

Shifting from

External Dependency

Remodelling the G5 Sahel Joint Force for the Future

Dr Fiifi Edu-Afful, Dr Andrew E. Yaw Tchie,
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Executive Summary

After a decade of battling jihadist and violent extremist groups in West Africa, France has initiated the restructuring and relocation of its largest overseas military mission in the Sahel with an announcement of the withdrawal of Operation Barkhane (the French military counter-terrorism intervention) from Mali. The exit over the coming months may signify an important shift of western military operations in Mali and the Sahel. France's deployment in the Sahel was initially triggered by the activities of Tuareg separatists in the northern part of Mali. Islamic extremists closely associated with Al-Qaeda took advantage of the situation, seizing north Mali and spreading their activities southwards in 2012. Despite French counterterrorism operations, instability worsened, and Islamists controlled vast swathes of northern and central Mali, parts of Burkina Faso, and western Niger.

Over time, under the motivation of France, the G5 Sahel Joint Force (G5S-JF) was created to address the everyday challenges of terrorism and transnational organised crime among the five member states (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger). For a force supported by three United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2359 (2017), 2391 (2017) and 2480 (2019); and with a force strength of 5600 troops organised around three sectors,¹ its operational successes have been a mixed bag (ten joint border operations). Operation Barkhane together with European Union Training Mission Mali (EUTM), the Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) and Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), has enhanced the operational readiness and capabilities of the G5 Sahel through mentoring, training, and funding of the joint-force operations.

1 An eastern sector (or fuseau in French) for Niger and Chad, with two battalions; a central sector for Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad with four battalions; and a western sector corresponding to Mauritania and Mali with two battalions.

Additionally, these external operations, particularly Barkhane, have been supportive of the activities of G5S-JF by providing intelligence, supporting logistical and joint planning, providing aerial and air support, and engaging in medical evacuation. Notwithstanding, the Joint Force has been contending with weak intelligence, shortfalls in equipment, limited aerial capabilities and a lack of rapid response, which invariably hinders operational effectiveness. The Joint Force represents an essential step toward addressing the instability that affects Mali and the broader Sahel, but as of yet, the G5S-JF has been unable to fully demonstrate its effectiveness as a force despite significant support from donor countries such as France. Moreover, it is uncertain how Mali's withdrawal from the Joint Force will impact on the overall strategy of the G5S-JF and its sustainability going forward, especially given Mali's recent announcement of withdrawing from the G5 Sahel.²

The departure of Barkhane, together with Takuba and other European arrangements from Mali, raises many unanswered questions about the funding, operational capacity and political cooperation between the other member states of the Joint Force. Even though France has reiterated that it will continue to support peacekeepers serving under MINUSMA; and Malian troops continuing to battle Islamic violent extremism after the Barkhane withdrawal, the response time to jihadist attacks and activities inside Malian territory will not be the same. Without Barkhane, the G5S-JF will struggle to protect civilians, evacuate soldiers in need of medical attention, and support effective joint planning and coordination of G5S-JF and intelligence sharing—which has been instrumental in the fight against jihadist.

To address emerging challenges, enhance the ability of the G5S-JF and sustain its support, this report proposes four possible options that could fill the gap resulting from the current security vacuum being created following the possible withdrawal of some of the external military forces from Mali, and Mali itself from the G5S-JF. In arriving at these proposed options, emphasis is placed on regional perspectives, which draws on African frameworks and the use of African resources, experience, capabilities and understanding. The report argues that this would allow better ownership and closer proximity to the issues, ensuring that international partners are not dictating how the region and African Union (AU) Member States (MS) should solve challenges. The evaluation considered the full spectrum of options to include:

- A reconfigured and scaled-up G5 Sahel Joint Force (Plus);
- A reconfigured G5 Sahel Joint Force and revised MISAHHEL through the AU, ECOWAS, ECCAS and CENSAD;
- An integrated ECOWAS (deployment of the African Standby Force) utilising the G5 Sahel force; and
- Elevating the G5 Sahel force to an AU (Peace Enforcement mission) with UN support.

² France24 (2022). Mali withdraws from the G5 Sahel regional anti-jihadist force. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220515-mali-withdraws-from-g5-sahel-regional-anti-jihadist-force>

The proposed options focus on military and hybrid solutions that can tackle existing challenges in the Sahel and West Africa as a whole. However, defeating jihadism and violent extremism is essentially a job that should include intelligence and police authorities to win the hearts and minds of the population, but this cannot be done solely with hard stabilisation efforts. Tackling the vast challenges in the Sahel requires a careful mix of adaptive, agile and sustained efforts that cut across social, economic, political, developmental, humanitarian and recovery instruments and support. Thus, the report suggests additional stabilisation efforts to support the Sahel focused on local, national, regional and international initiatives that can connect to the ground and tackle internal challenges comprehensively. These initiatives, it will be argued, can plug into existing structures but also help to support structures not fully recognised. Efforts to resolve the problems in the Sahel stand a much greater chance of success if fully supported with buy-in from the AU, together with ECOWAS and support from the UN, EU and donors that can draw on the full spectrum of available instruments which have a demonstrable desire to work with like-minded partners. The authors of this report believe that a scaled-up and reconfigured G5 Sahel Joint Force (G5 Sahel Plus) option (discussed below) would have been the optimal model. However, following the recent withdrawal of Mali from the G5S-JF and the deteriorating political landscape in the region and between states, the authors' reassessment calls for an AU Peace Enforcement mission as the most appropriate, given the current situation. It is important to note, the recommendations provided in this report hinge on the ability of the current and former G5S-JF states to address and resolve the deteriorating political situation, which is fluid in nature and continuously evolving. This will require all states (current and former G5S-JF) to recognise that they need each other to address these challenges, and that any reconfiguration (the models provided in this report) depends on the political situation being fully addressed. There is a need, as the models indicate, to have more joint efforts between the AU and ECOWAS to assist in resolving the current impasses in the region.

1. Introduction

On February 17th, 2022, French President Emmanuel Macron announced the withdrawal of Operation Barkhane from Mali within the next four to six months. According to Macron, the decision to withdraw has been occasioned by the breakdown of diplomatic relations between Paris and Bamako, following the unconstitutional changes of government in Mali since 2020, and the hostility emerging from the current governing military junta in Bamako.³ While this announcement did not come unexpected, it is still not clear how this move will affect the operational effectiveness of the Group of 5 Sahelian states (G5 Sahel Joint Force). Over time, the French forces have become the foundational pillar for most of the military engagements in the Sahel, providing important intelligence and logistical capabilities in the area of joint planning, aerial and air support, medical evacuations and the provision of critical information to these military operations in the Sahel.⁴ Operation Barkhane was launched in August 2014, at a time when Mali was facing political and humanitarian crises occasioned by the resurgence of the rebellion presence of jihadist groups in the north.⁵ The immediate objectives of Operation Barkhane, which had replaced Operation Serval, was to expand the scope of French intervention beyond Mali and support the five Sahelian countries' forces in fighting the terrorist threat.⁶

3 France 24 (2022). Macron announces French troops withdrawal from Mali. <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20220217-live-macron-holds-conference-on-sahel-engagement-as-france-poised-to-withdraw-troops-from-mali>.

4 Wilén, N. and Williams, P. D. (2022). What Are the International Military Options for the Sahel? IPI Global Observatory. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/04/what-are-the-international-military-options-for-the-sahel/>.

5 Stewart, D. J. (2013). What is Next for Mali? The Roots of the Conflict and Challenges to Stability Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11807>.

6 Shurkin, M., Pezard, S., & Zimmerman, S. (2017). Mali's Next Battle: Improving Counterterrorism Capabilities. RAND Corporation.

For a decade, the scope of Barkhane operations was to include other countries such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Niger in an effort to help stabilise the broader Sahel region. Over time, more than 5,000 French troops have been deployed in the Sahel region, with almost 2,400 of these being stationed at three bases in northern Mali alone. More recently, France has been winding down its presence in favour of Takuba, a European coalition force established in March 2020 to progressively replace the French Operation Barkhane. The inability of operation Barkhane and other international actors to stem the inexorable deterioration of security in the Sahel, attempts to convert their “tactical successes into a strategic victory,” as well as the political deadlock enabled by Barkhane’s presence, has culminated in some opposition and resentment against international intervenors in Mali.⁷

The immediate objectives of Operation Barkhane expand the scope of French intervention beyond Mali and support the five Sahelian countries’ forces in fighting the terrorist threat.

Currently, three countries in the Sahel (Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso) are ruled by leaders that acceded to power through a coup d’état, indicating a general decline in the democratisation process in the region. Meanwhile, defence and security forces in the region seem to be less well equipped and prepared to effectively counter the jihadist threat which is gradually expanding southwards towards the coastal States. France and its European allies have also lost public trust and good will, leading to anti-French sentiment across the Sahel, partly caused by their inability to tackle the security crisis, and lack of transparency about civilian casualties during military operations.

