



DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2023-23-1-67-87

EDN: USAWTB

Review article / Обзорная статья


## Regional Security Complex and Threat Dynamics of the Sahelian States

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**Abstract.** The geographic area of the Sahel is of particular interest when examining regional security issues that have negatively affected political, economic and social interaction on the African continent for decades. The region has seen a massive upsurge in lethal violence, and militant groups continue to expand their activities southward, now threatening coastal West Africa. The paper examines the links between the growing dynamics of the Sahel and the security of Liptako-Gourma, composed of groups of contiguous states rooted in historical and geographical environments. The paper empirically applies the Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver's "Regional Security Complex Theory" (RSCT) as a framework for studying the discourse of security threats and the dynamics of security challenges in the region. The application of RSCT theory makes a significant contribution to understanding these regional security issues in the Liptako-Gourma region. The complex links between threats demonstrate the likely impossibility of addressing these threats in isolation, and the need for a broader approach. The study interprets the current relationship between France and Mali in relation to Mali's withdrawal from the G5 Sahel Force as hostile. The authors argue that the regional nature of the security threats strongly supports the claim that geographic proximity is a major contributor to security interactions. The paper also reveals that the individual security of each state cannot be separated from that of its neighbors. Therefore, it is suggested that mutual interests could contribute to a stronger regional security initiative that integrates the fight against a common threat such as terrorism.

**Key words:** Regional Security Complex Theory, RSCT, Sahel region, Liptako-Gourma region, insecurity, regional security

**Conflicts of interest.** The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

**Authors' contribution.** The authors made an equal contribution to the design, research and preparation of the final article's text.

**For citation:** Idahosa, S. O., Savicheva, E. M., Ikhidero, S. I., & Adebayo, K. M. (2023). Regional security complex and threat dynamics of the Sahelian states. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 23(1), 67–87. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2023-23-1-67-87>

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## Комплекс региональной безопасности и динамика угроз государствам Сахеля

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**Аннотация.** Географическая область Сахель представляет особый интерес при изучении проблем региональной безопасности, которые на протяжении десятилетий оказывают негативное воздействие на политическое, экономическое и социальное взаимодействие в Африке. В регионе наблюдается массовый всплеск насилия со случаями смертельного исхода, а группировки боевиков продолжают расширять свою деятельность, продвигаясь на юг и угрожая прибрежным районам Западной Африки. В исследовании рассмотрены вопросы безопасности регионов Сахель и Липтако-Гурма, включающих сопредельные государства с общими историко-географическими корнями. Авторы обращаются к теории комплексов региональной безопасности (ТКРБ) Б. Бузана и О. Вейвера в качестве основы для дискурса об угрозах безопасности и их динамике в регионе. Положения данной теории вносят большой вклад в понимание ситуации с безопасностью в регионе Липтако-Гурма. Сложное переплетение вызовов и угроз в регионе свидетельствует о невозможности противодействия им со стороны отдельных государств, а требует более широкого комплексного подхода. Отмечается, что возникшая напряженность между Францией и Мали в связи с выходом Мали из состава «Сахельской пятерки» (G5 Sahel) ведет к усилению нестабильности в регионе. Выявлено, что региональный характер угроз безопасности во многом определяется географической близостью стран, которая предполагает тесное взаимодействие в сфере безопасности. Также показано, что национальная безопасность любого государства региона не может быть обеспечена в отрыве от безопасности его соседей. Таким образом, взаимная заинтересованность могла бы способствовать формированию более широкой региональной инициативы в области безопасности, которая сплотила бы их в борьбе с общей угрозой — терроризмом.

**Ключевые слова:** теория комплекса региональной безопасности, ТКРБ, Сахель, Липтако-Гурма, отсутствие безопасности, региональная безопасность

**Заявление о конфликте интересов.** Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

**Вклад авторов.** Авторы внесли равнозначный вклад в разработку дизайна, проведение исследования и подготовку текста статьи.

**Для цитирования:** Идахоса С. О., Савичева Е. М., Ихидеро С. А., Адебайо К. М. Комплекс региональной безопасности и динамика угроз государствам Сахеля // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Международные отношения. 2023. Т. 23, № 1. С. 67—87. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2023-23-1-67-87>

### Introduction

The geographical area of the Sahel is of particular interest in the study of regional security, which for decades has negatively affected the nexus between political, economic and societal interactions on the African continent. In a region prone to political violence and home to two clusters of conflict — the Liptako-Gourma and the Lake Chad Basin — disruptions could lead to much more dramatic long-term security consequences (Bisson, 2020).

