

UNDERSTANDING THE G5: GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY IN THE SAHEL

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UNDERSTANDING THE G5: GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY IN THE SAHEL

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) is an inter-governmental organisation founded in 2014 in Nouakchott by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, with the stated purpose of combining security and development through regional cooperation. It came about at a time of rising regional security concerns – marked by the occupation of Northern Mali by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and the proliferation of armed groups across the region – and the adoption by donors of a myriad of ‘Sahel’ strategies, all of which were rhetorically committed to a similar three-fold approach of governance, security, and development. Against this backdrop, regional leaders established the G5 Sahel to facilitate a better coordinated response to the challenges that they were facing, and also to empower Sahelian states to set the agenda during their engagement with the international community in the context of increasing military assistance and foreign aid.

Acknowledging that the particularly low level of development across the region is a driver of political instability, G5 leaders designed a Priority Investment Program (PIP) to coordinate development projects in a wide range of sectors including security, democratization, popular participation, infrastructure, food security and pastoralism, human development, climate change adaptation, and water resources’ management.

Despite this, international actors have tended to focus on the role the G5 Sahel can play in restoring security in a region troubled by multifaceted and complex threats, a trend that became noticeably more pronounced following the creation of the G5’s Joint Force (*Force Conjointe du G5 Sahel* or FC-G5) in early 2017. This tendency to overlook development and governance issues – in other words, to ignore the “development” component of the “security-development” nexus – threatens to undermine the prospects for political stability, and to fuel long-term regional insecurity.

Many countries in the Sahel are locked in a vicious cycle. Continual bouts of political instability undermine democratic gains and the prospects of consolidation. At the same time, fragile political systems, fragmented societies, weak party systems and the limited authority of the government facilitate political instability – creating the conditions under which armed groups thrive.

In this context, the quality of political governance is a major concern in at least two respects. First, reflecting their colonial inheritance and the challenges of state-building in large countries with limited resources, G5 countries feature a centre-periphery divide in which the capacity of the government, to maintain order, declines the further one moves from the centre (the capital city and its environs) to the periphery (outlying rural areas). This undermines the capacity of Sahelian states to either deliver development or maintain security in the areas in which armed groups are most active.

Second, the region suffers from poor governance characterized by weak accountability mechanisms and the failure of leaders to respond to the needs of their citizens. Chad and Mauritania are authoritarian regimes in which presidents came to power through a coup and have retained it through uncompetitive elections. Given the level of government repression, in addition to the fragmented nature of opposition parties and civil society groups, political liberalization appears unlikely in the short-term.

Things look more promising in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, which all feature fragile democratic systems with some level of competition. However, these are relatively new political dispensations, as they emerged out of the 2014 insurrection in Burkina Faso, and the aftermath of coups in Mali and Niger. While these countries maintain a relatively open political landscape in which public grievances can be aired, accountability and good governance are limited, while the democratic gains achieved in recent years are extremely vulnerable to reversal.

The combination of chronic insecurity and poor governance helps to explain the region's economic difficulties. The G5 countries feature poorly functioning economies characterized by questionable government intervention, a weak private sector, limited welfare provision and considerable currency and price instability. As a result, the Sahel region is characterized by low levels of development in almost every aspect. The five countries regularly receive some of the lowest scores on the Human Development Index, while Niger currently sits last in the ranking.

Given the strong evidence that government failures and human rights abuses drive support for radical armed groups, enhancing the quality of political participation and representation, promoting transparent and accountable government, ensuring greater respect for human rights, and improving civil-military relations, should not be viewed as optional extras. Instead, they are essential to reduce the attraction of armed groups for citizens who feel marginalized by their own governments – and need to be prioritised.

In addition to a change of focus, the G5 Sahel would benefit from greater policy cohesion and coordination. At present, efforts to promote all three of the G5's priority areas have been undermined by the multiplicity of actors involved in the region, their diverse priorities, and the different modalities of engagement that they favour. The FC-G5 has been strongly influenced by the engagement of a number of foreign partners, most notably France but also the United States, China, and multilateral international bodies such as the African Union, European Union, and the United Nations.

These actors have different priorities and engage in the region through different modalities, with the consequence that the G5's mission has become entwined with a complex web of international relationships. This situation is further complicated by the fact that while countries such as France have invested in some multilateral approaches, they have also retained strong bilateral ties to promote their own interests. Cross-nation agreement over which projects are the most important, along with a reduction in the number of initiatives, would aid both the design and implementation of key interventions.

Given the history of civil-military relations in the Sahel it is also critical that efforts to build the FC-G5 are sensitive to local dynamics. Low levels of professionalization and a poor track record on human rights means that strengthening national armies risks increasing the number of abuses and increasing the power of the military relative to civilian governments. It is therefore important that international programmes in this area focus on the need to enhance military discipline and minimise the risk of further coups. Democratic backsliding and authoritarian reversal will only hurt the prospects for economic development; it will also undermine the prospects for sustainable peace and security.

2. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND TRENDS

The Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) is an inter-governmental organization founded in 2014 in Nouakchott by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, with the stated purpose of combining security and development through regional cooperation.² It came about at a time of rising regional security concerns, marked by the proliferation of armed groups across the region.³ These include the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), an alliance of several groups including Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and Ansar Dine; the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara; and, Ansarul Islam, an umbrella group of jihadist fighters based in Burkina Faso.

