



UDK: 323.28:355.02(66)

EXPLORING THE INTERCONNECTIONS OF ARMS PROLIFERATION, PRIVATE MILITARY CONTRACTORS, AND UNGOVERNED SPACES IN THE SAHEL AND LITTORAL REGIONS

Professional paper

Primljeno/Received: 27. 12. 2025.

Prihvaćeno/Accepted: 14. 4. 2026.

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Sažetak

Security challenges in the Sahel and the adjoining coastal West African states are increasingly being shaped by the convergence of three destabilizing forces: illicit arms flows, the unchecked operations of private military entities, and the persistence of ungoverned territories. These conditions have majorly enabled the emergence and entrenchment of jihadist groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP). This research is based on the qualitative research approach and utilizes secondary sources, including academic literature, policy reports, and conflict analysis, to build its arguments and explain the regional dynamics. The study noted that porous borders, fragmented governance, and external factors contribute to the regional instability. The study further argues that the proliferation of arms sustains militant networks, private military companies operate in legal vacuums, and also unregulated zones offer safe havens for insurgents. In response, governments must reassert control over peripheral regions, regulate non-state security actors, and also strengthen border surveillance. A coordinated strategy grounded in community engagement, inclusive development, and legal reform is essential to reversing the tide of extremism and fostering long-term stability.

Ključne riječi

Sahel, Littoral West Africa, Jihadist Networks, Illicit Arms, Private Military Companies, Ungoverned Territories, Regional Security

INTRODUCTION

Sahel has become the most topical problem of global security. What was formerly an isolated violence within the northern Mali region is now threatening the West African coast states, which are transforming the dynamics of the region, as well as altering international reactions. Historical legacies, porous borders and weak governance structures have been the causative factors contributed to the rise of jihadist groups in the region (Chilaka, Doutomi, and Chigozie, 2024; Newman, 2007). The idea of ungoverned space has been at the centre of scholarly and policy discussions. It is an area where the state does not control the territory or faces rivalry, and insurgents have built alternative governmental institutions (Abasa, 2015; Ojo, 2020). These areas have turned into jihadist nurseries, arms dealerships and PMC business in the Sahel. Researchers believe that such zones remain where there is a weakness in the structures and that insurgents intend to take advantage of the gaps in governance (Ziso and Hamandishe, 2024). The article focuses on the origins of jihadist growth, polarization and restructuring of militant players, and the movement of strategic drift to littoral areas. It also examines the combination of illegal flow of arms, unregulated activity of PMCs, and the existence of uncontrollable space to support insurgency. Having combined all these theories into a single concept, this paper aims at offering a coherent discussion of the Sahelian crisis and offer ways through which the crisis can be addressed. In the case of Libya in 2011, the fall of the government of Muammar Gaddafi resulted in the influx of weapons and fighters to the Sahel, destabilizing the already weak states like Mali and Niger (Strazzari, 2014; Boas and Strazzari, 2020). This influx accelerated the emergence of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which had hitherto been living in the fringes of Algerian insurgency but was now finding a favorable ground in the north Mali.

The 2012 uprising in northern Mali that came up first by Tuareg separatists was soon hijacked by jihadist groups. Organizations like the Ansar Dine, the Movement of Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and the AQIM acquired strategic cities like Timbuktu and Gao and ruled them with primitive forms of government and making their interpretation of Islamic law stringent (Haidara, 2024). The failure of the Malian state to react in an appropriate way exposed the institutional rot and predetermined a protracted insurgency. This course is a reminder of the role of regional struggles, state vulnerability and a foreign shock in establishing fertile grounds on which insurgency thrives. Researchers are clear that the instability of the Sahel is not only a consequence of the foreign intervention but also a process within the country, such as social-economic marginalization, ethnic conflict, and environmental challenges (Besenyo, Miletics, and Talas, 2024; Njoki, 2023). The subtle but important role has been played by environmental stress. Increased competition over resources has been driven by desertification, unpredictable rainfall, and decreased agricultural production, which are some of the factors that have intensified intercommunal conflicts between pastoralists and farmers (Njoki, 2023; Besenyo et al., 2024). Jihadist groups have been using these tensions to present themselves as the defenders of the oppressed communities and mediators of resource conflicts. The approach has widened their pool of recruits, especially the young people who see insurgents as a source of meaning and security.

The historical development of jihadist action in the Sahel does, therefore, indicate the interaction between structural weaknesses and opportunistic insurgent tactics. Since the overthrowing of the state power in Libya to the Malian uprising, the region has availed both material and

political opportunities to the insurgents. This background is critical to the explanation of further trends, such as the disintegration of jihadist groups and their spread to coastal states.

