



FORUM: Security Council (SC)

TOPIC: Addressing the Rising Transnational Terrorist attacks in the West African and Sahel Region

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POSITION: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

My name is Margarita Laoura Antonopoulou and I'm 18 years old, a graduate of the Experimental School of the University of Athens. It is an honour to be a deputy president in the Security Council of this years' AMLMUN conference. As it is my first time being a chair, I will try my best in order to make your experience as memorable as possible! I can't wait to see you all and have a fruitful debate. Feel free to express any questions and ask for help any time you want; the presidency of the committee has your back! antonopouloumargaritalaura@gmail.com

Best regards,

Margarita

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

More than a decade ago (2011-2012), terrorist operations escalated dramatically in the Sahel region, in West Africa. Since then, said region has been the epicenter of terrorism globally, accounting for over half of all global terrorism deaths and dominating the list of the 10 countries most impacted by terrorism, according to the 2026 Global Terrorism Index (GTI).¹ What once started out as a rebellion in northern Mali, now poses a terrorism crisis in West Africa and the Sahel as a whole.

Groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State-Sahel Province (ISSP) have gained great authority and influence within the whole region. From territorial control and disruption of key trade routes to capital blockades and cross-border operations and attacks, the aforementioned groups agitate the regions' security and quality of living.

Notably, one major factor which makes the case of the Sahel region highly distinctive is that international operations aimed at an intervention have been terminated, withdrawn or expelled. More specifically, because of the military juntas that have taken power in the

¹ "Global Terrorism Index: Countries Most Impacted by Terrorism." *Vision of Humanity*, 1 Sept. 2026, www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

region's most conflict-affected states, their authoritarian regimes have restricted or rejected cooperation with several key security partners, adopting anti-Western policies. For instance, the Malian military government has asked UN peacekeeping missions to withdraw. In general, they have turned to the Russian Federation as an alternative security partner, whose influence in the region is strengthening.

The aggravated situation in the Sahel region turbulates its peace and stability. Furthermore, persistent terrorist activity has weakened state authority, displaced large numbers of civilians, disrupted trade and local economies, along with deepening existing humanitarian crises by limiting access to food, healthcare education, as well as other essential services. Simultaneously, the cross-border expansion of such groups puts neighboring west African states at risk, which increases political instability, migration pressures and causes worries about how much this insecurity will spread. Such consequences put the citizens living in said areas in danger.²

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Terrorism

“Terrorism, in its broadest sense, is the use of violence against non-combatants to achieve political or ideological aims. The term is used in this regard primarily to refer to intentional violence during peacetime or in the context of war against non-combatants. There are various different definitions of terrorism, with no universal agreement about it. Different definitions of terrorism emphasize its randomness, its aim to instill fear, and its broader impact beyond its immediate victims.”³

Counter-terrorism

“Counter-terrorism, also referred to as anti-terrorism, encompasses the laws, policies, and operational measures used to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism. These efforts involve a range of tactics and strategies employed by governments, law-enforcement agencies, intelligence services and, in some contexts, private-sector organizations.”⁴

Military junta

“A military junta is a system of government led by a committee of military leaders. The term is used to refer to an authoritarian form of government characterized by a politically dominant group of military officers.”⁵

²UNHCR. www.unhcr.org/emergencies/sahel-emergency. Accessed 7 Sept. 2026.

³ Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism. Accessed 15 Aug. 2026.

⁴Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counterterrorism. Accessed 15 Aug. 2026.

⁵ Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_junta. Accessed 15 Aug. 2026.



Coup d'état

"A coup d'état, or simply a coup, is typically an illegal and overt attempt by a military organization or other government elites to unseat an incumbent person or leadership. A self-coup is said to take place when a leader, having come to power through legal means, tries to stay in power through illegal means."⁶

Salafi-Jihadism

"An approach to jihadism that is coupled with an adherence to Salafism. Salafi-jihadists tend to emphasize the military exploits of the Salaf (the early, righteous generations of Muslims) to give their violence an even more immediate divine imperative. Given their exclusivist view that their approach to Islam is the only authentic one, Salafi-jihadists often justify violence against other Muslims."⁷

Plausible Deniability

"A condition in which a subject can safely and believably deny knowledge of any particular truth that may exist because the subject is deliberately made unaware of said truth so as to be benefited or shielded from any associated responsibility."⁸

Quasi-state

"A quasi-state is an entity that possesses some characteristics of a sovereign state, such as a defined territory, a permanent population, and a functioning government, but lacks full international recognition and sovereignty. These entities often emerge from conflict, secessionist movements, or decolonization processes."⁹

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Geographical Position

Meaning "the shore" in Arabic, the Sahel is a vast semi-arid area with tropical climate, crossing approximately 6,000 kilometers from East to West Africa and covering the large desert of the Sahara. It encompasses many diverse geographic and agro-ecological systems, consists of 10 countries and is home to 400 million people. The aforementioned countries, as defined by the United Nations Strategy (UNISS), are Senegal, the Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria¹⁰. Here, when we talk about the

⁶ Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coup_d%27%C3%A9tat. Accessed 15 Aug. 2026.

⁷ Yeo, Andrew, and Aslı Aydıntaşbaş. "Islamism, Salafism, Jihadism: Understanding Key Differences." *Brookings*, 20 Aug. 2024, www.brookings.edu/articles/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

⁸ *Urban Dictionary: Plausible Deniability*, www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=plausible+deniability. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

⁹ "Quasi-State." *Model Diplomat*, modeldiplomat.com/learn/glossary/quasi-state. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

¹⁰ "Geography." *UNISS*, 17 Apr. 2024, uniss-sahel.org/geography/. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

question of transnational terrorist attacks in the Sahel region, we refer to central Sahel, meaning Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.



Map of Sahel¹¹

Understandably, given the nature of the Sahel, with a vast desert and small towns around its perimeter, such lands are not easy to govern, all the more to account for every town's security. This particularity of the Sahel region allows for people to move around borders, not only by themselves, but also by transporting items, either legal or not, without their governments being aware of their transfer. Moreover, such terrain facilitates armed groups to form and major operations to take place.

Political Instability and Historical Marginalization

Although the geography of the Sahel has aided the movement of armed groups across poorly controlled borders, the origins of the present terrorist crisis are primarily historical, political and social. In the central Sahel, particularly in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, the weak governance, the political marginalization, the corruption and the limited state presence have created conditions in which armed groups could progressively establish themselves. In numerous of the surrounding areas, governments have struggled to secure the borders and to protect justice, employment and basic public services, all while the relations between local communities and central authorities were often not in good terms.

