Introduction

Increasing instability and humanitarian crises in the Sahel Region have become a source of growing concern around the world. Political instability fuelled by porous borders and states’ complicity with organized crime and terrorism has allowed for an environment in which terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have grown. Weak state control in the area aggravates this power vacuum, enabling terrorist organizations to expand their sphere of influence and establish safe havens and cantons in areas out of government control. The scale and scope of security issues alongside an increase in the severity of challenges linked to ethno-nationalist irredentism has facilitated state-sponsored terrorism, organized crime, radical armed groups, and illicit financial flows.

Exacerbating the political climate in the Sahel Region is a growing humanitarian crisis, where, as of 2013, over 18 million individuals suffer from this crisis. It is underscored by environmental stress stemming from the very location of the Sahel to bring rise to a number of environmental challenges, including drought, variations in rainfall, and desertification. The accompanying impacts of these challenges include famine and food insecurity that expedite internal tensions, displacement of people, inter-communal violence, and political instability. It has become increasingly evident that the realities of the Sahel Region call for radical rethinking and the construction of “regional dynamics and international response frameworks in Africa” (Conflict).

With terrorist organizations increasing their sphere of influence in the drought-ridden Sahel Region, it is imperative that the situation in the Sahel Region be addressed immediately.

Definition of Key Terms

Sahel Region

The Sahel Region is the ecoclimatic and biogeographic zone of transition in Northern Africa separating the Saharan desert to the north to the Sudanese Savannah on the south. The Sahel region is located across the south-central latitudes of Northern Africa, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea.

For a cartographical representation of the Sahel Region, see Appendix I.

Terrorism/Terrorist Acts
See Appendix II.

*Note: No universal agreement on the definition of terrorism exists. This definition is simply to serve as a guide for delegates in their preparation for debate.*

**Militia**

A militia is a military force raised from the civil population with the purpose of supplementing a regular army in times of emergency.

**Military Coup (Coup d'état)**

A military coup, otherwise known as a coup d'état, is a sudden and often violent overthrow of an existing government by a relatively small group. The foremost prerequisite for a military coup is the total or partial control of the armed forces, the police, and other entities that constitute a nation's means of military protection.

**The Group of Five Sahel States (G5 Sahel)**

The Group of Five Sahel States (G5 Sahel) is an institutional framework for coordination of regional cooperation. The G5 Sahel consists of five Sahel countries: Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

**Background Information**

**The Origins of the Crisis**

The crisis in the Sahel region is one with geographical underpinnings that continue to exacerbate standard of living and social strife. For this reason, the origins of the crisis can be largely attributed to a lack of industrialization, brought on by geographical and climatic impediments that are inherent to the region. Nearly all crises in the region stem from or are associated with destructive climatic patterns.

**Twentieth Century Droughts**

The most severe of the climatic obstacles in the Sahel region are droughts, of which their frequency and severity is unparalleled in other areas of the world. At least one particularly severe drought has been confirmed every century since the 17th century.

Originally, excessive consumption of natural resources in the form of overgrazing, deforestation, and poor land management were blamed as the driving forces behind the Sahel's pattern of droughts. In addition to the aforementioned causes, it is now accepted that large-scale climate change is likely a trigger for the droughts as well.
Internal/External Conflicts and Political Instability

Political instability, conflict, insecurity, and extremism in the Sahel region continues to exacerbate its ongoing crises. Not only are humanitarian efforts being smothered through weakened flows of food, trade, and aid, but foreign investor confidence is diminishing as well.

Terrorism/Extremism

The major terrorist organizations that present a continuing threat to the stability of the region are Boko Haram and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Through countless attacks and displacements, terrorism and extremism in the Sahel Region have wrought devastation on human security and economic development. The region remains greatly threatened by violence and instability.

Boko Haram and AQIM have targeted already fragile and economically marginalized communities by disrupting health and education services and damaging local economies. In Nigeria and Mali, extremist groups seized control of strategic towns to turn them into no-go zones for regional governments and security forces (CSIS).

