Challenges in Mali, the Importance of Legitimate Governance in Combatting Terrorism and Violent Extremism

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Abstract

The Greater Sahel is one of the world's most troubled regions. Within the region, Mali is the regional lynchpin and has been the focus of French efforts to eradicate terrorist groups. The essay seeks to answer the question, "Why has violence increased and terrorist cells continued to thrive in Mali despite international efforts?" Although the issue is more complicated and nuanced, corruption and poor governance are significant factors in increased violence. Local leaders focus on militarization and violent suppression to maintain control over larger cities while neglecting rural communities. These actions undermine the government's legitimacy, exacerbated by rampant corruption. Secondary sources and conflict databases are utilized to provide quantitative analysis while also using a qualitative lens to factor in governance and engagement of the public, which are more challenging to measure. The essay provides an overview of the challenges, followed by a background of UN training missions in the Sahel and a cursory history and regional challenges. An analysis of the French withdrawal from Mali highlights the challenges of foreign governments. The conclusion provides suggestions for future missions in the region, focusing on governance, basic human rights, infrastructure, and essential services for the population.

Introduction

For many reasons, the Greater Sahel is one of the world's most troubled regions. However, all the challenges stem from increased violence due to militant groups, exacerbating a growing humanitarian crisis. The plight in the Sahel receives more scrutiny in Europe simply because of its geographic proximity to the region and internal concerns over African migrants who flee their homes in front of the wave of violence driven by criminal groups and religious extremists.[1] This is at least part of the reason the region requires global attention and coordinated response to create what Jean-Marie Guéhenno labeled an international conflict prevention strategy that is inclusive and supports the state's internal structure, which is the primary building block of development.[2] Fragile political institutions, food and water insecurity, and armed groups have created a humanitarian crisis that has displaced over 4.2 million people.

Furthermore, international and African counterterrorism missions have created a "war on terror" in ungoverned spaces that has only exacerbated the situation.[3] In 2016, jihadist groups launched large-scale attacks in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire, highlighting the region's tenuous security environment.[4] International attention falls to Mali, the epicenter of violence and terrorist groups. Malian forces maintain a heavy military and police footprint in major urban centers, though even these are within reach of terrorist groups. Remote ungoverned space in Mali provides safe havens for terrorists and criminal groups that have proven difficult for the state to eradicate. Their proliferation has further undermined the government's legitimacy.[5] Héni Nsaibia pointedly wrote, "Mali remains at the crossroads of hope and uncertainty."[6] The violence has also erupted in dense population centers that the state controls and considers safe, which has generated panic in Mali's fragile government that was previously content to exercise limited to minimal control in remote areas.

In 2017 experts predicted that Mali would face a significant crisis, and the growing threat of Boko Haram could further destabilize the region. Mali has indeed suffered from decades of neglect, and the last few years have been some of the worst in recent history. After a series of two military coup d'états in Mali in 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron finally had

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enough and terminated Operation Barkhane in June 2021. This essay demonstrates that the increased violence in the region was exacerbated by myopic policies driven by the European community and other international donors that focus on counterterrorism and supporting authoritarian leaders while placing a lower priority on governance and improving central infrastructure to support the needs of the people. The overarching challenges and problems of terrorist groups and violence are made worse by Western intentions focusing on military solutions, which undermine the importance of good governance.[7] While the Malian government historically exercised control over the major cities such as the capital of Bamako and other major urban centers that have been threatened by terrorist cells over the past few years, which has directly threatened the ruling regime. In June 2019, after a massacre of 160 people in the Muslim Fulani ethnic group in the village of Ogossagou, 30,000 protestors demonstrated against Mali's government in the capital of Bamako because of its inability to address ethnic violence.[8] The government's tenuous hold on most of the country has only weakened over the past few years, despite international efforts to stabilize the government.

Since Mali is a former French colony, they have historically led counterterrorism efforts in the region and paid lip service to democratic principles. However, in the same breath, they support oppressive leaders who are increasingly disengaged from the population, which has become more disenfranchised over time. France is not the only country guilty of such behavior. The US and other countries in the European Union (EU) mimic similar language and actions. Existing missions in the Sahel and Mali specifically are ineffective for three reasons.