Shifting the focus to the Republic of Mali, which is particularly important to understanding the current situation and how the present crisis developed, the nation became independent in 1960. Since then, northern Mali has experienced several rebellions, called Tuareg rebellions, which are a series of uprisings by the Tuareg people, a nomadic ethnic group in North Africa, all throughout 1961-1963 as well as 1990, 2006 and 2012.¹² These

¹¹GoogleImages. <https://www.google.com/imgres?q=sahel+region&imgurl=https://images.theconversation.com/files/158640/original/image-20170228-18215-i0iugc.jpg&imgrefurl=https://theconversation.com/sahel-region-africa-72569> (google.com in Bing). Accessed 30 July 2026.

¹²United Nations Digital Library. digitallibrary.un.org/record/4065894.

rebellions were connected to the political representation of the Tuareg and their economic marginalization, relations with the central state and demands for greater autonomy in the north. Despite the attempts made to resolve these disputes, tensions persisted, while weak state institutions, ineffective governance and perceptions of corruption and neglect further damaged confidence in the Malian Government. Consequently, long before the present jihadist terrorist attacks, northern Mali was already filled with armed networks, unresolved political situations and areas in which political authority was limited and challenged.

Emergence of Jihadist Organizations in the Sahel

Even prior to the Malian crisis of 2012, jihadist activity in the broader Sahara and the Sahel plays its part in understanding the current situation. In 1998, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)¹³ was established in Algeria and expanded into the Saharan areas. Its militants were involved in a kidnapping of 32 tourists in southern Algeria in 2003, with some hostages transported to Mali.¹⁴ In January of 2007, the GSPC changed its name to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and subsequently developed a significant operational presence across parts of Algeria, Mali, Niger and used, among other methods, kidnapping and extortion to finance its activities.¹⁵

Groups such as AQIM and later Islamic State (IS) affiliates, are generally associated with Salafi-Jihadist ideologies, which is a militant ideological current which legitimized the use of violence and armed jihad in pursuit of a political and religious order based upon its own interpretation of Islam. Although the jihadist ideology is based upon an interpretation of Islam, it should not be confused with Islam generally, or even with forms of Salafism, seeing as academic literature distinguishes Salafi-jihadism from non-violent forms of Islamic and Salafi religious thoughts.

Moreover, religious ideologies alone cannot explain all the recruitments into terrorist organizations in the Sahel. A 2023 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study based on nearly 2,200 respondents in eight African countries found that economic and political insecurities were significant factors in recruitment. Moreover, 25% of voluntary recruits identified employment opportunities as their primary reason for joining, while the study found that abuses by State actors can act as a powerful recruitment trigger.¹⁶

¹³UN Security Council.

main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/the-organization-of-al-qaeda-in-the-islamic.

¹⁴UN Security Council.

main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/the-organization-of-al-qaeda-in-the-islamic.

¹⁵UN Security Council.

main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/the-organization-of-al-qaeda-in-the-islamic.

¹⁶[UNDP.www.undp.org/africa/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement](https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement)

The Libyan Collapse and the 2012 Mali Crisis

Explicitly, a major turning point for the central Sahel was the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya in 2011. After the Libyan conflict, Malian Tuareg fighters who had been present in Libya, returned to Mali carrying significant quantities of weapons.¹⁷ United Nations investigators reported estimates ranging from several hundreds to several thousand returning fighters and documented armed convoys traveling from Libya to Mali.¹⁸

In mid-January 2012, the Tuareg-led National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), together with armed Islamist groups including Ansar Dine, AQIM and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), launched attacks against Malian government forces in the north. The returning, well-equipped combatants from Libya strengthened the rebellion.¹⁹

In March of 2012, disaffected soldiers carried out a military coup in Bamako, the capital and largest city of Mali, suspended the Constitution and dissolved government institutions. The coup accelerated the collapse of state authority in northern Mali, which enabled the MNLA and other armed groups to overrun the cities Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. The MNLA proclaimed an Independent state of Azawad in April of 2012, but ideological and political divisions soon emerged between the nationalist rebels and the jihadist groups.²⁰ By November 2012, Ansar Dine and MOJWA had repelled MNLA from the principal northern towns, while AQIM and allied organizations exercised substantial control in the region.²¹



Map Of Mali ²²

¹⁷ United Nations Digital Library. digitallibrary.un.org/record/724030.

¹⁸ United Nations Digital Library. digitallibrary.un.org/record/724030.

¹⁹ United Nations Digital Library. digitallibrary.un.org/record/738881.

²⁰ United Nations Digital Library. digitallibrary.un.org/record/738881.

²¹ United Nations Digital Library. digitallibrary.un.org/record/738881.

²² The Red Line Podcast. www.theredlinepodcast.com/post/malis-dark-shadow-inside-jnim

International Intervention and the Regionalization of the Conflict

In January of 2013, France launched an operation in support of Malian forces, following a renewed southward offensive by armed groups, known as Operation Serval, which later transformed into Operation Barkhane. In addition, in April, the Security Council, alarmed by the situation, established and deployed the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The deployment of French, African and UN forces prevented the jihadist groups from consolidating this territorial expansion, albeit not ending the insurgency. By the end of January 2013, state control had been restored over most major northern towns, including Gao and Timbuktu.²³ Nonetheless, the organizations themselves had not been eliminated. Jihadist fighters increasingly shifted towards rural and surrounding areas, where armed groups could exploit weak state presence, local conflicts and dissatisfaction with government institutions.

As time went by, violence spread from northern and central Mali into neighboring countries, such as Burkina Faso and Niger, and specifically through the Liptako-Gourma tri-border region, which helped transform what had initially been a Malian conflict into a wider transnational Sahelian urgency.

The Rise of JNIM and the IS in the Sahel

The regionalization of armed groups was followed by the consolidation of larger jihadist organizations. In March 2017, several Al-Qaeda—aligned organizations formed Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), a jihadist organization under the leadership of Iyad Ag Ghali. This alliance brought together elements of AQIM in the Sahel, along with other jihadist forces, meaning Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun, and the Macina Liberation Front, presenting itself as Al-Qaeda's branch in Mali.

