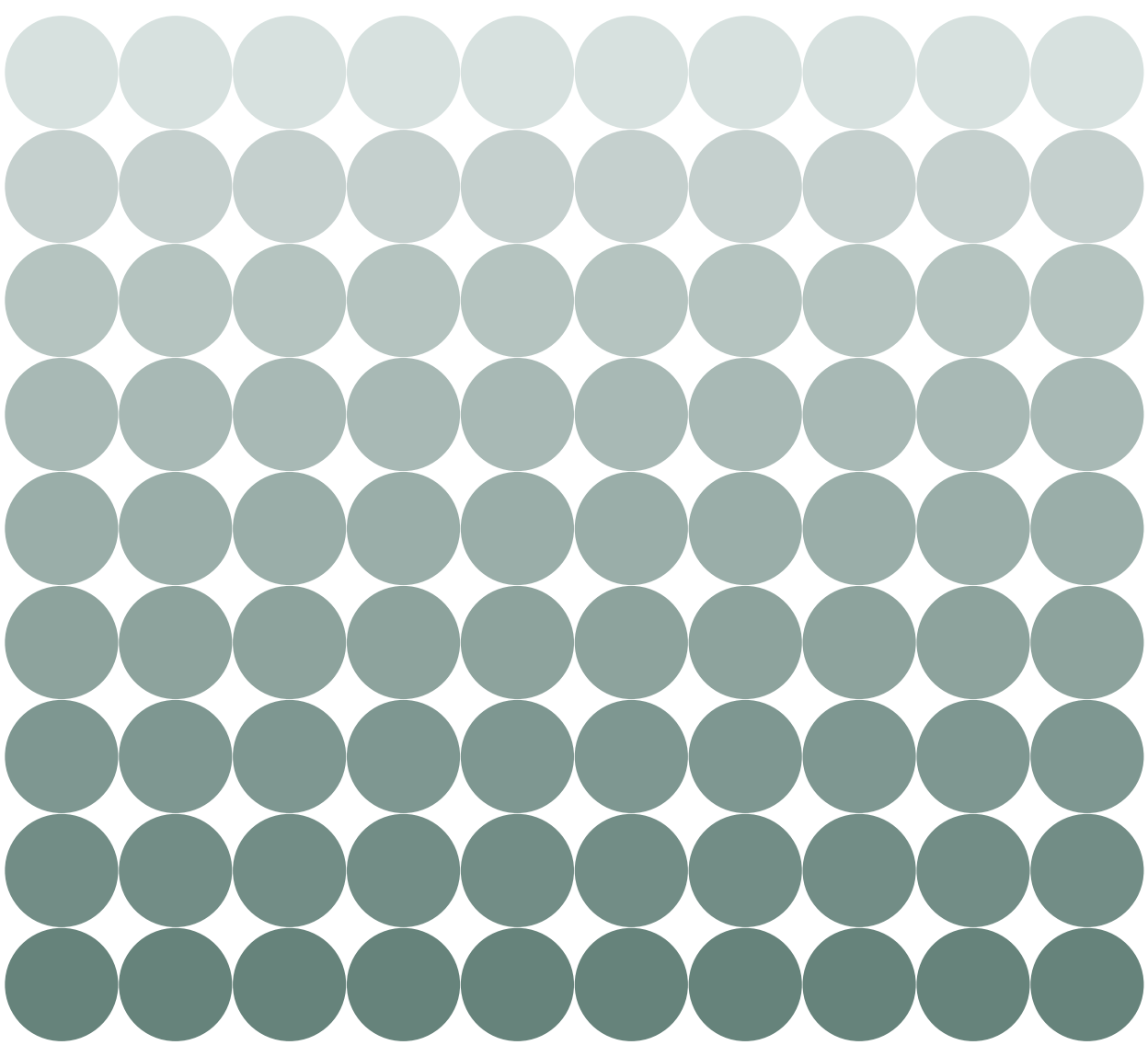


CONFLICT MEDIATION AND PEACEBUILDING IN THE SAHEL

The Role of Maghreb Countries
in an African Framework

VIRGINIE BAUDAIS, AMAL BOURHROUS
AND DYLAN O'DRISCOLL



STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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**STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL
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Preface

Conflict dynamics in the Sahel are complex. The region faces a multidimensional crisis that includes the proliferation of terrorist groups, criminal networks, environmental pressures, state weaknesses and severe governance problems. In addition to this internal context, the Sahel crisis has been affected by external factors, such as the fall of Muammar Gaddafi and the civil war in Libya. Its deeper causes can be found in the structural factors of fragility in the sociopolitical dynamics of internal divisions, serial uprisings and weak states. Having started as a largely Malian conflict, the crisis now affects the whole Sahel region and, despite the deployment of military and security operations, it continues to get worse. A new approach is needed.

The authors of this Policy Paper—Virginie Baudais, Amal Bourhrous and Dylan O’Driscoll—identify regionally and locally driven solutions as one such way to support development and promote peace. They highlight how stronger involvement of the Maghreb countries that share borders with the crisis-affected countries to their south could be a critical factor in building the foundations of stability and starting to meet longer-term development objectives. Given their engagement with Sahel crises in the past and the multiple linkages that connect the two regions, the role of these countries—and especially Algeria and Morocco—could be pivotal. Despite challenges, African-led initiatives are perceived to be more legitimate and to have a deeper understanding of local contexts. The authors thus recommend that the African Union, with its emphasis on endeavouring to bring ‘African solutions to African problems’, provides the framework for coordinated action in the Sahel.

This paper offers a fresh assessment of the situation in the Sahel in the context of relations with neighbouring Maghreb countries. The authors’ insightful analysis and recommendations will be of interest to policymakers in Africa, in Europe and elsewhere, as well as to local actors and other stakeholders involved in mediation and peacebuilding efforts in the Sahel.

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The authors
Stockholm, December 2020

Summary

The Sahel and the Maghreb are connected through multiple human, cultural, religious and economic linkages. These cross-regional connections mean that instability in one part of the Maghreb–Sahel region can have a substantial impact on other parts. At the same time, these connections also highlight the important role that Maghreb countries can play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Sahel. Indeed, although the geopolitical rivalries in the Maghreb have often created conditions for instability in the Sahel, Maghreb states remain indispensable for reaching a solution to the Sahel crisis and they can contribute much to conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

The Sahel crisis started as a largely Malian conflict related to the Tuareg question and to grievances about the marginalization of populations in the northern regions of Mali (and Niger). It has subsequently evolved to become a multidimensional regional crisis that involves the proliferation of terrorist groups, criminal networks, state weakness and severe governance problems. As conflict dynamics in the Sahel have become more complex, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive approach that addresses questions related to state capacity, violent extremism, environmental challenges and socio-economic problems. Many of these challenges have a regional dimension and can only be addressed at the regional level. In addition, any attempt to solve the crisis has to take into account the regional interdependencies of the Sahel and the Maghreb and the unique ways in which actors in the region engage with the conflicts depending on their particular perceptions, interests, positions and relations with each other.

Based on its historical involvement in the Sahel, Algeria has played a leadership role in mediation processes. Morocco's increasing influence in the region could also help support peacebuilding efforts. However, the domestic problems of Maghreb states and the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco may hinder their ability to have a positive influence in the Sahel unless their engagement takes place in the context of a wider African framework—in particular through the African Union (AU)—and with the support of other regional and international actors.

Currently, numerous actors are involved in peacebuilding in the Sahel, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the AU, the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel), the United Nations, the European Union (EU), Algeria and France. They operate through various mechanisms, with different agendas and approaches, which necessarily creates problems of coordination and overlap. A coordinated, inclusive, and African-led approach is needed that integrates relevant parties; otherwise, there is a risk that peacebuilding efforts will be undermined by excluded actors that seek to pursue their own agendas through other frameworks. With adequate support from international actors, the AU has the potential to provide such a framework and attempt to reconcile competing initiatives in ways that place the needs and the security of local populations at the centre of peacebuilding processes. This would require a coordinated regional strategy that not only focuses on mediation at the national level but also integrates local level mediation and community-level peacebuilding.

Abbreviations

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
ATNMC	Alliance Touarègue du Nord-Mali pour le Changement (Tuareg Alliance of North Mali for Change)
AU	African Union
CEMOC	Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint (Joint Operational Staff Committee)
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel–Saharan States (from a transliteration of the initial letters of Sahel, س, and Sahara, ص, in Arabic)
CMA	Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (Coordination of Azawad Movements)
CNSP	Comité national pour le salut du peuple (National Committee for the Salvation of the People, of Mali)
CNT	Conseil national de transition (National Transition Council, of Mali)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
EUCAP Sahel Mali	European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali
EUCAP Sahel Niger	European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger
EUTM Mali	European Union Training Mission in Mali
FC-G5S	Force conjointe du G5 Sahel (G5 Sahel Joint Force)
G5 Sahel	Group of Five for the Sahel
HCUA	Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad (High Council for the Unity of Azawad)
JNIM	Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (Support Group for Islam and Muslims)
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MISAHHEL	African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel
MNLA	Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)
MUJAO	Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa)
OAU	Organization of African Unity
ORA	Organisation de la Résistance Armée (Armed Resistance Organization)
POC	Protection of civilians
UN	United Nations
UNOWAS	UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel

1. Introduction

The Maghreb and the Sahel have historically been connected through strong human, cultural, economic and political linkages. In many ways, they constitute a regional system, in the sense that whatever happens in one part of the system affects the other parts.¹ Moreover, for a long time the Maghreb countries have competed for regional influence and leadership in the Sahel and have played a role in mediation and peace processes in the context of recurring Tuareg rebellions in Mali and Niger. These cross-regional linkages and interests mean that no conflict in the Sahel can be examined in isolation from the Maghreb, and that the countries of the Maghreb have an important role to play in stabilizing the situation in Sahel. Given these historical connections, this Policy Paper examines the role that Maghreb actors could and should play in building peace in the Sahel, taking into consideration the geopolitical dynamics in the Maghreb.²

Two countries in particular—Algeria and Libya—have played prominent, albeit different, roles in the Sahel. After independence in 1962, Algeria adopted an active foreign policy supporting anti-colonial nationalist movements and non-aligned countries against Western economic and political domination. It not only supported its three neighbours to the south—Mauritania, Mali and Niger—but also participated in various international forums, such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the League of Arab States. Libya's foreign policy was based on its own unique brand of pan-Africanism and socialism. Under the rule of Muammar Gaddafi, its political role was coupled with massive economic and financial investments in West African and Sahelian countries.³ However, Libya's attempts to reinforce the position of Africa at the international level was closely associated with its frequent interference in the internal affairs of neighbours and its contribution to instability through its support of rebel movements.⁴ In contrast, Morocco's presence at the African level diminished after its withdrawal from the OAU in 1984, despite having been active in supporting national liberation through the Casablanca Group, which preceded the OAU. It was not until the accession to power of king Mohammed VI in 1999 that Morocco's engagement with African countries was given a new impetus, with a particular emphasis put on economic relations and religious diplomacy.⁵

¹ Lounnas, D., *The Libyan Security Continuum: The Impact of the Libyan Crisis on the North African/Sahelian Regional System*, Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture (MENARA) Working Paper no. 15 (Istituto Affari Internazionali: Rome, Oct. 2018).

² Boukhars, A., 'Reassessing the power of regional security providers: The case of Algeria and Morocco', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2019), pp. 242–60.

³ Larémont, R. R., 'After the fall of Qaddafi: Political, economic, and security consequences for Libya, Mali, Niger, and Algeria', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2013), article 29.

⁴ Sour, L., 'The Algerian strategy in African Sahel: Towards a regional security architecture', *Madarate Siyasiya* [Political Orbits], vol. 2, no. 3 (Dec. 2018), pp. 160–84.

⁵ Barre, A., 'Les nouveaux axes de la diplomatie marocaine' [The new axes of Moroccan diplomacy], eds M. Mokhefi and A. Antil, *Le Maghreb et son sud: Vers des liens renouvelés* [The Maghreb and its South: Towards renewed links] (CNRS Éditions: Paris, 2012), pp. 41–58.