The emergence of the G5 Sahel also followed the adoption of a myriad of “Sahel” strategies by international donors, all of which were rhetorically committed to a similar three-fold approach of governance, security, and development.⁴ Against this backdrop, regional leaders established the G5 to facilitate a better coordinated response to the challenges that they were facing, and also to empower Sahelian states to set the agenda during their engagement with the international community in the context of increasing military assistance and foreign aid.⁵

Since its formation, a great deal of attention has been given to the role that the G5 Sahel can play in restoring security in a region troubled by multifaceted and complex threats. In particular, media attention and expert commentary has tended to focus on the G5’s Joint Force (FC-G5) – a combined military force – an initiative that was adopted in early 2017, with considerable international support led by France. This is natural given the growing threats to the maintenance of political order in the Sahel.

While the trend of increasing insecurity has played out very differently across the region, it has generated major challenges for every country. Chad has been marred by instability and political violence throughout its post-colonial existence, and the Lake Chad region is currently affected by the activities of Boko Haram, a radical Islamic terrorist group that first emerged in Nigeria. The Malian state has also come under greater pressure over the last decade. Most notably, the country’s democratic dispensation, long thought to be one of the most open and promising on the continent, was revealed to rest on weak foundations when the Northern region known as Azawad was occupied by Tuareg independentists and then by Islamist armed groups. Against this backdrop, a coup launched by disgruntled military officers forced President Amadou Toumani Toure out of power in 2012. Peace accords were signed in Algiers in 2015, but local conflicts continue in Central and Northern Mali.

² G5 Sahel, “Communique Final du Sommet des Chefs d’Etat du G5 du Sahel”, 16 February 2014, Accessed on November 30, 2018.

https://www.g5sahel.org/images/fichiers/FEV_2014_COMMUNIQUE_FINAL_SOMMET_DU_G5_SAH_EL.pdf.

³ Offner, Fabian, “Shifting Relationships: Growing Threats: Who’s who of insurgency groups in the Sahel”, *Irin News*, 19 February 2018, Accessed on November 30, 2018.

<https://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2018/02/19/shifting-relationships-growing-threats-who-s-who-insurgent-groups-sahel>.

⁴ For example, the European Union’s Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel (2011); the United Nation’s Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (2013), the African Union’s Strategy for the Sahel Region (2014).

⁵ Desgrais, Nicolas (directed by Hugo Sada). “Le G5 Sahel, en réaction à la mutation de l’environnement stratégique sahélien.” Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 28 February 2018, p. 53.

Similarly, Niger has oscillated between periods of peace and moments of tremendous instability since independence. Most recently, the government of President Tandja was deposed in a coup in 2010 as he attempted to remove term-limits and further entrench his political control. Niger has also suffered a negative spill-over effect as a result of nearby armed groups entering the country via its borders with Nigeria and Mali. Insecurity is also on the rise in Burkina Faso, which for many years was sheltered from political insurgencies by a tacit understanding between President Blaise Compaoré and the various armed groups operating in Northern Mali. However, after Compaoré was forced out of power following a popular uprising in 2014 – having held office for 27 years – armed groups began to target the North and later the East of the country in attacks that the new government of President Roch Kaboré has struggled to contain.

Mauritania also has a history of coups and instability, with President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi removed from office by military intervention in 2008. More recently, the country has witnessed a deteriorating security situation as a result of the combination of ethno-racial tensions, the weakness of state institutions, and the growing radicalization of some younger members of the population.⁶

Precisely because the security challenges across the region are so pronounced, considerably less attention has so far been devoted to the other two priorities identified when the G5 was initially set up: governance and development. This article addresses this gap by considering the governance and development strategies outlined by regional and international actors, and the way in which they interact with the security imperative.

Acknowledging that the particularly low level of development across the region is a driver of political instability, G5 governments designed a Priority Investment Program (PIP) to coordinate development projects in a wide range of sectors including security, democracy consolidation and popular participation, infrastructure, food security and pastoralism, human development, climate change adaptation, and water resources' management. However, despite growing recognition of the “security-development” nexus, these priorities tend to have been overlooked in favour of a focus on regional defence, especially since 2015. In turn, this is likely to undermine efforts to generate inclusive development, as Sahelian countries feature weak states characterized by a “centre-periphery” divide, and their limited resources and authority means that they are unlikely to effectively undertake social and economic transformation on their own.

Given this, the tendency for international actors to focus on the FC-G5 and its security outlook, rather than the broader G5 agenda, may hamper the prospects for peace and stability in the long-term. This risk is exacerbated by two other factors. First, the region features two predominantly authoritarian states (Chad and Mauritania), and three countries in which more open and competitive politics is possible, but where democracy remains weak and fragile (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger). In this context, there is a significant risk that international strategies intended to enhance the coercive capacity of the armed forces will facilitate more repressive forms of governance. Second, and closely related, regional security forces have a poor record when it comes

⁶ Boukhars, Anouar, “The Drivers of Instability in Mauritania”, Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 30 April 2012, pg. 1. Accessed on November 30, 2018. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/04/30/drivers-of-insecurity-in-mauritania-pub-47955>.

to human rights, and progress towards a joint military force has been slowed down by the fact that national armies are over-extended and poorly trained. Unless respect for civilian authorities, human rights and rule of law are built into the very ethos of the FC-G5 from the start, there is a danger that strengthening the military will lead to fresh humanitarian abuses, further stoking the grievances felt by historically marginalised communities. At the same time, if participation in the FC-G5 exposes soldiers from regional armies to inequalities in salaries and conditions of service, there is a real danger that we will see a deterioration in military moral and fresh coups attempts.