At the same time, an Islamic State-aligned movement was developing. In May 2015, Adnan Abu Walid al Sahroui and his followers split from Al-Mourabitoun and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, which was formally recognised by the IS's news agency, named Amaq, in October 2016. This faction became known as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), which operated principally in Mali and Niger and subsequently contributed to the expansion of the insurgency into Burkina Faso.

The emergence of ISGS and JNIM have heightened violence in the Sahel. Recently, JNIM has 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 2020.²⁴

²³United Nations Digital Library. digitallibrary.un.org/record/746532.

²⁴ "Violent Extremism in the Sahel | Global Conflict Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

Recent Developments and the Withdrawal of International Support

In 2020 and 2021, Mali faced consecutive military coups, resulting in an interim government under a military junta. Furthermore, in February 2022, France announced the withdrawal of Operation Barkhane due to the consistent rise of violence and terrorist attacks in the region and the deterioration of France-Mali relations. Concurrently, European Union-led Task Force Takuba, which was deployed since 2020 in cooperation with Operation Barkhane, also announced its intent to withdraw all troops from Mali.

As a result of the departure of the French and European troops, a security vacuum was created, which was taken advantage of by the armed groups mentioned above, with renewed attacks in the Sahel. In the first half of 2022, a dramatic increase in attacks was recorded, with more than 2,000 civilians being killed during this period, an over 50% rise from 2021. Many attacks have specifically targeted MINUSMA, which has been dubbed the United Nations' most dangerous peacekeeping mission.²⁵ Moreover, in June 2023, Mali's government demanded the departure of MINUSMA, which agreed to withdraw within six months, hindering the State's potential of transition to civilian rule. In lieu of French support, the Malian military junta sought security assistance from the Wagner Group, a Russian mercenary organization.

The withdrawal of UN peacekeepers has further been exploited by jihadist organizations, seeing as the increase in violence coincides with the first phase of their departure. JNIM, in particular, has taken advantage of the withdrawal as an opportunity to resume its offensive, blockading Timbuktu in the north and carrying out a series of attacks on military and civilian targets. Consequently, Islamist groups and Tuareg rebels consolidate authority in northern Mali, putting the country on the verge of civil war. Such violence in Mali has further spilled over into the neighboring nations of Burkina Faso and Niger. In the wake of dissolving international support, their military governments are struggling to regain control, with the instability deteriorating.

The Humanitarian Crisis and the Political Instability

An acute humanitarian crisis exacerbates the threat of terrorism in the Sahel region. More specifically, 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 among the world's poorest, with issues of poverty, food insecurity and high unemployment. 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.²⁶

²⁵ "Violent Extremism in the Sahel | Global Conflict Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

²⁶ "Violent Extremism in the Sahel | Global Conflict Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

Meanwhile, extremist violence has surged across the Sahel. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), in the first seven months of 2023, at least 7,800 civilian deaths have been reported, which is a significant increase from 2022. Such data contradicts claims by the military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger that they are effectively tackling insecurity.²⁷

Lastly, nations in Sahel are consistently ranked high on the Fragile State Index, with Mali being placed 14th, Niger 19th and Burkina Faso 21st.²⁸ Frequent transfers of power pose another threat to the stability of these states. Several Sahelian countries, namely Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, have experienced a combined 25 successful coups d'état between 1960 and 2022.²⁹ The region is facing a so-called coup epidemic, which was launched by the consecutive military coups in Mali in 2020 and 2021, followed by coups in Niger and Burkina Faso.

Understanding the causes of the contemporary Crisis

All in all, the contemporary terrorist crisis in West Africa and the Sahel ought not to be attributed to a single cause. In reality, it has developed through the interaction of weak governance, corruption, limited state presence, political and socioeconomic marginalization, unresolved local conflicts, economic insecurity, abuses by the state security forces, criminal networks and the spread of transnational Salafi-Jihadist organizations and ideology. The collapse of Libya in 2011 as well as the Malian crisis of 2012 created such dynamics, while the subsequent expansion and re-organization of jihadist groups transformed local insurgencies into increasingly interconnected conflicts operating across national borders.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Burkina Faso

Since military officer Ibrahim Traoré assumed power in a 2022 coup, the security situation has deteriorated significantly in Burkina Faso. In September 2022, thanks to a wave of civilian support and promises of containing terrorists in the country, Traoré was able to take control of the government. Nonetheless, under Traoré, Burkina Faso has now become the epicenter of terrorism and violence in the Sahel.

In order to maintain power and stifle political opposition, he has seized control of the media and concealed information about the state of his country's security. Certainly, he has fallen through on his promises of tackling jihadist groups, seeing as Burkina Faso faces extreme

²⁷ *Sahel Deaths Are Surging, Contradicting Juntas' Security Claims* - Bloomberg, www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-08-07/sahel-deaths-are-surging-contracting-juntas-claims-on-security. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

²⁸ "Global Data." *Fragile States Index*, fragilestatesindex.org/global-data/. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

²⁹ Williamson, Megan Duzor and Brian. "By the Numbers: Coups in Africa." *By The Numbers: Coups in Africa* - VOA Special Report, projects.voanews.com/african-coups/. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

terrorism, with the nation ranking 1st in the Global Terrorism Index for 2024 and 2025.³⁰ According to the latest GTI studies, terrorism deaths are increasing rapidly, while Burkina Faso's junta-led forces are repeatedly accused of mass atrocities against civilians.³¹ Reports also state that, under the rule of Traoré, nearly 80% of the country's territory is openly being controlled by terrorist groups linked with Al-Queda and IS.³² The ruling Burkinabé military junta under Capital Ibrahim Traoré has expelled French forces and Western partners, experiencing a cycle of anti-Western sentiment. Even though it has denied contracting Wagner Group, the interim president said Russia is a strategic ally.

Chad

Chad has experienced persistent terrorist threats in the border areas near population centers. Due to a lack of resources and government insufficiencies, Chad has been a victim of Boko Haram and the ISWAP, specifically in Lake Chad Basin, with these groups repeatedly targeting both civilians and security forces. Even though Chad has one of the most active militaries in the region, the poverty and the instability in the surrounding areas has made it difficult to suppress the insurgency.