Strongly supported by France, the G5S-JF has yet proven unable to mobilise and marshal the needed logistics and funds to support its joint operations on its own.

This governance crisis in the three Sahelian countries is now paralysing the G5S-JF. Strongly supported by France, the G5S-JF has yet proven unable to mobilise and marshal the needed logistics and funds to support its joint operations on its own. The end of Barkhane in Mali and the restructuring of Barkhane and Takuba as “external operations” in the Sahel—combined with the reorganisation of joint planning, command, and security assets—will therefore have significant consequences on any military operations currently being conducted by forces such as G5S-JF, MINUSMA and the Malian forces operating in the country. The security void which will be occasioned by the relocation and restructuring of Barkhane, will weigh heavily on the

7 Nsaibia, H. and Weiss, C. (2020). “The End of the Sahelian Anomaly: How the Global Conflict between the Islamic State and al-Qa’ida Finally Came to West Africa”, CTC Sentinel, Vol. 13, No. 7, 1-46.

future of G5S-JF and MINUSMA. The untimely departure of French and European forces from Mali may invariably weaken the efforts in the tri-border region between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The desire of stakeholders to rapidly push towards burden-sharing without careful structural planning, adequate institutions in place or coordination, puts any continued operations at risk.

We set out to examine what impact the exit of Barkhane from Mali will have on the G5S-JF.

In this Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) report,⁸ we set out to examine what impact the exit of Barkhane from Mali and the restructuring of Barkhane and Takuba as an “external operation” will have on the G5S-JF. We start by briefly tracing the formation of the G5S-JF and the efforts it has made to date, and ask how effective these have been. The report then moves to answer a central question of what potential models—regional and continental capabilities or forces—would ensure that the region and the continent can respond to insecurity (cross-border) and challenges. Here the authors provide four possible options of support which could plug in the gaps created following the exit of Barkhane from Mali, and the reorganisation of French and European operations within the current security space in the Sahel. We then move to provide additional recommendations on supplementary support that can be plugged into our proposed models, before providing concluding thoughts on the ways forward.

8 Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) report (2022). Source <https://effectivepeaceops.net/>.

2. Context of the Sahel

Described by many as one of the poorest regions of the world, the Sahel faces several challenges including extreme poverty, fragile democratic governance, food crises, rapid population growth, effects of climate change and unresolved internal tensions, violent extremism, illicit trafficking, and general insecurity.⁹ The challenges in the Sahel go beyond individual state borders and are closely intertwined. Increasingly, instability in the region has varied sources and takes different expressions. These insecurities have been created by long years of underdevelopment, particularly in the remote and isolated north; insufficient decentralised decision-making; poor infrastructure and delivery of public goods; the inequitable sharing of revenues of economic activities, and other challenges. The long periods of underdevelopment, social exclusion, injustice and lack of opportunities for young people, have created tensions that allow organised criminal networks to engage with impoverished communities.

One of the countries in the Sahel region which has received a lot of attention from these groups in recent times, is Mali. The tensions pushed Mali to the brink and led to the rebellion in January of 2012, and a coup d'état in March of the same year. The northern regions of Mali were quickly overrun by a coalition of armed groups, including irredentist movements affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).¹⁰ The first phase of the conflict exposed some limitations of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the continental framework governing security governance spearheaded by the African Union's Peace and Security Council (AU PSC), and the need for a regional organisation legitimate enough to coordinate

9 Villalón, L. A. (2021). *The Oxford Handbook of the African Sahel*. Oxford University Press.

10 Elowson, C. & Tham Lindell, M. (2013): *A New Political Model for Mali*, FOI Memo 4724, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), <http://foi.se/>

regional and international action in the Sahel. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) led the regional initiatives in March after the 2012 coup. However, at the request of the Malian state, France, Mali's former colonial master, sought support to deal with these terrorists leading to Operation Serval, the French-led military intervention that rolled back the jihadist conquests of the northern region in January 2013.¹¹

The Sahel faces several challenges including extreme poverty, fragile democratic governance, food crises, rapid population growth, effects of climate change and unresolved internal tensions, violent extremism, illicit trafficking, and general insecurity.

This paved the way for the deployment of MINUSMA and a greater international presence in Mali and its immediate environment.¹² While the UN mission aimed to contribute to lasting peace in Mali by favouring dialogue with the parties and addressing the structural causes of conflict, Operation Serval was exclusively military and focused on neutralising jihadist groups and restoring state authority. The new organisation was focused on playing an important role in peacebuilding matters by addressing the root causes of conflict linked to security and development challenges.¹³

11 Bagayoko, N. (2019). "Le multilatéralisme sécuritaire africain à l'épreuve de la crise sahélienne", Centre Franco-Paix/ Université du Québec à Montréal, (rapport), juin: https://dandurand.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Rapport_Bagayoko_Multilateralisme_Securitaire_Africain.pdf, p.29.

12 Charbonneau B. & Sears, J. M. (2014) Fighting for Liberal Peace in Mali? The Limits of International Military Intervention, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol.8, No. 2-3, 192-213, DOI: 10.1080/17502977.2014.930221.

13 ICG. 2017. « Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force ». *Africa Report*, no 258: 25; Châtaigner, Jean-Marc, et Clémence Chevalier. 2019. « Enjeux de paix et de développement : comment sortir le Sahel de la trappe à pauvreté ? » *Réalités Industrielles*, 29-37,91-92,94.

3. The Formation of the G5 Sahel Joint Force

The G5S-JF was established in response to the Malian crisis to protect other Sahelian states from the challenge of non-state actors confronting state authority. The G5S-JF operates in an environment where state authority is challenged by the terrorist activities of the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)—a jihadist coalition formed by AQIM-affiliated groups in March 2017—and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), active in the border regions of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso since 2016. Despite the presence of a large international military coalition in Mali, these two groups have progressively dominated the rural hinterlands of the Central Sahel, expanding their influence through a combination of violence and playing on the grievances that arose due to the absence of state administration. The rise of violent extremist organisations and the weak presence of state authority have contributed to the emergence of pastoralist and self-defence groups, such as Dan Na Ambassagou in Mali, or the Koglweogo in Burkina Faso, and who defend specific communities and have long felt marginalised. Despite attempts at institutionalising these auxiliaries, as is the case with the volunteers for the defence of the homeland in Burkina Faso, the proliferation of armed groups has strained social cohesion in many of the G5 Sahel countries.

The G5S-JF embraces a security and development nexus that has been central to the strategies of its international partners, such as the European Union. From its creation, the G5S-JF has been closely associated with international peacebuilding efforts in the region, and in particular with

France's counter-terrorist operations in the Sahel.¹⁴ The founding meeting of February 2014 in Nouakchott occurred three months after a multi-stakeholder visit by the Heads of the UN, World Bank, EU, and the Organisation for Islamic Conference (OIC), to discuss and assess development issues in the region, and to operationalise the UN integrated strategy for the Sahel.¹⁵

The G5S-JF was established in response to the Malian crisis to protect other Sahelian states from the challenge of non-state actors confronting state authority.

Composed of approximately 5600 troops, the joint force of the G5 Sahel (G5S-JF) is organised around three sectors, where eight battalions, each consisting of 650 troops, would be deployed to secure the different borders in the same fashion as with the Opérations Militaires Conjointes Transfrontalières (OMCT). Its headquarters, after taking a violent hit in Sévaré in 2018, relocated to Bamako. Its different operational sectors are: Western sector, which consists of the border region between Mali and Mauritania, with its headquarters in Nbeiket el Lahouach (Mauritania); Central sector, which consists of the border between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, with its tactical headquarters in Niamey (Niger); and Eastern sector, which is the border between Niger and Chad, with its tactical headquarters in Wour (Chad).¹⁶

In March 2021, an additional battalion, composed of 1200 Chadian personnel, was positioned at Tera (Niger), to reinforce the G5S-JF's presence in the Liptako-Gourma area, the hotspot of violence in the region.¹⁷ During operations in these corridors, the relevant national components of the G5S-JF would have the right of "hot pursuit" against terrorist and other spoiler elements within 100 km of each border, pending approval of their request by the Joint Force Commander at its headquarters in Bamako from Sévaré (Central Mali).¹⁸