The analysis of this article is limited to the Sahel and Liptako-Gourma regions. The Sahel and Liptako-Gourma countries, in this case Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, have experienced successive attacks in the rural trans-border zone. This zone, which connects the three countries, creates favorable conditions for terrorist activities, economic problems, and internal security priorities, which prompted them to create the G5 Sahel Force, and to engage France and other EU countries, the United States as partners to address these security problems.

The idea of security cooperation, collective defense, and collective security policy in the international system is not new, since alliance systems based on these concepts brought states together through mutual security and defense commitments. The establishment of the G5 Sahel brought with it the return of regional security dynamics subordinated to actors (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

In the place of geopolitical interest, the perspective of regionalism has proved to be one of the main theoretical approaches for analyzing the structure of international security. This perspective argues that regions, as groups of contiguous states rooted in historical and geographical setting, represent areas where security interdependence is predominantly intensive. The degree of interdependence “stems from the simple mechanism... by which threats, particularly political and military, are most strongly felt when they are at close range” (Buzan, 1991).

In the case of the Sahelian countries, three factors are particularly relevant: (i) they are located in relatively close proximity to Europe; (ii) the Sahel is an area from which illegal migrants originate or through which they transit; and (iii) the Sahel countries are seen as a potential source of global terrorism. Thus, external involvement continues to increase, regardless of what security policies they pursue or how these states are threatened by security. The transfer of external involvement from international security providers to the region is related to the transfer of power and leverage from the former to the latter (Osland & Erstad, 2020).

The Liptako-Gourma region is located in the cross-border zone between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Historically, the geographic scope of the Liptako-Gourma region covers the border zone between Burkina Faso and Niger, where the Liptako Emirate was established in the early 19th century. Today, there are different geographical definitions of what regions are considered part of the Liptako-Gourma region. According to the Liptako-Gourma Authority

(LGA), this region administratively encompasses the following regions, which cover an area of 370,000 square kilometers.<sup>1</sup> In Burkina Faso, it covers eight regions, including Center, Center-East, Center-South, Center-Nord, Est, Plateau-Central, Nord, and Sahel. In Mali, it covers four regions: Region 5 (Mopti), Region 6 (Tombouctou), Region 7 (Gao), and Region 8 (Kidal). In Niger, it covers two regions and one urban community: Tillabéri, Dosso and capital district Niamey (Figure 1).

Because of its three-state composition since decolonization, the region has also become known as the “three-border zone” or “triangle of conflict.”<sup>2</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, this “three-border zone” was in the spotlight because of severe droughts, the effects of which are still being felt today.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, therefore, we will attempt to answer the following question: How has the geographic proximity of the Sahelian countries generated security problems?

### Theoretical Framework

As a basic theoretical framework, regional security complex theory (RSCT) will be used, which emphasizes the inter-subjective construction of security problems by state actors and security groups, while emphasizing geographic proximity as the main generator of security problems (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, pp. 45—46). Barry Buzan’s theory of the regional security complex was introduced in the first edition of *People, States and Fear* (Buzan, 1983). It provides a theoretical rationale for constructing world regions based on the degree of geographic proximity, enmity and friendship that exists between states.

<sup>1</sup> Zones d’intervention // Autorité de développement integre des Etats du Liptako-Gourma. URL: <https://www.liptakogourma.org/zones-dintervention/> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Study on Border Community Perception of Border Security and Management in the Liptako-Gourma Region // International Organization for Migration. 2021. URL: <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/Perception-Study-Liptako-Gourma.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022). See also: (Assanvo et al., 2019).



**Figure 1. Liptako-Gourma Region**

Source: In the Sahel, a Counterterrorism Force Fights for More Than Funding // Stratfor Worldview. December 22, 2017. URL: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/sahel-counterterrorism-force-fights-more-funding> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

An evaluation of the theory was proposed in the second edition of *People, States and Fear* (Buzan, 1991), and a modified version of the RSCT was presented by B. Buzan, O. Wæver and J. Wilde (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998) and B. Buzan and O. Weaver (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). The constructivist ontology adopted in this paper uses the RSCT to define what geographic proximity sees as a generator of security threats. The geographic proximity of the region under study will be analyzed by engaging the discourse of relevant actors and security actors, in addition to the initiatives of states and the actions of non-state actors. Proximity in this case helps to correlate the geopolitical interests of the actors, which contributes to the logic of emphasizing the transnational nature of these threats.