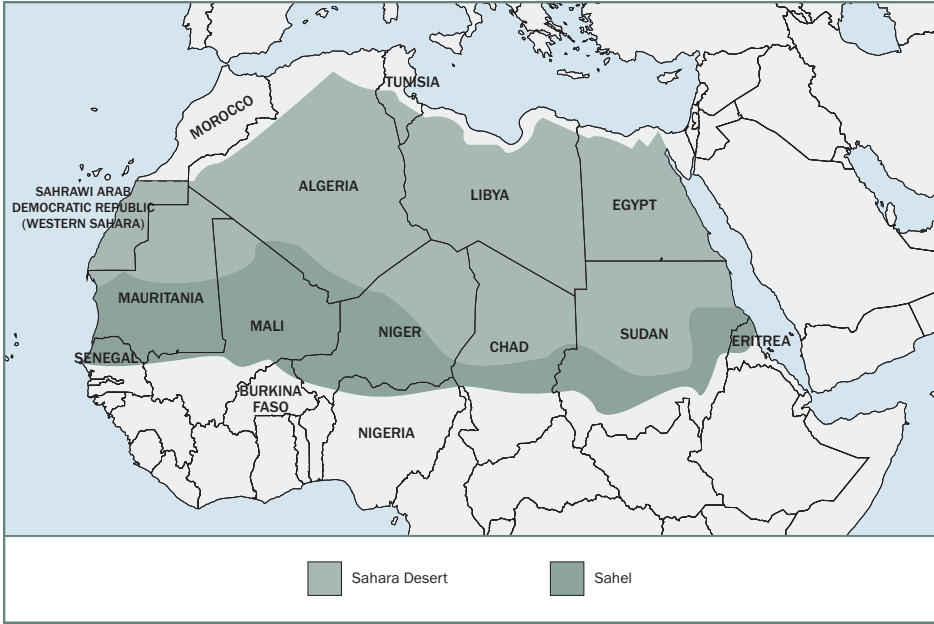


Figure 1.1. Map of the Maghreb and the Sahel

As part of the Maghreb–Sahel regional system, recent events in Maghreb states have had, and continue to have, an important impact in the Sahel. In particular, the civil war in Algeria during the 1990s, the political turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and the fall of Gaddafi and the subsequent protracted civil war in Libya have all contributed to instability in the Sahel. This includes, for example, the expansion into northern Mali and other parts of the Sahel of various armed groups. These include al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which developed from remnants of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat, GSPC) after it had been driven out of Algeria. The fall of Gaddafi not only resulted in the return south of heavily equipped and well-trained Tuareg ex-combatants from their Libyan exile but has also deprived Sahel countries of important economic resources through the Libyan Investment Authority (e.g. interest-free loans to Niger).

Reciprocally, since 2011–12 the continued deterioration of the situation in the Sahel has been a major concern for the neighbouring Maghreb countries. With the exceptions of Algeria and Morocco, which tightly control their borders, states in the region have trouble securing their borders, which remain porous to terrorist groups and organized criminal networks, especially after the collapse of the state in Libya. Moreover, the fact that conflict and violence are no longer confined to the northern regions of the Sahel but have now spread to central Mali and to Niger and Burkina Faso—through the Liptako-Gourma cross-border area (see figure 1.1)—poses a considerable challenge to broader security in the Maghreb–Sahel space as a whole. The risk that insecurity will spread is increased

by unaddressed governance issues in the countries of the region, state weakness and escalating inter-communal tensions.

Because of the transnational character of the threats in the Sahel and given strategic interests in the region, several international actors have been operating in the Sahel through various peace and security or military frameworks. These started in December 2012 with the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).⁶ This was replaced in April 2013 by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).⁷ The French-led Operation Serval of 2013–14 ran in parallel and was then replaced in August 2014 by Operation Barkhane. They were joined by the European Union (EU) Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) established in January 2013 and officially launched in February 2013, then the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) in February 2014 and the EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) in April 2014, alongside the earlier EU Capacity Building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) of February 2012.⁸ In addition to these civilian missions to train police and security forces and the military and counterterrorism operations, political frameworks have also been established, such as the African Union (AU) Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) in August 2013, and the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

Despite the massive human and material resources that have been invested in the stabilization of the Sahel, the situation has barely improved. While other foreign actors, especially the EU and its member states, are also anxious about the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel—in particular, the increase in terrorist activity and the movements of migrants and refugees that the insecurity in the region spurs—the countries of the Maghreb are most immediately affected by the violence and instability along their borders.

Although the rivalries (both past and present) between Maghreb states often contribute to instability in the Sahel, Maghreb countries nonetheless remain indispensable for reaching a solution to the crisis. They can contribute much to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Sahel. The collapse of the state and the civil war in Libya have debilitated a once pivotal and influential actor in the region. This has left Algeria and Morocco rivalling each other as regional powers, mobilizing their respective diplomatic, political and economic resources to exert influence in the Sahel.⁹ While Morocco has increased its religious and economic reach into Sahel countries through investments in a variety of sectors, Algeria has largely focused on security, owing to its experience in facilitating peace processes and agreements in the region and to the historical and social connections between

⁶ UN Security Council Resolution 2085, 20 Dec. 2012.

⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 2100, 25 Apr. 2013.

⁸ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force*, Africa Report no. 258 (ICG: Brussels, 12 Dec. 2017).

⁹ Boukhars (note 2); and Chena, S., 'Alger et Rabat à Bamako' [Algiers and Rabat in Bamako], *Afkar/Idées*, no. 46 (summer 2015).

the populations of southern Algeria and northern Mali.¹⁰ Tunisia does not share borders with Sahel countries, and it does not share its Maghreb neighbours' aspirations to regional influence. Its engagement with the Sahel crisis in particular has been limited. Moreover, Tunisia's fragile transition in the aftermath of the Arab Spring has meant greater focus on domestic questions and a rather modest African policy.¹¹

This Policy Paper argues that the situation in the Sahel cannot be analysed without paying greater attention to the neighbouring Maghreb countries, Algeria, Libya and Morocco. Based on its historical involvement in the region, Algeria is particularly well placed to play a leadership role, while Morocco's increasing influence in the region could also help support peacebuilding efforts. However, the domestic problems of Maghreb states and the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco may hinder their ability to have a positive influence unless their engagement is encouraged and supported by regional organizations, especially the AU. Currently, the myriad of peacebuilding initiatives and frameworks in the Sahel need better coordination of their approaches and actions. Nonetheless, local mediation and peacebuilding activities are also needed to better address and respond to the specific needs of the Sahelian populations through governance, economic and social reforms. Crises in the Sahel are built on local and regional issues and responses must also take account of these specific challenges.

This Policy Paper first provides a historical background on the conflicts in Mali and Niger, both of which have resulted from a convergence of factors (chapter 2). It then goes on to examine the historical relationship between countries of the Maghreb and those of the Sahel to highlight the interdependencies of the two regions and the importance of the Maghreb's participation in regional peacebuilding in the Sahel (chapter 3). The paper then reviews the current architecture for peacebuilding and peacekeeping in the Sahel (chapter 4) and shows how the multiplicity of actors and initiatives has led to a highly crowded peacebuilding space in which the probability of overlap and lack of coordination is high. It then examines how this approach can be adjusted for the best chance of success (chapter 5). Finally, the paper concludes with policy recommendations (chapter 6).

¹⁰ Sour (note 4).

¹¹ Augé, B., 'La politique africaine de la Tunisie: Entre opportunisme et opportunités non exploitées' [Tunisia's African policy: Between opportunism and untapped opportunities], *L'Afrique en questions* no. 49, Institut Français des Relations Internationales, 24 July 2019.

2. The crisis in the Sahel: From domestic rebellions to regional destabilization

The Tuareg question and the marginalization of the northern regions of Mali and Niger

Since each achieved independence in 1960, Mali and Niger have faced several rebellions by Tuareg movements in their northern regions. The Tuareg (who call themselves Kel Tamasheq) have traditionally been a nomadic pastoralist people who straddle the state borders, drawn up by colonial powers, that have split Tuareg and Arabs between Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali and Niger. Northern populations have historically moved across the Sahel–Saharan space, even though colonial rule constrained their geographical and social mobility.¹² While many Tuareg have increasingly adopted a sedentary way of life, others continue to consider the Sahel–Saharan space as their own territory of mobility, despite state borders and control.¹³ Indeed, far from limiting contacts, national borders fail to impede cross-border links that continue to open up multiple opportunities, in terms of trade and resources, based on the common cultural, linguistic and family relations that make Tuareg populations feel closer to Tuareg in other countries than to their compatriots.¹⁴

In Mali and Niger, Tuareg populations have repeatedly denounced their marginalization, each state's excessive centralization of power and the lack of economic development in the northern regions. Together, these have led to the deterioration of their living conditions, especially given their shrinking area of mobility. Since the 1960s, environmental fragility, in the form of droughts and famines, has exacerbated the frustrations of Tuareg communities and the feeling of being neglected by their respective governments. As a result, many Tuareg from Mali and Niger have abandoned pastoralism to seek employment in other sectors and have migrated to more prosperous Libya (during the Gaddafi era) and Algeria. Gaddafi's Tuareg-friendly policy encouraged many to move and settle in Libya, where economic opportunities were more abundant and where identity cards and even Libyan citizenship were granted.¹⁵ Large numbers of Tuareg have thus been integrated into Libya's labour market, and many joined the Islamic Legion—Gaddafi's army of mercenaries—which fought in Chad, Lebanon and Sudan.¹⁶

¹² Emmanuel, G., *Touaregs du Niger: Le destin d'un mythe* [Tuareg of Niger: The fate of a myth] (Karthala: Paris, 1999).

¹³ Badi, D., *Les relations des Touaregs aux Etats: Le cas de l'Algérie et de la Libye* [The relations of the Tuareg to states: The case of Algeria and Libya] (Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI): Paris, 2010).

¹⁴ Scheele, J., 'Tribus, États et fraude: La région frontalière algéro-malienne' [Tribes, states and smuggling: The border between Algeria and Mali], *Etudes Rurales*, vol. 184, no. 2 (Jul.–Dec. 2009), pp. 79–94.

¹⁵ Kohl, I., 'Libya, the "Europe of Ishumar": Between losing and reinventing tradition', eds A. Fischer and I. Kohl, *Tuareg Society Within a Globalized World: Saharan Life in Transition* (I.B. Tauris: London, 2010), pp. 143–54.

¹⁶ Ronen, Y., 'Libya, the Tuareg and Mali on the eve of the "Arab Spring" and its aftermath: An anatomy of changed relations', *Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4 (2013), pp. 544–59.

Close relations between Gaddafi's Libya and the Tuareg of Mali and Niger have constituted a factor of both stability and instability in the Sahel region. In Libya, the Tuareg not only cultivated nationalist and revolutionary ambitions, but they also acquired military training and experience.¹⁷ The conditions of their return to their countries of origin exacerbated existing tensions with the central governments of Mali and Niger. While the Nigerien Government encouraged Tuareg to return to Niger in 1989, they eventually ended up in refugee camps, living in difficult conditions. This aggravated discontent and created conditions for instability and revolt. Whereas contacts between the different Tuareg communities were limited before 1980, exile has reinforced a strong feeling of injustice, and exclusion from their respective states has strengthened community sentiment based on a common language and social ties.¹⁸

In the early 1990s, rebellions in Mali and Niger were triggered in part by the precarious economic and social situation and the return and marginalization of exiles from Algeria and Libya—some of whom had served in Gaddafi's Islamic Legion.¹⁹ Unresolved problems and intra-Tuareg tensions resulted in the resumption of violence and the eruption of the third Tuareg rebellion of 2006–2009 in Niger and Mali.²⁰

The fall of the Libyan leader and the collapse of the state in 2011 deprived the Tuareg of protection and of important economic support. The Tuareg's association with Gaddafi's regime meant that they became frequent targets when his regime collapsed.²¹ The dynamics of this unrest have been largely reminiscent of the 1990s rebellions in that former Tuareg fighters left Libya for Mali and Niger, bringing with them weapons and arms from Libya's stockpile that triggered another round of violence in the Sahel.²² The governments of Mali and Niger managed the return of the ex-combatants differently: Niger implemented a disarmament programme, but Mali was unable to do so. In comparison to the unrest during the early Tuareg rebellions, the scale of the recent crises has escalated, and the crisis in Mali combined with the proliferation of armed groups and jihadist groups has precipitated the breakdown of the security situation across the Sahel region.²³

¹⁷ Lecocq, B., *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali* (Brill: Leiden, 2010).

¹⁸ Bourgeot, A., 'Les rébellions touarègues, une cause perdue?' [The Tuareg rebellions: A lost cause?], *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 180 (1996), pp. 99–115.

¹⁹ Djibo, M., 'Rébellion touarègue et question saharienne au Niger' [Tuareg rebellion and the Saharan question in Niger], *Autrepart*, no. 23 (2002), pp. 135–56.

²⁰ Lecocq (note 17).

²¹ Boisselet, P., 'Des centaines de combattants touaregs pro-Kadhafi rentrent au Niger et au Mali' [Hundreds of pro-Gaddafi Tuareg fighters return to Niger and Mali], *Jeune Afrique*, 30 Aug 2011.

²² Damone, É., 'Mali: Les responsabilités (ou pas) de la France' [Mali: The responsibilities (or not) of France], *Outre-Terre*, nos 33–34 (2012), pp. 491–501, pp. 491–92.

²³ Shaw, S., 'Fallout in the Sahel: The geographic spread of conflict from Libya to Mali', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2013), pp. 199–210.