14 ICG (2017). « Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force ». Africa Report, No. 258: 25.

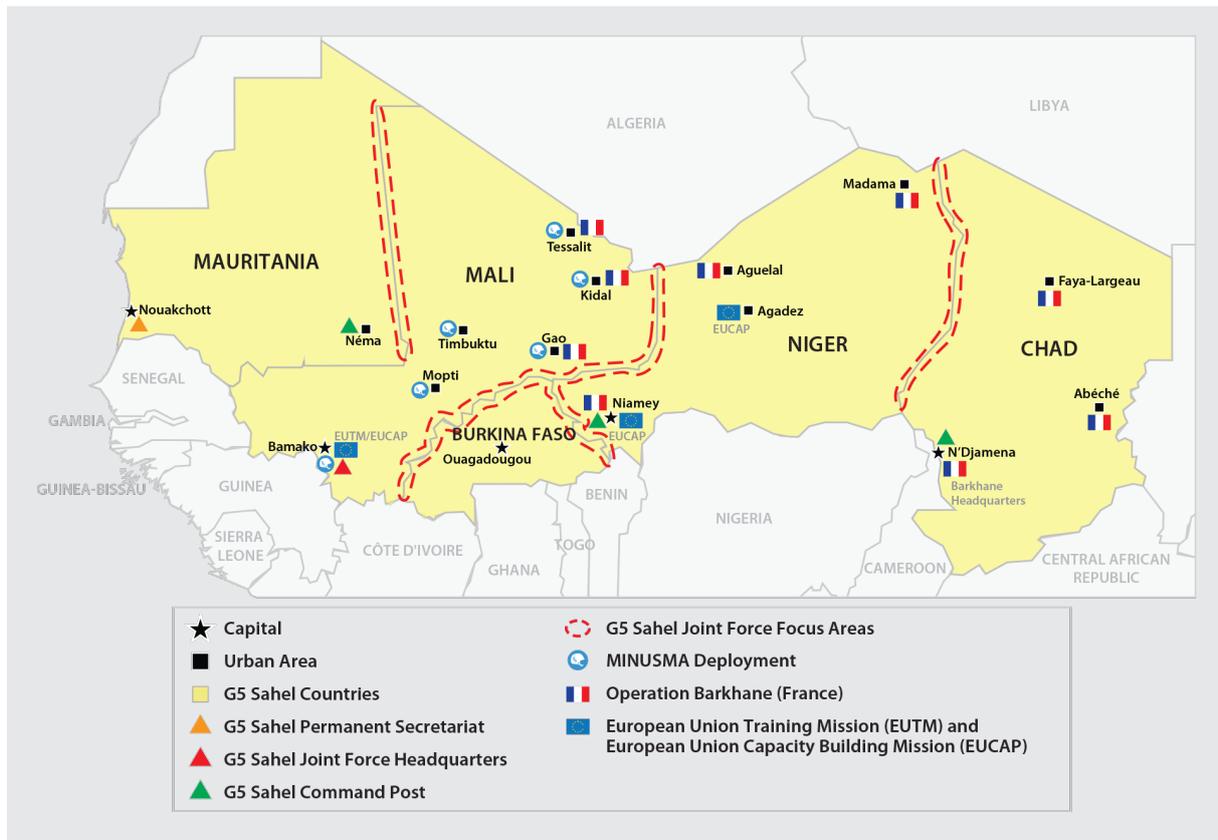
15 Diallo, O. (2018). « L'architecture africaine de paix et de sécurité dans le Sahel : entre adaptation et compétitions face aux menaces régionales », Bulletin du Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix | Vol. 3 No. 5-6

16 See Image below.

17 United Nations. (2021). « Report of the UN Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel ». S/2021/442. New York: United Nations. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF-CF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2021_442.pdf.

18 United Nations (2017). 'Report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel'. Report of the Secretary-General S/2017/869. New York: United Nations. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B-65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2017_869.pdf, page 6

Figure 1: Map of the G5 Sahel West, Central and East sectors (Situation as of 2021)



Source: *Africa Centre for Strategic Studies*

Operation Barkhane and EUTM have been the key training and mentoring partners in the operationalisation of the G5S-JF and currently shares a command system and an intelligence fusion cell with the Force in Niamey, Niger.¹⁹ The shared command structure has facilitated joint operational planning and increased high-profile joint operations focused largely on the Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger tri-border area.²⁰ The joint operations are particularly instructive because prior to that, the G5S-JF mostly conducted minor operations. The integration with Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA has helped the force to move beyond conducting minor operations and to enhance its operational readiness and capabilities.²¹

19 Fergus, K. (2020). 'Sahel Coalition: G5 and France Agree New Joint Command, Will Prioritise Fight Against Islamic State'. The Defense Post. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/01/14/sahel-coalition>, accessed on 21 April 2022.

20 Harris, M., Doxsee, C. & Thompson, J. (2022). The End of Operation Barkhane and the Future of Counterterrorism in Mali. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/end-operation-barkhane-and-future-counterterrorism-mali>, accessed 15 April 2022.

21 Sandnes, M. (2021) The G5 Sahel Joint Force: Operationalisation and Dependency on External Actors. PRIO Policy Brief 5/2021

4. International Cooperation in the Sahel

The spread of terrorism and violent extremism has culminated in the establishment of different multilevel configurations of international counterterrorism operations and initiatives in the Sahel. The most conspicuous counterterrorism operation in the region is the French-led Operation Barkhane which succeeded Operation Serval and Operation Épervier in August 2014.²² Unlike the earlier operations, Operation Barkhane had a much wider geographical coverage with deployments in Mali, but also with the other G5 Sahel member countries (Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad).²³ Its headquarters is in N'Djamena, Chad, with over 5,000 soldiers and an annual budget of about €600m.²⁴ While the majority of Operation Barkhane's forces were deployed in Mali, it also had a base in Niger primarily focused on intelligence collection, with a special task-force called Operation Sabre in Burkina Faso to conduct counterterrorism operations.²⁵ Aside its internal operational configurations, Operation Barkhane depends on intelligence support from the United States special forces involved in intelligence collection in Niger.

22 Operation Serval was deployed to Mali in January 2013, to push back the advances of a convoy of jihadists and Tuareg rebels towards the capital Bamako following the 2012 political crisis.

23 Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. (2022). The International Coalition for the Sahel. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country>, accessed on 20 April 2022.

24 Ibid; European Council on Foreign Relations. Mapping Armed Groups in Mali and the Sahel. https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel_mapping/operation_barkhane, accessed 1 May 2022

25 France24. (2022). Security in the Sahel: Is the Takuba Task Force still welcome in Mali? <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220128-security-in-the>, accessed 14 April 2022.

French troops also constitute the majority of the Takuba Task Force, a French-led coalition of European special forces that was deployed in March 2020 with a mandate to train Malian soldiers, gather intelligence, and carry out targeted operations.²⁶ The Task Force is comprised of troops from France, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden and it has demonstrated France's desire to involve its European Union partners directly in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel.²⁷ Prior to the deployment of the Task Force, the EU had three Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions: the Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali)²⁸ and Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger); and the EU training mission (EUTM) in Mali.²⁹

The EU had three Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions: the Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) and Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger); and the EU training mission (EUTM) in Mali.

The mandate of EUCAP Sahel Mali is to assist the internal security forces by reasserting the government's authority over the whole country, whereas EUCAP Sahel Niger's aim is to strengthen the capacities of Niger's internal security sector to fight against security threats through training, strategic advice, and logistical support.³⁰ Similarly, EUTM Mali's mandate is to help the Malian armed forces to strengthen their military capacity to be able to conduct military operations to restore the country's territorial integrity through advice and training.³¹ Beyond the three missions, the EU also established the Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell (RACC) in Nouakchott, where the Permanent Secretariat of the G5 Sahel is located. The different EU missions work in close coordination and cooperation with Operation Barkhane, Takuba Task Force and other actors like the MINUSMA.³² Although this has enhanced the G5S-JF's counterterrorism capabilities, it has also made the Joint Force over-reliant on external support and therefore less self-sufficient.

Operationally, Barkhane has constituted the dominant mentoring partner for the G5S-JF since the force's establishment, especially in regard to planning and conducting joint operations.

26 Ibid.

27 Euronews. 2022. EU's Takuba military taskforce in Sahel caught between France and Mali. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/02/03/eu-s-takuba-military-taskforce>, accessed on 12 April 2022.

28 Europa. (2022). EUCAP Sahel Mali: mission extended until 31 January 2023 and mandate adjusted. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press>, accessed 14 April 2022.

29 For more information see European Union. (2019). The European Union's Partnership with the G5 Sahel Countries. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/factsheet>, accessed 21 April 2022.

30 For more information see "EUCAP Sahel Niger" <https://www.eucap-sahel.eu/en/qui-nous-sommes/>, accessed 20 April 2022.

31 European Union. (2020). EUTM Mali: Council extends training mission with broadened mandate and increased budget. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/03/23/eut>, accessed 12 April 2022.