METHODOLOGY

The research design employed in this study is a qualitative research design, as it will use majorly secondary sources to develop the analysis. The qualitative approach is also suitable due to the multidimensionality of the problem of insecurity in the Sahel and littoral West Africa, which can only be explained by the interpretive level and not quantified by certain numbers. The information was attracted to a vast body of scientific works, policy reports, doctoral dissertations, and international organizations publications. The methodology entailed a reviewed research on the literature that already exists on arms proliferation, the private military contractors, and the ungoverned spaces. The selection of sources was done based on their relevance, credibility and contribution to the concept of the interaction of these factors in determining regional security. Thematic analysis identified key themes, which enabled the study to follow historical paths, look at current dynamics, and combine theoretical approaches, including hybrid governance.

FRAGMENTATION AND REALIGNMENT OF JIHADIST GROUPS

The jihadist environment in the Sahel was never a stable one but that of disintegration, rivalry and occasional realignment. Following the Malian mutiny of 2012, rebel groups had gone viral and divided based on ideological, tribal, and strategic lines. As of 2017, a small number of groups related to Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) attempted to resolve this disunity by merging into Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), under the leadership of Iyad Ag Ghali. This combination was not merely an organizational one, but a conscious effort to consolidate the fragmented jihadist efforts and make operation more cohered in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (African Security Analysis, 2025). The formation of JNIM was a position of Al-Qaeda, which is larger by integrating itself into local grievances and establishing pragmatic alliances. In contrast to the movements that only hinge on ideological inflexibility, JNIM focused on localized legitimacy which saw it portray itself as a protector of communities that were marginalized by weak governance. Researchers like Hansen (2018) have observed that the process of cohesion in jihadist groups is essential to their existence and the fact that JNIM has been able to unify various groups under one banner has been its main defining strength. Berger (2023) further notes that jihadist rule in the Sahel is to be viewed as a component of a hybrid political order, insurgents being not the ones who exist outside but within the established systems of power and community life.

Conversely, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) which later transformed to be the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP) became one of its rivals. ISGS was formed by a former member of AQIM, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, and pledged devotion to the Islamic State, taking more violent methods, including mass executions and looting of the villages (Raafat, 2021). The hierarchical structure and transnational agenda of ISSP resulted in it clashing with the model of JNIM, which was decentralized and located locally. The competition between JNIM and ISSP has also increased the violence as both groups are competing in terms of recruits, resources, and ideological legitimacy. According to Thurston (2020), this struggle is an extension of larger conflicts between the adaptive pragmatism of Al-Qaeda and the doctrinaire

nature of the Islamic State. The results of such disintegration are immense. Governments have to deal with various insurgent forces that have taken different approaches, making it hard to counterterrorism. The threat of fringe groups establishing new alliances increases the instability, whereas the flexibility of the jihadist movements highlights the ability to reform according to the changes in the local and global dynamics. Osland and Erstad (2020) note that insurgent resilience in weak states such as the Sahel has its basis in their capacity to adapt with the political and social environment.

EXPANSION TO COASTAL STATES WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES.

Since 2017, jihadist organizations have spread southwards to the coastal West African countries, such as Benin, Togo, and Cote d'Ivoire. This growth is not only opportunistic but is a strategic realignment that is geared towards tapping into new sources of recruiting workforce, breaking regional trade routes, and destabilizing coastal regimes (Boukhars, 2024). It is reflected in the attacks in northern Benin and Togo and the raid that occurred in 2020 in Kafolo, Cote d'Ivoire (The Soufan Center, 2024). A Sahelian issue has now been transformed into a crisis of the regions where insurgents intentionally intrude into place that was once deemed insulated against jihadist influence. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (2024), this southward shift is one of the most notable changes in the dynamics in the security of the region. Jihadists use domestic issues to insulate themselves in border villages. Recruitment is fertile on land conflicts, ethnic friction, and mistrust of security agencies (International Crisis Group, 2023). Through their primitive services, dispute resolution systems and ideological brainwash, jihadist groups gain roots in regions that lack the state or are mistrusted by the state. This approach of coercion and co-opting resembles the previous jihadist methods of northern Mali, where the insurgents resorted to violence and simple forms of governance to establish themselves (Haidara, 2024).

