



ARMED CONFLICTS, HUMANITARIAN CRISIS AND ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION IN THE SAHEL REGION

INYIKALUM, Daniel Chibuikwe^{1*} & OKE, Harry Omoro JP.²

Centre for Peace and Security Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt

ARTICLE HISTORY

RECEIVED

22-08-2026

ACCEPTED

01-09-2026

PUBLISHED

07-09-2026

Corresponding author:

INYIKALUM, Daniel
Chibuikwe

Centre for Peace and Security
Studies, Faculty of Social
Sciences, University of Port
Harcourt



Abstract

In examining armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region, this paper observed with keen interest that the persistent and growing strength of violent extremist organizations in the Sahel threatens to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis and spread instability across the Sahel region of Africa. The study was based on the Neo-Malthusian theory which insists that there exist a relationship between environmental changes and insecurity since the former would bring about scarcity in resources and the latter would also occur because of competition over scarce resources leading to violent conflict and crime. The methodology of the study was that of the qualitative method based on secondary sources of data collection. The study discovered that violence in the Sahel has exponentially increased the rate of displacement and migration from the region, compounding pressures on northern and coastal African states and Europe, the epicenters of violence and humanitarian disaster are in the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad Basin sub-regions. Based on the above, the study recommended that Governments across the central Sahel and affected coastal countries, along with technical and financial partners, to significantly scale up investment in expanding access to essential social services and protection, as key pathways to peace and security.

Keywords: Armed conflicts, Humanitarian crisis, Sahel Region

Introduction

The Sahel region has experienced rapid population growth, unemployment and poverty which have resulted in series of armed conflict and the need for urgent humanitarian attention in the region. The persistent and growing strength of violent extremist organizations in the Sahel threatens to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis and spread instability across Africa, posing significant security and financial risks to the United States and Europe. The continuing collapse of international counterterrorism support, as well as weakening leadership in regional efforts, has created a vacuum in which violent extremism can expand. Organizations including Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP), and others have already taken advantage of that vacuum, using countries in the region as platforms to launch indiscriminate attacks on government forces and civilians alike. Other non-state actors, such as the Wagner Group, have also capitalized on the absence of foreign involvement to expand their influence (Ahorsu and Ame, 2021). The possible convergence of security threats, including increased cooperation among terrorist organizations, and between terrorist and criminal organizations, could intensify the danger those groups pose in the region and beyond. Sahel countries are consistently ranked high on the Fragile State Index, particularly Chad, Mali, and Nigeria. Frequent transfers of power are also a problem: Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger experienced a combined twenty-five successful coups d'état between 1960 and 2022.

The crisis is unfolding in one of the most climate-affected regions on the planet. Temperatures in the Sahel are rising 1.5 times faster than the global average. Rainfall is more erratic and intense, causing floods that reduce crop yields and contaminate scarce water supplies. In 2022, the worst flooding in years damaged or destroyed 38,000 homes in Niger, which ranks 7th globally on UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index (Beland, 2015). The crisis in the central Sahel remains chronically and critically underfunded: in 2022, UNICEF received just one third of its US\$391 million Central Sahel appeal. In 2023, UNICEF has appealed for US\$473.8 million to support our humanitarian response in the central Sahel and in neighbouring coastal countries.

Statement of the problem

The Sahel region has long faced severe, complex security and humanitarian crises. Since gaining independence in the 1960s, many countries in the Sahel have experienced violent extremism due to the confluence of weak and illegitimate governance, economic decline, and the worsening effects of climate change. Violence, conflict, and crime have surged over the last decade, transcending national borders and posing significant challenges to countries both in and outside the region (Frank 2017). Women and children are mostly affected by these conflicts. For instance, Ten million children in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are in dire need of humanitarian assistance – twice as many as in 2020 – largely due to spiralling conflict, while nearly 4 million children are at risk in neighbouring countries as hostilities between armed groups and national security forces spill across borders, according to a UNICEF child alert issued today.

“Children are increasingly caught up in the armed conflict, as victims of intensifying military clashes, or targeted by non-state armed groups,” said Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa. “The year 2022 was particularly violent for children in the central Sahel. All parties to the conflict need to urgently stop attacks both on children, and their

schools, health centres, and homes.” In Burkina Faso, three times more children were verified as killed during the first nine months of 2022 than in the same period in 2021, according to UN data. Most of the children died from gunshot wounds during attacks on their villages or as a result of improvised explosive devices or explosive remnants of war.