At the same time, Chad has taken part in numerous counterterrorism initiatives, such as the G5 Sahel Alliance and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which is located in N'Djamena, Chad's capital. Moreover, it has served as a major counterterrorism partner for Western forces, while contending with spillover instability from neighboring Alliance of the Sahel States (AES) countries along its porous borders. According to the US Department of State, in 2023, Chad contributed 1,425 US-trained soldiers as part of MINUSMA, 2,000 soldiers in support of the MNJTF, and 1,200 soldiers in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border region joining Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger as part of the G5 Sahel Joint Force.³³ However, terrorist attacks continue to affect the country and limit the effectiveness of any operations such as the ones mentioned above.

France

France has played a major role in counter-terrorism procedures in the Sahel region. More specifically, with Operation Barkhane, launched in 2014, the French military aimed to combat Islamist terrorist groups located in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Mauritania. Furthermore, of great significance is Operation Serval, held by the French military in 2013, which succeeded in gaining most of northern Mali back from Islamic militants. Notably, by

³⁰ "Global Terrorism Index: Countries Most Impacted by Terrorism." *Vision of Humanity*, 1 Sept. 2026, www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

³¹ 2023 Global Terrorism Index Measuring the Impact of Terrorism the Sahel &, docencia.uaeh.edu.mx/estudios-pertinencia/docs/AGENDA%20INDEX%20GLOBAL/Global%20Terrorism%20Index%202023.pdf. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

³² ADFmagazine. "Terrorism Worsens in Burkina Faso." *Africa Defense Forum*, 24 Mar. 2026, adf-magazine.com/2026/03/terrorism-worsens-in-burkina-faso/. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

³³ U.S. Department of State, 2021-2025.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2023/chad/. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

2020, France had deployed 5,100 troops in the Sahel region.³⁴ Nonetheless, after the establishment of coups in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, the French were asked to leave the Sahel region indefinitely, seeing as the terrorist attacks were steadily increasing despite their presence. Finally, an anti-French sentiment has surged in these nations, and the diplomatic relations of France with the aforementioned Sahel states have deteriorated dramatically.

Mali

Ruled by a military junta since a successful coup in 2020, the country of Mali has been a significant victim of terrorist attacks. Especially this past decade, after 2012, northern Mali has faced extreme violent occurrences from different jihadist groups, such as JNIM, and separatist organizations, such as MNLA. Not only were the organizations targeting military bases, but also caused many fatalities of the civilians of Mali. In fact, Mali is consistently ranked among the first 10 countries most impacted by terrorism, according to the GTI in the past years.³⁵ While there have been attempts for de-escalation, either specifically Mali-centered ones, with the most important being the UN peacekeeping mission, MINUSMA, or regarding the Sahel as a whole, such as the G5 Sahel Joint Task Force (FC-G5S), the situation in Mali remains severe.

Despite constant terrorist attacks and incidents of violence, the ruling military government of General Assimi Goïta expelled French forces and MINUSMA, relying heavily on Russia's Africa Corps for security support. It is important to note that the Malian army has perpetrated most of the violence against civilians in 2022, accounting for 845 deaths, in contrast to the combined 221 deaths of IS and JNIM.³⁶ Lastly, most of the territory in northern and central Mali is currently controlled by JNIM, which is in conflict with the IS branches in the Sahel, resulting in further casualties.

Niger

Niger has also become one of the most heavily affected countries by terrorism in the Sahel, ranking 3rd in the Global Terrorism Index for 2026.³⁷ The country faces pressure from several jihadist organizations, principally Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP, formerly ISGS) and, in the Lake Chad Basin, Islamic State-West Africa Province (ISWAP). Concurrently, Boko Haram has also increased their presence in Niger, especially in the southeast, where Lake Chad is located, as well as JNIM in the western Niger. In the western regions bordering Mali and

³⁴ "Violent Extremism in the Sahel | Global Conflict Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

³⁵ Staff, Editorial. "10 Countries Most Impacted by Terrorism: GTI 2025." *Vision of Humanity*, 4 Feb. 2026, www.visionofhumanity.org/sahel-dominates-top-10-countries-most-impacted-by-terrorism/. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

³⁶ 2023 *Global Terrorism Index Measuring the Impact of Terrorism the Sahel* &, docencia.uaeh.edu.mx/estudios-pertinencia/docs/AGENDA%20INDEX%20GLOBAL/Global%20Terrorism%20Index%202023.pdf. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

³⁷ "Global Terrorism Index: Countries Most Impacted by Terrorism." *Vision of Humanity*, 1 Sept. 2026, www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

Burkina Faso, particularly around the Liptako-Gourma region, ISSP and JNIM have exploited weak state presence and cross-border mobility to expand their operation.

The security crisis has been further complicated by political instability, as the military overthrew the democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum, and General Abdourahamane Tchiani subsequently assumed leadership of the country. The junta justified its seizure of power partly by the government's failure to contain insecurity, yet militant Islamist violence has remained a severe security issue. Simultaneously, the junta has distanced Niger from traditional Western security partners, expelling French forces and terminating US basing rights, while strengthening cooperation with the military governments of Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as with Russia, significantly reshaping the country's approach to counterterrorism.

Nigeria

Nigeria contends with persistent attacks from Boko Haram and ISWAP, with the latter continuing to be the deadliest terrorist group in Nigeria, having established control of northeastern Nigeria. In 2021-2022, thanks to the government's military counter-offensives, as well as their internal rivalries, these jihadist organizations had been weakened. However, this improvement in the situation was short-lived, with violence subsequently increasing. Currently, it is the 4th country most affected by terrorism, according to 2026 reports.³⁸ Moreover, Nigeria saw the largest increase in terrorism deaths from 2024 to 2025 globally, marking the highest death toll since 2020, driven by internal instability as well as ongoing conflict between ISWAP and Boko Haram.³⁹

Nigeria is the region's largest military power and an anchor state for counterterrorism efforts in the Lake Chad Basin through the MNJTF, while also being the most populous country in ECOWAS and the site of its headquarters. Nigeria, along with Chad, continues to maintain and deepen ties with traditional Western security partners, such as the US and France, which aim at countering terrorism and strengthening governance of the security sector. Lastly, since 2017, Nigeria has also cooperated with Turkey in the fight against terrorism and arms smuggling.