In Mali, violent extremists helped precipitate state collapse in the toppling of the elected government in April, 2012. Attempting a total take-over of the country, a coalition of terrorists were stopped by French and Chadian soldiers.

In the past few years, Boko Haram and AQIM (among other extremist groups) have come under increasing pressure. Regional and international military interventions, a UN peacekeeping deployment into northern Mali, and other efforts listed under “Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue” have played critical roles in limiting the scope of their influence. Both Boko Haram and AQIM have suffered significant setbacks in materiel and have lost control over their respective areas. However, their influence and presence continue to be felt in the region.

Humanitarian Crisis

The Sahel’s humanitarian crisis has escalated from acute rainfall deficits and worsening insecurity.

Displacements

Droughts in recent years “has prematurely thrust pastoralist communities into the lean season, with herders migrating earlier than usual” (Sahel). Hundreds of families have been uprooted in recent months due to growing insecurity in Mali and armed terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso and Niger, adding to the long-running conflict around the Lake Chad Basin.
In Burkina Faso and Mali, some of the worst-hit populations are in areas that are difficult to reach, hindering effective delivery of assistance. Border closures in Niger and Chad are preventing herders from reaching pastures and markets to sell their livestock.

Famine

During the 1960-1980 period, famine affected most of the Sahel’s 60 million people, bringing about the death of over 100,000 people and leaving 750,000 people dependent on food aid (UNEP). Much of the economies, human populations, livestock, and agriculture of the Upper Volta (Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Niger, and Burkina Faso) felt severe repercussions.

Failed harvests and subsequent high prices of staple foods have “hastened the arrival of this year’s ‘lean season’ … [as a result] up to 5.8 million people risk severe hunger” (WFP). Families in the Sahel have reported cutting down on daily meals and children being too weak to attend school. In an increase of 50 percent over the last year, up to 5.5 million children across the Sahel are at risk of acute malnutrition, of which 1.6 million children facing severe acute malnutrition (WFP).

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Chad

Ridden with natural disasters and illness, Chad has been struggling for years to strengthen its economy. However, with unstable markets and food insecurity from floods, the nation is in constant need for humanitarian, military, and economic aid.

In 2015, Chadian forces assisted French forces to support Mali in their fight against radical Islamic insurgents who had tried to seize power in Mali.

The ongoing crisis in the Lake Chad Basin has led to Chad becoming the seventh largest refugee-hosting nation in the world; with over 750,000 displaced persons, the majority of this influx consists of refugees or Chadian returnees fleeing from the Central African Republic, Sudan, Nigeria, and Libya.

Mali

For the past decade, Mali has suffered from severe repercussions arising from natural disasters, of which steep increases in the rates of poverty and famine stand at the forefront of its resulting humanitarian crisis. In part fueling the political corruption that is rife in the nation, Mali has experienced organized crime, warlord activity, and terrorism.

Migration across the Sahelian countries is a feature of life among Sahelian peoples, where the flow of refugees moving with livestock from war-affected areas in Mali is particularly prominent.
The violent outbreaks in northern Mali in 2012 have continued to affect security to hamper humanitarian efforts. Conflict and insecurity have exacerbated the already limited provision of healthcare and education, poverty, unemployment, and armed attacks in the nation. Violence against women and girls has increased in tandem to the increase in political insecurity.

**Libya**

Internal conflicts in Libya began with peaceful demonstrations in February, 2011, that were violently suppressed by the Libyan government. Diplomatic initiatives by the UN were ineffective. Neighboring nations in the Sahel Region experienced large influxes of refugees fleeing from the ongoing crisis in Libya within a relatively short period of time. In addition to these refugees, an inflow of unspecified and unquantifiable numbers of arms and ammunition from the Libyan arsenal followed. Being nations largely unfit to carry a larger populace, this immigration en masse directly threatens impending food security and nutrition crises that could further aggravate the socioeconomic situation in the region.