The choice of cases is primarily dictated by the element of geographic proximity and shared borders. Only Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger will be considered in this paper. Niger will be considered as it represents the longest border of the Liptako region with Mali and Burkina Faso. Because of the significant structural security challenges in the region, regional security and interdependence models are considered sufficient.

The countries of the Sahel region have recognized that the fate of their security is intertwined with each other and cannot be resolved in the absence of a collective approach to threat reduction. Security cooperation as a means to combat cross-border crime is a major focus in the region and has become one of the main pillars of the regional security organizing bodies, the G5 Sahel Forces and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).

The main claim of this paper is that the countries reflected in this study have regional threats that are transnational in nature. They also share common geographical spaces that originate from each other's territories. It will be shown that the interaction between Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso is primarily driven by non-traditional security threats such as Islamist radicalism, drug trafficking, and growing terrorist interdependence. For the purposes of this paper, the consideration of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger in the context of Sahel analysis is conditioned by the fate of the interconnected nature of security of the countries analyzed in this study, which cannot be resolved in the absence of a collective approach to threat reduction. The combination of these regional threat processes contributes to the G5 Sahel

regional security complex. Moreover, these emerging patterns increasingly make the EU, France and the United States the main actor of regional security and the generator of regional security interdependence as opposed to security groupings.

The general purpose of the study is to examine the nature of the security situation in the Sahel, and the specific purpose of the study is to examine the nature of the geographic proximity of the Sahelian countries and the interrelationship of threats in the region.

### **Regional Security Complex Theory**

The RSC theory offers an analytical framework for structuring an analysis of how security concerns are intertwined in a “regional formation,” where geographical proximity is a factor of paramount importance (Wæver, 2012). A regional security complex (RSC) is often defined “as a group of units whose threats are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another” (Reynolds, 2009). The essential concept behind RSCs is that “most political and military threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones; insecurity is usually related and associated with proximity” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 11). Although global security issues may occasionally dominate regional ones, nevertheless regional concerns will always be present to a greater or lesser degree (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 11).

The main structural features of RSCs are the differentiation of units, the number of units, the patterns of amity and enmity and the distribution of power (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 13). In addition, complexes are defined by the “interpretation of who is actually intersected in terms of security interaction” (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p. 34). Often the main factor in defining a complex is “a high level of threat/fear that is mutually felt by two or more states” (Buzan, 1991). However, states can have various common and overlapping interests, since interdependence need not a priori be

conflictual (Buzan, 1991, p. 208). These patterns are going to be durable due to their structural, historical and geographic nature (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 45).

According to Buzan and Wæver, the following combination of security clusters will be present in post-Cold War sub-Saharan Africa: two regional security complexes, a pre-complex (bilateral security relations seem to have the potential to bind together into an RSC) and a proto-complex (manifest security interdependence to delineate a region but security dynamics thinner/weaker than a formed RSC) (Da Silva, 2012, p. 3). The subcomplexes represent distinctive patterns of security interdependence that nevertheless fit into the broader model that defines the RSC as a whole (Walsh, 2020). This paper has noted the shortcomings of the above analysis, it is clear that it misses the contemporary security dynamics in Africa-Sahel, which have changed dramatically in recent decades. In line with the definition of the RSC as “group of states whose security cannot realistically be considered separately from each other,” this paper treats the Liptako-Gourma as a RSC.

### **Empirical Application of the RSCT**

RSCs arise where actors have inter-subjectively formed issues in a geographic area as security threats (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p. 19). Security threats within the RSC may be asymmetrical, in that a security threat may not be counter-protected by another actor or may not be seen as a threat at all. A social constructivist approach to understanding the process by which problems become security threats can show where such complexes have arisen (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p. 72).

The study of discourse and political constellations allows us to analyze the processes of security threats that occur (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p. 25). For this reason, relevant structural factors — the evolution of security interdependencies, security constellations, demographic changes, and the like will be

included in the analysis to emphasize the emerging “structure” of security relations, which will be added to the “agency” factors identified in the discourse analysis. Since patterns of security construction are the primary elements that define the RSC, an overview of what security threats to the region mean and how they arise should be provided.