The first is a lack of coordination among the various agencies and programs--the United Nations (UN) mission should be the natural coordinating agency. However, it lacks the framework to demarcate lines of effort and a division of labor among agencies. The second focuses on treating the region's symptoms rather than the root cause of violence: economic development, opportunities, good governance, economic equality, and a transparent judicial process that holds people accountable. The centerpiece for the region must involve the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Improvements in these sectors would also encourage foreign direct investment (FDI), promote infrastructure

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projects, and reduce the appeal of terrorist organizations to young people. Economics and infrastructure must be a central framework for Malians, demanding that more significant funding is directed towards infrastructure improvements that benefit the people. In Mali, for example, military spending is snowballing and outpacing crucial infrastructure projects as a percentage of GDP.

Lastly, aid must be tied to the meaningful reduction of corruption and changes that promote transparency. This issue marginalizes the people and further fuels ethnoreligious violence in the Sahel. This manuscript seeks to answer the question, "Why has violence increased and terrorist cells continued to thrive in Mali despite international efforts?" It is divided into three sections. The first will provide a background or context for the Sahel over the past decade culminating with the French announcement of ending the Barkhane mission in June 2021. The following section will analyze existing programs and policy recommendations for the future, followed by a conclusion and the consequences or impact if changes are not implemented.

Background

Africa is home to the largest concentration of UN soldiers on any continent. There are ongoing UN missions in Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Western Sahara, Abyei, and South Sudan.[9] As of October 2021, there were 16,598 UN personnel deployed to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), an endeavor that began in July 2013 to stabilize Mali and help restructure the government.[10] MINUSMA has had limited success in its peacebuilding and peacekeeping role in reducing conflict, though humanitarian intervention has been the central focus of the UN. Critics suggest that the structure of the UN is part of the problem as it lacks a command system capable of rapid decision-making and coordination with the numerous forces and contingents involved in the Sahel. It is also concerning that Mali's violence has reached a high watermark over the past few years, despite the heavy concentration of forces from the UN, Europe, and other African countries. In 2018, of Mali's population of 18.6 million, 335,000 were forced to flee their homes.[11] Furthermore, in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, violence

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increased dramatically in 2021 to 2,500 incidents and 6,000 deaths.[12] If anything, it is clear that the security environment has grown much worse.

The military missions show slight improvement, though the shocking rise of coups and coup attempts suggests much more going on in the Sahel. As of July 21, 2020, 84,000 refugees and 570,000 displaced people returned to their homes in Mali, which, on the surface, suggests that the MINUSMA mission is compelling.[13] However, overall, the crisis and fatalities from armed groups in 2020 reflected a five-year increase in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.[14] According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), as of October 2020, deteriorating conditions in the central Sahel states of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger increased almost 60% in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic, with a record of 13.4 million people requiring humanitarian assistance.[15] Other studies that focus on violence in the region were equally stark. As of 2020, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported 2,400 civilian deaths in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, one of the deadliest years in recent history.[16] Insurgent groups continue to thrive in the region and have expanded their networks and areas of operation over the past few years.

Mali continued to be the epicenter of the crisis and went through two military coup d'états in 2020, one of the worst years in recent history.[17] Between the middle of 2020 and early 2022, there were five coups in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali, Sudan, and two failed attempts in Guinea-Bissau and Niger.[18] Other areas in the Sahel have also deteriorated precipitously, though environmental conditions and the COVID-19 epidemic were also factors. According to Paul Taylor, Regional Vice President for West Africa at the IRC:

> This is not the same crisis it has historically been. Civilians in the Central Sahel are worse off in 2020 by nearly every measure—more likely to need humanitarian aid, be displaced, face food insecurity, or die from conflict—than at any other point in the previous decade. More than 7 million people are acutely food insecure – a tripling since last year – and this number is expected to grow to almost 13 million by the end of this year. In 2019, civilian deaths in the region rose by a staggering 1,870% compared to 2016, with civilian deaths linked to militias increasing by 8,500% in just four years from 2015 to 2019.[19]

The situation in the Sahel has worsened, with environmental stress caused by altered rainfall patterns, damaging floods, and droughts, generating conflict among the agricultural and pastoral communities in the region, according to a September 2020 press release by the UN Security Council.[20]

The Islamic State in the Great Sahara (ISGS), Boko Haram, which now calls itself the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and the Al Qaeda-affiliated *Jama'at Nusrat Al Islam Wal Muslimin* (JNIM) continue to exacerbate regional tensions and the stabilization and protection of civilians have decreased, undermining the credibility of MINUSMA. Furthermore, due to confusion and misinterpretation over the mission and scope of the MINUSMA (established in 2013 after the Tuareg rebellion in 2012), UN leadership views the operation through the lens of counterterrorism versus one that needs to support the government and state.[21]

Five countries in the Sahel, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, formed the G5 Sahel (G5S) on February 16, 2014, to increase cooperation on economic policies and security issues in West Africa. The G5S has been marred by allegations of abuse and corruption, primarily centered on Chad's military. In August 2014, France launched a large counterterrorism mission, Operation Barkhane, with 3,000 soldiers in the G5 Sahel.