The effectiveness of the G5 will depend on whether its broader agenda of governance and development can be furthered along with security and defence. Although this will be predominantly shaped by domestic and regional forces, international actors will have an important role to play. At present, the multiplicity of actors involved – each with their own set of interests and priorities – is undermining both the capacity of any one actor to exert a coherent influence, and the coordination capacity of the G5 Sahel itself. Unless this gives way to a more integrated approach that is rooted in the region's own needs, the opportunity represented by the G5 and the FC-G5 is likely to be lost.

3. THE KEY ACTORS IN THE SAHEL

As explained above, the initial impetus behind the G5 came from Sahelian countries themselves. But a range of international actors have long been involved in the politics of the region, shaping regional politics by influencing what is possible through the provision, or withdrawal, of military and financial assistance. Most obviously, the FC-G5 has been strongly influenced by the engagement of a number of foreign partners including France, the United States, China, and multilateral international bodies such as the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN). These actors have different priorities and engage in the region through different modalities, with the consequence that the G5's mission has become entwined with a complex web of relationships. Most notably, while countries such as France have invested in multilateral approaches, they have also retained bilateral relationships, complicating the picture.

In turn, the lack of international consensus weakens the capacity of Western governments to influence developments and creates greater opportunities for domestic actors to determine the region's future.

3.1. International engagement: China, France, the United States, the EU and the UN

As the former colonial power across the region, France has retained a privileged position and strong influence. Most notably, in 1990 President Idriss Deby of Chad came to power on the back of strong backing from France to oust his predecessor Hissene Habre. Similarly, when the political system in Mali fell apart under the pressure of armed groups who took control of the Northern half of the country and were threatening to move south in January 2013, France launched Operation Serval and deployed troops in a bid to sustain the regime. This reflects a history of French military intervention in the continent in support of allied governments. France also implements

initiatives aimed at increasing youth employment and promoting food security and efficient urban planning through the French Development Agency (AFD).

In order to be able to prosecute its interests more effectively, France is determined to retain a strong bilateral relationship with Sahelian countries. However, it also engages with the region through the EU, which is involved in various sectors. The EU adopted a Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel in 2011, originally focusing on Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, but expanded to cover Burkina Faso and Chad in 2014. The EU's strategy focuses on peace, security, and development, with approximately 8 billion Euros pledged by member states for development initiatives, and capacity-building programmes for civilian and military security forces in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) and Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUTM).⁷

While the prominent role of France in the region often obscures the role played by other European states, a number of them also play a significant role in the Sahel. Germany is an important donor and supports stabilisation and peacebuilding efforts in Mali, security sector reform in Niger, and food security initiatives across the region.⁸ The United Kingdom, which has not historically had a strong presence in the region, is poised to open two new embassies in Niger and Chad.⁹

The United States also engages heavily with Sahelian countries, but generally eschews multilateral approaches. Bilateral ties are framed within a regional resilience programme covering Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger.¹⁰ The US military also has around 1,000 troops deployed in the region for technical assistance and training.¹¹ These are mostly based in Niger where AFRICOM is currently building a drone base.¹²

The United Nations is also involved in the Sahel, both through its agencies working on assistance and development initiatives, and through a peace-keeping operation, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). An integrated UN Strategy for the Sahel was adopted in 2013 to promote governance,¹³ security and resilience, although to date this has had limited success in

⁷ European Union External Action Service, "European Union External Fact Sheet", 2 June 2017, Accessed on November 30, 2018. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/4099/european-union-and-sahel-fact-sheet_en.

⁸ Groupe de Recherche et d'Information sur la Paix et la Sécurité, "Vers une Montée en Puissance de l'Engagement Allemand dans la Sécurité en Afrique de l'Ouest ?", 28 May 2018, Accessed on November 30, 2018. https://www.grip.org/sites/grip.org/files/BREVES/2018/EC_2018-05-28_FR_Q-LABBEY.pdf.

⁹ United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office, "UK to Open New Embassies in Chad and Niger", 29 August 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-open-new-embassies-in-chad-and-niger>.

¹⁰ USAID, "Our Work: Programs in Niger and Burkina Faso", 21 May 2018, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.usaid.gov/node/46296/our-work>.

¹¹ Africa Faith and Justice Network, "U.S. Military Presence and Activity in Africa: Sahel Region", 23 July 2018, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <http://afjn.org/u-s-military-presence-and-activity-in-africa-sahel-region/>.

¹² Turse, Nick, "The U.S. Is Building A Drone Base In Niger That Will Cost More Than \$280 Million By 2024", *The Intercept*, 21 August 2018, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://theintercept.com/2018/08/21/us-drone-base-niger-africa/>.

¹³ For more details see United Nations, "Integrated Strategy for the Sahel", 2013, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.un.org/undpa/en/africa/sahel>.

generating a more integrated and coherent programme due to the multiplicity of different agencies and bureaucracies involved.

China represents another major player in the Sahel, with proliferating investments in the sectors of infrastructure and energy. Key examples are China's heavy investment in the oil, gas, and uranium sector in Chad and Niger,¹⁴ and the construction of roads,¹⁵ bridges, and railway across the region. China also engages bilaterally and, through its contributions to MINUSMA, multilaterally. Historically, an important obstacle to a regional approach was Burkina Faso's recognition of Taiwan. Not only did this prevent any official cooperation between mainland China and Burkina Faso, but it undermined China's willingness to support regional projects that included Burkina Faso such as railway construction or the FC-G5. However, in May 2018 the Burkinabè government announced that its 28-year-old relationship with Taiwan was coming to an end and resumed ties with China. This decision was motivated both by Burkinabè hopes of securing greater economic assistance from the Chinese authorities, and by pressure from other regional players to secure greater Chinese funding for joint projects.