Russian Federation

Russia has played an important role as a security partner of the military-led governments of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Russian military personnel, initially connected with the Wagner group and subsequently the Africa Corps, have provided training, weapons and security assistance to the juntas. Furthermore, Russia has pursued economic interests in

³⁸ "Global Terrorism Index: Countries Most Impacted by Terrorism." *Vision of Humanity*, 1 Sept. 2026, www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

³⁹ *Measuring the Impact of Terrorism Global Terrorism Index 2026 Youth*, www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

the region, including natural resources, while offering diplomatic backing and information operations support.

This cooperation has also strengthened the position of the military juntas by providing them with an alternative security partner that does not condition assistance on a rapid return to civilian government. Russia's growing influence has driven Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to distance themselves from traditional Western and regional partners, as its support has reduced their dependence on such cooperations, like the ECOWAS. Hence, Russia's intervention has driven them to withdraw from ECOWAS and create the AES as an alternative for political and security framework.

United States of America (USA)

The USA has played a significant role in counter-terrorism efforts in the Sahel region. The country has provided security assistance and military forces, deploying up to 1,500 troops to the region, as well as aid in training Sahelian countries' military troops.⁴⁰ The United States has also offered logistics and advisory support to both the MNJTF and G5 Sahel Force, while remaining a top donor of humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, it established the Pan-Sahel Initiative in 2002, in order to train and equip local forces to secure porous borders, monitor human trafficking and promote regional cooperation and stability. Despite the significant efforts of the USA, after the military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the juntas have requested their removal from the area. Nowadays, the country has lost basing rights in Niger, though it has deepened security cooperation with Nigeria, including drone deployments, and has made tentative diplomatic outreach to AES junta governments under the Trump administration.⁴¹

Alliance of the Sahel States (AES)

The AES is a confederation formed between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, which originated as a mutual defense pact on 16 September 2023 and was established as a confederation on 6 July 2024. Its creation was preceded by a successful coup in Niger earlier that year, resulting in the ECOWAS threatening to intervene militarily and the aforementioned countries withdrawing from the organization. All three member states are currently under military control, following a string of successful coups d'état. Markedly, they have pivoted sharply away from Western security partnerships toward Russia, while their forces have been accused of killing more civilians than the jihadist groups they claim to be fighting.⁴² For

⁴⁰ "Violent Extremism in the Sahel | Global Conflict Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

⁴¹ "Violent Extremism in the Sahel | Global Conflict Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

⁴² "Violent Extremism in the Sahel | Global Conflict Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

instance, more than 1,200 civilian deaths in Burkina Faso were the result of government forces since 2023, according to the Human Rights Watch.⁴³

Boko Haram

Boko Haram, officially known as Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da'wa wa al-Jihad (JAS), is a Sunni violent extremist group that seeks to establish a Salafi-Islamist state in Nigeria, free from Western-style education and influence, which the group views as corrupting to Islamic values.⁴⁴ Since its founding in 2002 in northeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram has been affiliated occasionally with al-Qaeda and IS, but it is currently unaffiliated with either group. For instance, in March 2015, the group pledged allegiance to IS, and was renamed to ISWAP. However, after a dispute over the leadership of ISWAP in August 2016, two factions of the group emerged. More specifically, one faction continued to operate as ISWAP and another faction reverted to the use of Boko Haram's formal name JAS.⁴⁵ Since 2021, Boko Haram has lost many of its fighters and its leader, as well as some territory to its rival group, ISWAS, but continues to conduct frequent attacks, particularly in the Lake Chad region and in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

The ECOWAS is a 15-country organization in West Africa with a mandate to promote economic integration, which was later expanded to include resolving conflicts and maintaining peace, and then fostering democracy and rule of law. It has arguably been the most effective of several such blocs on the continent.⁴⁶ The ECOWAS has developed the Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan as a means of reducing terrorism in West Africa. The Plan is built on a framework of three pillars—prevent, pursue, and reconstruct—and features implementation of numerous ECOWAS instruments.⁴⁷

However, in July 2023, following the successful coup in Niger and the establishment of the Tchiani regime, the organization announced a series of sanctions on Niger, the strictest measures ever imposed, and threatened a military intervention. Consequently, junta-led Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger withdrew from the ECOWAS and signed a mutual defense pact, which

⁴³ Staff, Al Jazeera. "Burkina Faso Military, Allies Committing 'horrific' Civilian Abuses: HRW." *Al Jazeera*, www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/4/2/burkina-faso-military-allies-committing-horrific-civilian-abuses-hrw. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.

⁴⁴ Counterterrorism Guide WWW.ODNI.GOV Boko Haram Overview, www.odni.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/CT-Guide-Boko-Haram_508.pdf. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.

⁴⁵ Affairs, Department of Home. "Islamic State West Africa Province." *Australian National Security Website*, www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/what-australia-is-doing/terrorist-organisations/listed-terrorist-organisations/islamic-state-west-africa-province. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.

⁴⁶ *What Turmoil in ECOWAS Means for Nigeria and Regional Stability* | International Crisis Group, www.crisisgroup.org/qna/africa/nigeria/what-turmoil-ecowas-means-nigeria-and-regional-stability. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

⁴⁷ Lewis, Dustin. "Ecowas Counter-Terrorism Coordination Unit." *HLS PILAC*, 30 Mar. 2015, pilac.law.harvard.edu/africa-region-efforts//ecowas-counter-terrorism-coordination-unit. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.

evolved into the AES. The ECOWAS continues efforts to re-engage the AES governments through diplomatic outreach, but struggles to preserve its relevance as a security actor in the Sahel.

Group of Five (G5) for the Sahel

The G5 Sahel, or G5S, was a regional, intergovernmental organization providing an institutional framework to promote development and enhance security in West Africa. It was created on 16 February 2014, in Nouakchott, Mauritania, at a summit of the five Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. It adopted a convention of establishment on 19 December 2014, and was permanently seated in Mauritania. The coordination was organised at different levels, with military aspects regulated by the respective countries' Chiefs of Staff.