32 Ibid.

Cooperation between the G5S-JF and Barkhane was formalised in 2020, with the formation of a shared command system and an intelligence fusion cell. This cooperation developed to also include pre-deployment planning through the shared command structure.³³ In many instances, Barkhane and the G5S-JF have conducted joint planning to understand the strategic and operational environments to which they deploy. This has often determined the best methods for employing the various capabilities available to them in eliminating jihadist targets. The G5S-JF has more weaknesses in planning and executing than strengths and lack the financial resources and logistical capabilities to engage the jihadists on their own. The weakened financial and logistical positioning has pre-empted and elicited the support of Barkhane in helping to plan jointly amid a scarcity of resources. Barkhane's exit from Mali will invariably impact negatively on the Joint Force's capacity to plan. The absence of joint planning and coordination also puts any continued operations at risk.

However, since 2019, anti-French sentiment and unfolding political events in Mali and the Sahel region have continued to dislocate Western dominated counterterrorism cooperation in the Sahel.³⁴ This sentiment, more recently, has led to tensions between Mali and its Western partners over the deployment of the Wagner Group and on divergences over the Takuba Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).³⁵ The diplomatic tensions escalated when the Malian authorities expelled the French Ambassador to Mali and asked Danish troops deployed as part of the Takuba Task Force to withdraw from its territory.³⁶ Other Troop contributing Countries (TCC) are also considering a possible exit from Mali since December 2021, because of the presence of the Wagner Group. This has led to divided opinions among EU states on whether to remain engaged in the Sahel (Mali to be specific) amid the drawdown of Operation Barkhane³⁷ and French President Emmanuel Macron announcing the withdrawal of all French troops from Mali, including those in the Takuba Task Force.³⁸ These unfolding developments could be a further blow to the efforts of the G5S-JF.

33 Sandnes, M. (2021) op. cit.

34 Harris, M., Doxsee, C. & Thompson, J. (2022). The End of Operation Barkhane and the Future of Counterterrorism in Mali. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/end-operation-barkhane-and-future-counterterrorism-mali>, accessed 15 April 2022.

35 Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/mali/news/article/mali-the-malian-transitional-authorities-terminate-the-defense-cooperation>

36 France24. (2022b). Denmark to start pulling troops out of Mali after junta's demand <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220127-denmark-to-start-pulling-troops-out>, accessed on 15 April 2022.

37 France24. (2022c). Security in the Sahel: Is the Takuba Task Force still welcome in Mali? <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220128-security-in-the>, accessed on 15 April 2022.

38 France24. (2022a). Macron announces French troop withdrawal from Mali, <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20220217-live-macron-holds-conference>, accessed on 21 April 2022.

5. G5 Sahel Operational Successes

Between its authorisation by the UNSC in June 2017 and March 2019, the Joint Force has launched just about ten border operations with mixed results, mainly due to poor training and equipment shortfalls, weak intelligence, communications and rapid response failures, and very limited aerial capabilities – all impacting the G5 Sahel’s effectiveness.³⁹ As to whether these operations contributed to dismantling and neutralising jihadist groups has yet to be assessed, however, anecdotal evidence suggests that these operations may have had little to no wider strategic impact on security in the Sahel. In any event, they highlight the tactical limitations and cautious commitment of the G5S-JF.

|| The limited impact of the G5S-JF on the overall security situation in the Sahel has received some criticism.

In June 2018, an attack on the G5S-JF HQ in Sévaré, which occurred when Operation Ir Go Ka was deployed in the central sector, demonstrated the extent of the threat and the scale of the challenge faced by the regional force.⁴⁰ The complex attack by Al-Qaeda’s Group of Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), which involved the use of suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs) and fighters, killed six and left four wounded, causing a temporary halt to operations, and dealing a significant blow to efforts aimed at accelerating the full operationalisation of the G5S-JF.⁴¹ It was not until 2019 that the G5S-JF resumed its joint

39 Harris, M (2022) op cit.
40 Ibid.
41 United Nations 2018b, 1

operations, in tandem with Operation Barkhane.⁴² In 2020, the G5S-JF conducted Operation Sama 1 (3 March - 31 July) and Sama 2 (1 August - 31 January 2021) and in its Central Sector, disrupted logistical caches of spoiler groups in the Liptako-Gourma region.⁴³ Operation Sama 2 continued, with the participation of the Chadian battalion, despite the 18 August coup d'état in Mali.

Despite these operational successes, the limited impact of the G5S-JF on the overall security situation in the Sahel has received some criticism. This is because terrorism has now spread from Mali to Niger, Burkina Faso, and the northern territories of some countries in the coastal region of West Africa, like Benin, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire. Militants linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) continue to reinforce their foothold and wreak havoc across the region, making large swathes of territory ungovernable and stoking ethnic violence, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso,⁴⁴ while Malian authorities have never succeeded in re-establishing control over the whole country. Since its establishment, and due to lack of internal funding, the G5S-JF has largely depended on resources, finances and capacity-building support from external actors—including donor partners, Operation Barkhane and the three EU missions—to conduct counterterrorism operations. Between 2017 and 2018, a total of €414 million was pledged in support of the force by France, the EU, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Norway, the United States and other partners, during a donor conference in Paris and Brussels.⁴⁵ The EU alone has provided a contribution of €147 million to help in the initial set-up of the Joint Force through the African Peace Facility.⁴⁶

42 Security Council Report (May 2022) Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2022-05/group-of-five-for-the-sahel-joint-force-6.php>

43 United Nations 2021

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 European Union. (2019). The European Union's Partnership with the G5 Sahel Countries. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/factsheet>, accessed 21 April 2022.

6. Restructuring and relocation of Barkhane to Niger and Implications for the G5 Sahel Joint Force

For nearly a decade, French forces, together with several European states and Canada, have created a dependency in which major military engagements to some extent incapacitated the region's and states' ability to deal with insecurity. With Barkhane acting as a central node for operations for a range of partners in Mali and throughout the region, their principal roles have encapsulated everything from combat patrols with Malian forces and other partner militias, to local development activities aimed at dealing with gaps created by the absence of the central government.^{47 48} These efforts have been focussed on expeditionary counterterrorism, which invariably provides important intelligence and logistical capacities for the G5S-JF, EUTM Mali and MINUSMA.⁴⁹

The decision to withdraw operation Barkhane from Mali remains significant, although misconstrued in many quarters, since approximately 2,400 of France's 5,000 troops deployed in the Sahel are stationed in Mali.⁵⁰ Mali has become the epicentre of Barkhane's operations,

47 Lebovich, A. (2021). After Barkhane: What France's military drawdown means for the Sahel. <https://ecfr.eu/article/after-barkhane-what-frances-military-drawdown-means-for-the-sahel/>

48 Additionally, Barkhane actions have included intelligence gathering and training, joint tactical and operational planning, medical evacuations, aerial and air support and logistical and reassurance support.

49 Lori-anne Thérout-Bénoni and Sampson Kwarkye (2022) Lessons must be learnt before Barkhane marches into new territory. ISS Africa <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/lessons-must-be-learnt-before-barkhane-marches-into-new-territory>

50 Harris, M., Doxsee, C. & Thompson, J. (2022). The End of Operation Barkhane and the Future of Counterterrorism in Mali. Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/end-operation-barkhane-and-future-counterterrorism-mali>

with three military bases (Gossi, Menaka and Gao) in the tri-border area, and two in the north (Timbuktu and Tessalit).⁵¹ The decision of Barkhane to withdraw military resources from Mali is only mathematical, as Barkhane will still remain in some form in parts of the Sahel.⁵² Principally, they are only downsizing in Mali, redeploying and shifting their efforts to other parts of the region, particularly in Western Niger where Paris intends to increase its military cooperation in the fight against Islamic terrorist groups in the Sahel. With this new arrangement, Niger becomes the centrepiece of French military operations within the flashpoint tri-border enclave where Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger meet.

Some of the areas in which the G5S-JF might feel the absence of Barkhane include information and intelligence sharing, joint planning and logistical support, medical evacuations, aerial and air support, among others.

While some may see this planned departure as an opportunity for G5S-JF to scale-up its efforts and effectively invest its operational capabilities in engaging violent extremism in the Sahel, others take the view that this departure will expose the inefficiencies and vulnerabilities of the G5S-JF, which already seems ill-prepared to counter the jihadist threat.⁵³ The departure of the lead force presents a situation that might burden the national armies of the Joint Force and wider region. Some of the areas in which the G5S-JF might feel the absence of Barkhane include information and intelligence sharing, joint planning and logistical support, medical evacuations, aerial and air support, among others. In essence, Mali may miss out on the prospect of future engagements between Barkhane, Takuba, EUTM and other G5S-JF member states.