As a result, China plays an increasingly prominent role in the region which, much like Africa itself, now features "multi-polar" international relations. With no dominant force and many competing partners, domestic and regional leaders face increasing choices about who they wish to fund them, and how they wish to proceed.

3.2. Regional organizations

Regional organizations such as the AU and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have mainly been occupied with efforts to overcome insecurity. This has especially been the case since the Malian crisis, and the occupation of the Azawad region by armed groups in 2012, demonstrated that neither the AU nor ECOWAS had sufficient capacity to act, protect, and promote the security of Sahelian countries.

The failure of regional intervention reflects the limited resources available to the AU and ECOWAS, and the rivalries between them. In the case of Mali, for example, ECOWAS attempted to lead conflict resolution efforts through a regional mediation process headed by then President of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré. This led to the adoption of an African peacekeeping force known as the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). However, disagreements between ECOWAS and the AU over who would lead this initiative, coupled with limited financial resources, meant that progress was extremely slow. In the end, France was forced to step in unilaterally in January 2013, which led to AFISMA being transformed into a UN-led operation, MINUSMA. In turn, this effectively side-lined the AU and ECOWAS, which encouraged these bodies to re-think their approach.

¹⁴ Besliu, Raluca, "Chad: How China Created an African Power", *The Globalist*, 26 December 2013, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.theglobalist.com/chad-china-created-african-power/>.

¹⁵ Global Security, "Niger-China Relations", n.d, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/africa/ne-forrel-prc.htm>.

In 2014, the AU responded by adopting a regional strategy for the Sahel,¹⁶ and created a political mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL). Once again, this was articulated around the three pillars of governance, security, and development. However, while it promoted cooperation within the region, resulting initiatives like the FC-G5 fell outside of the AU's control. As Nicolas Desgrais puts it, "the imposition of the G5 Sahel as a peace actor shows a shared will by the Sahelian states and their partners to go around the AU, ECOWAS and the CEMOC [a military cooperation framework between Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Algeria adopted in 2010], which had shown their inability to sustainably set up efficient mechanisms to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts".¹⁷

G5 states are also members of other cross-national organizations that further complicate this picture. A good example is the Liptako Gourma Authority, which comprises Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger without the other two G5 partners, and the Nouakchott Process, a grouping of 11 countries led by Algeria that includes the G5 states which, having lain dormant for some time, was reactivated at a meeting in late November 2018. As a result, international engagement in the region is often characterized by duplication, complexity, and a lack of cohesion. The bilateral efforts of individual foreign powers, and multilateral efforts of the United Nations, have had greater traction than the regional solutions proposed by the AU and ECOWAS. Nonetheless, the competition between all of these actors undermines the potential for consensus and the opportunity to bring about transformational change.

3.3. The G5 Sahel and the security fixation

The G5 Sahel was created in 2014 as a mean to foster intergovernmental cooperation and channel international support to the areas of development and security, increasingly understood in terms of a regional scope. Despite this, international actors have remained fixated on the security imperative, with the stated purpose of setting up an operational regional force able to tackle common security threats posed by cross-border terrorists and traffickers. As a result, efforts to address the underlying challenges facing the region, which play a key role in driving insecurity, have often been overlooked.

The FC-G5 is still being operationalized, but already has a number of important international backers. The anticipated budget of the FC-G5 is 423 million Euros, of which 10-25% has already been disbursed. Saudi Arabia and the European Union represent two of the most significant contributors, at around 100 million Euros. Other important partners include France, Rwanda, China, UEOMA, and the United Nations. The United States promised 60 million US Dollars in 2017, following intense lobbying from France, but this has yet to be dispersed. The AU has praised the initiative, but so far has provided little support.

Divisions and disagreements among these partners complicate the prospects for the G5 to even achieve its security goals. For example, the EU and some European

¹⁶ Institute for Security Studies, "AU Summit 31: What is the African Union's role in the Sahel", 25 June 2018, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/on-the-agenda/au-summit-31-what-is-the-african-unions-role-in-the-sahel>.

¹⁷ Desgrais, Nicolas (directed by Hugo Sada). "Le G5 Sahel, en réaction à la mutation de l'environnement stratégique sahélien." Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 28 February 2018, p. 30.

partners wish to maintain greater control over their funds by delivering them through the EU's Africa Peace Facility, as they are wary that resources will be mismanaged by the G5's bureaucracy. Meanwhile, the tendency of France and the United States to operate separately from international organizations has also led to complications. France continues to favour a bilateral approach, and the US has been reluctant to engage with the G5, preventing the UN Security Council from awarding the G5 with a 'reinforced mandate' in line with America's broader policy goal of reducing the UN's role globally.

The growing presence of China in the region has also raised concerns that the FC-G5 will see the development of stronger states go hand in hand with democratic backsliding, particularly around human rights monitoring. While most Western partners have conditions tied to their funds – for example, US military assistance is subjected to the Leahy Law which prohibits American military assistance to foreign forces who commit gross human rights violations, while EU funds are restricted to non-lethal equipment and assistance – China has explicitly legitimated its engagement in Africa on the basis that it does not seek to impose restrictive conditions on what African governments can and cannot do. This is a major concern given the documented abuse by security forces across the region, and growing evidence that abuse by security forces is a key driver in the willingness of local communities to support armed groups.¹⁸

There are also tensions and disagreements about the best way to promote security. These revolve around whether the FC-G5 should focus on cooperative border management, the fight against terrorism, or efforts to replace international forces such as MINUSMA and Operation Barkhane (the French operation that replaced Operation Serval in 2014). This lack of clarity and consensus risks undermining the effectiveness of the initiative, even against this narrow goal.