From the Malian crisis to the Sahel breakdown

The current conflict in Mali cannot be reduced to its Tuareg dimension alone.²⁴ Rather, a variety of factors have converged to create a tremendously complex situation of instability that affects the western Sahel region as a whole. In a context already marked by fragility and vulnerability, the rise of AQIM, present in northern Mali since 2003, and the increase in the number of armed and radicalized groups have further contributed to instability and violence in the region. The situation has also been exacerbated by the circulation of arms and other trafficking activities (involving e.g. drugs, cigarettes and humans). This has created insecurity, hindered economic development and expanded the zone of lawlessness in a region where states struggle to impose their authority and suffer from a lack of capacity and an uneven territorial presence.

Prior to 2012, Tuareg rebellions were guided by a secular ideology and fought against the Malian and the Nigerien states to demand political inclusion and economic and social development. In 2010 the National Movement of Azawad (Mouvement national de l'Azawad, MNA) demanded greater autonomy for the Azawad region (comprising the Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal regions of Mali). In April 2012 it unilaterally declared the independence of Azawad when it became the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad, MNLA).²⁵ Since then, however, a number of radicalized Islamist movements have begun to operate in the northern regions of Mali and Niger.²⁶

Events of 2012–13 threatened the existence of the Malian state. The weak capacity of the Malian authorities gave criminal and violent extremist groups the opportunity to extend their influence and increase their financial resources (e.g. through the participation of some leaders in negotiations for the release of hostages and related ransoms). The complicity of some Malian officials in various forms of trafficking, including high-ranking military officers, customs officers and even the president's close entourage, further contributed to the government's loss of credibility and resulted in its capacity to restore sovereignty being questioned.²⁷ The deterioration of the situation, the collapse of the army in the north, and protests in Bamako against the poor conditions facing soldiers led to the overthrow of President Amadou Toumani Touré on 22 March 2012. He was replaced by a transitional government and an interim president, Dioncounda Traoré. The military strength of the groups operating in the north was revealed in March and April 2012 when the MNLA, supported by Islamist groups, took control of the cities of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. On 6 April the MNLA tried to force the independence

²⁴ Pezard, S. and Shurkin M., *Achieving Peace in Northern Mali: Past Agreements, Local Conflicts, and the Prospects for a Durable Settlement* (RAND Corporation: Santa Monica, CA, 2015).

²⁵ Chebli D., 'From the MNA to the MNLA: The shift to armed struggle', Network of Researchers in International Affairs (NORIA), 10 June 2014.

²⁶ Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), 'Ansar Dine', Mapping Militant Organizations, Stanford University, July 2018.

²⁷ Lacher, W., *Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region*, Carnegie Papers (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington, DC, Sep. 2012), p. 19.

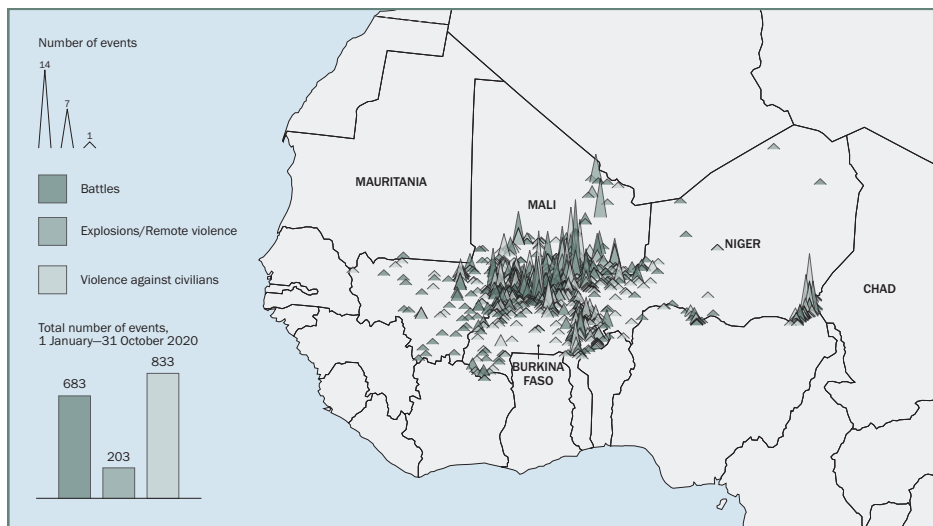


Figure 2.1. Number of battles, explosions and incidents of violence against civilians, 1 January 2019–31 October 2020

Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘Regional overview: Africa’, 7 Nov. 2020.

of these regions as Azawad.²⁸ The Islamist groups proved to be more powerful than their secular ally. AQIM and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mouvement pour l’unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l’Ouest, MUJAO) rapidly evicted the MNLA from Timbuktu and Gao, while Ansar Dine evicted the MNLA from Kidal. Then, in January 2013, after several months of violent clashes in the north—when Ansar Dine had joined forces with AQIM and MUJAO against the MNLA—France launched Operation Serval to stop the extremist groups’ offensive, at the request of the transitional Malian Government and under the authority of a UN Security Council resolution.²⁹

As part of international efforts to restore Malian territorial integrity, negotiations started in Ouagadougou, first mediated by the UN and Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré as the ECOWAS mediator. A ceasefire and a preliminary peace agreement were signed on 18 June 2013 between the transitional Malian Government on one side and, on the other, the MNLA and the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (Haut Conseil pour l’Unité de l’Azawad, HCUA, created in May 2013).³⁰ The agreement opposed the partition of the country and aimed to facilitate the return of the state, its administration and the army to northern Mali; to prepare the ground for the organization of presidential and legislative elections; to

²⁸ Bencherif, A. and Campana, A., ‘Alliances of convenience: Assessing the dynamics of the Malian insurgency’, *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2016), pp. 115–134.

²⁹ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Mali: Sécuriser, dialoguer et réformer en profondeur* [Mali: Security, dialogue and meaningful reform], Africa Report no. 201 (ICG: Brussels, 11 Apr. 2013).

³⁰ Accord préliminaire à l’élection présidentielle et aux pourparlers inclusifs de paix au Mali (Accord préliminaire de Ouagadougou) [Preliminary Agreement for Presidential Elections and Inclusive Peace Talks in Mali (Preliminary Ouagadougou Agreement)], 18 June 2013.

end the hostilities and preserve the ceasefire; and to maintain armed combatants in cantonment pending a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. The implementation of the agreement was to be monitored by a joint technical security commission and supervised by MINUSMA with the assistance of Operation Serval.³¹ The newly elected Malian president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, organized two major conferences on a nationwide decentralization reform and the situation in the north, but he deliberately delayed the political phase of the peace agreement—negotiations on a final peace agreement that were supposed to begin within 60 days of the installation of the new government—and instead pursued a military option, resulting in armed clashes.³²

The defeat of the Malian Army in Kidal in May 2014 during a visit by the prime minister, Moussa Mara, and then the deposition of Burkinabe President Compaoré on 31 October paved the way for President Keïta to question the mediation of ECOWAS, as represented by Compaoré. He finally succeeded in imposing Algeria as mediator.³³ The Malian Government had always criticized Compaoré's support for the MNLA, which had fallback bases within Burkina Faso.³⁴ The rivalry between Algeria and Morocco was also visible, with Morocco supporting the MNLA while Algeria prioritized the dialogue with the Malian Government. Algeria considered northern Mali to be within its sphere of influence and, as leading mediator in the Malian conflict, it managed to place itself at the forefront of the peace negotiations.³⁵ The inter-Malian dialogue, launched in July 2014, resulted in June 2015 in the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali signed by the Malian Government, the Coordination of Azawad Movements (Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, CMA)—which consisted of the MNLA, the HCUA and Arab Movement of Azawad (Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad, MAA)—and the Platform—composed of groups loyal to the Malian Government.³⁶

The implementation of the 2015 agreement has been slow, despite the considerable support—through mediation and militarily—of the international community.³⁷ While the military situation in the north has stabilized, the situation in central Mali (Segu and Mopti regions) has deteriorated. New jihadist groups emerged, such as Katibat Macina led by Amadou Kouffa, which operated in the Niger delta

³¹ Bombande, E. and van Tuijl, P., 'In Mali, peace and reconciliation is a balancing act', Global Observatory, International Peace Institute, 7 Feb. 2014.

³² Boutellis, A. and Zahar, M.-J., *A Process in Search of Peace: Lessons from the Inter-Malian Agreement* (International Peace Institute: New York, June 2017), p. 11; and Pezard and Shurkin (note 24), chapter 2.

³³ Tiassou, K., 'La médiation a du plomb dans l'aile au Mali' [Mediation is in bad shape in Mali], *Deutsche Welle*, 1 July 2014.

³⁴ Carayol, R., 'Crise malienne : Algérie, Burkina, Maroc . . . un médiateur peut en cacher deux autres' [Malian crisis: Algeria, Burkina, Morocco . . . one mediator can conceal two others], *Jeune Afrique*, 19 Feb. 2014.

³⁵ Tiassou (note 33).

³⁶ Accord Pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Mali Issu du Processus d'Alger [Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from the Algiers Process], 20 June 2015.

³⁷ Boutellis, A. and Zahar, M.-J., 'Mali two years after the Bamako Agreement, what peace is there to keep?', Global Observatory, International Peace Institute, 22 June 2017; and Carter Center, *Observations sur la mise en œuvre de l'Accord pour la paix et la réconciliation au Mali, issu du processus d'Alger: Évaluation de l'année 2019* [Observations on the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers Process: Assessment of the year 2019] (Carter Center: Atlanta, GA, Jan. 2020).

and built its claims on the frustration and grievances of Fulani communities. In 2017 Katibat Macina merged with Ansar Dine, al-Murabitoun and the Sahara branch of AQIM to create Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM, Support Group for Islam and Muslims) led by Iyad ag Ghaly, the leader of Ansar Dine.³⁸ These developments have transformed the Liptako-Gourma region into the epicentre of violence of the Sahel and have made Mali's neighbours Burkina Faso and Niger a regular target of various terrorist groups (see figure 2.1).³⁹ Violence is directed against civilian populations, local authorities, civil servants, including teachers, and national security forces. Armed groups are kidnapping or killing traditional, religious and community leaders suspected of collaborating with the state. This strategy aims to discourage local populations from cooperating with the state and force them to collaborate with the armed groups, which destroys traditional community ties.⁴⁰

In addition to the prevailing insecurity in the Sahel, rampant corruption and bad governance have also fuelled broader contestation of the regime in Mali. After weeks of popular mobilization led by the 5 June Movement–Rally of Patriotic Forces (Mouvement du 5 juin–Rassemblement des forces patriotiques, M5-RPF)—a coalition that denounced the manipulation of the results of the April 2020 legislative elections, the corruption of the regime and the deterioration of the situation in the country—President Keïta was removed from power by a military coup staged by high-ranking officers on 18 August 2020.⁴¹

While the implementation of the peace agreement remains the strategic goal of the Malian Government and the international mediators, the country's new military rulers have expressed their willingness to talk to all Malians, including the leaders of groups that have not signed a peace agreement such as Kouffa and ag Ghaly. This approach echoes President Keïta's earlier willingness to open dialogue with jihadist groups in the JNIM.⁴²

In contrast to the situation before 2012, when it was still possible to negotiate an agreement with the Tuareg rebellion within the framework of the country's territorial integrity, the current situation has become so complex that any attempt at conflict resolution would necessarily need to go beyond Mali's national context and take into account the regional dimensions of the crisis. The ongoing struggle against the various radicalized and armed groups operating in the Liptako-Gourma region transcends Mali's territory and can only be addressed at a regional level.⁴³

³⁸ Tobie, A., 'Central Mali: Violence, local perspectives and diverging narratives', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2017/5, Dec. 2017.

³⁹ Lebovich, A., 'Mapping armed groups in Mali and the Sahel', European Council on Foreign Relations, May 2019.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, 'Mali: Army, UN fail to stop massacre, second militia attack on Ogossagou village killed at least 35', 18 Mar. 2020.

⁴¹ Baudais, V. and Chauzal, G., 'Mali's transition: High expectations and little time', WritePeace blog, SIPRI, 4 Sep. 2020.

⁴² Roger, B., 'Au Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta prêt au dialogue avec les jihadistes, au risque de négocier avec le diable' [In Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta is ready for dialogue with jihadists, at the risk of negotiating with the devil], *Jeune Afrique*, 25 Feb. 2020.

⁴³ Boutellis and Zahar (note 37).

3. The Maghreb and the Sahel

The Maghreb and the Sahel are highly interrelated regions. Their countries share multiple human, cultural, religious and economic connections, giving Maghreb states an advantageous position in conflict resolution in the Sahel. Building on these cross-regional linkages, Algeria and Libya have been active in mediation processes since the early Tuareg rebellions and, until the fall of Gaddafi, were the primary security actors in the Sahel even as their own interests occasionally created instability.

