

Policyweekly

The G5 Sahel: Countering Insurgency or Countering Democracy?



Policy Recommendations

- 1** The international community, particularly regional organisations, should make respect for democratic principles a condition to be met by ad hoc coalitions seeking support for counter-insurgency initiatives.
- 2** Ad hoc coalitions fighting insurgency must make governance reforms and human development as cardinal components of their counter-insurgency framework.
- 3** There is a need for an independent team of experts to be deployed periodically to review the implementation of counter-insurgency frameworks and the concept of operations of ad hoc coalitions fighting insurgency.
- 4** The international community must restrict regime use of international military bases in the G5 Sahel countries.

Introduction

On Saturday, 16th September 2023, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger signed a mutual defence pact establishing the [Alliance of Sahel States](#). The Alliance of Sahel States is a collective defence and mutual assistance framework by the three states to help each other against possible threats of armed rebellion or external aggression. This latest pact adds to the [G5 Sahel Joint Force \(FC-G5S\)](#) launched in February 2017 as the military component of the G5 Sahel – a regional body established in 2014 by Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad. The establishment of the G5 Sahel by the five Sahelian states was borne out of the motivation to bring stability to the Sahel through an [ad hoc coalition](#) to address the security and development challenges facing member countries. Over the past two decades, efforts at bringing stability to the Sahel region have focused on the formation of ad hoc military

coalitions like the G5 Sahel Joint Force and international military interventions like [Operation Serval](#) and [Operation Barkhane](#).

Despite the international counter-insurgency operations and formation of ad hoc military coalition by the G5 Sahel countries, insurgency and activities of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) have soared across the G5 Sahel countries, particularly in the [Liptako-Gourma](#) region. More so, democracy has been dealt a great blow as coups and counter-coups have recently spread like wildfire across countries of the G5 Sahel. The latest military pact entered into by three members of the G5 Sahel is worrisome because, instead of serving as a bulwark against terror, the military alliance may be a coalition to counter the restoration of democracy in the three countries. This edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides insight on how the use of ad hoc military coalition for counter-insurgency is exploited to subvert democracy in countries of the G5 Sahel.

Explaining the preference for Ad hoc coalitions for counter-insurgency in the Sahel

Karlsruud and Reykers (2020) described ad hoc coalition as a temporary group of actors who agree to address a particular security problem at a given time and location. They highlight reasons for the preference of ad hoc coalition in dealing with security issues to include inter alia: member states remain more in control of their troops and are able to pursue national interests while involved in ad hoc coalition; it avoids bureaucratic delays and do not require unanimity or consensus among member states. However, Karlsruud and Rykers espoused the dangers of ad hoc coalition to include forum shopping and institutional exploitation. Despite the dangers associated with ad hoc coalitions, recent experience in the Sahel shows that ad hoc coalitions remain attractive to superpowers who use the framework to prosecute proxy war on terror across the Sahel. Accordingly, two remarkable ad hoc military coalitions have been formed across the Sahel in the last two decades – The [Multinational Joint Task Force \(MNJTF\)](#) established in 2014 and the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) established in 2017.

The reliance on ad hoc military coalitions for counter-insurgency across the Sahel is explained by various factors. First is the appetite of the international community and donor countries for a security and military approach to counter insurgency in the region. The crusade of the Global War on Terror by the United States and its allies since the 9/11 attacks has led to the expansion of tool kits for fighting terrorism and growth in donor funding for counter-insurgency operations globally. Even the European Union (EU) has [integrated counterterrorism](#) as part of its strategies for peacebuilding, thereby making more funds available to support counter-insurgency across the globe. This global appetite for a military approach to counter-insurgency underscores why the FC-

G5S was quickly [endorsed](#) by the international community, particularly the European partners who immediately initiated [donor conferences](#) in 2017 and 2018 that resulted in €414 million being pledged for training and equipment for the joint force.

A second reason for preferring ad hoc military coalition for counter-insurgency by leaders in the Sahel is the flexibility it affords self-serving local leaders who use the coalition to pursue self-serving regime interests and to exit the coalition with little or no consequences when their interests are no longer served by the ad hoc coalition. For instance, in June 2022, Mali [withdrew](#) from the G5 Sahel, including the FC-G5S, after some members of the ad hoc coalition refused to allow the transitional authorities in Mali to assume G5 Sahel's rotating presidency. Furthermore, ad hoc military coalition has been used for regime protection by authoritarian leaders who are able to deploy forces under their control to suppress opposition and dissenting voices under the guise of counter-insurgency. As of the time of establishing the G5 Sahel, many leaders of the G5 Sahel countries were authoritarian leaders who had been in office for a long time and were battling legitimacy crisis. [Idris Deby](#) had been in power for over three decades in Chad, President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso had been in power for over two decades, in Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who transitioned from a military to a civilian leader in 2009, was seeking re-election. Therefore, using an ad hoc military coalition like the FC-G5S would enable these leaders to pursue self-interests while benefiting from external support (especially funding) from the international community under the guise of fighting terror.