3.4. Summary and outlook

In addition to the difficult political context in the region, two main factors risk undermining the success of the G5 initiative, and the narrower FC-G5 project. First, the lack of international consensus in how to engage and what international intervention should be trying to achieve. Second, the tendency to focus on security considerations at the expense of the broader development and political challenges facing the region.

Efforts to counter-balance the narrow security focus of international support to the G5 thus far are ongoing, most notably the Alliance for the Sahel initiative announced by President Emmanuel Macron of France in July 2017¹⁹. Much will depend on the extent to which these will align with the G5's own PIP and the developmental needs of the region – a question taken up in section 5.

¹⁸ International Alert, "If Victims Become Perpetrators", 2018, p. 7. Accessed on November 30, 2018. https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Sahel_ViolentExtremismVulnerabilityResilience_EN_2018.pdf.

¹⁹ France Diplomatie, "La force conjointe G5 Sahel et l'Alliance Sahel", n.d., Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/defence-security/crisis-and-conflicts/g5-sahel-joint-force-and-the-sahel-alliance/>

4. THE PROSPECTS FOR GOVERNANCE AND STABILITY

Many countries in the Sahel are locked in a vicious cycle. Continual bouts of instability undermine democratic gains and the prospects of consolidation. At the same time, fragile political systems, fragmented societies, weak party systems and the limited authority of the government facilitate political instability. This cycle is rooted in the fact that the state has yet to achieve a monopoly of the legitimate use of force. Reflecting their colonial inheritance and the challenges of state-building in large countries with limited resources, G5 countries feature a centre-periphery divide in which the capacity of the government to maintain order declines the further one moves from the centre (the capital city and its environs) to the periphery (outlying rural areas).²⁰

When it comes to the quality of democracy, there is considerable variation within the Sahel. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger all feature fragile democratic systems with some level of competition. According to the latest release of the Bertlesmann Transformation Index (BTI),²¹ Niger and Burkina Faso are “defective democracies” while Mali is a “highly defective democracy” (Table 1). However, these are all relatively new political dispensations, as they emerged out of the 2014 insurrection in Burkina Faso, and the aftermath of coups in Mali (2012)²² and Niger (2010). These countries maintain a relatively open political landscape in which public grievances can be aired, but accountability and good governance are limited and the democratic gains achieved in recent years are vulnerable to reversal.

By contrast, Chad²³ and Mauritania can be considered authoritarian regimes, with the BTI ranking Mauritania as a moderate autocracy and Chad as one of the most authoritarian states on the African continent. In both countries, presidents came to power through a coup and have retained it through uncompetitive elections. Given the level of government repression and the fragmented nature of opposition parties and civil society groups, political liberalization appears unlikely in the short-term.

Table 1: Political Status of G5 States

Consolidating democracies	Defective democracies	Highly defective democracies	Moderate autocracies	Hard-line autocracies
Values 10 to 8	Values <8 to 6	Values <6	Values >4	Values <4
	Burkina Faso Niger	Mali	Mauritania	Chad

SOURCE: BTI 2018.

²⁰ Herbst, Jeff. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014. This represents Herbst’s general theoretical approach – see the Introduction for a full exposition.

²¹ Bertlesmann Transformation Index, “Bertlesmann Transformation Index 2018”, 2018, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.bti-project.org/en/home/>.

²² For more details on Mali, see Bleck, Jaimie, Abdoulaye Dembele, and Sidiki Guindo, “Malian Crisis and the Lingering Problem of Good Governance”, *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 5(1), 2016, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.457/>.

²³ *African Papers*, 12, February 2018, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://sahelresearch.africa.ufl.edu/files/Eizenga-2018-OECD-chad.pdf>.

A similar pattern can be identified when it comes to the quality of governance across the G5, understood in terms of the capacity of governments to form consensus, formulate policy, implement development goals, and fight corruption (Table 2). Niger (good governance), and Burkina Faso and Mali (moderate governance) are a long way off best practice but lead the way in terms of the region. By contrast Mauritania (weak governance) and Chad (very weak governance) perform particularly poorly. The close relationship between the quality of democracy and the quality of governance provides clear evidence that the quality of economic and political management in the region is unlikely to improve unless countries adopt stronger accountability mechanisms and constitutional checks and balances.

Table 2: Quality of Governance in G5 States

Very good	Good	Moderate	Weak	Very weak
Values 10 to 7	Values <7 to 5,6	Values <5,6 to 4,3	Values <4,3 to 3	Values <3
	Niger	Burkina Faso Mali	Mauritania	Chad

SOURCE: BTI 2018.

Against this background of problematic governance and weak states, civil-military relations and the destabilizing impact of poor governance become particularly significant.

4.1 . Civil-military relations

Armies have been involved in politics across the region for a long time. Military intervention is still a recurring phenomenon, with an army mutiny in Burkina Faso in 2011 and recent coups carried out in Niger (2010) and Mali (2012) and attempted in Burkina Faso (2015). Significantly, this risk has not receded – militaries remain heavily politicised across the region, and willing to act to protect their interests. This is particularly concerning, because it means that if the efforts to reorganize the armed forces currently underway in Mali is poorly managed it could trigger fresh military intervention. A similar risk exists in Burkina Faso, where military reorganization has yet to take place but is much needed after the presidential security unit, Régiment de la Sécurité Présidentielle (RSP), was disbanded and its leader, General Diendere – who had been a key operative of Compaoré’s intelligence and security apparatus – was arrested.