The purpose of G5 Sahel was to strengthen the bond between economic development and security, while eliminating the threat of jihadist organizations operating in the region, including AQIM, Al-Mourabitoun and Boko Haram. However, a series of new military juntas in the region prompted several countries to withdraw from the G5 Sahel alliance. On 15 May 2022, Mali announced its withdrawal from the alliance, following its 2021 coup d'état. On 3 December 2023, Burkina Faso and Niger exited the alliance, after their 2022 and 2023 coups, respectively. On 6 December 2023, the remaining members, Chad and Mauritania, announced the dissolution of the alliance.⁴⁸

Islamic State - Sahel Province/Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISSP/ISGS)

ISSP, formerly known as ISGS, is a transnational Islamist militant group and affiliate of the IS, adhering to the ideology of Salafi Jihadism. Emerging from a split within the al-Qaeda-aligned group al-Mourabitoun, after the pledge of allegiance of one of its leaders, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, to the Islamic State, ISGS was formed on 15 May 2015. In March 2022, the Islamic State (IS) declared the group a formal IS branch, naming it Islamic State – Sahel Province (ISSP).

The group uses violence as a means of replacing governments in the Sahel with the rule of Islamic law, in line with IS's strategic direction and goals.⁴⁹ Notably, it is slightly less prolific in its areas of operations but generally more violent than JNIM, according to the 2026 GTI report.⁵⁰ The group started conducting attacks in the Sahel in 2016, targeting Burkinabe, Malian, Nigerien, French and Russian forces. Nowadays, benefiting from the globally integrated IS network structure, ISSP has become a major jihadist group operating in the tri-border region of the Sahel, primarily in northern Burkina Faso, western Niger, and the Mali-

⁴⁸Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G5_Sahel. Accessed 29 July 2026.

⁴⁹ *Www.Odni.Gov Counterterrorism Guide ISIS-Sahel a.k.a. Isis–Greater Sahara*, www.odni.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/CT-Guide-ISIS-Sahel_508.pdf. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.

⁵⁰ *Measuring the Impact of Terrorism Global Terrorism Index 2026 Youth*, www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

Niger border area. Finally, ISSP is in conflict with JNIM, since the former encroached upon JNIM strongholds mid-2019. After coexisting in the central Sahel for years, such disagreements culminated in major clashes between the two groups from early 2020 onward.

Islamic State - West Africa Province (ISWAP)

ISWAP is a Salafi Jihadist militant group, administrative division of the Islamic State (IS) and unrecognized quasi-state. The branch formed in March 2015, when Boko Haram pledged allegiance to IS and adopted the name “Islamic State-West Africa Province” (ISWAP). ISWAP is one of IS’s largest and most lethal branches, seeking to establish an IS caliphate. In order to fulfil its goal, it exacerbates sectarian violence, while exploiting poor economic conditions and social divisions to attract members.⁵¹ ISWAP rejects existing national borders and opposes elected governments, aiming to remove them through violence.⁵²

It is dominant primarily in northeastern Nigeria and parts of Niger, while conducting large-scale operations throughout the Lake Chad region, on the border of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. Over the past two years, ISWAP activity has increasingly extended into southern Nigeria. In addition, it reclaimed its position as the nation’s deadliest terrorist group, as it was responsible for over half of all attacks and deaths in the country in 2025.⁵³ Lastly, it has collaborated with ISSP, while fighting former Boko Haram (JAS) members who split after the pledge of allegiance.

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)

JNIM is a coalition of four jihadist groups, namely Ansar Dine, Al-Mourabitoun, Katiba al-Furqan (the Saharan branch of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and the Katiba Macina. Established on 2 March 2017 and led by Iyad Ag Ghali, it is an al-Qaeda affiliate, since it has pledged allegiance to Algeria-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Qaeda General Command. In its statements, JNIM says it pursues two main goals: the withdrawal of foreign troops and the establishment of Islamic rule, aiming to bring Mali’s political system as well as social practices in line with a particularly stringent interpretation of Islamic law (Sharia).⁵⁴

Since 2017, JNIM has consolidated its influence in northern and central Mali, while expanding into neighboring Burkina Faso and stamping its footprint on spaces in southern and

⁵¹ WWW.ODNI.GOV Counterterrorism Guide Isis–West Africa (ISIS-WA), www.odni.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/CT-Guide-ISIS-WA_508.pdf. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.

⁵² Affairs, Department of Home. “Islamic State West Africa Province.” *Australian National Security Website*, www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/what-australia-is-doing/terrorist-organisations/listed-terrorist-organisations/islamic-state-west-africa-province. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.

⁵³ *Measuring the Impact of Terrorism Global Terrorism Index 2026 Youth*, www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

⁵⁴ *Mali: Enabling Dialogue with the Jihadist Coalition JNIM* | International Crisis Group, www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/africa/mali/306-mali-enabling-dialogue-jihadist-coalition-jnim. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.



western Mali as well as in western Niger.⁵⁵ JNIM has carried out numerous attacks against the Malian Defense and Security forces, the G5 Sahel Joint Task Force, the MINUSMA and the French forces, as claimed by their media agency Al Zalaqa.⁵⁶ Currently, JNIM is the main jihadist group in the central Sahel, accounting for the 3 deadliest terrorist attacks in 2026.⁵⁷ Taking advantage of the withdrawal of French and UN forces, JNIM launched joint nationwide attacks on Mali in April 2026 alongside Tuareg rebels, killing the Malian Minister of Defense. Lastly, fighting between JNIM militants and those affiliated with ISGS has escalated, their competition posing another challenge.

National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)/Azawad Liberation Front (FLA)

In 2011, the Tuareg fighters and rebels established a separatist group named “National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)”. The organization sought an independent state for the Azawad region in northern Mali, launching the 2012 Tuareg rebellion. MNLA states that they aim to establish this state for all the peoples of northern Mali, which are mostly Tuaregs, (comprising approximately 10% of the total Malian population)⁵⁸ Songhai, Arabs, and Fulani. However, in fact, 99% of fighters are Tuaregs whose motivation is to establish a Tuareg state, according to Al-Jazeera reports.⁵⁹ Despite MNLA launching the rebellion which began the crisis in 2012, the group is generally disregarded, since it has receded and been displaced by al-Qaeda-linked groups, which have taken over the field.⁶⁰ In the past, it has temporarily cooperated and later distanced itself from several jihadist groups, such as AQIM, MOJWA and Ansar Dine.

In November 2024, the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) was formed from components of past Tuareg rebel groups, including MNLA. Lately, FLA has allied with JNIM, conducting coordinated attacks against the Malian junta and Russian forces, such as the April 2026 nationwide offensive.