### **Sahel Security Situation Overview: The Dynamics of Insecurity in Liptako-Gourma**

The security situation in the Sahel is deteriorating. A massive surge of deadly violence continues in the region, and militant groups continue to expand southward, now threatening coastal West Africa.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, the world has witnessed a redrawing of the geopolitical map and configuration of security groups in the Sahel. The Sahel is a clear example of a region plagued by multiple forms of recurrent violence, weak governance and instability. Responsibility for regional security and stability, which used to be vested in authoritarian state regimes, now falls partly to transitional organized crime groups, terrorist groups, etc. Although in some countries the leadership has managed to ensure a certain degree of stability during this period.<sup>5</sup>

Three of the 10 countries most affected by terrorism in 2021 are in the Sahel region. Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso have registered significant increases in terrorist deaths, 81, 174, and 74, respectively.<sup>6</sup> The past five years have

seen a significant increase in terrorist attacks in the Central Sahel, predominantly persistent attacks across the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The incursion of jihadist groups such as the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) and Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) may explain this growth<sup>7</sup> (Figure 2). The growth of powerful militias, which have filled a security void in Libya, is challenging the power of the new government. Its spillover effects on other countries in the Sahel put these Sahelian states at risk of a new wave of civil conflict and deteriorating economic conditions.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, the profits from kidnapping for ransom have been key to the growth and prosperity of many terrorist groups operating in the region (Makpah & Idahosa, 2021).

The Liptako-Gourma region is affected by a complex crisis involving growing high levels of poverty, community tensions, lack of state institutions and basic services, and violence related to organized crime and non-state armed groups. In 2019 alone, the crisis resulted in approximately 4,000 deaths and caused significant displacement in the three affected countries. As of August 20, 2020, 1,551,160 people were displaced, including 1,383,895 internally displaced persons (89% of the displaced population) and 167,265 refugees (11% of the displaced population). 67% of the displaced population (1,032,698 individuals) lived in Burkina Faso, while 16% resided in Mali (256,470 people), 13% — in Niger (199,012 people) and 4% — in Mauritania (62,980 people).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Berger F. West Africa: Shifting strategies in the Sahel // The Africa Report. October 1, 2019. URL: <https://www.theafricareport.com/17843/west-africa-shifting-strategies-in-the-sahel/> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>5</sup> See: Threats to International Peace and Security — Security Council, 9131st meeting // Security Council Report. December 19, 2014. URL: [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_pv\\_7351.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_7351.pdf) (accessed: 21.07.2022); Vogler S. Security Challenges in Libya and the Sahel // CNA Workshop Report. December 2012. URL: [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/dcp-2012-u-003450-final.pdf](https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/dcp-2012-u-003450-final.pdf) (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>6</sup> Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism // Institute for Economics & Peace. March