To address the challenges in the region with Boko Haram, in April 2012, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Benin retooled the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which was initially formed in 1994.[22] However, it became much more active in 2015. The most significant change in the MNJTTF in 2015 was increased resources and the fact that it would fall under the supervision of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. It operates 10,000 troops under an African Union Peace and Security Council mandate. The US and the EU are the largest donors to the MNJTF. The MNJTF had achieved some traction in 2015-2016, though the gains were lost in 2018-2019 when Boko Haram attacked an MNJTF base and killed 90 soldiers in March 2020.[23] This attack underscored the reach of terrorist groups and undermined the credibility of the MNJTF undertaking because it has repeatedly failed to stop killing innocent civilians. One example occurred in late 2020 when dozens of farmers in Nigeria's Borneo State

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were killed.[24] Adding more challenges to the MNJTF, Chad's leaders felt that they were bearing the burden of the force, and they pulled 1,000 troops from Nigeria in 2020.[25] The reduction of troops undermined the effectiveness of the MNJTF, which was precarious at best.

On March 27, 2020, European countries banded together to support the French Barkhane operation by forming a new task force, Takuba. Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Niger, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom dedicated resources to support Task Force Takuba to combat terrorism in eastern Burkina Faso, southwestern Niger, and central Mali. Task Force Takuba was also to work in coordination with the G5S, MINUSMA, and the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali). In addition to these missions, several others pursue various security goals in the region, such as the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) and EU Capacity Building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger). The programs were established between 2013 and 2014 to bolster civilian, military, and law enforcement capabilities.[26] While it might appear that there was a bit of overlap and redundancy in the EU missions in the Sahel, the Takuba mission was designed to deploy EU military personnel to the field and fill a gap in the restrictions imposed by the EUTM.[27]

In May 2021, Mali leadership announced a new interim president and prime minister nine months after the last coup d'état on August 18, 2020.[28] In June 2021, the French announced they were canceling the Barkane mission in the Sahel, which began in August of 2014 to replace Operation Serval (2002-2014), designed to remove Islamic militants in northern Mali. The abrupt cessation of Barkhane reflects unmet French demands that states in the region take on greater security and governance responsibilities for themselves, particularly following Mali's May 2020 coup and the subsequent coup in August 2021. Two coups within nine months probably shaped France's decision to end its operations in the region the following month in June of 2021. In August 2021, Chad announced that it recalled half of its troop allocation, or 600 soldiers, from the G5S to better position them to counter terrorist threats in other areas.[29] France also announced reducing its troop footprint from 5,100 to 3,000-2,500, though French soldiers will operate out of Niger and abandon Mali altogether.[30] Emmanuel Macron stated that he would

gradually withdraw France's soldiers over several years and shift the mission to a broader international coalition but burdened the countries that required assistance.[31] Macron told a reporter that France was unwilling to continue working in Mali, a country "where there was no democratic legitimacy or transition."[32] The French reduction in the region will have a wide-ranging impact as it was the principal proponent of intelligence and logistics capabilities crucial to other military operations in the Sahel, supporting the MINUMSA and G5S missions.[33] The big concern over Mali is that France is curtailing a large force without having a firm plan for incorporating its essential elements of responsibility into other partner missions, which will only make the programs harder to maintain and exert the pressure needed for governmental reforms in Mali. Over the next few years, Mali may continue to slip precipitously towards the edge of becoming a failed state.

By ending its long-standing Barkane mission, France highlighted the host of frustrations by the international community regarding failed governance and corruption. Countries operating in the region have neglected to hold leaders accountable and ignore or downplay the abuse and excessive violence used by military and police forces which undermines the government's credibility in the people's eyes, ultimately eroding public confidence in the system. Although the international community talks about improving governance, little takes place in the way of meaningful changes and policies that improve the daily lives of the people of Mali.[34]

Much like the US challenges in Afghanistan, the French and American people have lost patience with distance missions that divert funding and priorities from home countries. The military and government have marginalized the people through often heavy-handed responses with military personnel. The Human Rights Watch found that security personnel suspected over 250 unlawful killings of alleged terrorist suspects and civilians between December 2019 and August 2020.[35] While most Malian people would prefer democracy, 75%, according to the Afrobarometer, the population is frustrated with instability and graft that they are willing to give anyone a chance to lead if there is a remote possibility that they are less corrupt.[36]