The armed conflict has become increasingly brutal. Some of the armed groups that operate across vast swathes of Mali, Burkina Faso, and increasingly in Niger employ tactics that include blockading towns and villages and sabotaging water networks. Over 20,000 people in the border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger will be in ‘catastrophe’-level food insecurity by June 2023, according to recent projections (Rahim, 2020). Armed groups that oppose state-administered education systematically burn and loot schools, and threatens, abduct or kill teachers. Over 8,300 schools have shut down across the three countries because they were directly targeted, teachers have fled, or because parents were displaced or too frightened to send their children to school. More than 1 in 5 schools in Burkina Faso have closed and 30 per cent of schools in Niger's Tillaberi region are no longer functional due to the conflict.

Hostilities are spilling over from the central Sahel into the northern border regions of Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo – remote communities with scarce infrastructure and resources, where children have extremely limited access to essential services and protection. At least 172 violent incidents, including attacks by armed groups, were reported in the northern border areas of the four countries in 2022. In Benin, which has been hardest hit, up to 16 per cent of the population are considered at risk, according to a regional monitoring network. In both Benin and Togo, nine schools in the countries' northern regions had shut down or were no longer functional due to insecurity by late 2022.

Aim and Objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the relationship between armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region
2. Identify and discuss the root causes of armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region
3. Interrogate the dynamics and implications of Armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region

Study Questions

1. What is the relationship between armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region?
2. What are the root causes of armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region?
3. What are the dynamics and implications of Armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region?

Significance of the study

This study will be of theoretical and practical importance.

Empirically and theoretically, it will be an updated addition to the existing literature on armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region

Scope of the study

The scope of this paper is limited to armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region.

Invariably, the study focused on the Sahel region.

Conceptual Review

The Sahel region

The Sahel region remains a principal transit point for migrants traveling from sub-Saharan Africa to northern coastal states and on to Europe. Further violence has exponentially increased the rate of displacement and migration from the region, compounding pressures on northern and coastal African states and Europe. The epicenters of violence and humanitarian disaster are in the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad Basin subregions (Stephen, 2016). Liptako-Gourma is in the central Sahel, in the borderlands of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Current instability is associated with the collapse of the Libyan state in 2011, which led to the proliferation of weapons and armed fighters in the region.

The influx of extremists into northern Mali reignited the dormant Tuareg rebellion [PDF] in 2012, which had previously surfaced in 1963, 1990, and 2006. Representing only 10 percent of the Malian population, the Tuareg people, organized under the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), sought an autonomous state and aligned themselves with multiple Islamist groups, including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Ansar Dine to push government forces out of the north. Then-President Amadou Toumani Touré was deposed in a March 2012 coup by the army, which disapproved of the government's failure to suppress the rebellion. The consequent collapse of state institutions in the north enabled the MNLA to capture the regional capitals of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu; the group had declared the independent state of Azawad [PDF] in northern Mali by April. The MNLA quickly split from al-Qaeda and other allied Islamist groups in June following their attempt to impose Islamic law and declare an Islamic caliphate over the northern territory.

After a period of relative calm, the crisis deteriorated in January 2013 as AQIM, MUJAO, and Ansar Dine pushed further south to capture Konna in central Mali. In August, Mali transitioned back to a civilian-led government under Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, which later signed a peace agreement with a coalition of Tuareg independence groups including the MNLA in 2015. The coalition excluded Islamist organizations, which quickly took advantage of the agreement to expand their control, spreading further into central Mali and neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. Liptako-Gourma has since become a hotbed for violent extremism in the Sahel.

Notable attacks targeting the Radisson Blu Hotel in Mali, the Splendid Hotel in Burkina Faso, and L'Etoule du Sud Hotel in Ivory Coast in 2015 and 2016 demonstrated the extent of the Islamist threat to the Sahel and West Africa. In September 2016, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) surfaced in Burkina Faso, launching its first major attack on a border post near the Burkinabe city of Markoye. In 2017, several al-Qaeda affiliates merged to form Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimene (JNIM). The emergence of ISGS and JNIM have intensified violence in the Sahel. Both JNIM and ISGS have pushed farther south in Liptako-Gourma, threatening the security of West Africa's relatively stable coastal states. JNIM has more recently gained control over territory in northern and central Mali, while ISGS has been confined to northern Burkina Faso and western Niger due to clashes with JNIM that began in 2020.

Violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin at the intersection of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria prevailed in the same period

with the reemergence of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. Founded by Muhammed Yusuf in northeastern Nigeria in 2002, Boko Haram was forced underground in 2009 after Nigerian police forces killed over seven hundred members, including Yusuf, during a raid that July. In June and August 2011, Boko Haram resurfaced, indicating its more expansive and aggressive strategy by launching suicide attacks [PDF] on police and the UN headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria. The group gained international notoriety following its abduction of 276 girls from the town of Chibok, Nigeria, giving rise to the global Bring Back Our Girls movement in April 2014 (Turner, 2014).

In 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State and rebranded as the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP). A splinter faction of the original Boko Haram was active until 2021, when ISWAP killed its leader, absorbed its territory, and relegated its members to remote islands in Lake Chad. ISWAP has since established control of northeastern Nigeria and parts of Niger.

Experts attribute the expansion of violent extremism in the Sahel to persistently weak governance, characterized by corruption, democratic backsliding, legitimacy deficits, and human rights violations. Many countries in the region share similar internal dynamics of inequality [PDF]—state power tends to be concentrated in southern, urban regions while rural, northern areas remain underdeveloped and ripe for exploitation by extremist groups. Thus, Sahel countries are consistently ranked high on the Fragile State Index, particularly Chad, Mali, and Nigeria. Frequent transfers of power are also a problem: Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger experienced a combined twenty-five successful coups d'état between 1960 and 2022. Consecutive military coups in Mali in 2020 and 2021, resulting in Mali's current interim government under a military junta, launched the region's most recent so-called coup epidemic, which saw similar occurrences in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger.

The death of Chadian President Idriss Déby on April 20, 2021, created a leadership crisis in regional counterterrorism efforts. Under Déby, Chad and its military acted as a linchpin in regional security coalitions across both Liptako-Gourma and the Lake Chad Basin. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)—comprised of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria—was activated in 2014 to respond to the threat of Boko Haram, organized crime, and banditry in the Lake Chad Basin. In February 2017, France and the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5) countries—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger—announced the creation of the G5 Sahel Force, a five-thousand-troop-strong counterterrorism force aimed at fighting militant groups with an expanded mandate to cross borders in the Sahel region. Increasing civilian casualties and severe human rights violations by security forces in Chad, Mali, and Nigeria have further undermined regional and national efforts (Tor and Benjaminsen 2012).

In 2013, international involvement began in earnest when French forces entered Mali at the request of the Malian government. Operation Serval, later transformed into Operation Barkhane, became a three-thousand-strong force based in N'Djamena, Chad, focused on rooting out violent extremists in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, in partnership with local governments and with the support of Chad and Mauritania. In 2015, Operation Barkhane's mandate expanded to provide additional support to the MNJTF [PDF] in its fight against Boko Haram. Operation Barkhane was quickly succeeded by the

establishment of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and, in 2020, support from the European Union-led Task Force Takuba. By 2020, France had deployed 5,100 troops supported by 15,000 UN peacekeepers from around the world.

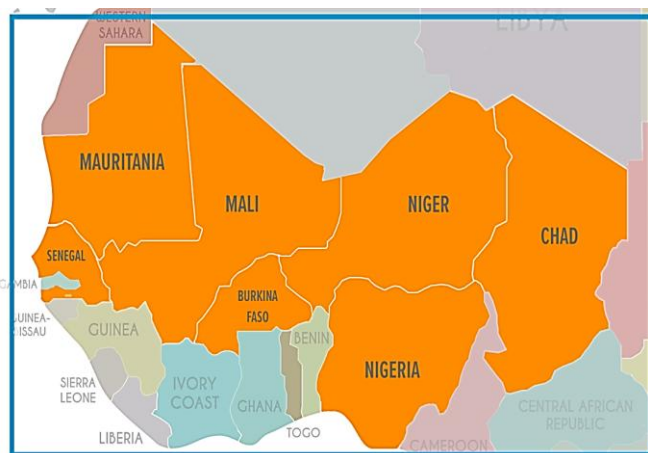


Fig 1.1 Map of the Sahel Region

Source: NBS (2026)