However, the involvement of Maghreb states inevitably bears the traces of the region's unique geopolitical dynamics and brings into the Sahel the rivalries between Maghreb countries and their diverging national interests. Algeria's role and influence in the Sahel in general had to contend with competition from Libya under Gaddafi.⁴⁴ Since his fall, and with Morocco's strategic shift towards the African continent, this competition for regional leadership and influence in the Sahel has been replaced by the hostile rivalry between Algeria and Morocco. Nonetheless, with an appropriate framework—which is most likely to be provided by the AU—the diplomatic capital and the competence of Maghreb states can still be deployed in the service of conflict resolution.

This chapter provides an overview of the multilevel linkages between the two regions and describes the engagement of Maghreb countries with the Sahel conflicts in the past. These cross-regional ties demonstrate the importance of Maghreb countries for security and stability in the Sahel and reveal the role that Maghreb actors have to play in any peacebuilding initiative in the Sahel.

Connections between the Maghreb and the Sahel

Transnational mobility and migration

The transformation of Tuareg society over the past few decades has resulted in the emergence of new trends in transnational mobility and trade. The Sahel–Sahara space has become a transnational space of exchange for the Tuareg: they appropriate it and make use of it despite state borders and control and they engage in various types of informal transborder activity that often entangle legal and illegal activities.⁴⁵ The smuggling of food products, diesel and other commodities as well as the transportation of migrants have long been important parts of transborder economic activity. Informal trade flourishes in the borderland between Algeria and Mali and across the border between Libya and Niger. The northern regions of Mali and Niger have long depended on goods and commodities smuggled from Algeria and Libya, which are cheaper than local products. With the deterioration of the security situation in the Sahel and the emergence of violent extremist

⁴⁴ Ronen (note 16), p. 552.

⁴⁵ Kohl, I., 'Afrod, le business touareg avec la frontière: Nouvelles conditions et nouveaux défis' [*Afrod, the Tuareg's business with the border: New conditions and challenges*], *Politique Africaine*, no. 132 (2013), pp. 139–59.

groups and other non-state actors, the level of criminality in the area has reached unprecedented levels, as the network of routes connecting the Maghreb and the Sahel have increasingly been used for other types of criminal activity, including trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans. These transnational organized criminal networks have often served to finance terrorist activities.⁴⁶ The whole local economy has been greatly affected, including tourism which was flourishing in central Mali (e.g. Timbuktu and Bandiagara) and northern Niger (e.g. Agadez and the desert). Insecurity has become a major impediment to socio-economic activity in the region, including trade, herding and agriculture, which has forced the inhabitants to find other means of subsistence including in the service of armed groups and community defence militias.

The Sahel–Saharan space is also criss-crossed by routes followed by migrants from sub-Saharan Africa hoping to reach Europe.⁴⁷ Many migrants reach Algeria across its border with Niger, and some then cross into Morocco.⁴⁸ The influx of migrants has given Maghreb countries a role in securing the EU’s external borders.⁴⁹ As a result, Algeria and Morocco have both routinely expelled clandestine migrants without due process to Mali and Niger.⁵⁰ While Morocco has primarily been a transit country in the past, it has increasingly become a destination and an immigration country. In addition to clandestine migrants, sub-Saharan African students represent the majority of foreign students in Morocco.⁵¹ This trend is closely related to the fact that education has been a key aspect of Morocco’s South–South cooperation efforts, with the signature of several bilateral agreements between Morocco and sub-Saharan African countries.⁵²

Economic connections

In addition to informal transborder economic exchanges, formal economic relations between the states of the Maghreb and the Sahel have increased over the past decades. Prior to the fall of Gaddafi, Libya had a considerable economic influence in the Sahel. It was an appealing destination for migrant workers from

⁴⁶ Ben Yahia, J. et al., *Transnational Organized Crime and Political Actors in the Maghreb and Sahel*, Mediterranean Dialogue Series no. 17 (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: Berlin, Jan. 2019).

⁴⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC), *An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security* (OECD: Paris, 2014).

⁴⁸ Molenaar, F., ‘Conflict-sensitive and humane migration management in the Sahel’, Conflict Research Unit (CRU) Policy Brief, Clingendael–Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Dec. 2018.

⁴⁹ Brachet, J., Choplin, A. and Pliez, O., ‘Le Sahara entre espace de circulation et frontière migratoire’ [The Sahara between space of circulation and migratory frontier], *Hérodote*, no. 142 (2011), pp. 163–82.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Abused and Expelled: Ill-Treatment of Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Morocco* (HRW: New York, Feb. 2014); and European Council on Refugees and Exiles, ‘Algeria deports 25000 migrants to Niger’, 18 Jan. 2019.

⁵¹ Agence Marocaine de Coopération Internationale (AMCI), ‘Étudier au Maroc à Travers l’AMCI’ [Study in Morocco through the AMCI]; and Niandou, T., ‘Les étudiants subsahariens, nouveaux portraits de la présence étrangère au Maroc: L’exemple des Maliens de Fès’ [Sub-Saharan students, new portraits of the foreign presence in Morocco: The example of the Malians of Fez], eds N. Khrouz, and N. Lanza, *Migrants au Maroc: Cosmopolitisme, présence d’étrangers et transformations sociales* [Migrants in Morocco: Cosmopolitanism, the presence of foreigners and social transformations] (Centre Jacques-Berque: Rabat, 2015).

⁵² Agence Marocaine de Coopération Internationale (AMCI), ‘AMCI—réalisations: Éducation supérieure et formation technique’ [AMCI—achievements: Higher education and technical training], 31 Dec. 2016.

Sahel countries since it offered work opportunities and higher salaries than their home countries. In addition, for many years, these countries depended on economic assistance from Libya. Its large hydrocarbon revenues meant that Libya could provide financial assistance to its Sahel neighbours and use its many sovereign funds and investment portfolios to finance infrastructure projects and other economic ventures in various sectors.⁵³

Although Maghreb countries have traditionally focused on trade and economic relations with European partners, their economic relations with their southern neighbours have intensified in recent years. Maghreb states have thus concluded bilateral agreements with their southern neighbours to reinforce economic cooperation.⁵⁴

Since the accession of King Mohammed VI in 1999, Morocco has significantly stepped up its African foreign policy, which has become an important pillar of its diplomacy.⁵⁵ It considers the African continent as a space of 'strategic depth'.⁵⁶ As a result, King Mohammed VI has increased the number of official visits to strengthen relations with African neighbours, particularly in West Africa and the Sahel. These visits often include the signature of bilateral cooperation agreements.⁵⁷ Morocco's direct investments in Africa represented 60 per cent of its outward flows between 2003 and 2017, with 55 per cent for West Africa alone.⁵⁸ For example, Moroccan investments in Mali—some channelled through holding companies that are intricately connected to the state or the royal family—have targeted mining, banking and telecommunications, among other sectors.⁵⁹

Religious connections

For centuries, the Sahara has been crossed by trade routes connecting the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. The flourishing trans-Saharan trade has led to the rise of some cities as important centres, such as Sijilmasa in the Tafilalt oasis in Morocco and Timbuktu in Mali.⁶⁰ The spread of Islam in the region also contributed to the creation of religious connections between the Maghreb

⁵³ Adamczewski, A. et al., 'Investissements ou accaparements fonciers en Afrique? Les visions des paysans et de la société civile au Mali' [Investments or land grabbing in Africa? The visions of peasants and civil society in Mali], *Développement durable et territoires*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Dec. 2012).

⁵⁴ Dworkin, A., *A Return to Africa: Why North African States are Looking South*, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) Policy Brief no. 330 (ECFR: London, 3 July 2020).

⁵⁵ Messari, N., *Morocco's African Foreign Policy*, Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture (MENARA) Future Notes no. 12 (Istituto Affari Internazionali: Rome, June 2018).

⁵⁶ Medias 24, 'Le Roi: L'Afrique, prolongement naturel et profondeur stratégique du Maroc' [The King: Africa, natural extension and strategic depth of Morocco], 20 Aug. 2016.

⁵⁷ Dkhissi, M. et al., *Les relations Maroc-Afrique: Les voies d'une stratégie globale et renouvelée* [Morocco-Africa relations: Paths to a global and renewed strategy] (Institut Royal des Etudes Stratégiques (IRES): Rabat, Nov. 2012), p. 9.

⁵⁸ Oukessou, T. et al., *Développement des Entreprises Marocaines en Afrique: Réalité et Perspectives* [Development of Moroccan business in Africa: Reality and prospects] (Ministry of the Economy and Finance, Directorate of Studies and Financial Forecasting: Rabat, Nov. 2018), p. 17.

⁵⁹ Cohen, S. J., 'Mali's "Africa-only" phosphate mine built by Morocco', PhosphatePrice.com, 2 May 2014; Reuters, 'Moroccan bank in biggest Mali privatisation', 28 July 2008; and Reuters, 'Maroc Telecom to buy 51 pct of Mali's Sotelma', 8 July 2009.

⁶⁰ Lightfoot, D. R. and Miller, J. A., 'Sijilmasa: The rise and fall of a walled oasis in medieval Morocco', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 86, no. 1 (Mar. 1996), pp. 78–101.

and the Sahel with the establishment of intellectual and spiritual hubs, such as Timbuktu and Djenné in Mali and Agadez in Niger.⁶¹ The networks created by Sufi orders, particularly the Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya, have also contributed considerably to transnational connections between the Maghreb and the Sahel. For example, large numbers of disciples from Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and beyond travel to Fez in northern Morocco to visit the mausoleum of the spiritual founder of the Tijaniyya, Sheikh Ahmed Tijani (1735–1815). The Tijaniyya order owes its prominence in West Africa and the Sahel largely to Sheikh Ibrahim Niassé (1900–75), an influential Senegalese Sufi figure who established himself as the spiritual heir of Sheikh Tijani. The teachings of Sheikh Niassé are followed by a community that extends from Senegal to Sudan.⁶²

Capitalizing on the deep reach of Sufi networks, Morocco has considerably increased its soft power in West Africa and the Sahel. It has integrated religious diplomacy into its African foreign policy.⁶³ With the spread of Wahhabi Islam and the rise of extremist groups in many Sahel countries, Morocco has promoted its own brand of Sunni Maliki Islam with its Sufi tendencies as a moderate alternative to the more rigorous Wahhabi Islam. Thus, Morocco has become a destination for students of Islamic studies and has trained hundreds of Imams from Sahel countries.⁶⁴

Maghreb countries and the Sahel crisis: Diplomatic relations and conflict mediation

The rivalries between Maghreb countries have marked their political relations with the Sahel and their engagement with its crises. The competition between Algeria and Libya considerably affected both the conflict dynamics in the Sahel and the processes of mediation and peacebuilding. As Libya's role ebbed after the overthrow of Gaddafi and the eruption of the civil war, the space opened for Morocco to increasingly challenge Algeria's influence.

Morocco has acted mainly through economic and religious diplomacy (see above), rather than through heavy involvement in mediation and any focus on security. These latter domains have largely remained within Algeria's purview. However, both Algeria and Morocco have tried to raise their profile and influence in the Maghreb and Sahel regions by scoring diplomatic successes, with mediation in the Malian and Libyan crises becoming another proxy for their strained relations. In particular, Morocco's hosting of an inter-Libyan dialogue and its

⁶¹ Kane, O., *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 2016).

⁶² Gray, C., 'The rise of the Niassene Tijaniyya, 1875 to the present', eds O. Kane and J.-L. Triaud, *Islam et Islamismes au Sud du Sahara* [Islam and Islamisms to the south of the Sahara] (Karthala: Paris, 1998).

⁶³ Tadlaoui, G., 'Morocco's religious diplomacy in Africa', Policy Brief no. 196, Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), Feb. 2015.

⁶⁴ Kingdom of Morocco, 'President Boubacar Keita expresses sincere thanks to HM the King for training 500 Malian imams in Morocco', 14 Feb. 2018.

approach to conflict resolution have not been favourably received by the Algerian Government.⁶⁵

Libya's failed attempt to unify the Sahel–Saharan space

The engagement of Gaddafi's Libya with its Sahel neighbours was volatile and ambiguous. It was part of a wider foreign policy towards the African continent based on Gaddafi's long-standing ambition to unify African countries under his leadership.⁶⁶ The establishment in 1998 of the Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN-SAD)—a regional integration framework that initially brought together Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Niger and Sudan—was largely the result of Gaddafi's efforts. Spearheaded by Libya, where its headquarters are located, CEN-SAD supported programmes focused on food security, environmental protection and rural development in Sahel countries.⁶⁷ Since many of these programmes were financed by Libya, CEN-SAD largely served to increase Libya's influence in the Sahel.⁶⁸

Gaddafi also played an important role in the creation in 2000 of the AU—which replaced the OAU—although his original plan was to create and lead a highly integrated 'United States of Africa'.⁶⁹ Libya acted as a driving force of the organization—contributing to its institutional development, pushing for greater integration and providing it with financial resources. However, there are two sides to the influence of Libya under Gaddafi in the Sahel: at times it contributed to destabilizing its southern neighbours, while at other times it played a prominent role in mediating Sahel conflicts. Perhaps the most conspicuous example of this duplicity was Gaddafi's interference in Chad, where he played an important role in peace negotiations between the government and the opposition from 2003 despite Libya's repeated military interventions in Chad in the 1980s and its plans to annex parts of northern Chad.⁷⁰

Even though Libya was widely suspected of stirring up trouble and supporting the rebels, including during the 2006–2009 Tuareg rebellion, Gaddafi helped broker a peace agreement between the Tuareg rebels and the Nigerien and the Malian governments in 2009.⁷¹ The Libyan-sponsored peace agreement brought an end to the fighting between the Nigerien Government and the Nigerien Movement for Justice (Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice, MNJ), created in 2007, and between the governments of Mali and Niger and the Malian Democratic Alliance of 23 May 2006 for Change (Alliance démocratique du 23 Mai 2006 pour

⁶⁵ Hamamdjian, T., 'Crise en Libye: Pourquoi le Maroc joue les facilitateurs' [Crisis in Libya: Why Morocco plays facilitator], *Jeune Afrique*, 7 Sep. 2020.