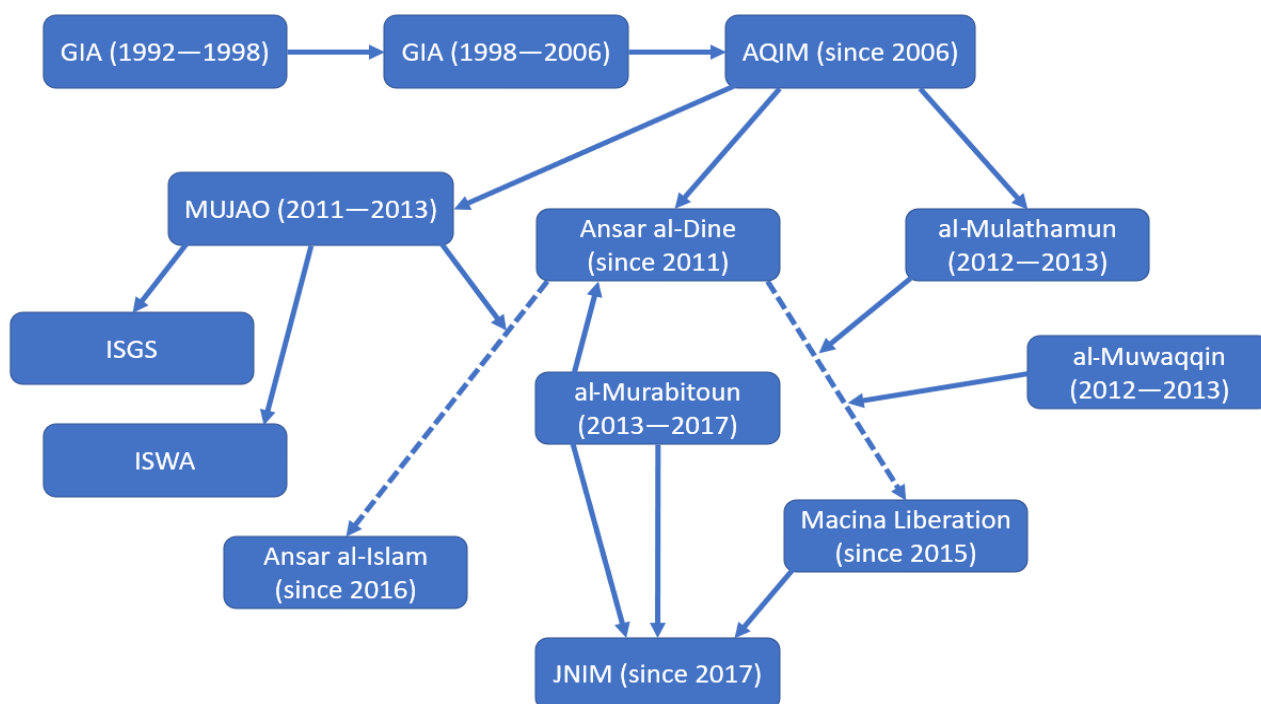
2022. P. 59. URL: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-04112022.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Vogler S. Security Challenges in Libya and the Sahel // CNA Workshop Report. December 2012. URL: [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/dcp-2012-u-003450-final.pdf](https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/dcp-2012-u-003450-final.pdf) (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>9</sup> Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). Central Sahel & Liptako Gourma Crisis — Monthly Dashboard #8 // International Organization for Migration. August 20, 2020. URL: [https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/LGC\\_Monthly\\_Dashboard\\_August\\_2020\\_v3.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=9448](https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/LGC_Monthly_Dashboard_August_2020_v3.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=9448) (accessed: 21.07.2022).





**Figure 2. Evolution of Salafi-jihadi Groups in the Sahel**

Source: Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism // Institute for Economics & Peace. March 2022. P. 50. URL: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-04112022.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

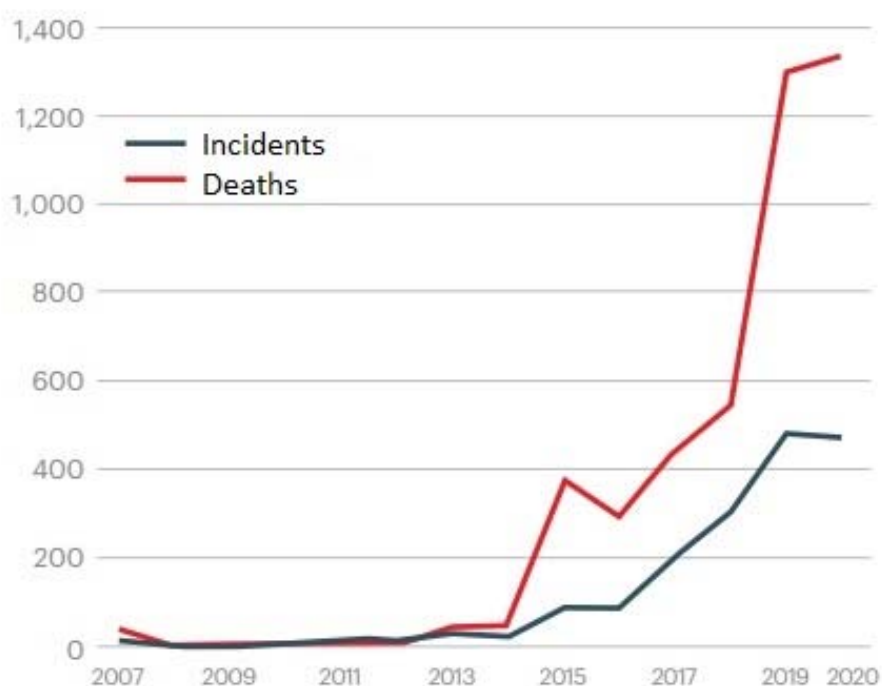
The Liptako-Gourma region has long had the highest poverty rate in the Sahel region, which is already one of the poorest parts of the world. According to the World Bank, in Niger, the region of Tillabéri recorded a poverty incidence of 56%, higher than the national average of 48.2%. In Burkina Faso, the Sahel region has a poverty rate 21% higher than the national average of 40%. Compared to the national average poverty rate in Mali (at 40%), the poverty rate among the population in 2018 was significantly higher in Mopti (about 58 to 62%), and in Meneka and Gao (about 49 to 57%). In Liptako-Gourma, the poverty rate is estimated at 70.4% in the Northern region.<sup>10</sup> In all three countries, the poverty rate in the Liptako-Gourma region is significantly higher in rural areas than in urban areas.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Community-Based Recovery and Stabilization Project for the Sahel (P173830) // The World Bank. October 8, 2020. URL: <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P173830> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