**United States of America**

The United States of America has historically been inconsistent in its support and interest in the Sahel region. In 2017, the United States of America “has promised $60 million to support the Group of Five Sahel States (G5 Sahel) Joint Force’s counter-terrorism efforts” (Campos and Ross). The force will eventually consist of nearly 5,000 troop units from Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania to counter the growing jihadist threat in the Sahel region.

**France**

France has an active military presence across Africa relative to other European nations, which is justified by the existence of French colonies such as Chad and Mali within the Sahel region. France’s willingness to be forceful on the world stage is evidenced by the unilateral intervention in Mali in 2013.

Operation Serval was a French military operation in Mali with the aim of ousting Islamist militants from northern Mali. For a cartographical portrayal of France’s involvement in Mali, see Appendix III.

France is resolutely engaged in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region, on a bilateral as well as European level. This is seen chiefly in the French operation Barkhane, alongside the G5 Sahel joint force. Although the objective of this operation is to enable nations in the Sahel region to acquire the capacity to autonomously ensure their security, it has received criticism in its support to the repressive Sahelian governments that lie at the heart of the Sahel region’s problems.
ECOWAS (The Economic Community of West African States)

The Economic Community of West African States is a regional group of 15 West African countries with the goal of promoting economic integration and “self-sufficiency” across West Africa. This is acted upon via the creation of a single, large trading bloc for its member states. The nations that exist in the Sahel region and are also member states of ECOWAS are: Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

In collaboration with the West African Monetary Union Commission and the Permanent Interstates Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, ECOWAS has developed a Sahel Strategy Document. The action plan’s implementation is scheduled for 2016-2020 and comes with the support of a Coordination Platform comprising major stakeholders.

ECOWAS also serves as a peacekeeping force in West Africa.

UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)

UNODC has a global presence in the fight against drug trafficking and international crime. The UNODC Sahel Program “supports the development of accessible, efficient and accountable criminal justice systems to combat illicit trafficking drug trafficking, organized crime, terrorism and corruption in the region” (UNODC). This program has been developed within the framework of the UN Regional Integrated Strategy for the Sahel 2014-2019.

Boko Haram

Boko Haram is a branch of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The group is largely active in the north of Nigeria, with the aim of imposing Sharia law upon the Nigerian populace by overthrowing the government and setting an Islamic state.

Since its insurgency in 2009, Boko Haram has increased their asymmetrical attacks in the Sahel region, expanding their violence to Chad and Niger (countries that have committed forces to the Multinational Joint Task Force). The terrorist group has carried out a number of mass murders throughout the Sahel region.

As of 2017, Boko Haram is the second-deadliest terror group in the world in terms of the total number of people killed (UNICEF).

AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb)

AQIM is an Islamist militant organization with the aim of overthrowing the Algerian government to institute an Islamic state. Its anti-government campaigning brings rise to threats that not only affect Algeria but also the neighboring Sahel region as a whole.

Timeline of Events

Page 6 of 11 | Research Report
June-August, 2010
2010 Sahel drought. During this period, severe famine hit the Sahel region and temperatures reached record highs. Humanitarian crisis followed.

March 21st, 2012
Beginning of the 2012 Malian coup d’état. Followed by unanimous international condemnation and sanctions by Mali’s neighbours.

January 2014-December 2016
2014-2016 Response Plan for the Sahel Region. The strategy provides a set of ambitious objectives and targets that will require a sustained, multi-year effort to achieve.

January 3rd-January 7th, 2015
2015 Baga Massacre: a series of mass killings carried out in Nigeria by Boko Haram, where up to 2,000 people were killed.

**Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

- Security Council Resolution 1566, 8 October 2004 (S/RES/1566)
- Security Council Resolution 2100, 25 April 2013 (S/RES/2100)
- European Parliament Resolution of 22 October 2013
- Security Council Resolution 2295, 29 June 2016 (S/RES/2295)

**Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue**

Several attempts have been made in limiting state sponsored terrorism, the most prominent of which are listed below:

- **Security Council resolution 1373** (2001), building on the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (1999), calls upon “[member] states to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism, inter alia, by criminalizing the collection and provision of funds for terrorist purposes, and urges them to set up effective mechanisms to freeze funds and other financial assets of persons involved in or associated with terrorism, as well as to prevent those funds from being made available to terrorists.”