The United States has also provided logistics and advisory support to both the MNJTF and G5 Sahel Force. In addition, the U.S. military has increased its presence in the Sahel, deploying approximately 1,500 troops to the region and building a drone base in Niger as a platform for strikes against groups across West and North Africa. On October 4, 2017, members of the U.S. Special Operations Task Force were ambushed by an Islamic State-affiliate group in Togo, Niger, leading to the deaths of four servicemen. The United States also remains a top donor of humanitarian assistance; continues to provide military training, such as the Flintlock program; and has delivered millions of dollars of arms to the region (Stefan, 2020).

Despite increased international involvement, the campaign against militants has instead caused the spread of militancy to countries across the Sahel. That failure, coupled with France's growing unpopularity in its former colonies, led French President Emmanuel Macron to announce on July 13, 2021, that Operation Barkhane would end in the first quarter of 2022. In February 2022, France and its European allies comprising Task Force Takuba also announced their intent to withdraw all troops from Mali, ending their nearly decade-long intervention. Violent extremists exploited the resulting security vacuum with heightened attacks across the Sahel. The first six months of 2022 saw a dramatic increase in attacks, particularly in the Liptako-Gourma area and spilling into coastal West Africa. More than two thousand civilians were killed during this period, an over 50 percent increase from 2021.

Many attacks have specifically targeted MINUSMA, which has been dubbed the United Nations' most dangerous peacekeeping mission. In lieu of French support, the Malian military junta sought security assistance from the Wagner Group, a Russian mercenary organization involved in other fragile contexts including the Central African Republic, Libya, Mozambique, Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine. Since its introduction in December 2021, the Wagner Group has deployed one thousand mercenaries to Mali housed at fifteen outposts, including former French bases. March 2022 was the deadliest month recorded by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project since 1997—coinciding with renewed activism by ISGS along the Niger-Mali border and the Moura massacre in central Mali. On March 23, Malian soldiers accompanied by Russian

mercenaries from the Wagner Group launched a five-day attack on the town to root out Islamist militants, killing more than three hundred civilians.

Prospects for regional and international counterterrorism efforts deteriorated further in May 2022 when the Malian government officially terminated its Defense Cooperation Treaty with France alongside the Status of Force Agreement formerly governing France and the European Union's operations in the country. Mali's military government also pulled out of the G5 Sahel greatly diminishing the organization's counterterrorism capacity. In June, JNIM killed 132 villagers in central Mali, the deadliest attack on civilians since the coup. In June 2023, Mali's government demanded the departure of MINUSMA, the UN peacekeeping force. The UN agreed to withdraw within six months, raising concerns of a power vacuum and setbacks for Mali's transition to civilian rule, for which the junta claims a June 2023 referendum was a first step. MINUSMA has also played a key role in assuaging Tuareg separatists, who warn that the UN departure will deal a "fatal blow" to the peace agreement (Raynaud, 2017).

An acute humanitarian crisis is exacerbating violent extremism's threat to regional stability. The last decade of conflict has displaced 2.6 million people in Liptako-Gourma and 2.8 million people in the Lake Chad Basin, with hundreds of thousands of refugees pouring into neighboring countries. Sahel countries consistently rank [PDF] among the world's poorest with compounding issues [PDF] of poverty, food insecurity, high unemployment, and the world's fastest-growing population. The Lake Chad Basin crisis has long been recognized as one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world due to the severe harm of climate change and weak governance in rural areas.

Temperatures in the Sahel are rising 1.5 times faster than the global average, directly damaging the livelihoods of millions dependent upon natural resources. Diminishing land and water resources have led to increasingly frequent clashes between herding, farming, and fishing communities. Violent extremist organizations have not only helped worsen humanitarian conditions, including by targeting humanitarian workers, but have also exploited [PDF] insecure conditions to recruit and control populations in the Sahel. In addition, the weakened economies and proliferating violent extremists have increased illicit activity and criminal organizations in the region, further contributing to instability.