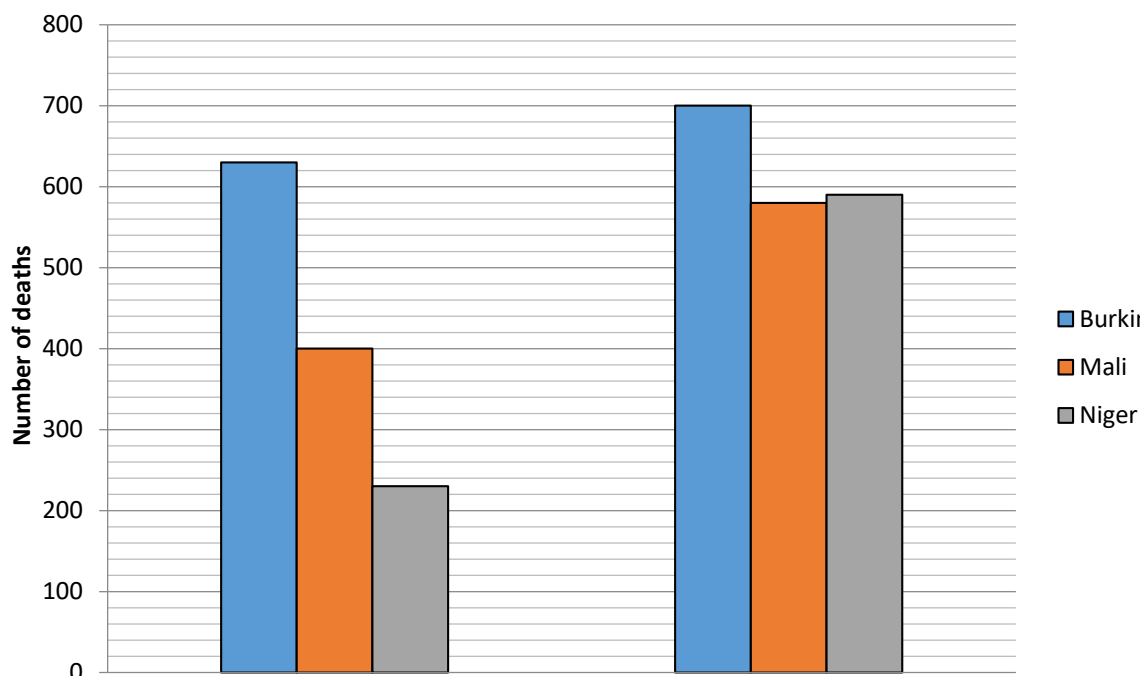
According to the Global Terrorism Index, the total number of incidents and deaths from terrorism in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from 2007—2020 and the change in the number of deaths in these three countries from 2020—2021 increased exponentially (Figure 3 and 4).

On the other hand, this threat in the Sahel region has led to serious migration. For the EU, who is also a player in the region, migration has been one of the most dynamic areas of the EU policy over the past two decades, that its securitization of migration has become a challenge for the Sahelian countries. The security-migration nexus, that is, the connection that exists between migration and human and state security, has been subject of academic debate for about two decades. Experts and researchers have extensively analyzed, recognized, and discussed this relationship (Schmidthäussler & Niemann, 2014; Bianculli et al., 2021).



**Figure 3. Total Number of Incidents and Deaths from Terrorism in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, 2007—2020**

Source: Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism // Institute for Economics & Peace. March 2022. P. 59. URL: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-04112022.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).