- Through its Sahel Program, UNODC “aims to promote capacity building in the fight against terrorism and transnational organized crime of the authorities of the region through accessible, effective and accountable criminal justice systems” (UNODC).

- Through the creation of the UN Support Plan for the Sahel, the UN has set the goal to “scale up efforts to accelerate shared prosperity and lasting peace in the Sahel countries and the region at-large by implementing priorities to achieve the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the African Union Agenda 2063” (AfricaRenewal).
The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali is a peacekeeping mission set in Mali and founded on 25 April 2013 by UN Security Council Resolution 2100.

Following the West African Sahel drought of 1968-73, The United Nations Sahelian Office (UNSO) was created with the goal of addressing the issues brought on by drought in the Sahel region.

The World Food Programme (WFP) provides emergency food and cash assistance to food insecure persons, aiming to “save lives and avert famine” (WFP). The World Food Programme assists in building of rehabilitating infrastructure, diversifying livelihoods, restoring ecosystems, and providing school meals and nutrition support.

Possible Solutions

In order to alter the cost-benefit calculus, effectively address the region’s ongoing humanitarian crisis, or limit the scope of terrorism and other forms of violent activity, the careful fulfilment of the following steps may provide effective action.

From an economic standpoint, a solution could come by imposing boycotts, tariffs, embargos, and other restricting measures on states found to be sponsors of or associated to terrorist organizations. Likewise, imposing “a secondary boycott on states that continue to maintain economic and other ties, whether open or covert, with states on which a boycott was imposed because of their involvement in terrorism” would serve as further restriction (Ganor). In a similar vein, countries may establish or strengthen national institutions specializing in financial intelligence to curb illicit financial flows. Doing so would tackle issues such as money-laundering, drug trafficking, and related offences provided in the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Perhaps the most comprehensive approach to combat organized crime and terrorism in the region would be in establishing a permanent international mechanism to combat terrorism, ensuring punitive measures are taken against states engaged in terrorism and warning against any infringement of these measures. To facilitate this, the nations making up the Sahel Region must take the necessary measures to establish or strengthen security throughout their borders. Doing so would allow for governments to crack down on smuggling networks and monitor influxes or exoduses of refugees and asylum seekers. Similarly, political leaders within these nations must establish legitimacy and promote transparency in order to tackle corruption within their borders.

Delegates must keep in mind that when preparing resolutions for this issue, international law is abided and nations’ sovereignty is respected. Additionally, delegates must consider tackling the issue from a number of different standpoints in an attempt to produce comprehensive solutions.
Bibliography


Appendices

Appendix I
Appendix II

In accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004), terrorist acts are condemned as:

criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism, are under no circumstances justifiable by considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar nature.

Appendix III
French intervention in Mali

French and Malian troops continued to advance northeast on Tuesday, hours after seizing several central towns from rebels.

France continues to use air and ground power in their joint offensive with Malian soldiers against Islamist groups which control the Northern swaths of the country.

Islamists left the town of Diabaly late last week. They rode northbound for three hours in a convoy of between 30 to 50 cars, mostly large range SUVs and pickups said witnesses. The rebels have vowed to defend urban centers and turn the situation in Mali into a protracted guerrilla conflict they call “France’s Afghanistan.”

Paris has deployed heavier vehicles and high-tech artillery pieces as well as its most sophisticated helicopter gunship, the Tiger.

Diabaly, which lies 400 kilometers north of the capital Bamako, has been the theater of air strikes and fighting since it was seized by Islamists a week ago.

The town of Douentza, which had been under Islamist control since September, had also been retaken by French and Malian troops.

French military bases in neighboring countries.

Reported conflict areas.

Islamist stronghold before the conflict.

Government controlled area.

Information Source: Aljazeera, UNCHR, BBC.