This threat means that elected leaders often have an ambivalent relationship to the armed forces. On the one hand, ruling parties often deploy the security forces to achieve political ends, such as suppressing the opposition, in addition to protecting the mainland. This creates a strong incentive to seek international support for the further professionalization of the defence and security forces, which are understaffed and lack essential equipment in all of the G5 states according to their own Development and

Security Strategy.²⁴ On the other hand, the fear of empowering military leaders to act against the government, combined with the knowledge that professionalization remains a major challenge that cannot be quickly resolved, provides a strong disincentive to significantly expand military budgets.

Investing in the armed forces is also complicated by resistance from civil society groups who are frustrated by the high cost of living and failure of the government to address issues such as poverty and inequality. Against this backdrop, redistributing resources to the security sector from other budget priorities such as health and education is challenging. For example, both Burkina Faso and Niger have recently been marked by strikes and protests against rising fuel prices, while Chad's public servants are regularly striking against large cuts in their salaries.

But while doing nothing often proves to represent the path of least resistance in the short-term, it can also increase the potential for further military intervention in the long-run, as inflation erodes the real value of security sector wages. Significantly, recent research by Maggie Dwyer has found that in contexts such as these "the increase in African participation in international peacekeeping has also led to a series of peacekeeping related mutinies,"²⁵ because the experience of better terms and conditions can make soldiers even more critical about the situation that they face back home.

Given this, it is imperative that the operationalization of the FC-G5 does not risk destabilising civil-military relations by introducing differential treatment, pay and conditions for those in G5 and non-G5 units who are operating in similar areas. The same applies to the treatment of military units across countries. Ensuring transparency in the selection process that determines who is stationed at the G5's command posts, which enjoy better conditions, is also important to avoid accusations of unequal treatment.²⁶

4.2. The destabilising effect of poor governance

The roots of radicalization are complex and include economic, social and historical factors. However, a growing literature stresses the importance of government policies and actions to the willingness of community members to support or join armed groups in the region. Indeed, while the role of religious ideologies in the spread of terrorist activities in this part of Africa has received much attention, it is long-standing local grievances that provide the best guide as to which communities are more willing to adopt a more radical religious outlook. Indeed, access to land, intergenerational conflicts, and feelings of marginalization are often cited by local experts as key factors that drive violent extremism, especially if there is no peaceful way to meaningfully engage with authorities and express these grievances.²⁷ According to the Institute for

²⁴ G5 Sahel, *Stratégie pour le Développement et la Sécurité des Pays du G5 Sahel*, September 2016, p. 13, Accessed on November 30, 2018. https://www.g5sahel.org/images/Docs/SDS_G5S_VF.pdf.

²⁵ Dwyer, Maggie. *Soldiers in Revolt: Army Mutinies in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, back cover.

²⁶ Dwyer, M (2018). *Soldiers in Revolt: Army Mutinies in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁷ Royal United Services Institute, "Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review", 2015, p. 6. Accessed on November 30, 2018. <http://www.dmeforpeace.org/peaceexchange/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Drivers-of-VE-Hypotheses-and-Literature-Review.pdf>

Security Studies,²⁸ in Mali, “the absence or weakness of the state, experienced by the population as a sign of neglect or disinterest, often motivates young people to get involved in those groups that attempt to replace the state by providing certain basic social services.”²⁹

Similarly, research conducted by the peacebuilding organization International Alert in the Sahel demonstrates that perceived abuse by government authorities was the “number one factor behind young people’s decision to join violent extremist groups.”³⁰ This is a particularly worrying finding given the extensive violations³¹ that have been found to have been committed by security forces across the region.³² In this context, International Alert warns that ‘despite the stated intentions, the deployment of forces accused of serious abuses, negligence around DSF training, the right of pursuit without the right of inspection and the absence of a proper risk mitigation strategy all seem to be a recipe for exacerbating tensions and increasing local communities’ vulnerability to violent extremism.’³³

The relationship between poor governance, the militarization of politics, human rights abuses and radicalization helps to explain the vicious cycle of instability and growing authoritarianism that has characterized the Sahel over the last thirty years.

4.3. Summary and outlook

The prospects for democratic consolidation in the Sahel region are limited. Chad and Mauritania appear to be undergoing processes of growing authoritarianism. Meanwhile, the region’s more democratic states face major challenges in the near future.

Most notably, Burkina Faso is experiencing growing insecurity ahead of the 2020 elections. The opposition has so far been unable to capitalize on popular disenchantment with the government’s failure to deal with the nearly daily attacks rocking the Northern and Eastern parts of the country, or to propose a compelling vision

²⁸ Institute for Security Studies, “AU Summit 31: What is the African Union’s role in the Sahel”, 25 June 2018, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/on-the-agenda/au-summit-31-what-is-the-african-unions-role-in-the-sahel>.

²⁹ Lori-Anne Thérout-Bénoni and William Assanvo, “Mali’s young ‘jihadists’: Fuelled by faith or circumstance?”, Institute for Security Studies, 29 August 2016, p. 5.

³⁰ International Alert, ‘If victims become perpetrators: Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel’, 2018, pg 7. Accessed on November 30, 2018. https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Sahel_ViolentExtremismVulnerabilityResilience_EN_2018.pdf.

³¹ Human Rights Watch, “Mali: Unchecked Abuses in Military Operations”, 8 September 2017, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/08/mali-unchecked-abuses-military-operations>.

³² Human Rights Watch, ‘By day we fear the Army, by night the Jihadists’, 21 May 2018, pp. 28-41. Accessed on November 30, 2018.

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/burkinafaso0518_web2.pdf; Human Rights Watch, ‘Mali: Unchecked Abuses in Military Operations’, 8 September 2017, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/05/21/day-we-fear-army-night-jihadists/abuses-armed-islamists-and-security-forces>.