**Figure 4. Changes in Mortality from Terrorism in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, 2020—2021**

Source: Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism // Institute for Economics & Peace. March 2022. P. 46. URL: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-04112022.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).



Understanding the nature and intensity of these threats in general, as well as discussing the challenges facing the Sahel regions, can help to better see the challenges that pose a growing threat not only to political and economic reforms in the region, but also include other major powers such as the United States and European Union (Sour, 2015).

### **Regional Security and Threat Dynamics: Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**

The region near Burkina Faso's borders with Niger and Mali suffered the highest number of terrorist attacks. It is likely that most of the threats in this region move more easily, which leads to the interdependence of clusters located at the regional level in the field of security. According to T. Kahrs (2004), Buzan and Weaver (2003), "The key idea in regional security complex theory is that, as most threats journey more effortlessly within a short distance than longer distance, security interdependence is normally into regionally based clusters — security complexes. The level of security interdependence is more intense between actors inside such complexes than they are between actors outside of it."

The movement of security threats in the Sahel region undeniably necessitates the interdependence and intensity of security actors within the region: clusters at the regional level — the security complex. By 2019, the number of terrorism-related fatalities in Burkina Faso had increased significantly (+590%).<sup>12</sup> If we compare 2020 and 2021, the number of reported terrorism-related deaths increased by 11%. Similarly, more than 50% of the 732 deaths in 2021 were civilian. In 2018, there were 167 conflict-related events that resulted in 506 deaths. In 2020, that number rose to 476 conflict-related events resulting in

<sup>12</sup> Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism // Institute for Economics & Peace. March 2022. URL: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-04112022.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

1,046 deaths.<sup>13</sup> Crisis Watch noted a worsening conflict situation in Niger when jihadist groups stepped up attacks in the Nigerien regions of Tillabéri and Diffa, killing more than 50 people.<sup>14</sup>

There is therefore a consensus among states that terrorist activity and religious or political fanaticism are clearly defined threats to national security. The Sahelian states often have contested and porous borders that facilitate illegal movement and trade. In these states, institutional capacity is often underdeveloped and the government has difficulty mobilizing resources. All of these factors combine to greatly increase the prospects of domestic instability. As a result, high levels of domestic insecurity can generate high levels of regional instability. A problem for one state in such an environment is a problem that is ultimately shared by other states in the region. Supporting this argument by Buzan, one can understand why security concerns vocalized by one state are frequently echoed around neighboring states with a relatively short time frame (Roehrs, 2005).

The coup d'état is another factor linking these states. Over the past decade, Mali has gradually become an epicenter of regional conflict and instability as security and socioeconomic conditions have deteriorated in recent years. President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was overthrown in a coup d'état in August 2020; in May 2021, the same soldiers overthrew the transitional civilian leaders they had put in place.<sup>15</sup> Before the 2022 coup d'état, Burkina Faso had historically suffered from coups d'état. For example, a bloody coup d'état was staged

<sup>13</sup> Niger: Democratic progress hindered by increasing insurgency // The Africa Report. January 18, 2021. URL: <https://www.theafricareport.com/59827/niger-democratic-progress-hindered-by-increasing-insurgency/> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>14</sup> CrisisWatch: Tracking Conflict Worldwide // International Crisis Group. 2022. URL: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/april-alerts-and-march-trends#niger> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>15</sup> Crisis in Mali // Congressional Research Service. May 23, 2022. URL: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10116.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