Wagner Group

The Wagner Group, commonly known as Private Military Company (PMC) Wagner, is a Russian state-funded corporation that was controlled until 2023 by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a

⁵⁵ *Mali: Enabling Dialogue with the Jihadist Coalition JNIM* | International Crisis Group, www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/africa/mali/306-mali-enabling-dialogue-jihadist-coalition-jnim. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.

⁵⁶ UN Security Council. main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/jamaa-nusrat-ul-islam-wa-al-muslimin-jnim. Accessed 28 July 2026.

⁵⁷ *Measuring the Impact of Terrorism Global Terrorism Index 2026 Youth*, www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf. Accessed 08 Sept. 2026.

⁵⁸ “Violent Extremism in the Sahel | Global Conflict Tracker.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

⁵⁹ Welsh, May Ying. “Region’s Armed Groups.” *Al Jazeera*, www.aljazeera.com/features/2013/1/17/making-sense-of-malis-armed-groups. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.

⁶⁰ Welsh, May Ying. “Region’s Armed Groups.” *Al Jazeera*, www.aljazeera.com/features/2013/1/17/making-sense-of-malis-armed-groups. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.



former close ally of Russia's president Vladimir Putin, and since then, by Pavel Prigozhin. Since its introduction in the Sahel region in December 2021, the Wagner Group has deployed 1,000 mercenaries to Mali housed at 15 outposts, including former French bases.⁶¹ Moreover, the Wagner Group has used infrastructure of the Russian Armed Forces.

Evidence suggests that Wagner has been used as a proxy by the Russian government, allowing it to have plausible deniability for military operations abroad and hiding the true casualties of Russia's foreign interventions.⁶² The Malian government does not officially recognize Wagner's presence in the country, but instances of Russian mercenary activities and atrocities have made clear that a Russian group is active there. In spring 2022, Wagner and local military forces orchestrated an anti-terror operation in the country that killed about 500 civilians. Notably, civilian casualties in the country have risen disproportionately since Wagner's arrival.⁶³

⁶¹ "Violent Extremism in the Sahel | Global Conflict Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

⁶² Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wagner_Group. Accessed 15 Aug. 2026.

⁶³ Stronski, Paul. "Russia's Growing Footprint in Africa's Sahel Region." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 23 June 2026, carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/02/russias-growing-footprint-in-africas-sahel-region. Accessed 09 Sept. 2026.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	EVENT
1991-2002	Algerian Civil War/First appearance of terrorism rooted in Islam
2002	The establishment of Boko Haram
24 January 2007	The official start of AQIM
17 January 2012	Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali
11 January 2013	France launches operation Serval
25 April 2013	UNSC Resolution 2100
1 August 2014	France launches operation Barkhane
19 December 2014	UNSC Resolution 2195
7 March 2015	The creation of ISWAP
May 2015	The establishment of ISGS
September 2016	ISGS starts operating in the Liptako-Gourma region
2 March 2017	The creation of JNIM
31 March 2017	UNSC Resolution 2349
June 2017	The start of G5 Sahel Joint Task Force
2020	JNIM vs ISGS conflict over territory
2022	ISGS is renamed as ISSP
2023	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) starts withdrawing from Mali
2024-2026	Intense conflict among JNIM and ISSP

RELEVANT UN TREATIES, CONVENTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

Security Council Resolution 2100 (2013) [on establishment of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)]

Resolution 2100 was of major significance regarding addressing transnational terrorist attacks in the Sahel. It was not long after the rebellion of the Tuareg in northern Mali and the rise of jihadist groups' operations that the Security Council, being concerned with the situation, submitted the aforementioned resolution. Its main aim was to protect civilians, help with national political dialogue, assist with humanitarian aid and ensure that human rights were being treated accordingly. A key product of this resolution was the formation of MINUSMA, a UN peacekeeping mission in order to ensure stability in the area. According to 2023 UN reports, MINUSMA had deployed 15,000 UN peacekeepers from around the world.⁶⁴

As the years went on, relations between MINUSMA and the Malian military-led government became increasingly tense, especially when disputes arose over the mission's involvement in the country's political transition, human rights situation and implementation of the peace process. The mission ended in 2023, when the military junta of Mali requested the immediate withdrawal of troops, which was authorized by the adoption of the UNSC Resolution 2690.⁶⁵

Security Council Resolution 2195 (2014) [on preventing and combating terrorism, including terrorism benefitting from transnational organized crime]

The Security Council acknowledged that terrorist groups can benefit greatly in the financial department from transnational organized crime, while being concerned of the sources of their funding in order to execute such large operations. Therefore, this resolution urges the UN Counter-Terrorism Office to expand its Integrated Assistance for Countering Terrorism (I-ACT) initiative directly to Sahel countries. That expansion, calling for more effective international and regional cooperation, included strengthening border control, thus preventing terrorist organizations from exploiting transnational criminal networks. However, political instability, particularly stemming from the military coups in central Sahel, complicates and hinders the implementation of this resolution.⁶⁶

Security Council Resolution 2349 (2017) [on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region]

The Security Council, seeing that terrorism only grew further, adopted resolution 2349, which expressed grave concerns regarding stability and the humanitarian crisis in Lake Chad Basin from Boko Haram and IS-affiliated groups. Furthermore, it urged countries from the lake

⁶⁴ "Personnel: United Nations Peace Operations." *MINUSMA*, United Nations Peace Operations, 2 Sept. 2025, minusma.unmissions.org/en/personnel. Accessed 07 Sept. 2026.

⁶⁵ United Nations Digital Library. digitallibrary.un.org/record/748429?ln=en&v=pdf. Accessed 15 Aug. 2026.

⁶⁶ United Nations Digital Library. digitallibrary.un.org/record/785567?ln=en&v=pdf. Accessed 15 Aug. 2026.



region, meaning Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon, to enhance regional military cooperation and intelligence-sharing about attacks in order to impose a better counter-terrorism plan. Efforts were also made for the coordination of local with international authorities so as to resolve the issue. Lastly, it aimed for the implementation of humanitarian aid.⁶⁷

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Multinational Joint Task Force centered in Lake Chad Basin (MNJTF)

The MNJTF, founded in 1994, was deployed in Nigeria during the dictatorship of Sani Abacha, in order to combat banditry activities and facilitate free movement along the northern border of the country. As the years went on, countries of the region battling the same problem, namely Chad, Cameroon, Benin and Niger, became members of said task force. As Islamist groups expanded and gained more power within the area, specifically Boko Haram, the MNJTF began counter-terrorism operations. Furthermore, in 2015, after a large attack from Boko Haram at the headquarters of the MNJTF in Baga, Nigeria, the task force underwent changes, such as troop and personnel increase, a mandate expansion as well as the relocation of its headquarters to Chad.