Theoretical Framework

The Neo-Malthusian theory

The Neo-Malthusian theory insists that there exist a relationship between environmental changes and insecurity since the former would bring about scarcity in resources and the latter would also occur because of competition over scarce resources leading to violent conflict and crime (Homer-Dixon, 1994: 1999). It is also argued that "decreasing access to renewable natural resource increases frustration, which in turn creates grievances against the state, weakens the state and civil society and increase the opportunity for instigating an insurrection" (Bernauer, 2012, p.20). As earlier noted in the environmental scarcity theory by Homer-Dixon examined in this study, Homer-Dixon (1994) identified three (3) types of scarcity: supply induced, demand induced and structural scarcities. Reduced availability of renewable resources that come as a result of continuous consumption and depletion which turn to be faster than their regeneration process is attributed to supply induced scarcity. On the other hand, scarcity that comes as a result of

population growth (consumption per capita) is referred to as demand induced scarcity. Finally, structural scarcity comes as result of unequal distribution of access to resources.

Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted the historical-descriptive design

Method of data collection: qualitative method based on secondary sources

Method of data analysis: The content analysis was adopted as the method of data analysis

Results and Discussions

Armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region

The Sahel region is facing diverse armed conflicts and unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Over 16 million people need assistance and protection, marking a 172 percent increase from 2016. The number of internally displaced people has surged by over 2,400 percent since 2014 and food insecurity has risen by 532 percent (Raynaut 2017). Despite making up just 0.9 percent of the global population, the Central Sahel accounts for 5 percent of global humanitarian needs.

Recent reports by from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) 2024 indicates that the combined impacts of climate change and armed conflict are causing a significant increase in humanitarian need, displacement and food insecurity. “The humanitarian impacts we are seeing in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are not a coincidence, but a result of historical and current political decisions that have left communities unprepared to face the impacts of climate change,” explains Modou Diaw, the IRC’s regional vice president for West Africa. The Central Sahel’s ongoing humanitarian crisis is not evenly spread. Prioritization of certain regions has left peripheral areas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger particularly vulnerable to the impacts of armed conflict and climate change (Rahim, 2020).

Root curses of armed conflicts and Humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region Inequality after independence

Following their independence in the 1960, countries of the Sahel region especially Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger faced difficulties integrating their marginalized regions. The new governments focused on maintaining control of peripheral regions through security measures. They also extracted resources and tax revenue from rural regions without promoting economic growth. Instead of promoting economic diversification or fostering development in the marginalized periphery, Central Sahel governments persisted in centralizing power and resources within their capitals well into the 21st century. This approach has led to fierce political tensions.

There have been 18 successful coups in the Central Sahel since 1960—an average of one every 3.5 years. These coups have not only fractured economic progress and social unity but have also compelled newly-formed governments to adopt 'coup-proofing' measures, directing substantial resources towards military and defense, often to the detriment of public infrastructure and welfare (De & Gelfand, 2018).

Long history of political instability in the region

A long political legacy has left peripheral areas in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger economically and politically marginalized. As a result, residents suffer from a lack of economic opportunities and political inclusion, which drives grievances against their respective central governments. The exclusion also contributes to a reliance on industries that are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change,

such as farming and herding. Ultimately, extended marginalization and the impacts of climate change increase conflict risk in the Central Sahel. When conflict erupts, it worsens poverty, increases displacement and leaves those on the periphery increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, creating a dangerous self-enforcing cycle (De & Gelfand, 2018).

Climate change drives competition over limited resources

The Central Sahel's conditions have given rise to 41 non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in Mali alone. Some have ties to Al Qaeda and compete with each other and the government to control populations, territories and resources. The ongoing conflicts intensify the challenges of poverty and food insecurity. Violence uproots people from their homes and prevents them from tending to their crops or animals. It also damages water, power and other forms of infrastructure that are crucial for managing the impacts of climate change. “I witnessed the gravity of the situation in Burkina Faso firsthand,” says Diaw (2023). “The food security of the population is unbearable and requires immediate action from all actors who have the capacity to make a difference for these people in dire need of food access.”