Bouakhars (2024) notes that this growth is enabled by porous borders and weak structures of governance. Kone (2020) also notes that local communities who feel isolated by the state can join insurgents due to the lack of money or frustration with the governmental indifference. These processes can be explained by the general tendencies of insurgent embeddedness in uncontrolled spaces, where absence of the state opens opportunities to non-state actors (Abasa, 2015; Ojo, 2020). The value of the coastal expansion as a strategy cannot be overestimated. Littoral states are the ports to the international trade, which are destabilized and result in the threat to the stability of the economy in the region. Additionally, the penetration of jihadist organisations in these states poses a threat of establishment of new arenas of war, which are already scarce security resources. Dahiru (2024) cautions that extending jihadist violence to coastal areas would put in danger the regionalization of insecurity, making localized insurgent movements into continental ones.

Outsiders have been aware of the seriousness of this growth. In 2024, the U.S. AFRICOM commander Michael Langley threatened that organizations such as JNIM and ISSP are spreading and relocating to the northern boundary of the west coast states of Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin (The Soufan Center, 2024). This evaluation highlights the need to have coordinated regional responses since Sahelian crisis is now posing more threats to the stability of the coastal West Africa.

The disintegration of the jihadist organizations and their spread to the coastal states point out two important dynamics. To begin with, insurgent groups in the Sahel are highly adaptive and they have adjusted their tactics to the changing political, social, and geographic conditions. Second, the jihadist activity is undergoing a southward drift, which proves that the crisis is not based in the Sahel. According to Berger (2023), it is necessary to define jihadist rule as a component of a hybrid political regime, in the sense that insurgents do not exist outside of social orders but integrate into them. This point of view plays a pivotal role in the analysis of expansion to the coastline because jihadist organizations will tend to copy the tactics of local infiltration in foreign lands. As a policymaker, it is difficult to foresee and counter such adaptive strategies. Responses should go beyond military measures and undertakings should be done to deal with the underlying causes of insurgency which encompasses socio-economic marginalization, absence of governance, and environmental pressure. Unless there are such holistic strategies, coastal states will turn to be the future of jihadist entrenchment. According to scholars like Badewa (2022) and Osman (2021), the maintenance of sustainable security in the Sahel and littoral areas needs a balance between military intervention and socioeconomic development and community interactions.

EXTERNAL ACTORS AND THE SAHEL CRISIS

The course of the conflict in the Sahel is impossible to analyze without referring to the role of the external actors. The security environment has been influenced by international interventions, regional alliances and the increasing activities of the private military contractors in a way that is contradictory. Even though external intervention helped at times relieves the situation on a short term basis, it has also created fragility and advanced new forms of dependency. This paradox is explained by the involvement of France in military affairs. The first missions, Operation Serval (2013) and Barkhane (2014-2022) were initially effective at clearing urban centers in Mali, but they were unable to destroy the rural insurgent networks, which turned out to be resilient and flexible (Charbonneau, 2022). The eventual French withdrawal in Mali in 2022 and redeployment to Gabon, Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire was an indicator of geopolitical priorities and increased tensions with Mali authorities. This withdrawal left a gap that was immediately used by insurgents to highlight the shortcomings of external military interventions in situations of profound institutional fragility.

This was the same case with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Jihadist organizations kept growing their presence even despite their presence, showing the impairment of the role of peacekeeping operations even in those areas in which insurgencies seek a shelter in the communities (International Crisis Group, 2023). Regional blocs like the ECOWAS tried to organize a response however sovereign interests usually prevailed over the collective security demands. Burkina Faso and Niger coups also weakened regional unity, leaving gaps that the jihadist can use (Ziso & Hamandishe, 2024).

The increasing presence of Russian mercenaries, especially the Wagner Group (now renamed Africa Corps) has brought new concepts of proxy wars. The Mali and Burkina Faso operations are also a part of the overall Moscow approach toward using the privatized military forces to gain influence in other countries (Abuseridze, Agapova, and Tumalavicius, 2023; Jones et al., 2021). The human rights violations, resource misuse, and the use of opaque contracts have brought up concerns related to the long-term consequences of PMC dependency (Margolin,

2024; Enos, 2023). The operations of Wagner are an example of the actions by external actors that can be used to both support the state in the short term in terms of military aid and diminish its legitimacy. Deproising the power of governments to rely on their own security organs turns them into dependent entities and undermines the institutions (Rothe and Ross, 2010; Naseeb, 2024). Securitization of development assistance has also been facilitated by external players who have directed funds in the military and counterterrorism structures. Although the aim of this approach is to stabilize weak states, it may lead to the creation of a culture of weakness, which focuses on short-term security instead of reforming the governance structure on a long-term basis (Boas & Strazzari, 2020). Military-based aid is frequently perceived as exclusionary, which helps to strengthen the attitude of the local populations and stokes resentment that is used by insurgents (Osman, 2021).