51 AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES(2022). France, European allies announce military withdrawal from Mali. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/17/france-allies-announce-military-withdrawal-from-mali>

52 Ibid.

53 Interview with Respondent B, Bamako, 12 April 2022.

7. Options for Consideration

In this section of the report we outline (from the analysis conducted) four possible options of support which could plug into the gaps that exist in the current security space in the Sahel. While France has announced the departure of Operation Barkhane from Mali, the EUTM has stated “We are halting the training missions for the (Malian) armed forces and national guards” adding, “The Sahel remains a priority. We’re not giving up on the Sahel, far from it. We want to commit even more to that region.”⁵⁴ Internationally the UN Security Council (UNSC) has not been able to agree on a UN Support Office that could secure predictable, sustainable, and flexible funding. There could be uncertainty over the United Kingdom’s Long-Range Reconnaissance Group (LRRG),⁵⁵ and the contribution of the German and Swedish contingents, who all provide critical information and logistical support to MINUSMA in the Gao and Ménaka regions.⁵⁶ This could have a knock-on effect on the region, particularly on the G5S-JF, which already faces internal cooperation challenges.

While recent analysis has started to emerge and provide suggestions focused on what the international military options are for the Sahel⁵⁷ and MINUSMA,⁵⁸ much of the analysis still lacks an African perspective on solutions to the challenges at hand. A large portion of the analysis

54 EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told a media conference.

55 Tchic, A, E, Y (2020). The UK Joins an Unwinnable Fight in the Sahel. Available at: <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/uk-joins-unwinnable-fight-sahel>

56 <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minusma>

57 Wilén, N and Williams, P, (2022). *What Are the International Military Options for the Sahel?*

58 De Coning, C., Edward Yaw Tchic, A., Rupesinghe, N. and Ovidie Grand, A. “Understanding Ad-Hoc Security Initiatives in Africa” (2021), Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI, Oslo).

from the stakeholders this research engaged with argued for the need to focus on a regional perspective which utilises African resources, experience, capabilities and understanding, and draws on existing or alternative African frameworks. This would allow better ownership and closer proximity to the issues, ensuring that international partners are not dictating how the region and African Union Member States (MS) should solve challenges. In essence, the models recommended in this section reflect “African solutions to African problems”, which may not be to the liking of all international actors operating in the region but takes a uniquely African approach to the challenges that abide where the G5S-JF operates. Thus, while we accept that these options may not be acceptable to all, we argue they represent a re-emergence of views from the region (and the wider West Africa region) on the challenges facing states affected by conflict, the spread of terrorism, illicit activities, and political instability. While the suggestions in this section are military focused, it is not to say that the authors agree that these solutions should be the only support provided. Still, it forms part of a broad range of solutions that can plug in and be sequenced with existing structures that might otherwise be overlooked or side-lined.

A large portion of the analysis from the stakeholders this research engaged with argued for the need to focus on a regional perspective which utilises African resources, experience, capabilities and understanding, and draws on existing or alternative African frameworks.

Here the authors ask,

What potential models—regional and continental capabilities or forces—would ensure that the region and the continent can respond to insecurity (cross-border) and challenges, while respecting and managing matters of human rights that are often indicated as a difficulty for some armies?

Therefore, this section focuses on some of the military and hybrid forms of solutions that can tackle existing challenges the Sahel and the broader West African region have to contend with. While our analysis shows that a significant number of officials and experts in policy and security arenas have argued that the G5S-JF is essentially a western established force, it also points to the need not to dissolve the force but to plug in and adapt this model going forward. The authors argue that there is a need for these challenges to be confronted through sustained support from the AU and a pivot of focus by ECOWAS and member states with broader adaptive stabilisation approaches that plug into national and regional stabilisation strategies.⁵⁹

59 De Coning, C., (2018), Adaptive Peacebuilding, International Affairs, Vol.94, No. 2, 301-317, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix251>

The assessment considered the full spectrum of possible options:

- A reconfigured and scaled-up G5 Sahel Joint Force (Plus);
- A reconfigured G5 Sahel Joint Force and revised MISAHHEL through the AU, ECOWAS, ECCAS and CENSAD;
- An Integrated ECOWAS (deployment of the African Standby Force) utilising the G5 Sahel Joint Force; and
- Elevating the G5 Sahel Joint Force to an AU Peace Enforcement mission with UN support.

Regardless of which option is ultimately chosen, the requirement is for an international security operation that can guarantee stability in the Sahel and the broader West African region, as well as deal with terrorist groups and other threats while enabling national forces to progressively become the main operational component through joint security initiatives, and to support states until they can take over full responsibility for looming security challenges.

7.1. Model One: Reconfigured and Scaled-up, G5 Sahel Joint Force (Plus —Pan African Solidarity)

A reconfigured and scaled-up G5-Sahel was identified as one of the quickest and easiest ways to plug into the insecurity challenges in the Sahel region. However, given the complications experienced when it comes to controlling forces and current political impasses (coups) in some G5 Sahel countries, it was admitted that this would remain difficult. Nevertheless, the exclusion of these states would only result in the cross-border areas of these states being a haven for terrorists. A reconfigured G5S-JF, with a new concept of operations (CONOPS) adapted to the evolving threat and geared towards enabling the force to become the main operational component, should still be seen as a legitimate solution. Given that the G5 Sahel member states (MSs) have a long-term interest in a stable, secure and prosperous region, it is in their best interest to continue this model but reconfigured. This would mean a continued focus on training and supporting troops who contribute to the G5S-JF and ensuring stipulations that insist that trained forces who meet the G5S-JF requirements, regional bodies' training protocols and international standards, are made available. In addition, several of the respondents felt it was important for this model to retain the option for the G5S-JF to seek support from other African states outside of the arrangement (what the authors determine as G5 Sahel Plus). In this reconfigured and scaled-up model, the G5 Sahel Plus would be the central command for all joint operations, communications and information sharing. The force would be able to accept

troops from broader West African states that may be willing to offer support, since they see it as being in their strategic interest and as part of a broader response to regional security challenges. The reconfiguration would need a range of combat support functions, including force projection, counter-IED, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting, command and communications support, civil-military coordination, medical evacuation, and combat logistics. Supporting and enabling the G5 Sahel Plus model will require civilian stabilisation and governance functions conducted by experts within the civilian capacity, police and armed-police planning and liaison functions to conduct joint patrolling and provide security escorts, specialised investigation expertise and community policing support.

The force would be able to accept troops from broader West African states that may be willing to offer support, since they see it as being in their strategic interest and as part of a broader response to regional security challenges.

The Plus feature of this model (G5 Sahel Plus) would allow states outside of the G5 Sahel agreement and region to provide support in the form of troops, as well as expertise in terrorism and counterinsurgency from the broader region and the African continent. Under this model, the G5 Sahel states could seek support from ECOWAS members like Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria and Ivory Coast, or states like Rwanda that have, in the past, rapidly deployed forces to Central Africa Republic (CAR), South Sudan and more recently to Mozambique. It could also draw on the expertise and counterterrorism experience of states like Kenya, which deployed elite forces to Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), or Burundi and Uganda who sent troops that were instrumental in meeting their mandate in Somalia through the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM, now ATMIS), and have proven capabilities in counterterrorism and peace enforcement operations, including in urban areas. The G5 Sahel Plus forces and their command structures would need to undertake joint exercises until they are confident that they can operate and manoeuvre together as one joint force. However, forces from west African states have already received significant joint training, which could be utilised.⁶⁰ Utilising African regional training centres in West, South and East Africa as well as the EUTM, the G5 Sahel Plus would develop training capacity aimed at preparing the units for joint operations with the G5S-JF. This model should include female engagement teams, military, police and civilian capabilities and expertise that can assist and engage with affected populations and ensure that their rights and needs of are considered and addressed, especially for women and girls. The G5 Sahel Plus would be guided by UN Human Rights and due diligence standards, as well as International Law rules, and would have preventative and compliance measures.

⁶⁰ US Africom Command. Available at: <https://www.africom.mil/what-we-do/exercises>

The G5 Sahel Plus would eventually—once conditions allowed—create space for African forces with long-established UN PKO experience to transition into zones where there is peace to be kept and support needed for the return of civilians, and to take over in areas where rapid force is being used in combination with build, hold and clear; and clear, hold and build tactics. In other areas, the forces would use the strategy of clear, hold and build. This could eventually allow for either the UN or MINUSMA to expand its footprint in conjunction with joint political support from the AU, which would utilise support through deployed AU liaison offices and mission in the captured region or areas. It would require predictable financial arrangements, a functioning financing mechanism with core funding from the UN's assessed contributions budget for UN peacekeeping operations and logistical support, and additional support from the EU's Peace Facility for stipends, or willing donors prepared to plug into this strategy.