Conflict also discourages governments and businesses from investing in vulnerable regions. International donors are largely unwilling to fund programs that improve climate adaptation in fragile and conflict-affected regions. The region's long history of marginalization has resulted in poverty, grievances and reliance on climate-vulnerable industry. As climate shocks intensify, conflict outbreaks become more frequent, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. Climate shocks are becoming increasingly common in the Central Sahel, where 78 percent of the labor force depends on agriculture and herding. Temperatures are climbing at a rate 1.5 times faster than in other parts of the world, with projections indicating a rise of 2- 4.3°C by 2080. Already, Niger loses 100,000 to 120,000 hectares of arable land to soil erosion and desertification each year (Chukwuma 2016). Climate shocks displace people and destroy their livelihoods. They also increase competition for natural resources, requiring farmers and herders to travel further for pasture and water.

The dynamics and implications of armed conflicts and humanitarian crisis in the Sahel Region

The military juntas that rule Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are likely to continue to shape the region’s security policies in 2024. Their rise across the Sahel ushered in a new era, leading to the withdrawal of French troops, the termination of the United Nations peacekeeping mission to Mali, and the entrenchment of Russian mercenaries. Given current trends, these regimes’ militarized approach to counter-insurgency is likely to continue to fuel escalatory dynamics. In Burkina Faso and Mali, they have already made clear that they will meet increasing violence of militants and rebels with increasing violence of military forces (Alisha et al., 2018).

The jihadist insurgency remains at the center of the Sahel crisis and is the main cause of insecurity and instability. But while all eyes are on northern Mali, several regions in central Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as the Tillaberi region in Niger, continue to be the most affected by violence. For instance, JNIM attacks against majority-ethnic Dogon militia Dan Na Ambassagou and other Dozo (or Donso) hunter militias doubled, and the number of reported fatalities tripled compared to 2022. However, Dozo militias in the Macina area of Segou have recently begun to reorganize themselves and perpetrate retaliatory mass killings and kidnappings against ethnic Fulani. While these ‘communal wars’ tend to be overshadowed by other forms of armed violence, over the years, they have turned into

particularly deadly and protracted conflicts.

Lulls or more sporadic fighting in the second half of 2023 between the most active armed groups, JNIM and IS Sahel, freed up their resources and manpower for attacks on other targets, especially pro-government forces. JNIM and IS Sahel each conducted a series of large-scale attacks on military bases at the end of 2023, which reportedly killed about 200 soldiers. These attacks and others led to the latter part of 2023 becoming one of the deadliest periods of violence since the crisis began in 2012. Subsequently, the continued relative appeasement between the two groups may have further implications on the trajectory of violence in 2024.

The growing influence of the Wagner Group (now rebranded as 'Africa Corps'), its relative success in Mali, and Russia's growing involvement in the region suggest that the mercenary group may set to expand from Mali into Burkina Faso and Niger. There are indications that a military base for Russian troops is being built in Burkina Faso, while the Nigerien junta appears to be divided on the issue. In northern Mali, where the FAMA and Wagner forces are continuing their offensive, its involvement has directly contributed to the brutalization of the conflict due to the widespread atrocities committed by Russian mercenaries, often alongside Malian troops.

The Sahelian state military forces make frequent use of more recently obtained aircraft, including Turkish drones, which have become something of a game-changer for their advantage against jihadist militants and rebels. However, their extensive use has contributed to an ever-growing air war and a broader trend of indiscriminate violence. The widespread use of air and drone strikes has been accompanied by more aggressive tactics by militant groups and more frequent use of remote violence (e.g., improvised explosive devices, landmines, mortar, and rocket fire). JNIM, in particular, has resorted to suicide tactics in one-off attacks or as part of larger armed assaults against military positions, reaching the highest number of such attacks recorded in 2023. Thus, aerial assets have acquired a central role on the battlefield. However, alongside mass atrocities committed by state forces, militias, and militants alike, and the region's escalating violence, new technology and tactics pose an ever-growing danger to the safety of civilian populations in the region.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that action must be taken to mitigate the economic impacts of climate change in the Sahel region. Scholars assist in developing water infrastructure to reduce the risk of conflict arising from competition over water access. In January 2023, UN experts advocated for an independent investigation into potential war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by government forces and the Wagner Group in Mali. Experts claim a "climate of terror and complete impunity" characterized the Wagner Group's activities in the country, pointing to the Moura massacre in March 2022. Wagner's future in West Africa is less certain after the group's failed June 2023 rebellion in Russia, but Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russia would allow its African operations to continue. In July 2023, the United States accused Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin of orchestrating Mali's decision to expel MINUSMA to advance Wagner's interests. Neighboring Burkina Faso has denied contracting Wagner Group, but the interim president said Russia is a strategically.