The G5 Sahel: Subverting democracy under the guise of counter-insurgency

Except for Mauritania, all other member states of the G5 Sahel are currently under military rule. At least eight military coups have been experienced across the G5 Sahel since the formation of the group in 2014. Two of the countries (Mali and Niger), which were under democratic rule at the time of forming the group, have transitioned to military rule. One major reason cited by most of the coup plotters for toppling the sitting government was the failure of the sitting government to contain insurgency. Table 1 provides a summary of coups in the G5 Sahel in the past two decades and the reasons advanced by plotters of the most recent coup in each of the countries.

Table 1: Coups in G5 Sahel countries and reasons cited for the most recent coup

Country	Coups (successful and attempted)	Reasons cited for the most recent coups
Burkina Faso	2014; 2022 (January); 2022 (September)	Burkina Faso's deteriorating security situation
Chad	2021	Necessary for security reasons
Mali	2020; 2021	Failing to protect the Malian people from spiking violence.
Niger	2021; 2023	Continuous deterioration of the security situation

Source: Authors' compilation

Although one of the objectives of the G5 Sahel is to [support democracy and good governance](#), the group sidestepped the developmental needs of the people and prioritised a military approach to counter-insurgency. Yet, at the root of the security challenges in the region is the governance deficit, which undermines the legitimacy of government, makes the local people willing accomplices of Jihadist insurgents and provides reasons for the military to topple sitting governments under the guise of fighting terror. The use of ad hoc military coalition to militarise the region in the name of counter-insurgency enabled increased contact and bonding among military personnel from the G5 Sahel countries. This increased contact among the military personnel of the coalition may have contributed to the contagious coups which spread across the region.

The international community is also implicated in the subversion of democracy witnessed in the G5 Sahel countries. By ignoring adherence to democratic principles once security issues are brought to the front burner, the international community unwittingly aided authoritarian regimes to remain in power and subvert democracy. For instance, on 30th January 2016, Idriss Deby of Chad was [elected](#) the Chairperson of the African Union (AU). His election as the Chairperson of AU despite his authoritarian rule in Chad where he had been in power for over three decades was [criticised](#) in some quarters. Besides, his election as Chairperson of the AU demonstrated that the AU, despite

its propagation of democratic principles, could turn blind eyes to a subversion of democracy by authoritarian rulers who cling to power under the guise of counter-insurgency. Again, following the death of Deby, France [supported](#) the coup by his son Mahamat, who took over power and suspended the constitutional arrangement which provided for the speaker of the parliament to become interim president upon the death of an incumbent. The reason advanced by France for her support was that the coup was necessary for security reasons. This support of authoritarian rulers and unconstitutional changes in government by the international community may have emboldened the military involved in the recent wave of coups across the Sahel to take over power under the guise of countering insurgency. The recent defence pact entered into by the current leaders of some G5 Sahel countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger) who assumed office through coup signifies another dangerous form of ad hoc coalition because their alliance may not only make restoration of democracy difficult but may embolden other unconstitutional changes in government across the Sahel.

Recommendations

1. Respect for democratic norms and principles should be a condition for supporting counter-insurgency:

The international community, particularly regional organisations such as the AU and ECOWAS, should make respect for democratic principles a condition to be met by ad hoc coalitions seeking support for counter-insurgency initiatives. Norms contained in protocols such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance ([ACDEG](#)) must be sacrosanct. This will limit the extent to which authoritarian rulers exploit the support of the international community to prolong their stay in power under the guise of counter-insurgency.

2. Governance reforms and human development should be integral components of counter-insurgency initiatives:

Ad hoc coalitions fighting insurgency must make governance reforms and human development as cardinal components of their counter-insurgency framework. Partner organisations and countries must also prioritise funding of governance reforms and human development components of counter-insurgency initiatives. This will go a long way in addressing the root causes of insurgency, such as poverty and scarcity of water, land and other agricultural resources.