WEAPONS PROLIFERATION AND REGIONAL INSECURITY.

Provided that the political and military aspects of the Sahel crisis have been influenced by external actors, the spread of weapons has been an everlasting fuel. Illegal access to weapons has converted localized complaints into prolonged insurgencies, allowing jihadist organizations to maintain the program of violence and territorial activities. There are several ways in which weapons find their way to the Sahel. Smuggling cartels capitalize on the deserts of the region, as well as the porous boundaries, and transport weapons with relative ease. According to Conflict Armament Research (2016), the functioning of these networks across the borders is recorded and is frequently supported by corruption and ineffective enforcement. Jesse (2021) notes that weapons are diverted out of the state arsenals and it is supported by corruption in the military and police institutions. During the war, army barracks have also been plundered by insurgents who redistribute weapons at the same time undermining the state capacity (Strazzari & Tholens, 2014). The external supply chains also make the situation more complex due to the contribution of both state and non-state actors to proliferation through the provision of arms to the proxies (Dan Suleiman, Onapajo, and Mustapha, 2021). The effects of proliferation on the security of the region are disastrous. With automatic rifles, explosives, and anti-aircrafts, insurgents are able to kill military convoys, government buildings, and civilians more than ever (Romaniuk, Roul, Fabe, and Besenyo, 2024). Weapons are also employed by armed groups to resolve conflicts, transforming ethnic resentment in revenge and violence cycles (Balogun, 2024). State forces have difficulties in keeping control when insurgents have better firepower resulting in disillusioning people and gaining more support to rebel (Osumah, 2013; Vinci, 2008). This firepower enables jihadists to expand their territories due to their ability to push people out and establish an alternate system of governance (Hassan, 2020; Nexus, 2024).

Ghana, Togo and Benin are coastal states, which are highly exposed to arms trafficking. According to UNODC (2023), smuggled weapons still find their way into the country because of the poor coordination of the security institutions, weak control of the borders, and corruption. Kone (2020) further notes that local communities tend to be detached out of the state structures, where they are sometimes working with the traffickers due to economic needs, making it even harder to enforce. The strategic consequences are drastic: littoral states are points of entry into the international trade, and their destabilization is a danger to the economic stability of the region. According to Awotayo et al. (2023), there is a vicious circle of violence and vulnerability between terrorism and arms proliferation in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Balogun (2024),

illegal arms trade is not only a criminal business but a structural source of insecurity, which is deeply rooted in the politics of the region economics. Proliferation means that there is a need to control the border, efforts should be done in disarmament, and there should be collaboration between the region. Yoneda (2014) supports measures of a stricter border management and capabilities of locality to intercept the flow of illegal weapons. In the absence of this, the proliferation and insurgency cycle will remain in the process of destabilizing Sahelian and littoral states. The contribution of outside players and the spread of arms meet to maintain insurgency in the Sahel. Interventions, be it military, peacekeeping, or PMC intervention, tend to focus on symptoms of the problem, rather than the causes, and sometimes may contribute to the fragility. In the meantime, the access to illegal weapons strengthens the forces of insurgents, undermines state legitimacy, and creates violence cycles.

PRIVATE MILITARY CONTRACTORS AND REGIONAL SECURITY

The retreat of the conventional military units has left a vacuum in the Sahel, which has been promptly occupied by the use of the private military contractors (PMCs). These players, who usually work in the legal and regulatory grey areas, have changed the face of war in the area. They are an indication of the need to have quick security solutions as well as the larger geopolitical race taking place in Africa. The second best-known PMC that has been active in the Sahel is the Wagner Group, recently renamed Africa Corps. Its intervention in Mali and Burkina Faso exemplifies the policy of Russia to have quasi-personal forces to grow influence overseas (Abuseridze, Agapova, and Tumalavicius, 2023; Jones et al., 2021). The interest of using Wagner is that it can offer combat and logistical support as well as training to local forces. According to Olson (2024), the practice of recruiting retired military officers by PMCs is particularly common and provides skills and experience that a weak state sorely requires.