In 2023, security forces in Mali and Burkina Faso faced allegations of civilian massacres. First, in April, survivors of a massacre in Burkina Faso blamed the military for the deaths of 136 civilians. Then, in May, the UN released a report accusing Malian soldiers and

foreign fighters of executing more than five hundred civilians in a March 2022 operation. Meanwhile, armed groups have stepped up attacks on poorly trained civilian volunteer forces. The withdrawal of the UN from Mali raises the risk of violence against civilians, as extremist groups might attempt to seize urban centers as they have in Burkina Faso.

More programs and support are necessary to decrease conflict risk. Ensuring humanitarian access is crucial for program implementation. In addition, providing economic support and opportunity is crucial to curbing conflict. A recent United Nations Development Program study indicated that the primary reason people joined NSAGs was "hope for employment." Indeed, Despite facing an unprecedented, and growing humanitarian crisis, Central Sahel countries receive less than 50 percent of the per capita funding that countries who are not experiencing conflict receive.

Recommendations

1. Governments across the central Sahel and affected coastal countries, along with technical and financial partners, to significantly scale up investment in expanding access to essential social services and protection, as key pathways to peace and security. This scale up should focus on reinforcing and supporting local systems, networks and workforces that are the first responders during crises, and that can consistently reach children, particularly in hard-to-reach communities.
2. All parties to the conflict to fulfil their fundamental moral and legal obligations toward children under international humanitarian and human rights law. This includes ending attacks on children and the services they rely on; respecting humanitarian space and access; implementing specific protocols on the treatment of children affected by the armed conflict; and engaging systematically with the United Nations on concrete action plans to end grave violations against children.

References

1. Ahorsu, K. and Ame, R. (2021). African conflict & peacebuilding: *Review*, 1(2):6-33 doi: 10.1353/acp.2011.0023
2. Alisha G. et al., (2018): "Avert catastrophe now in Africa's Sahel," *Nature* 575 (Brussels: International Crisis Group).
3. Amy H., (2014): "Peace in the Land of Upright People: Religion and Violence in Burkina Faso," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 27, no. 2.
4. Beland, D. (2015). The political construction of collective insecurity: From moral panic to blame avoidance and organized irresponsibility. Center for European Studies.
5. Chukwuma O. (2016) "The trajectories and dynamics of militancy in the Sahel," *Journal of Humanities and Social Policies* 2, no. 1 (2016);
6. Conflict Watchlist 2024: Sahel
7. De, D., & Gelfand, M. J. (2018). *Conflict in the workplace: sources, functions, and dynamics across multiple levels of analysis*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
8. Frank W. et al., (2017): "Subnational violent conflict forecasts for sub-Saharan Africa, using climate-sensitive models," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 2.
9. International Rescue Committee (IRC) 2024
10. Jeremiah O. A. (2016); "Citizenship and resource competition in the Sahel," *Anthropological Forum* 26, no. 1

11. Mark M., (2012): "Pastoral intensification in West Africa: implications for sustainability," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18, no. 2
12. Rahim, M., A. (2020). Towards A Theory Of Managing Organizational Conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management*. Vol.13 (3).
13. Raynaut C. (2017): *Societies and nature in the Sahel*, (New York: Routledge
14. Solomon M H. and Marshall B. (2014):, "Climate, conflict, and social stability: what does the evidence say?" *Climatic Change* 123, 33-59;
15. Stefan D. (2020): "Come rain, or come wells: How access to groundwater affects communal violence," *Political Geography* 76
16. Stephen A H. (2016); *Terror and insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel region: corruption, contraband, jihad and the Mali war of 2012-2013*, New York: Routledge,
17. Tonah, S. (2016). Migration and herder-farmer conflicts in Ghana's Volta Basin. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 40(1), 152-178.
18. Tor A. and Benjaminsen H. et al., (2012); "Does climate change drive land-use conflicts in the Sahel?," *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 1
19. Turner, M. D. (2014): "Political ecology and the moral dimensions of "resource conflicts": the case of farmer–herder conflicts in the Sahel," *Ethics in Political Ecology* 23, 7 863-889.27