³³ International Alert, ‘If victims become perpetrators: Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel’, 2018, pg. 35. Accessed on November 30, 2018. https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Sahel_ViolentExtremismVulnerabilityResilience_EN_2018.pdf.

for the future of the country. While President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré is expected to be re-elected, it is unclear whether a credible election can be held in the peripheral areas increasingly outside the government’s control. If these communities are not included in the vote, it will further increase their sense of political marginalization, and risks increasing support for anti-state forces.

Against this backdrop, adopting a predominantly security-based response to the complex and multifaceted challenges of political instability and weak governance may do more harm than good. Enhancing the coercive capacity of repressive political systems without the creation of new checks and balances against the abuse of power threatens to further disempower citizens. It may also give rise to fresh grievances among those communities that have never felt that they have a stake in the political system.

5. THE PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

As noted above, the G5 was originally conceived as a much broader initiative that would focus not only on military cooperation but also on development. The Sahel region is characterized by low levels in almost every aspect of development. In all five countries, agriculture and cattle-raising remain the pillar of the economy and the occupation of a large majority of the population, despite the presence of high-value resources like gold, oil, uranium, and manganese. The five countries regularly receive some of the lowest scores on the Human Development Index – a summary measure that includes factors such as a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and a decent standard of living – and Niger currently sits last in the ranking.

The G5 Sahel’s Strategy for Development and Security identifies its members as ecologically vulnerable states, and recognizes that this vulnerability, combined with insecurity and a history of low state capacity, contributes to the region’s development challenges.³⁴ These issues are then compounded by weak infrastructure, which restricts the movement of people, goods and energy into land-locked and desertified countries. According to the BTI 2018 (Table 3), all of the G5 states feature poorly functioning economies characterized by inadequate government intervention in the economy, a weak private sector, poor welfare provision and considerable currency and price instability.

Table 3: Economic Performance in G5 States

Developed economies	Functioning economies	Economies with functional deficits	Poorly functioning economies	Rudimentary economies
Values 10 to 8	Values <8 to 7	Values <7 to 5	Values <5 to 3	Values <3
			Burkina Faso	
			Mali	
			Mauritania	
			Niger	
			Chad	

SOURCE: BTI 2018.

³⁴ G5 Sahel, *Stratégie pour le Développement et la Sécurité des Pays du G5 Sahel*, September 2016, p. 13, Accessed on November 30, 2018. https://www.g5sahel.org/images/Docs/SDS_G5S_VF.pdf.

These challenges are compounded by the fact that the Sahel is particularly affected by climate change, both because pronounced ecological change is expected and because states lack the resources to adapt. G5 countries also feature a pronounced youth bulge, with some of the youngest populations in the world. This is potentially a positive factor, in that younger citizens can help to pay for the pensions of older citizens, but it is also a tremendous challenge because low quality education and high unemployment mean that there are insufficient jobs to absorb the region's youth.

Insecurity impacts the development landscape both because it undermines economic activity and because it reinforces existing regional inequalities. Across the G5, the areas worst effected by insecurity are peripheral regions that already suffer from particularly high levels of poverty and lower access to infrastructure and services – despite the economic potential of sectors such as mining or cattle-raising. As a result, insecurity further entrenches the centre-periphery divide.

5.1. Development agendas in the Sahel

At its creation, the G5 Sahel was originally designed as a coordination channel for the unprecedented aid flows that pledged to the region as a result of the various 'Sahel strategies' developed by donors. In response, Sahelian countries therefore identified a PIP amounting to just under 2 billion Euros focusing on key needs in the sectors of governance, security, economic resilience, and infrastructure. The PIP is a three-year programme encompassing 40 projects either of a regional nature or affecting border areas.³⁵ They cover a wide range of initiatives, from road construction to water, sanitation, electricity provision, or telecommunication facilities. While the G5 countries have vouched to fund 10% of the programme themselves, they are looking for international parties to cover the remaining 90%.

However, the security angle quickly overtook the development agenda, as the PIP's funding conference was repeatedly delayed due to the tendency to give priority to first establishing military cooperation. Nicolas Desgrais has argued that this strategic choice also reflected the ongoing disagreements over aid and funding modalities mentioned above, with donor's reluctance to fund projects through the PIP, preferring instead to use the tried and tested route of bilateral partnerships, while the G5 wished to channel the resources through its own defence and cooperation structures in order to 'prove the organization's seriousness and demonstrate its capacity to coordinate projects'.³⁶ Maman Sidikou, the G5 Sahel Permanent Secretary since February 2018, stated in an interview: "in my opinion, we over-emphasized the G5 Sahel's military dimension, whereas our defence and security mission in the Sahel also goes through the development of the states in the region and the reorganization of basic social

³⁵ G5 Sahel, "Priority Investment Program (PIP/G5 Sahel)", October 2018, pg. 3. Accessed on November 30, 2018.

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/f95e58_d120a4ca6eea4eeb9270e0f606455072.pdf.

³⁶ Desgrais, Nicolas (directed by Hugo Sada). "Le G5 Sahel, en réaction à la mutation de l'environnement stratégique sahélien." Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 28 February 2018, p. 59.

services such as water, education, health, which were totally destroyed by the terrorists.”³⁷

Meanwhile, in July 2017 President Macron of France launched an “Alliance for the Sahel,” in partnership with the German chancellor Angela Merkel. The Alliance is described as a “mechanism to strengthen partners’ coordination for a faster, more efficient, and better targeted aid benefiting vulnerable areas.”³⁸ It is also designed to enhance aid efficiency, and will channel around 6.5 billion Euros from the EU and its member states, the World Bank, the African Bank for Development, and the United Nations Development Programme for around 400 projects.