3. Periodic review of the implementation of counter-insurgency initiatives and Concept of Operations (CONOPS):

An independent team of

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

Nextier SPD (www.thenextier.com/spd) is an international development consulting firm that uses evidence-based research to develop and build knowledge and skills to enhance human security, peace, and sustainable development as means to achieving stability and prosperity in Nigeria, and in the African region.

experts should be deployed periodically to review the implementation of counter-insurgency frameworks and CONOPS of ad hoc coalitions fighting insurgency. This will ensure early detection of attempts to deploy resources for counter-insurgency for the self-serving interests of leaders.

4.Restrict regime use of international military bases in their countries: The international community must ensure that military regimes in the G5 Sahel countries are not allowed unfettered access to military bases in their territories established by the international community for counter-insurgency. As the [US resumes its counterterrorism](#) mission in Niger, care must be taken to ensure that the US military bases in Niger are not exploited by the military regime in Niger for regime interest.

Conclusion

The experience of the G5 Sahel countries shows that the use of ad hoc military coalition for counter-insurgency could be exploited to subvert democracy. The G5 Sahel was established as an ad hoc coalition to bring stability to the region.

Unfortunately, some of the authoritarian leaders exploited the coalition to further self-serving regime interest by prioritising a military approach to counter-insurgency. The recent military pact signed by three leaders of G5 Sahel who came to power through coups should be seen as an attempt to unite against democracy. Such a coalition may narrow the possibilities of restoring democracy if it receives unconditional support from the international community.

Reference

Karlsruud, J. & Reykers Y. F. (2020). Ad hoc coalitions and institutional exploitation in international security: towards a typology, *Third World Quarterly*, 41(9), 1518-1536.

Authors:

Dr. Chukwuma Okoli is an Associate Consultant at Nextier and a Lecturer at the Political Science Department at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

Dr. Ndu Nwokolo is a Partner at Nextier and an Honorary Fellow at the School of Government at the University of Birmingham, UK.

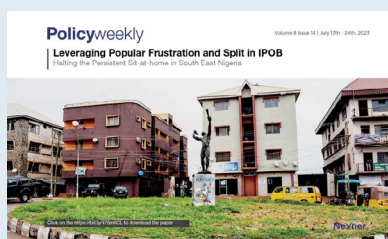
Nextier Sample Publications



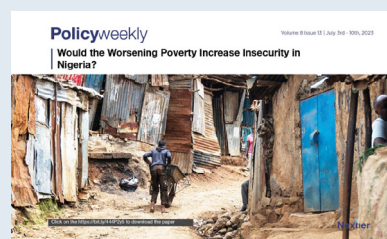
Food, Fear, and Fortitude: Rural Women's Journey Amid Armed Conflicts in Plateau State
Plateau State has been under the spotlight for all the wrong reasons. The region has been grappling with an increasing threat of armed attacks, particularly in its rural areas. The aftermath of these bloodbaths...



Why is Fuel Subsidy Removal Hurting Many Nigerians? Examining Six Ways to Reduce the Pains
Fuel subsidy ended in Nigeria when on 29th May 2023, the newly sworn-in President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, subtly announced the end of subsidy by thanking the outgoing...



Leveraging Popular Frustration and Split in IPOB Halting the Persistent Sit-at-home in South-East Nigeria
You are currently viewing Leveraging Popular Frustration and Split in IPOB Halting the Persistent Sit-at-home in South-East Nigeria...



Would the Worsening Poverty Increase Insecurity in Nigeria?
Third World nations in general, particularly Africa, which includes Nigeria, struggle greatly with poverty. Many individuals in Nigeria live in poverty due to the country's...



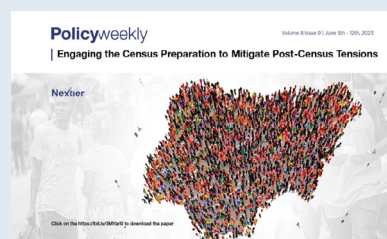
Safety of Buildings VERSUS Claims of Vengeance: Exploring Issues around the Alaba Market Demolitions
On Sunday, February 18, 2023, videos were circulating about the commencement of demolitions in Alaba International Market, Ojo Local Government Area of...



Strengthening Child Protection in Post-Conflict Communities in North East Nigeria
Children are usually the most vulnerable in armed conflict and post-conflict environments. Beyond being afflicted by humanitarian crises occasioned by armed...



Nigeria's Off-Cycle Elections and the Impending Violence
Off-cycle elections are held outside the regular elections calendar. General elections take place in the same year in Nigeria as part of the country's...



Engaging the Census Preparation to Mitigate Post-Census Tensions
Barring the last-minute suspension of Nigeria's housing and population census, scheduled to start on 3rd May and end on 7th May 2023, the country would...