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Despite the heavy UN footprint, Mali remains the epicenter of armed conflict in the Sahel. In fact, for most Malians, the government's failure under former President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in August 2020 partially fueled the military coup that took place in the same month, highlighting the people's frustration after decades of mismanagement.[37] Some analysts conclude that poverty, weak governance coupled with economic disparity, and a sizeable Muslim population distort and exaggerate the region's pressing concerns while creating policy outcomes of negligible value.[38]

Analysis

As the regional leader, France must coordinate with other EU and partner countries to ensure that security gains are not entirely erased by drawing down forces. Germany, which has 1,500 soldiers in Mali, 1,200 of which work for MINUSMA, expressed doubts about remaining part of the UN mission in Mali without France.[39] Several neighboring countries expressed concerns about a lack of UN presence in Mali and the potential for a worsening security environment. French leaders signaled that the new leadership in Mali created multiple obstructions and eroded the possibility of victory over terrorist organizations.[40]

The rising anti-French sentiment in Mali created openings for non-European actors who were working ineffectively to promote the interests of the Malian people. Unfortunately, it might be too late as Mali has turned to the Russian Wagner Group to fill the void, arguing that it must diversify its partnerships. However, mercenaries are only interested in profit and have little interest in achieving overarching principles and regional stability. Mali's leaders agreed with Wagner Group for at least 1,000 mercenaries in a $10.8 million (US) contract to train the military and provide security escorts for senior leaders.[41]

What has happened traditionally is that the focus on military operations emboldens and elevates the status of the military above other agencies, undermining the legitimacy of the government. Furthermore, a lack of economic opportunities and poor infrastructure erode public confidence. Venturi & Barana argued that terrorist groups "capitalized on losing livelihoods and economic woes to recruit people into its ranks. It has also worked to establish authority, improve service delivery, and encourage communities' trust in areas it controls."[42] The death toll has increased

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significantly over the past few years, according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), an organization based in Sweden that tracks violence and conflict worldwide. In 2017, according to UCDP, there were 605 deaths caused by state-based or non-state-based violence.[43] In the three years from 2018 to 2020, the total number of deaths spiked to 4,002, or 1,282 in 2018, 1,227 in 2019, and 1493 in 2020, far exceeding the deaths since 1990 (registered at 582).[44]

Among the countries in the Sahel, Chad has played an important leadership role in the region, providing most of the troops for counterterrorism efforts, despite allegations of misdeeds by Chadian forces. Chad is seen as a reliable, albeit authoritarian, country that the international community values, though its requests urging Chad's leaders to embrace diversity in the military and improve relations with the civilian community have produced negligible results.[45] Chad's President Idriss Deby was killed in April 2021 while visiting troops in the field, while his son, Mahamat Idriss Deby, has assumed the leadership role.[46] Chad's opposition parties requested joint dialogue with the ruling Zaghawa clan, who control the military and benefit from Chad's natural resources and appear unlikely to offer any concessions.[47] The new government will likely be just as authoritarian as the old one, cracking down on political freedom and human rights. The new government presented an opportunity for France and the rest of Europe to hold leaders accountable and encourage human rights and democratic principles as a condition for aid and support. However, it appears that President Macron was elected to continue the status quo with Chad.

Despite having achieved some meaningful results, all the missions in Mali and the Sahel are ultimately failures. For example, when one leader of a terrorist group is killed, another emerges. Although several missions work towards the same goals, they are not coordinated and only treat the symptoms of the problem, which is the growth of terrorism. Root cause analysis would find that the foundation of social upheaval is rooted in rampant poverty, economic inequality, and a lack of services. Authoritarian leaders are out of touch with the people, corrupt, and nepotists, all factors that undermine social order.

While France and American leaders talk about good governance, the talk is superficial, and aid is not meaningfully tied to political reform that could

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create lasting change in the region and improve society. As Morten Bøås and Francesco Strazzari wrote, "It is in this social space, where state institutions have always been distant and often proven inefficient in building and maintaining governance that delivers public goods to local populations while new material and ideological resources" such as humanitarian aid, services, and education where some jihadist insurgencies are creating a niche for themselves based on an altered social contract.[48] The lack of social services in much of Mali undermines the government and alienates the people. At the same time, local leaders and warlords only need to provide the most rudimentary services to garner public support.

