. Ansaroul Islam announced its formation after attacking a Burkinabé-French military camp in December 2016 . The group, which operates mostly in Burkina Faso and Mali, seeks to rebuild Djeelgodji, an ancient Fulani empire that ended after French colonization in the 1800s. Its targets include civilians, French counterterrorism forces and Burkinabé security personnel. It is thought to have no more than a few hundred active fighters now.

• **Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)**

The group operates in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. It broke off from Al Mourabitoun in May 2015 when Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi swore allegiance to the Islamic State and its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who died during a United States assault in October 2019. Although ISGS is recognized as an affiliate, the breadth of its support is not clear, according to Stanford. Among the group's Sahel attacks was the ambush that killed four U.S. Green Berets and several Nigerien Soldiers in October 2017. For about two years now, the group has clashed repeatedly with French forces and its allies under Operation Barkhane. ISGS was estimated to have 60 core members in 2018.

• **Katiba Salaheddine**

Sultan Ould Badi, a former member of AQIM and co-founder of MUJAO, founded the group in 2011. In 2016, Badi allied himself with ISGS' al-Sahrawi, a colleague from his days with MUJAO .

MILITARY EFFORTS FOR COUNTER-TERRORISM

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)

MINUSMA was established in 2013, is authorized to include 13,289 military personnel and 1,920 police officers. Its forces are spread across five sectors. Its mandate includes supporting the implementation of a peace agreement in Mali and helping Malian stakeholders devise a strategy to protect civilians and reduce violence. During much of its existence it has been the most dangerous peacekeeping mission in the world with 260 peacekeepers killed as of November 2021 (ADF Staff, 2022).

G5 Sahel Joint Force

Authorities formed the G5 Sahel Joint Force in 2017 as a military alliance among Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. At its creation it was authorized by the African Union and the U.N. Headquartered in Bamako, Mali, it has up to 5,000 personnel, including Soldiers, police and gendarmes. It addresses terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking in the Sahel with a particular emphasis on border regions between member countries (ADF Staff,2022) .

Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)

Officials established the MNJTF in 1994 in Nigeria in response to armed banditry in the Lake Chad basin. In 1998, it became truly multinational with the inclusion of Chad and Niger, which were experiencing similar security challenges. In 2015, as the extremist group Boko Haram spread throughout the region, the African Union authorized the deployment of about 10,000 troops to address the security crisis. It now includes five member states — Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria — with

four sectors headquartered in Mora, Cameroon; Baga-Sola, Chad; Baga, Nigeria; and Diffa, Niger (ADF Staff, 2022) .

European Union Training Mission (EUTM) Mali

The mission, which began in 2013, is made up of more than 800 Soldiers from 22 EU members and five nonmember states. EUTM Mali trains and advises the Malian military, improves the military education system, and advises G5 Sahel Joint Force headquarters personnel. It began its fifth mandate in 2020 and, as of mid-2021, had trained more than 15,000 Malian Armed Forces students in a variety of skills including first aid, countering improvised explosive devices and human rights law (ADF Staff,2022)

Operation Barkhane

This French-led military intervention came after Operation Serval in August 2014. Unlike Serval, which was limited to Mali, Barkhane was designed to respond to militants across the Sahel with a particular emphasis on the tri-border region between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Up to 4,500 Soldiers were deployed in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger with headquarters in N'Djamena, Chad. In July 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that he would end the operation while continuing French support for countries in the region fighting extremism (ADF Staff,2022).

Task Force Takuba

In December 2020, a European effort called Task Force Takuba arrived in northern Mali with the first troops coming from France and Estonia; Czech and Swedish forces arrived soon thereafter, according to the Council on Foreign Relations. In 2021, the task force brought together the special forces from seven European countries to fight terrorism in the Sahel. The force includes 600 troops, half of whom are from the French Army (ADF Staff, 2022) .

CONCLUSION

It is the findings of the study that the Sahel region faces many converging and complex social, economic, political and security challenges. These are likely to continue to undermine the development of the conditions necessary for Positive Peace, ensuring the Sahel would remain trapped in a cycle of violence and vulnerability. The inability of several Sahelian governments to provide effective security has encouraged terrorist groups to continue their activities, making the Sahel increasingly more violent, with deaths rising ten times between 2007 and 2021. Groups such as Islamic State (IS) continue to wage a violent campaign in the region, with deaths in the Sahel accounting for 35 per cent of global total of terrorism deaths in 2021.

The study also finds out that multiple factors including poverty, unnecessary conflicts, food insecurity, explosion of population, unemployment, bad governance are responsible for the constant terrorist operations in the Sahel region. All the causes of terrorism are the byproduct of failed government syndromes. That is, it is the failure of the governments of the Sahelian states to provide and protect the public goods that is actually the trigger of most factors responsible for the prevalence of terrorism in the Sahel. Therefore in order to decimate terrorism in the region, governments in the region should discard pseudo capitalism cum chronic individualism and adopt an economy of welfarism that will provide social nets for the progress, prosperity and growth of the people.

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