If the African Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) and the UN Security Council (UNSC) opted for the reconfigured G5 Sahel Plus model, it would be critical to transition the current mission in phases. This would be done by signalling a completed mandate, allowing G5 Sahel Plus countries to recognise success, and then signalling to affected states and their citizens that a new phase has begun. The UN and the AU would be able to shift into a mode of enabling and providing additional support to affected states – utilising both a broader AU stabilisation strategy and PCRDR policy which must plug into existing regional and national stabilisation strategies.⁶¹ Finally, a detailed handover, drawdown and withdrawal plan would need to be developed. In principle, this should be a phased process, where national forces progressively assume greater responsibility for security.

The disadvantages to this model, however, would be the challenges with command and control, negative perceptions of other forces operating within the G5-Sahel region—which would need a clear political communication mechanism to counter these national populist opinions—and a possibility that the two proposed transitions (regional to Plus forces to UN PKO) could end up in static postures. An additional challenge would be funding gaps for both contributing states through the G5-Sahel, which is already underfunded. Moreover, following the withdrawal of Mali from the G5S-JF, this may now not be the most optimal model for consideration.

61 See Table 1.

7.2. Model Two: A Reconfigured G5-Sahel Joint Force and MISAHHEL⁶² (Coordinated and centralised by the AU-RECs/RMs)

While the AU-RECs/RM work collaboratively, there can often be a mismatch in the efforts being carried out by both stakeholders. The recent emergence of ad hoc security initiatives (ASIs) is due to a feeling that both the AU and RECs were not as responsive as needed.⁶³ However, there is now a growing sense from regional actors and several respondents that the two entities need to engage better with each other, and that the current wave of ASIs needs to be brought together (harmonisation and support) to allow better coordination, political buy-in and joint thinking that could generate solutions to the complex threats the region faces.

Under this model, ECOWAS, ECCAS and CENSAD would directly sequence their efforts and revise the activities of MISAHHEL, which could feature as part of a broader AU adaptative stabilisation strategy in the future.

The second model would be to reconfigure the G5 Sahel and the Mission de l'Union Africaine pour le Mali et le Sahel (AU MISAHHEL), and make this a central component that facilitates constructive dialogue and coordinated joint efforts conducted by a range of ASIs. In essence, the AU, through MISAHHEL, would serve as a coordination mechanism for the various operations. Under this model, ECOWAS, ECCAS and CENSAD would directly sequence their efforts (such as the ECOWAS peace and security architecture and stabilisation strategy) and revise the activities of MISAHHEL, which could feature as part of a broader AU adaptative stabilisation strategy in the future. While we accept that these RECs (ECOWAS, ECCAS and CENSAD) or regions are not coherently balanced, there is a need to recognise that the challenges are spreading and morphing into a network of cross-border challenges with states initially not threatened with these issues, are now facing a ticking time bomb.

The MISAHHEL would act to facilitate political and joint security discussions on insecurity and the spread of terrorism across the region. Under this model, ASIs such as the G5S-JF, Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNTJF), and security arrangements not recognised by the AU—like the Accra Initiative, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, the Mano River Union, the

62 Established in August 2013, the mission is mandated to promote the rule of law and reinforcing democratic institutions in Sahel; to assure the promotion and protection of human rights; to oversee the efforts of the AU's response to the security challenges; and to focus on deterioration of environment and the consequences of underdevelopment.

63 "Understanding Ad-Hoc Security Intitiatives in Africa", (2021). Cedric de Coning, Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, Natasja Rupesinghe and Anab Ovidie Grand (NUPI, Norway).

Nigeria-Niger joint security agreement and the Liptako Gourma Authority (LGA)—would plug into the MISAHHEL who would convene two to three times a year at ministerial and defence levels. In addition, input from the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and its Governors Forum, Alliance Sahel and the three RECs, ECOWAS, ECCAS and CENSAD, would plug into the mechanism through regional stability pacts, which could serve as a high-level political and security forum, anchored in an annual Heads of State and Government summit. This would help to facilitate a regional political and security framework that endorses and supports the different governments' vision through agreements and where emerging problems can be addressed, and progress can be assessed. This would allow the AU to oversee the region's challenges better and sequence its support to the impacted regions. It would also mean regional challenges could be met through better consensus, and engagement objectives could be used to generate high-level political attention and focus on interlinking this with cross-border, regional and continental security challenges.

The recognised security arrangement can utilise this platform to create a joint fusion cell to ensure that the combined civilian, police and military efforts can be sequenced, joined-up, comprehensive, coherent and synchronised. Such a coordination mechanism must ensure that the overall process benefits from joint intelligence and analysis, joint planning, operational coordination, joint performance assessment and close synchronisation with capacity-building efforts. This model can also be used to bring together the comparative advantages of the various recognised and non-recognised security arrangements with RECs, UN agencies and country teams without losing its African character – thus helping to create legitimacy in the eyes of the people, which has proven to be a challenge more recently in some Sahel states. It opens the possibility of enhancing the G5S-JF with additional resources that enable capabilities such as engineering, combat logistics, and aviation assets to be shared amongst contributing states. Under a coordinated cell, joint operations would enhance analysis and planning, and ease coordination for the MS.

The disadvantages of this model are that it would require adaptive capacity from the AU and RECs to coordinate their efforts, and the need for clear rules of engagement when it comes to operations through new CONOPS. It would require allocating significant additional resources that are currently committed by the international partner and the continental body. Finally, the plug-in time and strategic oversight through transaction costs would draw focus away from solving challenges pertaining to security and stabilisation capabilities.

7.3. Model Three: An Integrated ECOWAS Standby Force Utilising the G5 Sahel Joint Force

The third model would draw on existing G5 Sahel forces but be plugged in with the African Standby Force (ASF model), with a peace enforcement mandate designed to build, hold and clear or clear, hold and build, as well as an adaptive stabilisation strategy to remove the enemy from the various regions over time. The G5S-JF would eventually be rehatted under ECOWAS once the conditions allowed, and if the challenges with coups were overcome. If not, it would need to plug into the G5S Plus model or utilise the additional 3000 troops announced by the AU PSC⁶⁴ to support the G5S-JF while the ECOWAS Standby Force is being prepared for deployment. This model would allow the security force to be linked and come under ECOWAS' regional political and security framework, closely aligned with a shared political vision and strategy. An ECOWAS Standby Force or regional security force has the potential to be much more sustainable over the long term and could allow ECOWAS member states to sequence their efforts. The model would enable ECOWAS to develop new CONOPS and joint-planning cells coordinated under one single entity. It would need a range of combat-support functions including force projection and counter-IED; surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting; command and communications support; civil-military coordination, medical evacuation and combat logistics, which could be supported by the AU and its partners as well as bilateral donors. This would allow ECOWAS to uniformly activate and deploy its peace and security architecture and stabilisation strategy. The ECOWAS Commission could use this platform to convene more stakeholders. Finally, this model would allow civilian and police planning-and-liaison functions and joint patrolling, providing security escorts, specialised investigation expertise and community policing support.

The G5S-JF would eventually be rehatted under ECOWAS once the conditions allowed, and if the challenges with coups were overcome.

The disadvantage of this model is that the existing ECOWAS commission is slow and often politicised. As one respondent noted, “it took ECOWAS two years to have a heads-of-state meeting on terrorism.”⁶⁵ The other challenge is political will. While ECOWAS in the past attempted to end the bloody civil war in Liberia using a regional force called the Economic Community Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)—where ECOMOG intervention

64 The report and recommendations of the meeting of the Military Staff Committee of the PSC, held on 4 June 2020, on the process of the deployment of 3000 troops in the Sahel.

65 Interview with Respondent A, 12 April 2022

succeeded in temporarily stopping the bloodshed and ethnic killing and is regarded by some⁶⁶ as a model of regional intervention efforts—ECOWAS as an organisation today does not have the decisive leadership it once did. Especially in Nigeria and Ghana, whose presidents are in their last term (in Nigeria the regional hegemony heads to elections in 2023). Finally, it would mean that the current impasse with states who have coups would need to be addressed, and at the moment this seems to be a challenge for ECOWAS.

7.4. Model Four: An AU Peace Enforcement Operation with UN Support Adapted from a Reconfigured G5S-JF

The final model, and now the most likely option, would be to temporarily reconfigure the G5S-JF, but then rehatting forces under an AU peace enforcement operation. The wealth of experience and expertise gained by the AU has enabled the AU to launch and deploy several peace operations of its own, including missions to the AU Mission in Burundi (AMIB); the AU International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA); the AU Mission in Support of Elections in Comoros (AMISEC) and the AU Electoral and Security Assistance Mission in Comoros (MAES); the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA); the AU Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) now The African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS); and the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS I and II).⁶⁷ The AU and RECs/RMs have also been increasingly involved in setting up and overseeing PSOs. The AU has a Peace Support Operations Doctrine that enables a full spectrum of operations, including counterterror and enforcement operations, and has experience in deploying counterterrorism operations in Somalia. This model would allow the AU to deploy the 3000 forces that the AU PSC requested and rehat existing G5 Sahel forces. The mission could remove forces that it felt did not comply with its PSO doctrine, but also provide additional and coordinated support to TCCs. In addition, it would allow for Plus forces to be included as part of the strategy and allow for a functioning financing mechanism with core funding from the UN's assessed contribution budget for UN peacekeeping operations, which would contribute to logistical support and possible additional support via the EU's Peace Facility for stipends. Finally, it would allow an AU PSO to access a range of combat support functions like surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting; command and communications support; civil-military coordination, medical evacuation and combat logistics.