⁶⁶ Solomon, H. and Swart, G., 'Libya's foreign policy in flux', *African Affairs*, no. 416 (July 2005), pp. 468–92.

⁶⁷ Huliaras, A. and Magliveras, K., 'The end of an affair? Libya and sub-Saharan Africa', *Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2 (June 2011), pp. 167–81.

⁶⁸ Huliaras and Magliveras (note 67).

⁶⁹ Huliaras and Magliveras (note 67).

⁷⁰ International Crisis Group (ICG), *L'Afrique sans Kadhafi: Le cas du Tchad* [Africa without Gaddafi: The case of Chad], Africa Report no. 180 (ICG: Brussels, 21 Oct. 2011).

⁷¹ Deycard, F., 'Le Niger entre deux feux: La nouvelle rébellion touarègue face à Niamey' [Niger between two fires: The new Tuareg rebellion against Niamey], *Politique Africaine*, no. 108 (2007), pp. 127–44.

le changement, ADC).⁷² Under this agreement, the Nigerien Government granted amnesty to Tuareg rebels on the condition that they disarmed. The Tuareg leaders largely accepted the deals brokered by Gaddafi. Nigerien presidents Mamadou Tandja (1999–2010) and Mahamadou Issoufou (2011–21) also demonstrated the willingness of the state to integrate members of the Tuareg communities. These include Rhissa ag Boula, a former rebel who has occupied several political functions since 1997 including as presidential adviser to President Issoufou, and Brigi Rafini, who has been prime minister since 2011. In contrast, the Malian Government continued to rely primarily on security-based approaches without making any significant progress in the implementation of peace agreements.⁷³

Morocco's rising ambitions

As part of its efforts to gain prominence at the African level, Morocco rejoined the AU in 2017 more than three decades after having left the OAU in a disagreement over the status of Western Sahara. As part of the same strategic pivot towards the south, Morocco applied for membership of ECOWAS in 2017. However, although ECOWAS has approved this application in principle, it remains pending, mainly due to issues related to Western Sahara and rivalries over influence in West Africa (particularly with Nigeria).⁷⁴

Morocco's engagement with and support of the G5 Sahel—a security initiative backed by France and with which Algeria has an ambiguous relationship—signals its eagerness to compete with Algeria for regional influence.⁷⁵ For example, Morocco has pledged funds to support the G5 Sahel's counterterrorism efforts.⁷⁶ However, Morocco's approach privileges bilateral cooperation in trade, education, environment, energy, culture and religious programmes. In the aftermath of the Malian military coup of August 2020, Morocco has increased its diplomatic relations with Mali, enhancing contact with officials in the transitional government and with key religious and political leaders.⁷⁷ Morocco's rising regional ambitions thus disrupt Algeria's position in the Sahel, which Algeria considers as its exclusive sphere of influence.

Algeria and conflict mediation in the Sahel

The Tuareg aspiration for autonomy in the north of Mali and Niger is a source of concern for Algeria, considering that it also has a sizable Tuareg population and that such demands could threaten its territorial integrity. Having recognized

⁷² Reuters, 'Mali, Niger, Tuareg rebels pledge peace: Libya', 7 Oct. 2009.

⁷³ New Humanitarian, 'Can Niger offer Mali lessons on the Tuareg?', 11 Apr. 2013.

⁷⁴ Talha Jebri, I., 'Morocco–ECOWAS: Good intentions are not enough', Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, 13 Feb. 2020.

⁷⁵ Fakir, I., 'Morocco looks south', Diwan, Carnegie Middle East Center, 23 Jan. 2019; and *Aujourd'hui le Maroc*, 'Le Maroc disposé à soutenir les pays du G5 Sahel dans la sécurisation des frontières' [Morocco willing to support the G5 Sahel countries in securing borders], 20 Sep. 2017.

⁷⁶ North Africa Post, 'Morocco to inject \$3.3 million in G5 Sahel counterterrorism force', 19 Sep. 2019.

⁷⁷ Majdi, Y., 'A Bamako, Bourita rencontre les responsables de la transition malienne et le leader du tijanisme malien' [In Bamako, Bourita meets the leaders of the Malian transition and the leader of the Malian Tijaniyya], *TelQuel*, 29 Sep. 2020.

the rights of its Tuareg population in the 1960s, Algeria has played a leading role in conflict mediation in northern Mali, supporting agreements that emphasize the integration of the Tuareg in their respective states and the recognition of their rights, while opposing claims for autonomy or independence.⁷⁸ Moreover, while the Algerian Tuareg have not traditionally made territorial claims and have instead been loyal to the authority of the Algerian Government, their political influence has gradually increased due to the unrest on the other side of the border.⁷⁹ Furthermore, with every round of violence in Mali, Algeria has faced an influx of refugees.⁸⁰ It has consequently had a strategic interest in containing the unrest of the Tuareg rebellions to prevent any spillover of the instability and has maintained its support of the territorial integrity of Mali.⁸¹

On the Malian side, several negotiations and peace agreements have been concluded in Algeria since the 1990s, including the 1991 Tamanrasset Accord;⁸² the 1992 National Pact;⁸³ and the 2006 Algiers Accord.⁸⁴ The 1992 National Pact provided the northern regions with a special status (with a transitional administrative organization pending an effective decentralization process), the integration of ex-combatants into the Malian armed forces, and the economic integration and demilitarization of the regions.⁸⁵ It marked the abandonment of Tuareg claims for autonomy and the acceptance of the national institutional framework. However, most of the subsequent agreements reproduced the same provisions without being fully implemented and eventually led to new rebellions.⁸⁶ Less than a year after the 2006 Algiers Accord was concluded, Ibrahim ag Fagaga's Tuareg Alliance of North Mali for Change (Alliance Touarègue du Nord-Mali pour le Changement, ATNMC) launched a number of attacks against security posts in 2007 and 2008.⁸⁷ President Touré's military response resulted in a decisive defeat of the ATNMC. In 2010 President Touré launched the Special Programme for Peace, Security and Development in Northern Mali (Programme Spécial pour la Paix, la Sécurité et le Développement dans le Nord du Mali, PSPSDN), which aimed to improve development and reinforce state capacity through the establishment of new

⁷⁸ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Algeria and Its Neighbours*, Middle East and North Africa Report no. 164 (ICG: Brussels, 12 Oct. 2015).

⁷⁹ Badi (note 13).

⁸⁰ Bouredji, F., 'Des réfugiés maliens pris au piège' [Malian refugees trapped], *El Watan*, 16 Feb. 2013.

⁸¹ Zoubir, Y., 'Algeria and the Sahelian imbroglio', *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies*, 25 Nov. 2012.

⁸² Accord sur la Cessation des Hostilités [Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities], Tamanrasset, 6 Jan. 1991.

⁸³ Pacte National conclu entre le Gouvernement de la République du Mali et les Mouvements et Fronts Unifiés de l'Azawad consacrant le Statut Particulier du Nord au Mali [National Pact concluded between the Government of the Republic of Mali and the Unified Movements and Fronts of Azawad enshrining the Special Status of the North of Mali], 11 Apr. 1992.

⁸⁴ Accord d'Alger pour la Restauration de la Paix, de la Sécurité et du Développement dans la région de Kidal [Algiers Agreement for the Restoration of Peace, Security and Development in the Region of Kidal], 4 July 2006.

⁸⁵ Seely, J., 'A political analysis of decentralisation: Coopting the Tuareg threat in Mali', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3 (Sep. 2001), pp. 499–524.

⁸⁶ Chena, S. and Tisseron, A., 'Rupture d'équilibres au Mali: Entre instabilité et recompositions' [Disruption of the equilibrium in Mali: Between instability and recomposition], *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 245 (2013), pp. 71–84.

⁸⁷ Pezard and Shurkin (note 24).

military garrisons, gendarmerie, national guard and police.⁸⁸ However, Tuareg leaders viewed this programme as a way to remilitarize northern Mali and so did not accept it.⁸⁹ The deterioration of the security situation in the northern regions and the subsequent deposition of President Touré in 2012 also put an end to the process.

In 2014 Algeria, with the support of the Malian Government, became the lead mediator to coordinate negotiations and international mediation efforts despite the MNLA's reservations and its earlier contacts with Morocco.⁹⁰ The mediation team led by Algeria consisted of MINUSMA, the AU, ECOWAS and the EU. After five rounds of negotiations in Algiers, the final agreement—the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali—was signed in Bamako in June 2015.⁹¹ New problems arose in 2017 when the two main coalitions—the CMA and the Platform—decided to temporarily withdraw from the post-agreement follow-up committee to denounce the lack of inclusiveness and delays in implementation. Despite this, a Conference of National Understanding took place on 27 March–2 April 2017, facilitated by Algeria.⁹² Little progress has been made since then, except perhaps in terms of military coordination through the Operational Coordination Mechanism (Mécanisme Opérationnel de Coordination, MOC), officially launched in May 2018.⁹³

In the case of Niger, negotiations were held for two years in Algiers and Ouagadougou between the Coordination of the Armed Resistance (Coordination de la Résistance Armée, CRA), a Tuareg rebel group, and delegations from Algeria, Burkina Faso, France and Mali. The final agreement was signed on 15 April 1995 in Ouagadougou between the government and the Armed Resistance Organization (Organisation de la Résistance Armée, ORA), a coalition of Tuareg rebel groups created to present a common Tuareg front—despite intra-Tuareg differences—in negotiations with the Nigerien Government.⁹⁴ As in Mali, the agreement focused on national reconciliation, the role of the defence and security forces, economic and social development (through decentralization), and the need for an ‘emergency development plan’ for the northern regions. The ORA committed to demobilize ex-combatants, who were to be integrated into various state services.

⁸⁸ Pezard and Shurkin (note 24).

⁸⁹ Chena and Tisseron (note 86); and Chahana, T., ‘Pour la paix, la sécurité et le développement au Nord Mali : ATT a concocté un programme spécial de 32 milliards’ [For peace, security and development in northern Mali: ATT has prepared a special programme of 32 billion], MaliWeb, 1 Nov. 2010.

⁹⁰ Carayol (note 34).

⁹¹ Accord Pour la Paix et la Reconciliation au Mali Issu du Processus d’Alger (note 36); and Bencherif, A., ‘Le Mali post « Accord d’Alger » : Une période intérimaire entre conflits et négociations’ [Mali after the ‘Algiers Accord’: An interim period between conflicts and negotiations], *Politique Africaine*, no. 150 (2018), pp. 179–201.

⁹² Mechoulan, D., ‘Mali’s National Conference: A missed opportunity for reconciliation’, Global Observatory, International Peace Institute, 14 Apr. 2017.

⁹³ Carter Center (note 37).

⁹⁴ Issa Abdourhamane, B., *Crise institutionnelle et démocratisation au Niger* [Institutional crisis and democratization in Niger] (Centre d’Étude d’Afrique Noire: Bordeaux, 1996); and Accord établissant une paix définitive entre le Gouvernement de la République du Niger et l’Organisation de la Résistance Armée (ORA) [Agreement Establishing a Definitive Peace between the Government of the Republic of Niger and the Armed Resistance Organization (ORA)], 15 Apr. 1995.

However, the situation deteriorated following an institutional crisis in 1995–96, a military coup in 1996, the withdrawal of the ORA from the peace process and the creation of a number of new rebel groups. A new peace agreement was signed on 18 February 1997 and another on 28 November 1997 in Algiers. On 25 September 2000 weapons were burnt in Agadez in central Niger, officially celebrating the end of the rebellion.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Kisangani, E., 'The Tuaregs' rebellions in Mali And Niger and the US global war on terror', *International Journal on World Peace*, vol. 29, no. 1 (Mar. 2012), pp. 59–97.