International donors worldwide can quickly become frustrated dealing with governments such as the one in Mali that is corrupt and incompetent. However, due to the suppression of other leaders in the country, these key figures are the only ones who exert any influence. In areas outside the city, the state has a reduced ability to ensure security and regulate social disturbances. Rural regions or ungoverned spaces provide opportunities where illicit actors can provide a flow of illegal money in the region to feed social mobility, improving local stability through undermining the government; in some cases, they also form a shadow black-market economy that provides some opportunities for the local community which is more than the state can offer.[49]

While American and European influence in Mali is waning, drawing lessons to avoid a similar fate in another country is crucial. The bottom line is that civilian and military responses must be balanced in such a way as to reinforce the rule of law and fair and equitable treatment of all citizens. Outside agencies must work with local officials who have the connections to get things done, making options very limited. Furthermore, those influential figures in Mali are also some of the most corrupt, forcing outside agencies to "bargain with the devil" to achieve limited objectives. However, this process undermines the confidence of the general population. France and the UN were forced to engage corrupt leaders who were the least bad option rather than engage marginalized leaders in Mali who did not have the influence to help facilitate training and secure supplies for programs designed to enhance training for the military and law enforcement officials.

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Human rights abuse by deployed troops in the Sahel continues to be an issue. In 2015, the African Union (AU) authorized the restructuring of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), initially formed in 1994 but has struggled to enforce oversight of the force and lacks the legal framework to do so.[50] The EU provides funding for the mission, but neither the EU nor the AU managed as a condition for funding the mechanism to hold troops accountable for their actions which means that international partners are "turning a blind eye on the malpractices unfolding in the region," which has the potential to incentivize more dysfunctional patterns and practices of regional security forces and regimes.[51] Military and civilian accountability is crucial to regaining the population's trust and restoring legitimacy to the host of programs operating in the Sahel.

The biggest challenge in the Sahel is the number of missions and overlap, though many suffer from insufficient resources. Even though African and European countries lead several programs, militants, security, terrorism, corruption, and human trafficking remain a problem. Overall coordination and specialization of each mission would produce better results. In this way, a comprehensive regional task-sharing can coordinate French, US, and EU missions under the umbrella of the UN that would sit at the apex and provide overall harmonization and oversee the efforts of regional actors. One of the biggest challenges is that there is no clear framework for dividing labor among organizations, and personalities and egos can be a barrier to redesigning a holistic framework and synchronizing international efforts. Another is that regional organizations' nature is that "their inherent predispositions and proclivities—severely limit their role in the resolution of internal conflicts."[52]

A more significant concern is that the missions are directed towards the symptoms of a much larger problem: economic development/opportunities, good governance, economic equality, and a transparent judicial process that holds people accountable, which means that ECOWAS must assume a central role. Improvements in these sectors would also encourage FDI, promote infrastructure projects, and reduce the appeal of terrorist organizations for young people.

The growth of armed insurgents in the Sahel, despite the host of missions designed to eliminate them, should signal the need to reassess the situation, look for the crisis's root cause(s), and encourage transparent

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military operations across all mission sets to better coordinate future operations. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that insurgent groups are not all driven by the same motivations. Bøås & Strazzari, expanding on a list first proposed by Christopher Clapham in 1998, suggested that all modern movements can be broken into four categories: separatist insurgencies such as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, reformists (e.g., Museveni's National Resistance Army in Uganda), warlord insurgencies fighting for power and influence (Froday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, and lastly, groups fighting strictly for profit (they have suggested this last grouping).[53] While armed non-state actors are increasingly common, the government should approach those that are influential and support governmental reform and the reduction of corruption. A good example was the transitional Prime Minister of Mali, Moctar Ouane, who said in 2020 that Mali would talk to jihadi groups. However, French officials and President Macron publicly rejected any formal discussions between Mali's government and terrorist groups.[54] In 2020 the Institute for Security Studies surveyed people around the Sahel and found that large community groups supported the government talking to terrorists. However, pockets still feel it would be a sign of weakness if the government did so.[55] As Nsaibia has suggested, the escalation of violence in the area continues to increase despite international and regional efforts to stem the flood of violence should be taken as an indication that exploring new avenues and talking with terrorists might be productive.[56] Such discussions have proven fruitful in other conflicts, such as the violence in Northern Ireland. The British government finally relented under Tony Blair's New Labor Party to talk to IRA members considered terrorists by many in the British government.[57]