The main goal of the operation is to counter the presence of Boko Haram and ISWAP in the area of Lake Chad Basin, which they have done to some extent, by limiting their presence and military capabilities. Simultaneously, they aim to facilitate stability in the region and promote humanitarian operations. In 2025, Niger withdrew from the task force, while the government of Chad has been having doubts about the task force due to the distribution of responsibilities. The MNJTF is still active.⁶⁸

Pan-Sahel Initiative

In 2002, concerned by terrorist activities and the vulnerabilities of the Sahel region, the US Department of State, with its Office of Counterterrorism, attempted to help Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Chad to combat such operations. Therefore, the Pan-Sahel Initiative was established. Its aim was to fulfil US national security interests and ensure peace and stability in the area, by detecting and responding to suspicious movements of people and goods, while combating terrorism and border incursions. The initiative further provided training, equipment and assistance to local security authorities. Nonetheless, in 2005, it was replaced by the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative, an interagency plan by the United States government to combat terrorism in Trans-Saharan Africa. The latter framework proposed combining efforts with both civil and military agencies, whose components were transferred to a grander operation, the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), in 2008.⁶⁹

⁶⁷United Nations Digital Library. digitallibrary.un.org/record/863830?ln=en&v=pdf. Accessed 15 Aug. 2026.

⁶⁸Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multinational_Joint_Task_Force. Accessed 19 Aug. 2026.

⁶⁹Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan-Sahel_Initiative. Accessed 19 Aug. 2026.

Accra Initiative

The Accra Initiative, formed by Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Togo in 2017, is an initiative aiming to prevent spillover of terrorism to other bordering countries of the Sahel by building a layered defensive architecture against such an expansion. It provides a framework for regional cooperation and collaboration in order to ensure security and stability among the members. Since its establishment, the Accra Initiative's responsibilities have been border control, capacity building, as well as information and intelligence-sharing.⁷⁰ Lastly, it has endeavored to address the structural causes of the instability, meaning the inadequate governance, porous borders and transnational criminal groups, which constrain the Initiative's capabilities to function properly as a regional security mechanism.

G5 Sahel Joint Task Force (FC-G5S)

The G5 Sahel Joint Task Force was established in 2017 by the G5 Sahel countries, particularly Mali, Chad, Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso, in order to respond to the growing danger of terrorist groups, combat transnational crime and strengthen regional security. Its ultimate goal was to establish a favorable environment for the socio-economic development of the region by pooling and multiplying their national efforts to fight against such mutual threats. The FC-G5S was designed to work in tandem with other existing forces. Although it had a peace enforcement mandate, counter-terrorism and the reinstatement of state authority were also included. Therefore, in practice, it was a counter-insurgency operation. However, its operations were hindered by persistent equipment and training insufficiencies. After the military coups of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, the G5 Sahel alliance as a whole has ceased to exist, hence the task force is no longer operational.⁷¹

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Establishing a Sahel Regional Counterterrorism Coordination Mechanism

In order to combat rising terrorist groups, including JNIM and ISSP, a Sahel Regional Counterterrorism Coordination Mechanism should be established, seeing as the FC-G5S is no longer operational. This mechanism should work in cooperation with the MNJTF, the UNOWAS, the ECOWAS, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Sahelian states. It would coordinate regional counterterrorism operations, facilitating deployment of troops along borders and in critical areas, such as the Liptako-Gourma region and the Lake Chad Basin, while being responsible for intelligence-sharing concerning jihadist and separatist groups' movements.

Moreover, the framework would be tasked to strengthen cross-border security by reinforcing border checkpoints and establishing joint patrols in particularly vulnerable areas. Their efforts to counter cross-border terrorist operations would be even more efficient by the

⁷⁰European Council on Foreign Relations. ecfr.eu/special/african-cooperation/accra-initiative/. Accessed 19 Aug. 2026.

⁷¹OHCHR. www.ohchr.org/en/countries/africa-region/project-supporting-g5-sahel-joint-force-implementation-human-rights-and-international-humanitarian. Accessed 19 Aug. 2026.

establishment of an Explosive Weapons and Arms-Control Program in order to investigate and address the illegal trade of arms, ammunition and explosive devices across borders, which would be overseen by the mechanism. Lastly, it is important to note that the framework must comply with international human rights law, hence a system for reporting civilian casualties and alleged abuses should be established.

Improving Diplomacy between ECOWAS Member States and AES States

In most of the Sahel countries, state capacity to provide protection is weak, frameworks are inadequate or underdeveloped and existing mechanisms are frequently not implemented, resulting in the rise of terrorist attacks and violence. Therefore, the UNOWAS (United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel) should hold regular meetings, in which UN officials and representatives from each ECOWAS member state and the three AES states could participate. These summits would attempt to bridge the fractured ties of the military-led Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger with ECOWAS nations, aiming at enhancing regional cooperation. Furthermore, in the meetings, frameworks relating to security and civilian protection could be reformed, while issues of intelligence-sharing and finance could be discussed. They would also highlight the importance of the national legislation being adopted or strengthened, especially regarding the strict penalization of terrorism-related crimes and human rights violations. In these regular meetings, the member states should be required by the UNSC to conduct reports on the current situation, with UNOWAS acting as a monitoring body intended to improve the performance of the measures applied. Thus, by this structured system of conditional diplomatic and economic engagement, a framework for sustained regional cooperation would be created.

Countering Jihadist Groups' Funding

Given that terrorist groups can profit financially from transnational organized crime, a regional counter-terrorist financing mechanism should be established, working in collaboration with INTERPOL, ECOWAS and relevant national financial intelligence units. More specifically, the framework would be tasked with facilitating the rapid exchange of financial intelligence, thus allowing authorities to identify suspicious transactions. The mechanism would also monitor high-risk money-transfers and strengthen the tracing of illicit proceeds derived from arms and drug trafficking, extortion and illicit natural-resource extraction. As a result, participating States could more effectively recognize and interfere with the movement of funds across national borders. Lastly, it would be responsible for assisting participating States in freezing and confiscating assets linked to terrorist financing, in accordance with national legislation and applicable international law.

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