4. The peacekeeping, peacebuilding and security architecture in the Sahel

Since 2012 the conflict in Mali has been aggravated by the increasing sway of violent extremist groups and the proliferation of criminal organizations. The crisis in the Sahel has become an important and pressing issue not only for the neighbouring countries but also for the international community. Outside the immediate region, the Sahel crisis receives most attention in Europe, mainly because of concerns over migration and violent extremism.

With the Sahel crisis placed at the top of the agenda, many external actors are operating on the ground through a multitude of initiatives at different levels. Some security programmes (e.g. the United States' Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership) have been in place since the 2000s. Considerable resources have been deployed in the northern regions of Mali and Niger, with significant emphasis on combating violent extremist organizations. Since the peak of the crisis in Mali in 2012, several other interventions and initiatives have been launched in the region (see table 4.1 below). Nonetheless, despite massive investments in military solutions, the situation in Mali has continued to deteriorate, and the crisis has increasingly assumed a regional dimension. The border regions, especially the Liptako-Gourma region (between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) and the Lake Chad Basin, have become some of the areas most affected by violence in the Sahel–Sahara space.

The proliferation of actors in the Sahel—each having its own objective, mandate, area of deployment and security approach—has created overlapping and sometimes competing initiatives, highlighting the need for greater coordination.⁹⁶ Moreover, an important limitation of the existing arrangements is that they often do not adequately include all relevant actors: some states participate in some initiatives but not others, largely because of enduring rivalries and tensions between various states and actors in the wider region. For example, Algeria has repeatedly facilitated peace negotiations in the region, but this has neither replaced regional cooperation nor removed the need for a coordinated regional and inclusive multi-lateral framework.

In this regard, a truly regional approach to peacebuilding in the Sahel is still lacking, and regional cooperation—in areas such as security, conflict resolution and mediation, and political transition and governance—is fragmented. As conflict dynamics in the Sahel have become more complex, there is a need for a comprehensive approach that addresses multidimensional challenges facing the Sahel—including state capacity and governance, criminal and terrorist activity, and socio-economic and environmental fragility—while recognizing the regional dimensions of many of them. It also needs to take into account the regional

⁹⁶ Helly, D. et al., 'Sahel strategies: Why coordination is imperative', Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Policy Brief no. 76, Mar. 2015; and Cold-Ravnkilde, S. M. and Lindskov Jacobsen, K., 'Disentangling the security traffic jam in the Sahel: Constitutive effects of contemporary interventionism', *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 4 (July 2020), pp. 855–74.

interdependencies of the Sahel and the Maghreb as well as the unique ways in which various actors in the Maghreb engage with the crisis depending on their particular perceptions, interests, positions and relations with each other.

This chapter examines the existing peacebuilding and peacekeeping mechanisms in the Sahel at various levels of engagement (international, national and regional). It discusses the extent to which they provide an inclusive format in which the synergies of actors in the region are harnessed towards reaching a solution to the crisis in the Sahel.

International and external interventions

The United Nations

The UN's involvement in Mali focuses mainly on peacekeeping and stabilization, but it also contributes to mediation processes and supports initiatives promoting good governance.

MINUSMA was part of the 2013 Ouagadougou Agreement and the Algerian-led mediation team that facilitated the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, and it has been mandated 'to facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive politically-led Malian strategy to protect civilians, reduce inter-communal violence, and re-establish State authority, State presence and basic social services in Central Mali'.⁹⁷ MINUSMA's activities have brought some improvement to stability in northern Mali and have helped to decrease the number of civilian fatalities while allowing large numbers of displaced persons to return home: as of 31 July 2020, more than 84 000 refugees and nearly 570 000 internally displaced people had returned to their homes in Mali.⁹⁸ However, its effectiveness in terms of stabilization and the protection of civilians (POC) has decreased since 2016.⁹⁹ It has faced enormous difficulties in implementing its POC mandate while ensuring the security of its personnel and assets. MINUSMA has become the deadliest peace operation in the world, with peacekeepers being frequently attacked in northern and central Mali.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, MINUSMA faces challenges to its credibility because of widespread confusion over its mandate. Some perceive it to be engaging in counterterrorism, others question the relevance of an operation that does not fight terrorist groups, and still others criticize it for its association with the government and state agents.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 2531, 29 June 2020, para. 19.

⁹⁸ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Operational portal: Refugee situations—Mali', 31 July 2020.

⁹⁹ van der Lijn, J. et al., *Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)* (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs: Oslo, 2019).

¹⁰⁰ Smit, T., Sacks Ferrari, S. and van der Lijn, J., 'Trends in multilateral peace operations, 2019', SIPRI Fact Sheet, May 2020; and Stepansky, J., 'Challenges ahead as UN set to extend "most dangerous" mission', Al Jazeera, 26 June 2020.

¹⁰¹ van der Lijn et al. (note 99).

Table 4.1. Engagement in the Sahel at the international level

Structure/initiative ^a	Nature of engagement	Role/mandate
<i>United Nations</i>		
United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) 25 Apr. 2013–	Peacekeeping Stabilization and restoration of state authority	Since 2019 MINUSMA's strategic priorities have been to (a) support the implementation of the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement; and (b) facilitate the implementation of a Malian-led strategy to protect civilians, reduce inter-communal violence, and re-establish state authority in central Mali. ^b
United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) Jan. 2016–	Coordination Mediation	UNOWAS leads the implementation of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. It engages in political mediation and supports good governance, human rights and the rule of law. ^c
<i>European Union (EU)</i>		
EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) Feb. 2013–	Training of Malian armed forces	EUTM Mali aims to improve the operational capacity of the Malian armed forces and to support the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the national armed forces of the G5 Sahel countries. ^d
EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) Apr. 2014–	Training of police and security force	EUCAP Sahel Mali aims to assist the Malian security forces, help improve their operational efficiency, and facilitate their redeployment to northern Mali. ^e
EU Capacity Building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) Feb. 2012–	Training of security forces	EUCAP Sahel Niger's objectives are to strengthen the Nigerien security sector's expertise in combating terrorism and organized crime and to increase its capability to better control migration flows. ^f
Alliance Sahel July 2017–	Development Governance	Alliance Sahel priority fields are education and youth employment; agriculture, rural development and food security; energy and climate; governance; decentralization and basic services; and internal security. ^g
<i>France</i>		
Operation Serval 11 Jan. 2013–30 July 2014	Military intervention	The aims of Operation Serval were to stop the jihadist advance; protect European and French nationals present in Mali; and restore Mali's territorial integrity. ^h
Operation Barkhane ⁱ 1 Aug. 2014–	Counterterrorism Training and advising Malian armed forces	Operation Barkhane aims to fight armed terrorist groups in support of the armed forces of the G5 Sahel members and international forces; and to support local populations. ^j

^a Date indicates the start or the duration of the initiative.

^b MINUSMA, 'Mandate', June 2020; and UN Security Council Resolution 2480, 28 June 2019, para. 20.

^c UNOWAS, 'Background'.

^d EUTM Mali, 'Common Security and Defence Policy: European Union Training Mission—Mali', 27 Nov. 2020.

^e EUCAP Sahel Mali, 'About EUCAP Sahel Mali', 20 June 2016.

^f European External Action Service, 'The EUCAP Sahel Niger civilian mission', Apr. 2016.

^g Alliance Sahel, 'The Sahel alliance'.

^h Boeke, S. and Schuurman, B., 'Operation "Serval": A strategic analysis of the French intervention in Mali, 2013–2014', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 38, no. 6 (2015), pp. 801–25.

ⁱ Including the Tabuka Task Force since July 2020

^j French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 'Opération Barkhane' [Operation Barkhane], Press dossier, Sep. 2020.

The UN has developed an integrated strategy for the Sahel implemented by the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel in Dakar.¹⁰² UNOWAS was established in an attempt to concentrate efforts and 'craft synergies to better engage with the countries of West Africa and the Sahel'.¹⁰³ The strategy's steering committee includes ECOWAS, while the AU takes part in the joint AU–UN technical secretariat established in February 2014.¹⁰⁴

The European Union and France

The EU has developed its own strategy for security and development in the Sahel, within the institutional framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).¹⁰⁵ The strategy was first elaborated in 2011 and subsequently enlarged by EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Mali (see table 4.1). The main focus of the second and third of these mechanisms is to train Malian defence and security forces and to support their restructuring.¹⁰⁶ However, the relationship between Mali and the EU is 'dissonant', and the EU's military assistance is perceived by some analysts as paternalist and self-interested.¹⁰⁷

However, European countries remain divided on the issue. Based on historical links and strategic interests, France is one of the most active actors in the Sahel region, but it acts alone on many initiatives and there is a lack of inclusiveness. It considers Mali—and the Sahel—as part of its sphere of influence, which also creates competition with Algeria. The French-led Operation Serval was launched in January 2013 to support the Malian Army and to restore state sovereignty a few

¹⁰² United Nations, Security Council, 'United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel', annex to S/2013/354, 14 June 2013

¹⁰³ United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, 'Background'.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations, Security Council, 'Progress towards the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2014/397, 6 June 2014.

¹⁰⁵ European External Action Service, 'Strategy for security and development in the Sahel', 21 June 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Alenius Boserup, R. and Martinez, L., *Europe Power and the Sahel–Maghreb Crisis*, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) Report no. 2018:03 (DIIS: Copenhagen, 2018); Faleg, G. and Palleschi, C., *African Strategies: European and Global Approaches towards Sub-Saharan Africa*, Chaillot Paper no. 158 (European Union Institute for Security Studies: Paris, June 2020); and Lebovitch, A., *Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans Fail to Promote Stability in the Sahel*, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) Policy Brief no. 338 (ECFR: London, Aug. 2020).

¹⁰⁷ Tull, D. M., 'Rebuilding Mali's army: The dissonant relationship between Mali and its international partners', *International Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 2 (Mar. 2019), pp. 405–22.

Table 4.2. Engagement in the Sahel by states in the region

Structure/initiative ^a	Nature of engagement	Role/mandate
<i>Algeria</i>		
Good offices 1990s–	Mediation	Algeria led a mediation team (composed of MINUSMA, the AU, ECOWAS and the EU along with France and the United States) that facilitated the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. In Mali, Algeria also facilitated the 2006 Algiers Accord; the 1992 National Pact; and the 1991 Tamanrasset Accord. In Niger, Algeria mediated the 1995 Ouagadougou Accord; and the 1997 Algiers Peace Agreement.
Joint Operational Staff Committee (Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint, CEMOC) along with Mauritania, Mali and Niger 2010–	Military coordination	CEMOC coordinates operations and logistics; and intelligence sharing through the Integration and Liaison Unit (Unité de Fusion et de Liaison, UFL), headquartered in Algiers.

AU = African Union, ECOWAS = Economic Community of West African States, EU = European Union, MINUSMA = United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

^a Date indicates the start or the duration of the initiative.

months after the occupation of northern Mali. Operation Serval was transformed into Operation Barkhane on 1 August 2014 to address terrorism-related threats in the region and to support and strengthen the national security forces of the G5 Sahel countries.¹⁰⁸ Operation Barkhane is also supported by the USA and the United Kingdom. Most recently, the Tabuka Task Force, a European military force, was created in 2020 and integrated into Operation Barkhane to accompany the Malian Army in its fight against terrorism in the Liptako-Gourma region. Although it is still too early to appraise the contribution of this force, its creation has already been criticized for adding to the ‘security traffic jam in the Sahel’.¹⁰⁹

On the development side, in July 2017 France, Germany and the EU, supported by the World Bank, the African Development Bank (ADB) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), launched the Alliance Sahel Platform. It is intended to support development and stabilization in the region. Despite the existence of development strategies, implementation on the ground remains difficult because of the deteriorated security situation. As Mali remains locked in a state of insecurity and violence that often justifies the prevalence of military and security-based solutions, the shift towards initiatives focusing on good governance and sustainable development becomes elusive and continues to be delayed.

¹⁰⁸ Boeke, S. and Schuurman, B., ‘Operation “Serval”: A strategic analysis of the French intervention in Mali, 2013–2014’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 38, no. 6 (2015), pp. 801–25; and French Ministry of the Armed Forces, ‘Opération Barkhane’ [Operation Barkhane], Press dossier, Sep. 2020.

¹⁰⁹ Cold-Ravnkilde and Lindskov Jacobsen (note 96).

