



A New Start for the G5 Sahel: Why the Region Needs More than Security

Despite coordinated security programs and high-level political dialogue, there is a limited chance of sustainable stability if regional actors do not quickly address the most pressing, and overlooked security crises far away from the affected capital cities. Without an inclusive economic and security package to address the most fragile regions, these areas risk becoming permanent pockets of extremism and violence, which could easily spill-over into neighboring states.

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The Sahel region of Africa has been synonymous with poverty, war, environmental stress, and lawlessness for decades. Organized crime and smuggling drain billions of illicit flows out of the region annually, reducing state capacity to provide basic services, and inhibiting meaningful development progress. Weak centralized governments, such as Niger, Mali, and Chad have struggled to maintain authority and control over massive swaths of land filled with armed militias, local tribes, and groups affiliated with extremists. Furthermore, the persistent instability in Libya has threatened neighboring states with violent spillover effects since the fall of Gadhafi in 2011.

These challenges, compounded with the prospect of rapid population growth over the next 20 years, paint a bleak picture for the region, but recent developments show potential prospects for improvement. Earlier month the five states that make up the G5 Sahel reached a landmark decision to coordinate a Joint Force for the first time to tackle trafficking,

terrorism, and the perilous security situation.¹ The European Union also committed a new level of engagement to support the region, with HRVP Mogherini personally attending the G5 Summit to dedicate EUR 50 million to support the new Task Force.²

This week, the EU made additional pledges, with European Foreign Ministers agreeing upon a new strategy for Mali and the Sahel region. The strategy includes plans to regionalize existing CSDP missions in Mali and Niger, providing trainings for the G5 security forces and creating a coordination cell made up of internal security experts from G5 Sahel countries.³ The EU will direct additional resources to stabilize the situation in Mali, and potentially deploy an Action to support the return of civilian administration to the center of Mali.

The EU has also boosted engagement in Libya, where concerns over the inflow of migrants have pushed the European Commission to support trainings for the Libyan Coast Guard and a new multi-annual smuggling and border management project that will be jointly implemented between Italy, the EEAS, and Libyan authorities. This controversial support comes in addition to over EUR 100 million funding to “improve the conditions of detention centers” throughout the country.⁴

EU Member States have also taken individual initiatives. Recently elected French President Macron recently signaled in a recent trip to Morocco that he will pursue a new Libyan policy to build peace.⁵ According to the French and Algerian Foreign Ministers, partners will seek to build a tentative coalition between the UN-supported Government of National Accord (GNA), and dissenting political factions in Libya such as General Haftar of the Libyan National Army, with the overarching goal of defeating jihadist affiliated extremist groups.

What’s Missing? An Economic and Governance Recovery Plan:

These developments may signal start of a new beginning for the Sahel, where jointly coordinated security programs and high-level political dialogue can guarantee the necessary reforms. But there is a limited chance of sustainable stability if regional actors do not quickly address the most pressing, and overlooked security concerns in the Northern strip of the Sahel and Southern Libya, far away from the affected capital cities. Without an inclusive economic and security package to address the most fragile regions, these areas risk becoming permanent pockets of extremism and violence, which could easily spill-over into neighboring states.

In Libya, pressure from the GNA, as well as other northern political actors, have increasingly pushed ISIS/jihadist fighters to the south, where they have exploited the larger governance

¹ UN. “Security Council Welcomes Deployment of Joint Force to Combat Terrorism Threat, Transnational Crime in Sahel, Unanimously Adopting Resolution.” 2017. Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12881.doc.htm>

² European Commission. “EUR 50 million for new Joint Force of the Sahel countries: EU steps up its support for security in the region.” 2017. Available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1542_en.htm

³ European Council. “Foreign Affairs Council June 2017 Conclusions, Mali and the Sahel.” 2017. Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press/press-releases/2017/06/19-conclusions-mali-sahel/>

⁴ European Commission. “Fourth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with Third Countries Under the European Agenda on Migration.” 2017. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/4th_progress_report_partnership_framework_with_third_countries_under_european_agenda_on_migration.pdf

⁵ “France under Macron signals shift in Libya policy, toward Haftar.” Reuters. 2017. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-libya-idUSKCN18E2UU>

vacuum.⁶ Extremists have already been pushed out of Tripoli, Sirte, Benghazi, and Sabratha, and if the GNA develops a coalition with General Haftar and others, more extremists will seek refuge closer to Niger and Chad. While the local communities in the south have largely rejected adopting jihadist ideologies, the lack of formal police and government services have enabled terrorist groups to set up training camps and take advantage of the lucrative local smuggling businesses.⁷

Since the fall of Ghadafi in 2011, both Niger and Chad have struggled to repel advances from Libyan rebel groups seeking to destabilize northern regions of the Sahel. Niger remains one of the last relatively stable countries in the region, but since the start of the Malian civil war, it has also faced pressure from Malian local jihadi groups and Tuareg separatist movements, which have attacked civilians and national security forces.⁸ Niger also faces pressure from the Nigerian extremist group, Boko Haram, which has fueled local tensions over natural resources in the eastern region of the country.

Without concerted efforts to address the drivers of instability and violence in the most volatile parts of the Sahel, such as the lack of governance and viable economic opportunities, rural populations will always be at risk. In addition to a G5 Task Force to combat terrorism, the G5 must develop a regional economic and governance recovery plan as a way to build resilience against cross-border spill-over effects and pressure from extremists. This plan should encourage the implementation of transparent regulatory frameworks, foreign investment, and the improvement of financial services for local communities.

The EU can also play a major role in developing this regional economic recovery plan, by not only driving private investment through the new European Fund for Sustainable Development, but by strengthening the African Governance Architecture's coordination with national reforms. As it develops its strengthened partnership with Africa ahead of the November EU-Africa conference in Cote D'Ivoire, the EU must make tangible investments in education, job creation, and youth exchange programs to help eradicate poverty and counter the expansion of extreme ideologies.

Counterterrorism and security coordination are a key element to sustainable peace in the Sahel, but it is essential that the EU, AU, G5 and local actors quickly fill the many economic and governance vulnerabilities that are currently being exploited by extremist groups.

Recommendations:

- The G5 Sahel and EU should develop a joint regional economic and governance recovery plan in order to catalyse development and build resilience against cross-border spill-over effects;
- The G5 Sahel should reinforce partnerships with the EU, UN, and AU, and coordinate a task force to better take advantage of the African Governance Architecture and the African Peace and Security Architecture;

⁶ Wehrey, Frederic. "Insecurity and Governance Challenges in Southern Libya." Carnegie Endowment. 2017. Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/30/insecurity-and-governance-challenges-in-southern-libya-pub-68451>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gueret, Tristan. "Niger and the Fight Against Violent Extremism in the Sahel." 2017. Available at: <https://rusi.org/commentary/niger-and-fight-against-violent-extremism-sahel>

- The EU should mobilize ambitious investments in public services, especially in the south of Libya and northern regions of the Sahel, using both the European Trust Fund for Africa and the European Fund for Sustainable Development to drive public and private finance;
- The EU should effectively regionalise existing CSDP missions in Mali and Niger, and ensure that trainings for G5 security forces include components of good governance and human rights.