66 Niagawoe, G. T. (2010). "The Result of Failed Leadership: The Republic of Liberia," Xlibris US

67 De Coning, C. (2018). *Africa and UN Peace Operations: Implications for the Future Role of Regional Organisations*. Palgrave Macmillan.

The final model, and now the most likely option, would be to temporarily reconfigure the G5S-JF, but then rehatting forces under an AU peace enforcement operation.

The disadvantage of this model is that it could result in the AU contributing to a frozen conflict—which the UNSC would push back against—and include challenges with command and control. These types of mission often mean African TCC suffer the most and are often underfunded compared to UN Peacekeeping Operations. Finally, the mission could encounter negative perceptions amongst and within states, linked in part to the length of time the mission operates in an affected state. A static posture and a funding gap could remain unaddressed after initial deployment. Finally, as was the case with AMISOM (not ATMIS), the AU may have its hands tied due to reduced funding and stipulations regarding the use of funding from donors, and so the felicity needed to deliver a truly multidimensional peace enforcement mission would be limited. While there would be no questions over the military deployments, our own assessment suggests that the civilian and police components would largely be delayed, meaning the mission—while initially envisaged as multidimensional—could end up being militarily heavy for the first few years, reenforcing the same challenges experienced by AMISOM.

8. Complementary Adaptive Stabilisation Efforts

Despite some of the tactical successes of the G5S-JF and its international support, insecurity in the Sahel is yet to be reversed and is in fact deteriorating. The strategy has disregarded major shortcomings such as the lack of investment in socio-economic issues, humanitarian and development measures, and insufficient attention given to the political and governance fronts. Moreover, the strategy—motivated by France’s counter-terrorism approach—has placed its focus on neutralising the strategic leadership of terrorist groups in the region without addressing the root causes of insecurity, which these groups tend to exploit in order to gain ground and influence.⁶⁸ This counterterrorism and military-focused strategy has therefore monopolised all efforts, undermining and postponing any possible initiatives for sustainable and durable peace. For this reason, a shift in strategy is imperative to bring forward a demand-driven and all-people-based stabilisation strategy that addresses the problem from its roots rather than only addressing some of its symptoms. Only through a multidimensional approach, where civilian stabilisation receives the same level of attention as the military component, can sustainable and durable peace be achieved.

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68 Thérout-Bénoni, L. & Kwarkye, S (2022) Lessons must be learnt before Barkhane marches into new territory. ISS Africa <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/lessons-must-be-learnt-before-barkhane-marches-into-new-territory>

While the four available options presented in the previous section are mainly military, this final section outlines the modalities in which stabilisation could be combined with the potential military options above to form part of a broader adaptive stabilisation strategy. Table 1 illustrates the proposed adaptive stabilisation strategy to compliment and support the proposed models above.

Table 1: Proposed Adaptive Stabilisation Strategy for G5-Sahel

Adaptive Stabilisation Strategy:

- Flexible and context-specific, able to adapt and connect to specific needs on the ground;
- Understood as an immediate and urgent response, often meant to be short-term;
- Combination of civilian and military tools, adopting a multidimensional approach often linked to other APSA, AU policy organs like ASF, AU PSC, AU PSO, PCRDR etc. with usually military prominence;
- Responds to a broad spectrum of situations of conflict and instability (internal conflicts, terrorist activities and insurgencies, high rates of criminal violence and terrorism etc.);
- Stability is seen as a precondition for democratisation and long-term development;
- The referent object of security equates to the national state but is not pivoted towards elites but people and society.

	Model One	Model Two	Model Three	Model Four
International Level	<p>A reconfigured and scaled-up G5 Sahel (Plus)</p> <p>The UN through continued assessed contributions, and EU funding through the EU Peace Facility fund and the EU Emergency Fund that can contribute to the delivery of logistics, humanitarian and development programmes and doctrinal trainings of the stakeholders involved.</p> <p>The EU through continued training and guidance with its CSDP missions: EUTM and the civilian capacity building missions (EUCAP Mali and EUCAP Niger).</p>	<p>A reconfigured G5 Sahel and revised MISAHHEL through the AU, ECOWAS, ECCAS and CENSAD</p>	<p>An integrated ECOWAS (deployment of the African Standby Force) utilising the G5 Sahel</p>	<p>Elevating the G5 Sahel force to an AU Peace Enforcement mission with UN support</p>
Continental and Regional Level	<p>Continued support from MINUSMA if mandate is renewed in June 2022.</p> <p>African Union:</p> <p>The AU as the supporting mechanism of stabilisation by sequencing its political leadership and enabling the delivery of stabilisation activities;</p> <p>The AU could coordinate and convene all relevant national leaders of the G5 Plus arrangement in meetings that would serve as opportunities to jointly address common challenges and where progress can be assessed on a regular basis;</p> <p>Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) initiatives to be implemented if or once conditions allowed.</p>	<p>ECOWAS, ECCAS and CENSAD:</p> <p>To coordinate and harmonise stabilisation efforts in a unified and comprehensive manner.</p> <p>Stabilisation could be plugged through harmonised stability pacts under each REC that would support the different visions of each country involved through agreements reached at high-level forums involving the relevant RECs and MS, where emerging challenges could be addressed, and progress could be assessed on a yearly basis.</p>	<p>UN Support office:</p> <p>UNSOS (United Nations Support Office for AMISOM) type of mechanism financed through assessed contributions would enable reliable and predictable funding and could plug into the stabilisation framework.</p>	<p>UN Support office:</p> <p>UNSOS (United Nations Support Office for AMISOM) type of mechanism financed through assessed contributions would enable reliable and predictable funding and could plug into the stabilisation framework.</p> <p>African Union:</p> <p>AU Peace Enforcement Mission drawing on its experience in AMIB in Burundi, AMISOM in Somalia, MISCA in CAR as well as the AFISMA in Mali;</p> <p>If or once conditions allowed, this mission could be plugged in with PCRD initiatives.</p>
			<p>ECOWAS</p> <p>Sequencing stabilisation efforts through the civilian component of the ASF model and deployed at national and local levels, utilising the Policy Framework for the Civilian Dimension of the ASF;</p> <p>The deployment of the civilian capacity under this model would allow for a closer and better look at the issues on the ground through daily interaction with local communities and development and humanitarian actors who have nuanced knowledge of the root causes of the conflicts and have direct access to the population;</p> <p>Fluid build hold clear and clear hold build strategy.</p>	

	<p>Additional mechanisms to be plugged in to help reach stability at the continental level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Governance Architecture (AGA) principles of democracy; human rights; transitional justice; governance; constitutionalism and the rule of law; and humanitarian affairs to connect national and local institutions for stabilisation measures; • African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP); • African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), Protection of Civilians Guidelines and AU’s Gender Policy for Human Rights and Protection compliance; • African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, African Union Commission (AUC) and African Union Political Affairs, Peace and Security (AU PAPS) for political and electoral monitoring;
National Level	<p>Develop coherent and adaptive policies on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of people associated with armed groups and ex-combatants; • Security Sector Reform (SSR) for security sector to become more adaptive, efficient and responsive; • Reform of the Defence Forces for better civil-military cooperation and clarification of priorities on the ground; • Reform of Police and Intelligence Forces in a bid to train, mentor and advise them for better and more democratic control; • Enhancing Youth protection and participation in peacebuilding processes; • Ensuring the return and protection of refugees, IDPs and asylum seekers; • Enhancing Gender protection and participation in peacebuilding processes; • Elections Monitoring and Support for advancing political legitimacy through democratic and popular standards; • Guarantee human rights for everyone; • Judicial Reform for accountability across all society; • Provision of the Rule of Law and Justice to be adequately implemented and provide assurance and requirements for civilians to feel safe and secure; • Recruitment and appointment of relevant staff to draft and implement stabilisation policies; and • Dialogue with terrorist leaders for negotiation and peace deals,
Local and community Level	<p>Civil society organisations and NGOs should act as the linking entities between humanitarian assistance and the local populations. Humanitarian assistance should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-based projects for quick recovery with a gender and youth lens; • Delivery of basic services such as healthcare, education, power, communications and transport infrastructure, water and sanitation; • Provision of protection of civilians, especially of women and children; • Programmes directed to victims of physical, sexual and gender-based violence; • Additionally, religious leaders should also be encouraged to use their influence in preventing radicalisation of vulnerable sectors of society through guidance, education and mediation.