National efforts by states in the region

Algeria's foreign policy is largely guided by the principles of non-alignment and non-interference. Until November 2020, when constitutional amendments were adopted in a referendum, Algeria's armed forces were not allowed to be deployed abroad (its secret services, however, have routinely reached across the border into Mali).¹¹⁰

Algeria sees the current situation in the Sahel as being of paramount importance for its national security. In 2010 Algeria established the Joint Operational Staff Committee (Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint, CEMOC), with headquarters in Tamanrasset, to increase collaboration with its neighbours, particularly in intelligence sharing (see table 4.2). However, this framework has been largely ineffective.¹¹¹

Algeria's involvement in the Sahel has thus largely focused on mediation processes. However, although Algeria considers itself as a Sahelian country, its interests have remained limited to the northern regions of its southern neighbours.¹¹² Previous peace agreements tended to reflect Algeria's priorities, its policy towards its own Tuareg population, and its emphasis on territorial integrity. All the peace agreements mediated by Algeria have thus urged governments to respond to the demands of Tuareg populations and have supported their integration into the state, economic and social development, and cultural recognition. Furthermore, Algeria's own experience with radical Islamist groups in the 1990s has also shaped its attitude and strategy towards the crisis in Mali and actors such as AQIM: it has favoured a political solution premised on the idea that dialogue with moderate groups would lead to the isolation of radical and extremist groups, although its attitude towards Iyad ag Ghaly is unclear.¹¹³ Several peace agreements in the Sahel have been reached with Algerian mediation (see chapters 2 and 3). What is distinct about the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement is that it was facilitated and backed by a broader team of mediators representing various parties (with the exception of Morocco), with Algeria taking the lead in the process.

Both Algeria and Morocco have their own strategic interests in and long-standing ties with Sahel countries. Following the military coup in Mali, both opened discussions with the transitional government of the National Committee

¹¹⁰ Bobin, F., 'Avec sa nouvelle Constitution, l'Algérie rompt avec sa tradition de non-interventionnisme militaire' [With its new constitution, Algeria breaks with its tradition of non-intervention], *Le Monde*, 3 Nov. 2020.

¹¹¹ Ghanem-Yazbeck, D., 'The Algerian Army: Cooperation, not intervention', Commentary, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), 7 Dec. 2017.

¹¹² Bencherif, A., 'L'Algérie doit repenser le Sahel' [Algeria must rethink the Sahel], *Jeune Afrique*, 29 Jan. 2020.

¹¹³ Lounnas, D., 'Confronting Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib in the Sahel: Algeria and the Malian crisis', *Journal of North African Studies*, vol 19, no. 5 (2014), pp. 810–27; and Filiu, J.-P., 'Pourquoi l'Algérie protège le pire jihadiste du Sahel' [Why Algeria protects the worst jihadist in the Sahel], *Un si Proche Orient*, *Le Monde*, 21 Oct. 2018.

Table 4.3. Engagement in the Sahel at the regional level

Structure/initiative ^a	Nature of engagement	Role/Mandate
<i>African Union (AU)</i>		
AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) Aug. 2013–	Governance Security	MISAHEL is the structure through which the AU Strategy for the Sahel is implemented. ^b It focuses on political transition; human rights and humanitarian action; security; and development.
<i>Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel)</i>		
Regional cooperation 16 Feb. 2014–	Security Development	The G5 Sahel aims to promote conditions for development and security within its member states by strengthening democracy and good governance within the framework of regional and international cooperation. ^c
G5 Sahel Joint Force (Force conjointe du G5 Sahel, FC-G5S) 2017–	Military force	The FC-G5S undertakes counterterrorism in the border zone of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. ^d
<i>Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)</i>		
African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) Dec. 2012	Troops	AFISMA was a joint initiative of the AU and ECOWAS. In Jan. 2013 it deployed 3300 troops to Mali from Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. It later handed over to MINUSMA. ^e
Good offices 2012–	Mediation	ECOWAS mediated in Mali after the 2012 rebellion (with a delegation chaired by Ivoirian President Alassane Ouattara); after the parliamentary elections of June 2020; and after the military coup of Aug. 2020.
Regional pressure	Sanctions	ECOWAS imposed sanctions on Mali following the coups of 2012 and 2020. ^f ECOWAS (like the AU) also suspended Mali after the 2012 coup.

^a Date indicates the start or the duration of the initiative.

^b African Union, Peace and Security Council, 'The African Union strategy for the Sahel region', PSC/PR/3(CDXLIX), 11 Aug. 2014; and African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL), 'Le Mali doit aller plus loin dans le processus de réconciliation' [Mali must go further in the reconciliation process], Press release, 23 Jan. 2014.

^c G5 Sahel, 'Présentation du G5 Sahel' [Presentation of G5 Sahel].

^d International Crisis Group (ICG), Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, Africa Report no. 258 (ICG: Brussels, 12 Dec. 2017).

^e Felix, B., 'West African army chiefs to approve Mali troops plan', Reuters, 14 Jan. 2013.

^f ECOWAS, Declaration of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government on Mali, 5 Oct. 2020.

for the Salvation of the People (Comité national pour le salut du peuple, CNSP).¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Radio Algérie, 'Sabri Boukadoum s'entretient à Bamako avec les membres du CNSP au Mali' [Sabri Boukadoum talks in Bamako with members of the CNSP of Mali], 28 Aug. 2020; and North Africa Post, 'Mali's new leader thanks King Mohammed VI for Morocco's contribution to resolving Malian crisis', 26 Aug. 2020.

As discussed in chapter 5, Maghreb countries have the necessary experience and understanding of the Sahel context to make relevant contributions to peacebuilding in the region.

Regional frameworks

A number of African regional organizations, including the AU, ECOWAS and the G5 Sahel, are taking part in the Sahel peacebuilding processes (see table 4.3). However, while these structures can be credited with producing ‘African solutions to African problems’, their inclusiveness varies. As such, regional actors continue to struggle with finding the appropriate format for cooperation, one that integrates relevant parties instead of marginalizing them and driving them to pursue their agendas through other frameworks.

The G5 Sahel

The G5 Sahel—composed of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger—aims to support security and development in the Sahel. It was first designed as an institutional framework for regional cooperation, aiming to support economic development and contribute to the fight against terrorism. At the time of its establishment, the G5 Sahel focused on stabilization and development. However, growing instability has meant that security has become its most important role. The G5 Sahel’s joint counterterrorism task force, the G5 Sahel Joint Force (Force conjointe du G5 Sahel, FC-G5S), became effective in 2017. It is supported by the UN and EUTM Mali (the mandate of which was extended in May 2020 for four years) and intervenes in the Liptako-Gourma border zone of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.¹¹⁵

Low levels of funding and the lack of capabilities of the member states constitute key weaknesses of the G5 Sahel. Algeria’s reaction to the creation of the G5 Sahel represents a further weakness: the G5 Sahel was created with the active support of France and was welcomed by Morocco, but Algeria saw in it an attempt by France to bypass it in a region that it considers as its own space of influence. Key challenges for the G5 Sahel include achieving political cooperation between the five member states, improving their capacity to coordinate with other actors on the ground, and developing their ability to gain the trust of the local populations.

The Economic Community of West African States

ECOWAS has also repeatedly contributed to efforts to help stabilize Mali. For example, following the August 2020 coup, ECOWAS took the lead in negotiating with the CNSP on the format of the transition. However, the diverging views of the leaders of ECOWAS member states, which seemed to reflect their respective

¹¹⁵ International Crisis Group (note 8); Desgrais, N., *Cinq ans après, une radioscopie du G5 Sahel : Des réformes nécessaires de l’architecture et du processus décisionnel* [Five years later, an X-ray of the G5 Sahel: Necessary reforms of the architecture and the decision-making process] (Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS): Paris, Mar. 2019); UN Security Council Resolution 2359, 21 June 2017; and UN Security Council Resolution 2391, 8 Dec. 2017.

national and electoral interests, have hindered the organization's initiatives and have significantly undermined its credibility as a mediator.¹¹⁶

The relationship between ECOWAS and the Maghreb states is also complex. Morocco's request to join ECOWAS remains in limbo mainly due to suspicions about Morocco's intentions, especially as it is expected to benefit more from the common market than it contributes.¹¹⁷ There are also tensions between ECOWAS and Algeria. Algeria was not included in the ECOWAS initiative to resolve the crisis spurred by the August 2020 coup in Mali; according to Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Algeria was not even consulted.¹¹⁸ However, stressing the importance of the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, Tebboune has declared that Algeria will, in turn, not involve ECOWAS in its own conflict-resolution initiatives in the Sahel, insisting that 'the solution to the Malian crisis is 90 per cent Algerian'.¹¹⁹

The African Union

As most of the existing arrangements are either not inclusive enough or not sufficiently grounded in the local and regional context, the AU is perhaps the most appropriate framework for peacebuilding in the Sahel. In the wake of the crisis in Mali, in 2013 the AU launched the Nouakchott Process, which aims to reinforce cooperation between various actors and stakeholders in the Sahel (including military and intelligence officials).¹²⁰ The Nouakchott Process has, however, yielded limited results, with a number of states preferring instead to engage through other arrangements, such as the G5 Sahel.¹²¹ The AU also supported the efforts of ECOWAS, including the latter's push for the deployment of an African-led stabilization force.¹²² Due to limited resources—which represents a major challenge for African-led initiatives—the AU requested help from the UN Security Council to support the deployment of the ECOWAS Standby Force (one of five such subregional forces that act under the direction of the AU). After some delay, in December 2012 the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of AFISMA by the AU and in close coordination with ECOWAS.¹²³ However, financing and logistical capacity were, yet again, a critical problem. Eventually, in July 2013 AFISMA handed authority to MINUSMA.¹²⁴

¹¹⁶ Baudais and Chauzal (note 41).

¹¹⁷ Talha Jebril (note 74).

¹¹⁸ Canal Algérie, [Meeting of the President of the Republic, Mr Abdelmajid Tebboune, with officials of some national media], YouTube, 20 Sep. 2020 (in Arabic, author translation).

¹¹⁹ Canal Algérie (note 118).

¹²⁰ Institute for Security Studies, 'What role for the AU in the Sahel?' *Peace and Security Council Report*, no. 103 (June 2018), pp. 5–7.

¹²¹ Institute for Security Studies (note 120).

¹²² Suzuki, S., 'Exploring the roles of the AU and ECOWAS in West African conflicts', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2020), pp. 173–91.

¹²³ UN Security Council Resolution 2085 (note 6).

¹²⁴ van der Lijn et al. (note 99).

Since August 2013 the AU has engaged in the Sahel through MISAHÉL. This mission is responsible for implementing the AU's Strategy for the Sahel.¹²⁵ The mission is led by the AU's High Representative for Mali and the Sahel. Until November 2020 this position was held by Pierre Buyoya, a former president of Burundi, who was deeply involved in the Algiers negotiations alongside Algeria.¹²⁶ As a primarily political mission, MISAHÉL's mandate emphasizes the governance–security nexus, and aims to facilitate the political transition in Mali, protect human rights, combat impunity and promote national reconciliation.¹²⁷

The fact that the position of Peace and Security Commissioner in the AU Commission is usually held by an Algerian indicates the close relationship between the AU and Algeria. The AU's inclusiveness has been increased by Morocco's renewed membership. It provides a broad and, importantly, African-owned platform through which all relevant actors can engage with the Sahel crisis and contribute to peacebuilding efforts. The AU's legitimacy stems from being an African body. But it faces many challenges related to capacity and funding as well as to the tendency of member states to pursue their own interests outside AU frameworks.¹²⁸ Nonetheless, with support from international actors, the AU can be empowered to push for enhanced coordination and try to reconcile competing initiatives. Furthermore, a strengthened role for the AU should be the point of departure for an approach to peacebuilding that does not only focus on mediation at the national level, but also integrates local-level mediation and community-level peacebuilding. Rather than being an afterthought, the needs of the local populations should define and guide peacebuilding initiatives.

¹²⁵ African Union, Peace and Security Council, 'The African Union strategy for the Sahel region', PSC/PR/3(CDXLIX), 11 Aug. 2014.

¹²⁶ Reuters, 'Burundi ex-leader quits AU envoy job after convicted of killing vote rival', 26 Nov. 2020.

¹²⁷ Gnanguenon, A., 'Mission analysis: African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHÉL)', *Peace and Security Council Report*, no. 58 (May 2014), pp. 2–5.

¹²⁸ Institute for Security Studies (note 120).

5. A different approach to the Sahel: Greater coordination and local peacebuilding

This chapter identifies three levels of peacebuilding—national-level mediation, local mediation and local peacebuilding—as well as the most relevant actor that could have a role to play. The current uncoordinated peacebuilding and peacekeeping in the Sahel is not working. There are too many actors pulling in too many directions. A coordinated strategy, with lead actors at all three levels, is needed in order to enhance the prospects of peace in the Sahel.

Mediation at the national and regional levels

In the Sahel, mediation between the state and rebel actors is necessary in order to reach an agreement to end conflict. Research on mediation of conflicts in Africa has found that an African conflict is more likely to reach a negotiated settlement and that settlement is more likely to be durable if an African third party mediates.¹²⁹

Despite often having considerably fewer resources than their non-African counterparts, African mediators have greater legitimacy than non-Africans, which plays an important role in this increased success. The legitimacy of African mediators is partly due to the shared history of colonialism and the strong principles of anti-imperialism and respect for the sovereignty of African states that has developed as a result, which has led to the mantra of ‘African solutions to African problems’. The notion of African unity is also a driving factor, as it enables African mediators to push for concessions in order to maintain unity.

