



SAHELIAN STATES OF NATURE

Policy Recommendations

1. Regional and international cooperation against terrorism should not be limited to military activities.
2. The United Nations and other donor agencies should harmonise and integrate their strategies for the Sahel.
3. There should be regional cooperation in sharing weather and climate data for early warning and action to mitigate climate change.
4. More investments in climate change adaptation strategies are urgently needed

The West [Africa Sahel sub-region](#) has had its fair share of underdevelopment and violent extremism. Ethnic conflicts, herder-farmer [clashes, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, human and drugs trafficking](#), transnational smuggling of small arms and light weapons have all combined to create a pervasive climate of insecurity in the sub-region. The nature of these violent conflicts makes the Sahel extremely [dangerous, volatile and insecure](#). For instance, the region is dotted with numerous terrorist cells such as the Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin, the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, etc.

Supported and fueled by [weak state structures, underdevelopment, inter-ethnic and resource conflicts](#), these groups have in the last decade engaged in full-fledged wars against constituted authorities and governments of Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, etc. This has resulted in the formation of standing counter-terrorism military forces in West Africa in efforts to curtail the activities of the terrorists. First, is [the Multinational Joint Task Force \(MJTF\)](#) with troops from Chad, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Benin, with its headquarters in N'Djamena, Chad. Next, is [G-5 Sahel Force](#), which is headquartered in Mauritania, consisting of military forces from

Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

Although, these counter-terrorism operations have made some gains, they have failed to contain the spread of extremist groups to other parts of West Africa, especially towards the southern part of the sub-region. Research by [Nordic Africa Institute and The Kofi Annan Peacekeeping and Training Centre](#) show that the 2011 foreign military intervention in Libya led to the spike in smuggling of armed groups and weapons into the Sahel. Furthermore, the political map of the region has been redrawn with the emergence of new political and military strongmen, thereby changing the Sahel's fragile political topography. In addition to the above, there are other factors that continue to re-define the sub-region. This edition of **Nextier SPD Policy Weekly** examines how the security situation in the West Africa Sahel has been shaped by ungoverned spaces, climate change and drought.

Climate change-induced drought in the Sahel has forced many cattle herders to migrate southward with attendant farmer-herder clashes over grazing right. Tonah (2006) observed that the perennial drought in the Sahelian belt and the accompanying southward migration of huge number of pastoralists into the Sudan and

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Guinea savannah belts of West Africa has resulted in significant increase in the incidence of farmers-herders conflicts. UNEP (2011) has also noted that while seasonal and circular migration are the traditional adaptation strategies to climate variability in the West African Sahelian sub-region, traditional migration patterns are increasingly being replaced by a more permanent southward shift. When herders stay too long in a particular place, violence is likely to occur between them and sedentary arable farmers (Agheyisi, 2017 b). This is anticipated considering the struggle over access to natural resources such as water and grazing areas. The dearth of these natural resources is mainly due to climatic changes, infrastructural development, population growth, etc.

The issue of ungoverned spaces cannot be overlooked in the analysis of the security situation in the West Africa Sahel. The combination of weak state authority and ungoverned spaces have provided safe havens for organised terrorist groups. Peripheral remote areas such as mountainous regions, sand dunes and rural areas that are not well policed (and far from the reach of state authorities) serve as hiding places for operational base and training for terrorist groups and conflict entrepreneurs (Agheysi, 2017a). The widespread local insurgencies are contagious and undermine state authorities in the sub-region. While the domino/neighborhood effect of the Malian crisis is increasingly affecting Burkina Faso and Niger, that of Boko Haram in Nigeria is affecting Niger, Chad and Cameroun. One reason for this is that international borders around the countries are porous and largely unguarded.

Today in the sub-region, [Mali is a regional terrorism hotspot](#). The Islamic Movement for the Azawad (MIA), Anser Dine, Anser Al Sunna and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) are driven by the desire to carve out an independent Azawad State from Mali. Burkina Faso is also witnessing a sharp increase in jihadist attacks since 2017. The Armed Conflict and Event Location Dataset (ACLED) researchers counted about 158 jihadist attacks in 2018. Jihadist elements linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have stepped up their attacks on government forces and civilians, and are increasingly stoking up communal tensions across the country. Inter-communal violence is also on the rise in the Republic of Niger owing to the violent protests and trans-border banditry in addition to the Boko Haram trans-border attacks. Chad is deeply enmeshed in the fight against Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin.

Insurgents are tapping into the pool of recruits from nomadic communities such as the Tuareg, Dossaak and Fulani who are worst hit by the perennial drought, food insecurity and climatic variability in the sub-region. These marginalised pastoralists have been implicated in the Sahel's interlocking conflicts. Nextier SPD (2019) reports that [the drying up of Lake Chad is undermining](#) food security leading to the worsening security situation in the Lake Chad Basin. As such, organisations such as the AU,

EU, World Bank, ECOWAS and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) have a major role to play in strengthening the governments to stem the tides of insecurity and improve food security in the sub-region. The following recommendations are proffered:

1. Regional and international cooperation against terrorism should not be limited to military activities. Development (including education and resilience), human security, governance (inclusion) and justice deficits should be holistically addressed, considering that these factors are interwoven. For instance, [in Mali, the absence of a fair and strong state](#), to deliver the above has continued to fuel inter-ethnic clashes and ethnic cleansing of some groups in Central Mali.
2. The United Nations and other donor agencies should harmonise and integrate their strategies for the Sahel. The strategies should be vigorously pursued so as to drive forward its cross-cutting implementation. They should be closely monitored considering that there may be overlaps between the strategies for the Sahel region, various nation-state as well as local strategies. This also includes the strategies by MNJTF and G-5 Sahel Forces.
3. There should be regional cooperation in sharing weather and climate data for early warning and action to mitigate climate change. While the **ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN)** as a Mechanism is dedicated to monitor, gather, analyse and disseminate threat information to the 15 member states, this mandate covers conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security in the sub-region. There are minimal coverages of climatic and environmental threats by the mechanism.
4. More investments in climate change adaptation strategies are urgently needed in order to avert looming total collapse of agriculture in the sub-region.

The combined effects of environmental degradation, perennial drought consequent upon climate change, violent extremism driven by Islamic ideology, porous borders and weak governance of the states in the sub-region have exacerbated the worsening insecurity in the sub-region. This has consequently aggravated the unprecedented displacement of thousands of people which has triggered humanitarian crisis as well as escalating food insecurity. Climate change, food insecurity, forced displacement, hyper-unemployment and the lack of opportunities continue to threaten the socioeconomic development of the region.

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