However, there is a high price associated with the dependency on PMCs. The human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, and exploitation of resources have also accompanied the activities of Wagner (Margolin, 2024; Enos, 2023). According to Fanara (2011) and Rothe and Ross (2010), because PMCs have no accountability mechanisms in place, they act with impunity, which undermines the legitimacy of host governments. In giving mercenary forces the role of providing the state with security, the states are likely to negatively impact on their sovereignty and the institutional nature of the national armies. The existence of the PMCs also makes the relations between diplomatic relations complicated. According to Sowemimo and Aghedo (2023), the use of PMCs that are sponsored by Russia is an indicator of non-traditional Western alliances, with the relationship with France, the United States, and other partners deteriorating. This not only destabilizes long held, security conditions but adds to anti-Western sentiments among the locals who usually believe that foreign contractors are a symbol of neocolonialism. The issue is also aggravated by resource competition. PMCs have often been labeled as focusing more on access to precious minerals, oil and gold instead of stabilization initiatives (De Villiers, 2024; Nandan and Deshpande, 2024). Their presence in resource endowed regions may escalate the levels of conflict, with local and foreign actors struggling to gain control. In this regard, PMCs are not just the security providers but active actors in the political economy of war.

Lastly, PMCs have also been involved in arms trafficking. Adejumo, Eshiotse, and Abumbe (2023) and Sarjito (2023) report the incidences of direct or indirect involvement of contractors in proliferation of small arms, either through arming allies or distorting supply lines. Such

participation only increases disarmament pressure and recidivism. Sheehy and Maogoto (2008) caution that the absence of regulation will ensure that PMCs will keep sabotaging any stabilization efforts by contributing to the same conflicts which they purport to deal with. When combined, these dynamics can be used to explain the two-faceted nature of the PMC intervention in the Sahel. On the one hand, they offer military capacity in the short term, but on the other hand, they undermine the legitimacy of states, increase the level of resource wars and contribute to the proliferation of arms. Their existence highlights how the international community needs to be more controlled and the African states must invest in the development of their own security organs instead of contracting their sovereignty to mercenaries.

THEORY: UNGOVERNED SPACES AND HYBRID GOVERNANCE.

The insecurity that is persisting in the Sahel and littoral regions cannot be attributed to external interventions or arms proliferation only. Fundamentally, the crisis is a manifestation of the existence of ungoverned spaces, the rise of hybrid forms of governance that the insurgents take advantage of. Ungoverned spaces refer to areas that lack in the authority of the state, are disputed, or whose authority is disputed. According to Abasa (2015), they can be defined as places where insurgent units can survive and succeed because they can be used as safe havens to recruit, train and logistical operations. It is in the Sahel, desolated deserts, porous borders as well as capricious state institutions that have facilitated just such conditions. According to Ojo (2020), these spaces do not exist as blank spaces of governance but as contested space where a number of actors, including insurgents, communities, and outside forces compete to have their way.

Jihadist forces have demonstrated their skill to take advantage of such empty spaces. They entrench themselves into the local communities, offer primitive services, settle conflicts, and offer security against other groups. This is one of the strategies that enable them to acquire legitimacy in regions where the state is absent or mistrusted. According to Berger (2023), the jihadist rule of the Sahel must also be conceptualized as an element of a hybrid political order where insurgents do not substitute the state structures, but exist within them and play with them. The idea of hybrid governance, promoted by Boas and Strazzari (2020) alters the analytical framework, where the focus is on the external intervention, but instead, it is an endogenous process. It emphasizes the manner in which insurgents exist within the social and political frameworks and not within them. This opinion is significant to the reasons why jihadist networks have not been destroyed by military interventions only. The insurgents do not exist in a vacuum; they are a part of the local society and take advantage of grievances and provide substitutes to state indifference.

The euphemistic nature of jihadist groups under the pressure of outside forces is also explicable by the hybrid governance. Insurgents establish enduring bases of support by fitting themselves into the local grievances that may be ethnic, economic or environmental. As illustrated by Njoki (2023) and Besenyo, Miletics, and Talas (2024), the heightened competition due to environmental stress locally leads to desertification and the decreasing agricultural yields; insurgents capitalize on this situation to establish themselves as saviors of the marginalized group.

This framework, as far as policy is concerned, provides the importance of context-sensitive strategies. Stabilization of the Sahel should not be limited to military actions but an intervention

on socio-economic marginalization, lack of governance and environmental strains that lead to insurgency. In the argument, Finkel et al. (2021) hold that community involvement and inclusive governance are the key to weakening the attractiveness of the jihadist ideology. Badewa (2022) continues that sustainable security means the balance between military action and socioeconomic development, infrastructure investment, and education. The ungoverned spaces in this sense are not merely spaces of absence of the state, They are used by insurgents to create legitimacy, by PMCs to make a profit, and by outside actors to bring sanity. The discussion of the combination of these forces in the prism of hybrid governance offers a more sophisticated method of studying the Sahelian crisis.