The US, Europe, and regional leaders in the Sahel should redesign their objectives, placing ECOWAS in a central role in their place. ECOWAS is a regional political and economic organization formed by fifteen countries to establish an integrated monetary and trade union in 1975. ECOWAS has had limited success, primarily due to political instability, social unrest, and terrorist groups. Nevertheless, international partners can work more closely with ECOWAS, an African-led program to increase pro-democracy protocols and other programs.[58]

Member states have sent military resources to bolster regions during political instability. ECOWAS maintains a solid regional reputation despite

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military coup d'états continuing to derail progress in member countries. Four coup d'états took place in ECOWAS member states in 2020 alone (two successful coups in Mali and coup attempts in Niger and Guinea). Despite these challenges, ECOWAS continues to operate and has several institutions to promote economic cooperation, such as an investment and development bank and projects geared towards improving industries in science and technology. Improvements and changes would need to be made because West Africa and Central Africa are separate regional economic communities (REC), making cooperation more difficult.[59]

Conclusion

While illicit actors abound in the Sahel, the reality is that the people in the region lack civil and political rights. The Malian people cannot address their needs for health, welfare, and employment opportunities without fear from the state.[60] All international aid focuses on military interests centered on illicit activities and extremist groups. For example, in 2020, the US allocated $79 million in foreign development assistance, although only one percent was directed towards governance projects.[61] Groups that fall under the terrorist designation operate within the Sahel and Mali. However, some are working to advance the people's interests by "challenging local, regional, and national government over issues of corruption, marginalization, political exclusion and mismanagement."[62] In some cases, corrupt government officials distort the narrative and objectives of militant groups to eliminate threats to their rule. This subject is not well studied and must be conducted to develop a comprehensive and meaningful approach to stemming the wave of violence in Mali and the Sahel.

The example of Mali is illustrative for the region regarding spending and budget allocations for defense versus infrastructure. As of 2012, Mali has doubled its spending on the military as a percentage of GDP, yet infrastructure projects lag far behind.[63] Some analysts suggest that Western countries are complicit in Mali for "the lack of security because they chose to extol the power-sharing agreement between President Ahmed Tourmani Toure and key military and opposition parties in 2002, instead of recognizing its disenfranchising elements."[64] While there is a need for a solid military for counterterrorism, funding must be increased to provide infrastructure for the Malian people and improve appropriately.

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The paltry percentage allocated to governance must be re-examined. Furthermore, government oversight and programs are crucial to holding military and civilian leaders accountable for corruption and abuse of their authority.[65]

Greater coordination and a central role for the UN must be established for future missions in the Sahel. This will require several changes and multilateral cooperation between the US, France, Europe, and the UN. For example, efforts in Mali were initially designed toward peacekeeping and stability while fostering good governance. Isaac Kfir argues that while fighting terrorists and training military personnel, Western countries have poured weapons and equipment into a region, making the environment more militarized while promoting violence to resolve differences; this erodes social order while supporting corrupt authoritarian leaders.[66] While countering terrorist groups is a Western priority, underlying state legitimacy, and local infrastructure are the most important for Malians, though those programs are lightly funded. These priorities must be realigned. Placing ECOWAS as the keystone for future policies can facilitate economic development.

Given the upward spiral of violence in the Sahel, the time was never more urgent to re-examine the framework and objectives of the host of missions to focus on balancing military objectives with those that support accountable governance responsible for the needs of the people. Funding should be increased to support government policies and infrastructure projects and hold leaders accountable with a transparent system. Countries in the Sahel are desperate for financial aid and investment, and Western donors must do more than talk about governmental reform and reducing corruption. Resources must be withdrawn if substantive changes are not implemented. If this 180-degree adjustment is not made, local warlords will quickly capitalize on the hardship experienced by the Malians and the economic disparity, further increasing violence.

While governance is the keystone for Mali and the Sahel, other factors may complicate the future and provide more significant areas for the insurgent group to undermine weak governments and infrastructure. A case in point will be climate change and droughts that will stress the Malian people and highlight poor infrastructure and social programs that are ineffective at supporting large segments of the population at the edge of survival. Due to

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global temperature increases and reduced rainfall, the Sahel region is expanding south by 1,400 square miles yearly, reducing arable land and forcing hundreds of thousands of farmers to migrate.[67] According to projections by the UN, by 2025, more than 2.8 billion people in 48 countries will suffer from water scarcity or water stress. An estimated "230 million Africans will face water scarcity, and 460 million will live in water-stressed countries."[68] The time for new policies in the Sahel was never more urgent.

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