One of the less obvious motivations behind Macron’s plan is to find a way to invest in the region while retaining control over their funds. Through this initiative, donors will be able to both streamline the management of their funds and avoid transferring them to the G5, with the AFD poised to play a key role in the processing of resources and implementation of projects. This may help to reduce corruption and waste – although both of these have been identified in French policy towards Africa³⁹ – but it is likely to frustrate regional actors and undermine the evolution of more credible regional bodies.

Moreover, while the PIP is in many ways a welcome development, a number of questions remain. It is not yet clear to what extent this initiative will align with the G5’s own PIP. It is also not clear how quickly the programme will get up and running, despite new pledges by France and the EU to commit a total of 1.3 billion Euros at a coordination conference which took place on 6 December 2018, after having been repeatedly delayed.⁴⁰

5.2. The security-development nexus

All regional strategies – either from the G5 Sahel itself or from international donors – are framed around a “security-development nexus” with both aspects supposed to go hand in hand. And indeed, the relationship between development and insecurity works in both directions. While conflict and political instability undermines development efforts, there is also considerable evidence that a lack of development is one of the factors that drive insecurity and instability. As a result, failure to deliver and distribute development is likely to undermine other goals.

³⁷ Chanda, Tirthankar, “Maman Sidikou: «Nous avons surcommuniqué sur la dimension militaire du G5 Sahel»”, *RFI Afrique*, 19 June 2019, Accessed on November 30, 2018.

<http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180618-g5-sahel-dimension-militaire-son-action-developpement-financement-sidikou>.

³⁸ France Diplomatie, “La force conjointe G5 Sahel et l’Alliance Sahel”, n.d., Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/defence-security/crisis-and-conflicts/g5-sahel-joint-force-and-the-sahel-alliance/>.

³⁹ Haski, Pierre, “The Return of Françafrique”, *New York Times*, 21 July 2013, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/22/opinion/global/the-return-of-francafrique.html>.

⁴⁰ Vidzraku, Sylvain, ‘G5 Sahel : L’UE et la France mobilisent 1,3 milliard d’euros pour les projets prioritaires de développement’, *La Tribune*, 7 December 2018, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <https://afrique.latribune.fr/politique/2018-12-07/g5-sahel-l-ue-et-la-france-mobilisent-1-3-milliard-d-euros-pour-les-projets-prioritaires-de-developpement-800279.html>

The EU's Sahel strategy,⁴¹ for example, has focused on four key priorities: preventing and countering radicalisation; creating appropriate conditions for youth; migration and mobility; and border management, fight against illicit trafficking and transnational organised crime. The EU also provides humanitarian assistance and support for longer term development and resilience initiatives. Meanwhile, the AU's strategy also targeted governance, security, and development, including a wide range of initiatives like supporting feasibility studies and implementation of regional infrastructure projects and supporting the development of regional and national action plans regarding youth and women, socio-economic integration and rural livelihood.⁴²

However, development and resilience initiatives are difficult to implement in areas most affected by insecurity. The need to protect staff and prevent aid being captured by armed groups significantly complicates development projects in such areas. At the same time, the presence of armed groups and their willingness to target not only security forces but also mayors, teachers, and doctors, means that there is a danger that international partners and domestic governments will not be able to find appropriate local partners to work with in the design and implementation of development programmes. As a result, it can be impossible to follow internal best practice, and development programmes become more prone to failure.

6. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

The original mandate of the G5 Sahel was broad and included a strong focus on development and democracy. However, this has since been watered down by the growing focus on security issues since the creation of the FC-G5. This is understandable, given the way that insecurity in the region has spread from northern to central Mali and across the borders in Niger and Burkina Faso over the last decade. Terrorism and illegal migration are critical concerns for the US and European donors, and so the FC-G5's operationalization has taken priority over other concerns.

However, the tendency to overlook development and governance issues threatens to undermine the prospects for political stability, and to further fuel regional insecurity in the long-run. Improving the quality of political participation and representation, promoting transparent and accountable government, ensuring greater respect for human rights, and improving civil-military relations, should not be viewed as optional extras. Instead, they are essential to reduce the attraction of armed groups to citizens who feel marginalized and let-down by their governments.

In addition to a change of focus, the Sahel would benefit from greater policy cohesion and coordination. At present, efforts to promote all three of the G5's priority areas have been undermined by the multiplicity of actors involved in the region, their diverse priorities, and the different modalities of engagement they favor. Cross-nation agreement over which projects are the most important, along with a reduction in the

⁴¹ European Union External Action Service, "Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel", 21 June 2016, Accessed on November 30, 2018. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/3947/strategy-security-and-development-sahel_en.

⁴² African Union, "Strategy for the Sahel Region", African Union: Addis Ababa, 12 August 2014, Accessed on November 30, 2018. <http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/the-african-union-strategy-for-the-sahel-region>.

number of initiatives, would aid both the design and implementation of key interventions.

Given the history of civil-military relations in the Sahel, it is also critical that efforts to build the G5 joint force are sensitive to local dynamics. Low levels of professionalization and a poor track record on human rights mean that strengthening national armies risks increasing the number of abuses and the power of the military relative to civilian governments. It is therefore important that international programmes in this area focus on the need to enhance military discipline and, hence, minimise the risk of further coups. Democratic backsliding and authoritarian reversal will only hurt the prospects for economic development; it will also undermine the prospects for sustainable peace and security.

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