The position of PMCs and the uncontrollability of ungoverned spaces meet each other to signify the weakness of the Sahel structure. The presence of PMCs helps in offering short-term military capability but compromises the sovereignty of states and contributes to the cycle of violence. Uncontrolled areas in the meantime provide to insurgents possibilities of integrating into the local communities and forming hybrid forms of governance that are hard to dismantle. Together, these dynamics underscore the limitations of conventional counterterrorism approaches. Military interventions, whether by external actors or PMCs, cannot succeed without addressing the underlying governance deficits that insurgents exploit. A holistic strategy must integrate regulation of PMCs, robust border control, community engagement, and socioeconomic development. Only by reasserting legitimate governance in peripheral regions can states hope to reverse the tide of extremism and foster long-term stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This intricacy of the insecurity in the Sahel and littoral areas requires a multidimensional response. Military interventions have not been enough and dependence on external players as well as private military contractors have in most instances increased fragility. In order to turn the tide of extremism and achieve long-term stability, there are a variety of recommendations.

Enhance Border Security and Arms Control Porous borders are also one of the greatest facilitators of arms proliferation and insurgency movement. The governments need to invest in the latest surveillance devices, increase the coordination of the border agencies, and use more stringent disarmament policies. The cooperation at the regional level is necessary because the arms smuggling networks are active beyond national borders. The processes like joint patrols and intelligence-sharing systems may assist in intercepting the routes of smuggling.

Limit Private Military Contractors (PMCs) The existence of such PMCs like Wagner has offered temporary military capacity at the expense of state sovereignty and responsibility. These should be backed by the establishment of legal procedures to control the activities of PMCs to be transparent and accountable and enforce human rights, as well as the system of monitoring the activities of contractors involved in abuses or selling weapons.

Reestablish State Control in the Uncontrolled Spaces The uncontrolled territories serve as safe haven to insurgents and destabilize the state authority. States should focus on regaining presence in marginalized areas by building infrastructure, educating, and providing healthcare to address the lack of trust between governments and marginalized groups and decrease the level of interest in insurgent rule.

Solve the Socio-Economic Marginalization Poverty, unemployment, and exclusion are driving sources of insurgency. Alternative sources in place of joining armed groups can be investments in agriculture, vocational training and youth employment programs. The approaches to development should be formulated on a local level to address the needs of communities the most susceptible to the influence of jihadist movements.

Improve Regional and International Cooperation The crisis in Sahelian is regional, and no individual state can solve it individually. ECOWAS and the African Union should intensify on integrated systems of security, and the international partners are not to be separated in their interventions as long as these are combined with the local priorities. External actors also need to coordinate in order to prevent disjointed responses that insurgents take advantage of.

Embrace Hybrid Governance Patterns It is important to note that insurgents have found a way of integrating themselves within the local structures, states must, therefore, employ hybrid governance approaches that integrate the traditional authorities, community leaders, and civil society in security and development planning. The latter strategy also recognizes the facts of disputed governance and attempts to develop resilience internally.

CONCLUSION

Sahel and littoral West Africa is experiencing a complex security crisis that is fuelled by the trafficking of illicit weapons, the activities of private military contractor, and uncontrollable locations. Jihadist organizations like JNIM and ISSP have taken advantage of these weaknesses to disrupt the insurgent landscape and spread violence to coastal states, where it had not previously existed. Although it is important, external interventions have been inept in solving root causes of the problems and the spread of weapons has contributed to the continuation of violence and the weakening of state legitimacy. The picture has been further complicated by private military contractors who provide short-term military capacity at the expense of the sovereignty and due to prolongation of resource conflicts. Ungoverned spaces on the other hand have offered good grounds to insurgent engraving to the extent that hybrid forms of governance emerge that are hard to unravel. Collectively, these dynamics highlight constraints of traditional counterterrorism strategies and the need to develop holistic and contextualized strategies. Successful reactions should involve military intervention with the governance reform, socio-economic development and community involvement. Intensifying border security, the regulation of PMCs, restoring the power of states in the periphery territories, and its socio-economic marginalization are critical measures. There will be a need to increase regional and international collaboration and embrace hybrid forms of governance that are more representative of the circumstances of challenged authority.

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