9. Conclusions

The withdrawal of Operation Barkhane, which has served as a critical partner of regional armies and international security arrangements such as G5 Sahel and MINUSMA, will be felt. Aside from the gains in providing military interventions like the G5 Sahel and MINUSMA with operational support in areas such as medical evacuations, aerial and air support, intelligence and information sharing, logistical support etc., Barkhane has faced a lot of resentment (anger and frustration) from the local population over the last few years, primarily due to what they perceive as its inability to defeat armed groups and safeguard civilians from violence—against a backdrop of a worsening security environment and recolonisation of former French territory. Barkhane continues to draw down its effort in Malian bases signalling the end of its operations in the country. The operation’s relocation to the north-western part of Niger means that they will continue to operate in the restive border area where Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso meet.

Despite its past backing and formation (still seen as a western force), promoting the G5S-JF as the main and the sole regional security actor has proven insufficient as the organisation struggles to find its feet in the region and heavily depends on the assistance of France, MINUSMA and other international partners. The exit of Operation Barkhane will impact the activities of G5S-JF —primarily where the forces conduct joint regional tasks to deal with jihadists in the Sahel and with medivac support. However, since the force has only conducted a limited number of missions since its inception, it is unclear how significant the withdrawal will be in other areas in which the G5S-JF operates. However, we estimate that if states of the Sahel continue to focus inwards, then the G5 Sahel will face a very dire and abrupt end to its operations in the future.

While in the past the push to resolve the challenges in the Sahel has been mainly through a western interventionist lens, the solutions have rarely been geared towards understanding the

needs of the populations or approaching the solutions from a unique African perspective. This has resulted in the solutions to challenges being overtly western and missing uniquely African perspectives to the challenges, which are often rooted in systematic and institutional failures in governance and leadership, among many others.

Following the announcement of the withdrawal of Mali from the G5S-JF, the authors argue that the best option would now be to elevate the G5S-JF to an AU Peace Enforcement mission with a UN Support Office.

This means some tough decisions will need to be made ahead of the completed withdrawals, not only for the affected states but also for ECOWAS and the AU. Nevertheless, these changes present an opportunity to rethink the different options for affected states, the regional authorities, and the continental body regarding their involvement in resolving these emerging challenges and the types of international support they see as conducive to their efforts. Therefore, the report's authors argue that now is an optimal time to drive the efforts toward an adaptive, people-centred approach built on a sustained African understanding of the context and the needs of the affected communities to confront the threats in the Sahel. What is needed is a well-coordinated political strategy that utilises African resources, experience, capabilities, and understanding to address growing insecurity and challenges. Regional and continental actors such as ECOWAS and the AU have a major role to play in this endeavour.

As this report has started to do, now is the time to begin conversations that rethink how we approach insecurity in Africa, particularly in the Sahel. In doing so, four options have been put forward for the Sahel, but it is argued that now is not the time to abandon the G5S-JF. The best available option, if well sustained, would have been to reconfigure the G5 Sahel Joint Force and include other states to widen the contribution (G5 Sahel Plus model). However, following the announcement of the withdrawal of Mali from the G5S-JF, the authors argue that the best option would now be to elevate the G5S-JF to an AU Peace Enforcement mission with a UN Support Office similar to what was done in Somalia (UN Support Office for AMISOM). This would allow the AU to deploy the 3000 forces that the AU PSC requested to rehat the remaining G5S-JF. The Peace Support Operations Doctrine would allow the mission to access a range of combat support functions like surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting; command and communications support; civil-military coordination, medical evacuation and combat logistics. This must be done in conjunction with an adaptive stabilisation strategy rooted in serving the people affected by the instability and insecurity in the region. At the heart of this is the need to strengthen state-society relations. Adopting a principled process allows an adaptive stabilisation strategy to facilitate processes that enable and encourage state-society connections, but stops short of actions that can influence the content or outcome of these processes. Together with the proposed AU Enforcement Mission approach, the adaptive stabilisation strategy must

focus on enhancing development, strengthening decentralised governance institutions, building peace and promoting human development, respecting diversity and being inclusive.

The recommendations provided in this report are not possible unless the rapid deteriorating political environment between current and former G5 Sahel states is fully resolved. This means each state formally involved or not involved in the region must recognise that progress and defeating terrorism requires collective action and full awareness that states are interconnected, and that one state cannot go it alone. They need each other to address these challenges. As all models have suggested reconfiguring the G5 Sahel is crucial to any long-term security solution. Finally, as all models have indicated in one way or another, there is a need more than ever to ensure that there are more joint efforts between ECOWAS and the AU to help resolve the current impasses in the region.

10. Annex 1: The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) Project Summary

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management. However, their effectiveness remains the subject of confusion and debate in both the policy and academic communities. Various international organizations conducting peace operations, including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify their effectiveness and impact. Although various initiatives are underway to improve the ability to assess the performance of peace operations, there remains a distinct lack of independent, research-based information about the effectiveness of such operations.

To address this gap, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with over 40 partners from across the globe, have established an international network to jointly undertake research into the effectiveness of peace operations. This network has developed a shared methodology to enable the members to undertake research on this topic. This will ensure coherence across cases and facilitate comparative research. The network produce a series of reports that are shared with stakeholders including the UN, AU, and EU, interested national government representatives, researchers, and the general public. All the EPON reports are available via <https://effectivepeaceops.net>. The network is coordinated by NUPI. Many of the partners fund their own participation. NUPI has also received funding from the Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support the Network and its research, including via the UN Peace Operations project (UNPOP) and the Training for Peace (TfP) programme.

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11. Annex 2: The Training for Peace (TfP) Programme Summary

11.1. What are the objectives of the TfP programme?

The Training for Peace (TfP) Programme works to generate knowledge, support the development of policy and builds the capacity of police and civilian peacekeepers.

The Programme also:

- Provides technical expertise, including for the African Standby Capacity;
- Supports the development of strategic policy and doctrine;
- Undertakes studies aimed at capturing lessons from AU missions; and
- Provides training and supports the development of training curriculum and material.

The programme's main objectives are to provide support to the AUC to enhance knowledge and understanding of the evolving conflict and security environment on the continent, and contribute to strengthening the AUC's comprehensive range of response capacities.

Overall, the goal is to contribute to strengthening the capacity of the AUC to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and insecurity on the continent through deploying the full spectrum of peacemaking tools.

11.2. Partnership and trust amid uncertainty and flux

The TfP programme is currently in its sixth phase. It started with a focus on peacekeeping training in southern Africa 26 years ago. Today it has developed and adapted to Africa's changing peace and security needs.

TfP helps the African Union (AU) to:

- Generate new knowledge derived from its own and related African peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding experiences and drawing on evidence-based research;
- Develop innovative and world-leading policies, doctrine and guidelines that will guide the next generation of AU mediation, observer and peace missions; and
- Build the capacity of the personnel that will undertake, support and direct AU and African mediation, observer and peace missions, and support the AU to maintain the African Standby Capacity and the African Standby Force.

11.3. What do we work on?

Themes covered by the TfP contribute to preventing conflicts, Silencing the Guns and sustaining peace. These include:

- Emerging security threats, such as violent extremism;
- AU peace support operations, with a particular focus on the role of police and civilian peacekeepers;
- In-depth support and research on Conflict prevention, PCRd and SSR;
- Ongoing research on UN/AU relations, including support to the AUPOM and A3; and
- Inclusivity, with a particular focus on youth, women and gender.

11.4. Our theory of change

Support to the AU Commission (AUC) and regional economic communities (RECs)/ regional mechanisms (RMs) contributes to increased knowledge and institutional capacity at the strategic levels. This enables the organisation and its RECs/RMs to effectively prevent and respond to conflicts and complex security challenges, thereby promoting and sustaining peace in Africa.

The G5 Sahel Joint Force (G5S-JF) was created to address the security vacuum and respond to transnational terrorism and organised crime, particularly among the five-member states (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger). With the support of external actors, the G5S-JF has relatively enhanced its operational readiness and capabilities through mentoring, training, and funding joint operations. However, with the announcement of Barkhane exiting Mali and transferring to Niger, the exit may signify a vital shift in western military operations in Mali and the Sahel over the coming months. Questions remain on the impact of these external withdrawals on the operational effectiveness of the G5S-JF and insecurity in the region. Drawing on in-depth interviews and informal conversations with actors from the G5 Sahel countries, UN, AU and ECOWAS and other interlocutors, this report explores four possible options that could plug into existing gaps created by the current security vacuum following the withdrawal of some of the external military actors from Mali; and Mali itself from the G5S-JF.



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