However, this does not mean that non-African actors cannot support African mediators; by offering material support and other incentives, they can strengthen the process.¹³⁰ The EU and member states such as France and Germany have invested heavily in the Sahel region and the UK has also increased its role, making them important actors in mediation processes.¹³¹ However, their role is better served in supporting the process and allowing African actors to take the lead in mediation.

As Algeria shares a border with both Niger and Mali and has its own Tuareg population, it is affected by the conflict in both states and therefore has more to gain from peace than other external actors. This makes it a more determined mediator, which can help the mediation process.¹³² Algeria’s legitimacy is further increased by its understanding of the dynamics of having a Tuareg minority. Algeria thus has legitimacy and leverage with the Tuareg and has played a historical role in

¹²⁹ Duursma, A., ‘African solutions to African challenges: The role of legitimacy in mediating civil wars in Africa’, *International Organization*, vol. 74, no. 2 (spring 2020), pp. 295–330.

¹³⁰ Duursma (note 129).

¹³¹ European Commission, ‘European civil protection and humanitarian aid operations: Sahel’, Fact sheet, 22 June 2020; and British Department for International Development (DFID), ‘Sahel region’, 9 May 2018.

¹³² Duursma (note 129).

mediating conflict in the Sahel—making it an ideal actor to play a leading role in the mediation process.

Since Abdelmajid Tebboune became president in December 2019—replacing Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was president for two decades—Algeria has shown a more pronounced willingness to step back onto the international stage, particularly in Mali.¹³³ A further major shift in Algeria's role was the announcement in February 2020 of the future creation of an Algerian agency for international cooperation, aiming at reinforcing cooperation with Sahel countries.¹³⁴ Previously, Algeria mostly focused on military and political cooperation.¹³⁵ In contrast, in 2020 post-Bouteflika Algeria shows a growing interest in rethinking its strategy towards the Sahel and in increasing cooperation with the Sahel countries. An indication of this is the constitutional amendment to allow the Algerian military to participate in operations abroad, which was adopted in November 2020.¹³⁶

However, although Algeria can be seen as the obvious leading actor, no single state can play a decisive role. The resolution of the Sahel crisis must be a joint responsibility—it needs support and a strong African collective position, through the framework of the AU's African Peace and Security Architecture. Since the Sahel crisis is cross-regional, strong involvement by the AU may strengthen the mediation process and help mitigate the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco.¹³⁷ A mediation process through the AU, with Algeria taking a leading role, includes the elements necessary to increase the chances of success. It would also ensure that the process does not focus only on the border regions, where Algeria's interests are stronger. However, for this collective position to succeed, the AU also has to address competition between Algeria and Morocco, while Morocco should play a role in mediation through its religious and economic connections.

Mediation at the local level

In addition to the above national and regional mediation efforts, mediation is also necessary at the local level, where intra- and inter-communal tensions can emerge over control of territory and resources.

Research beyond the Sahel suggests that organizations such as the UN are particularly effective actors in driving local mediation efforts and limiting local armed clashes.¹³⁸ This effectiveness is due to the logistical and security support

¹³³ Algeria Press Service, 'President Tebboune: Algeria to work "tirelessly" to support peace and security efforts in Africa', 9 Feb. 2020.

¹³⁴ Algérie Eco, 'Tebboune annonce la création d'une « agence algérienne de coopération internationale » [Tebboune announces the creation of an 'Algerian agency for international cooperation'], 9 Feb. 2020.

¹³⁵ Pugliese, M., 'What future for the Counter Terrorism Center of the African Union?', *European Eye on Radicalisation*, 23 July 2018.

¹³⁶ Bobin (note 110).

¹³⁷ Suzuki (note 122).

¹³⁸ Duursma, A., 'Making disorder more manageable: The short-term effectiveness of local mediation in Darfur', *Journal of Peace Research*, 5 May 2020; Ruggeri, A., Dorussen, H. and Gizelis, T.-I., 'Winning the peace locally: UN peacekeeping and local conflict', *International Organization*, vol. 71, no. 1 (winter 2017), pp. 163–85; and Smidt, H. M., 'United Nations peacekeeping locally: Enabling conflict resolution, reducing communal violence', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 64, nos 2–3 (Feb.–Mar. 2019), pp. 344–72.

that the UN offers, as well as the confidence in the process it gives to the actors through acting as a neutral mediator and its ability to monitor implementation of any agreement by all sides.¹³⁹ Connected to this is the ability of the UN and other such actors to facilitate intergroup dialogue activities between local leaders and the local population, which can act to decrease inter-communal violence and enhance broader peacebuilding.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, the presence of peacekeepers such as those from the UN also helps to deter incidents of conflict at the local level. In theory, the larger the number of peacekeepers deployed, the larger the impact, particularly when dealing with areas where there is a power vacuum.¹⁴¹

Despite the benefits of UN actors in local mediation that have been realized in other settings, in Mali peacekeepers are currently not having the expected impact. As highlighted in chapter 4, there are many peace operations deployed in the Sahel, yet violence persists.¹⁴² There are too many actors, a lack of coordination and no viable—or appropriate—peacekeeping plan. Insecurity hinders the impact of operations beyond a focus on security. A broad and inclusive agreement on peacekeeping and peacebuilding in the Sahel is needed. Through coordination—including a better plan on peacekeeping force location and the numbers of troops needed for specific locations—peacekeeping is likely to have a better chance of preventing conflict. Only then can peacekeeping create the dynamics for local mediation, and in this the UN would be the best actor to lead the process.

Local peacebuilding

Beyond mediation, peacebuilding processes that encourage the drivers of peace and limit the drivers of conflict at the local level are often ignored. They require investment and capacity building from international actors. This can help improve the interactions between communities, which can lessen the need for local mediation but can also feed into local mediation when it is necessary. At the same time, it can also put more pressure on elites at the local and national levels to reach an agreement.¹⁴³

Due to the considerable funding and great effort that the EU, its member states and the UK have put into peacebuilding in the Sahel region, they are suitable actors to drive local peacebuilding. The benefit of focusing on local peacebuilding and development is that it allows for a context-specific approach to tackling local issues that have an impact on the local community.

Nonetheless, a key aspect should be partnership and local ownership. Moreover, investment should not involve making local organizations follow the priorities of international actors. It should instead enable them to have the freedom to use their

¹³⁹ Duursma (note 138).

¹⁴⁰ Smidt (note 138).

¹⁴¹ Ruggeri et al. (note 138).

¹⁴² Smit et al. (note 100).

¹⁴³ O'Driscoll, D., *Building Everyday Peace in Kirkuk, Iraq: The Potential of Locally Focused Interventions*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 52 (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2019).

local knowledge to meet the needs of the local population.¹⁴⁴ If the EU and the UK could actively support the above national and local mediation and peacekeeping proposals and redirect their focus to local peacebuilding, they would be better placed to contribute to peace in the Sahel.

¹⁴⁴ Vogel, B., 'Civil society capture: Top-down interventions from below?', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2016), pp. 472–89.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The security situation in the Sahel has become increasingly more complex over the years. Tensions between Tuareg populations and the respective central states in Mali and Niger and the environmental fragility that is characteristic of the Sahel region are long-standing problems. They have now been joined and compounded by the spread of terrorist organizations and the expansion of criminal networks engaged in drug and human trafficking. This has caused a surge in violence in the region, resulting in the death and displacement of thousands of people.

By virtue of their geographic proximity and their many shared connections—historical, cultural, religious and economic—the Maghreb and the Sahel are each affected by conflicts and instability in the other. The breakdown of the state in Libya has thus dramatically destabilized the Sahel. In turn, the current security situation in Mali constitutes a major concern and a serious challenge to its neighbours, who fear the spread of instability to their own territories. But for the same reasons, Maghreb countries are well positioned to support conflict-resolution processes in the Sahel. Actors from the region tend to have more legitimacy and a greater understanding of the context.

In its current shape, the peace and security architecture in the Sahel consists of a multitude of actors, initiatives and mechanisms. In this crowded security space, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts tend to lack coordination and often include some relevant actors but exclude others. However, given the complexity and the multidimensional nature of the Sahel crisis, it is highly unlikely that a lasting solution to the conflict could be reached through the efforts of any one actor alone. Rather, the regional nature of the conflict requires a regional solution, and a collective arrangement is more likely to yield better outcomes. However, the diverging interests of regional actors—particularly the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco and tensions between Algeria and ECOWAS—are likely to hinder any such multilateral regional effort.

The greater inclusivity of the African Union makes it better equipped to facilitate and coordinate conflict-resolution efforts at the regional level, while providing the necessary support to the actor that takes the lead. Algeria remains the most likely actor for that task, given its experience in mediating past Sahel conflicts. However, as the current Sahel crisis is far more complex than past conflicts (with e.g. multiple non-state actors, terrorist groups and community militias), Algeria's action would need to be integrated within the AU framework and to work in collaboration with other actors from the region, including Morocco.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are directed to the AU, Algeria, the UN, the EU, the UK and other actors involved in the Sahel, and the transitional Malian Government and the transitional Malian legislature, the National Transition Council (Conseil national de transition, CNT).

The African Union

The African Union should design and promote a collective, inclusive African position on mediation in the Sahel. It should then support the efforts of the actors (such as Algeria and Morocco) that take the lead in the mediation while fostering inclusivity in order to prevent the process from being undermined by excluded actors. The AU should also enhance coordination of efforts and collaboration with the UN and the EU (including its member states) to develop a regional security plan. As part of this, coordination of the AU's MISAHHEL with the UN's Integrated Strategy for the Sahel is of particular importance.

Algeria

Algeria should continue to support the implementation of the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. In doing so, it should contribute to building trust between the central government and non-state actors involved in the Malian crisis. It should also work to build a regional process of mediation in the Sahel through the AU, rather than working as an individual actor. By working with other actors in the region, it can develop a collective conflict-resolution and peacebuilding process with broader resources and leverage.

The United Nations

The UN should support, from the level of the Secretary-General and down, AU-led efforts to provide a coherent framework of action that brings together all relevant actors. It should provide MINUSMA with the appropriate funding necessary to implement the tasks mandated by the UN Security Council—and should call on member states to do the same. More broadly, it should support the reform of the wider collective and coordinated peacekeeping framework. By focusing on the intersection of stabilization with sustainable development and good governance, the UN can build the foundations of a lasting peace. This will require the UN to support local and community-level mediation processes in order to prevent inter- and intra-communal tensions and new rebellions.

The European Union and the United Kingdom

The EU (and its member states) and the UK should support the AU's efforts to provide a multilateral framework for peacekeeping and peacebuilding initiatives. Their investment and action should focus on local peacebuilding and development opportunities where there is a chance to contribute to the broader peacebuilding framework. They should also support the development of inclusive policies and address the structural factors that lead to marginalization of populations and regions. They should exploit their standing to push for more inclusive development programmes and policies and ensure that local communities are involved in and take ownership of peacebuilding efforts. Rather than operating individually, other actors such as France that are involved in the Sahel should form part of the wider collective and coordinated peacekeeping framework through the AU and the UN.

The transitional Malian Government and legislature

Finally, the transitional Malian Government and the newly established CNT should cooperate with regional and international actors to ensure that the agreed transition period is followed by fair and free elections. During the transitional political process, they should ensure that the root causes of the conflicts are addressed and, in particular, support the return of the state presence in terms of national and internal security forces, judicial entities and basic social services.

Conflict Mediation and Peacebuilding in the Sahel

Conflict dynamics in the Sahel are complex. The region faces a multidimensional crisis that includes the proliferation of terrorist groups, criminal networks, environmental pressures, state weaknesses and severe governance problems. In addition to this internal context, the Sahel crisis has been affected by external factors, such as the fall of Muammar Gaddafi and the civil war in Libya. Its deeper causes can be found in the structural factors of fragility in the sociopolitical dynamics of internal divisions, serial uprisings and weak states. Having started as a largely Malian conflict, the crisis now affects the whole Sahel region and, despite the deployment of military and security operations, it continues to get worse. A new approach is needed.

The authors of this Policy Paper identify regionally and locally driven solutions as one such way to support development and promote peace. They highlight how stronger involvement of the Maghreb countries that share borders with the crisis-affected countries to their south could be a critical factor in building the foundations of stability and starting to meet longer-term development objectives. Given their engagement with Sahel crises in the past and the multiple linkages that connect the two regions, the role of these countries—and especially Algeria and Morocco—could be pivotal. Despite challenges, African-led initiatives are perceived to be more legitimate and to have a deeper understanding of local contexts. The authors thus recommend that the African Union, with its emphasis on endeavouring to bring ‘African solutions to African problems’, provides the framework for coordinated action in the Sahel.

This paper offers a fresh assessment of the situation in the Sahel in the context of relations with neighbouring Maghreb countries. The authors’ insightful analysis and recommendations will be of interest to policymakers in Africa, in Europe and elsewhere, as well as to local actors and other stakeholders involved in mediation and peacebuilding efforts in the Sahel.

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