by Captain Blaise Compaore on October 15, 1987,<sup>16</sup> an attempted coup in 1989 by Jean-Baptiste Boukari Lingani and Henri Zongo, another coup in October 2003. Former President Compaore was finally overthrown in 2014,<sup>17</sup> followed by a failed coup on September 16, 2015,<sup>18</sup> and an attempted coup on October 8, 2016.<sup>19</sup> On January 23, 2022, a coup d'état<sup>20</sup> led by military officer Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba<sup>21</sup> deposed former President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré.<sup>22</sup> This fits in with the broader dynamics seen at the regional level, where there have been two coups in neighboring Mali and an attempted coup in Niger.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Brooke J. A Friendship Dies in A Bloody Coup // The New York Times. October 26, 1987. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/26/world/a-friendship-dies-in-a-bloody-coup.html> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>17</sup> Burkina Faso Announces a Transitional Government // Al Jazeera. November 23, 2014. URL: <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/11/23/burkina-faso-transitionalgovernmentmilitaryincluded.html> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>18</sup> Military detains Burkina Faso's president, prime minister weeks ahead of landmark vote // U.S. News & World Report. September 16, 2015. URL: <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2015/09/16/military-detains-burkina-faso-leaders-weeks-before-vote> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>19</sup> Burkina Faso: Coup attempt thwarted, says government // Al Jazeera. October 22, 2016. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/10/22/burkina-faso-coup-attempt-thwarted-says-government/> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>20</sup> Burkina Faso's writer-colonel coup leader starts a new chapter in country's history // France 24. January 25, 2022. URL: <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220125-burkina-faso-s-writer-colonel-coup-leader-starts-a-new-chapter-in-country-s-history> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>21</sup> Who is Paul-Henri Damiba, leader of the Burkina Faso coup? // Al Jazeera. January 25, 2022. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/25/burkina-faso-coup-leader-paul-henri-sandaogo-damiba> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>22</sup> Burkina Faso president reportedly detained by military // BBC News. January 24, 2022. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60109234> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>23</sup> Demuyneck M., Coleman J. D. J. Political Upheaval and Counterterrorism in Burkina Faso: Between a Rock and a Hard Place // International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. February 1, 2022. URL: <https://icct.nl/publication/>

Security complexes are more easily identified and dealt with when there are clear patterns in the fragmentation among states (Roehrs, 2005). However, with reference to the Sahelian states of the Liptako-Gourma region, the patterns of fragmentation are obscured and the basis for relations and interactions among states are much more ambiguous. This pattern is sufficient enough to generate security complexes among a whole range of states and that is why it is in the interest of all states to strengthen the socio-political structure in the Sahel region.

### **Regional Security Complex Theory: The Liptako-Gourma in Perspective**

The RSCT offers a somewhat more contemporary and relevant approach to the conceptualization of Liptako-Gourma security. A standard regional security complex consists of two or more states that share a predominantly military and political security agenda (in this case, see the Liptako-Gourma region and the G5 Sahel configuration). The G5 for the Sahel, created in 2014 by five states, is an inter-governmental organization that includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. This cross-border joint force aims to fight terrorism and transnational criminal networks in the Sahel region and to maintain peace and security in the region, with the stated goal of combining security and development through regional cooperation.

The structure of a regional security complex such as the Sahel region includes four key components. First, the boundary of the complex, which distinguishes it from its neighbors. As Buzan and Wæver argue, the RSC captures a distinct dynamic between a particular set of states within a geopolitical context (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). As a result, relations between the states within the complex are enhanced by elements of familiarity and proximity. Thus, it is important that there is a

[political-upheaval-and-counter-terrorism-in-burkina-faso/](#) (accessed: 21.07.2022).

clear boundary and that local factors are given their proper weight in security analysis. Secondly, the arrangement of its units (an anarchical security complex requires the existence of two or more states). Thirdly, it is units. And, fourthly, friendship and enmity.

### **Structure of the Regional Security Complex: The Border**

As the name implies, regional security complexes are inherently geographic, consisting of neighboring actors and isolated from each other by natural barriers such as oceans, deserts, and mountain ranges. The Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger of Liptako-Gourma considered in this paper are neighbors and have natural barriers. For example, the Niger, with 1,693 kilometers in Mali, is the country's largest river and has been called the lifeblood of Mali, a source of food, drinking water, irrigation, and transportation.

Liptako is a historical region of West Africa. Today it is located in eastern Burkina Faso, southwestern Niger and part of southeastern central Mali. The main historic population of Liptako are the Gourmantche, a minority population in each of the three states, as well as the Mossi and Songhai, hence the common name for the region, Liptako-Gourma, referring to the Gourmantche people. Major Liptako cities include Diagourou, Téra in Niger, and Dori, Koala and Aribinda in Burkina Faso (Jefferson, 1982).

The border, which demarcates and distinguishes countries from their neighbors, is associated with multifaceted hotspot of conflict — contiguous states rooted within a historical and geographical setting with various shared and convergent interests (Buzan, 1991, p. 208) with historical and geographic nature (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 45). This captures a distinct dynamic of conflict between a particular set of states within a geopolitical context — Sahel — Liptako-Gourma (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). As a result, the relations between the states within the multifaceted hotspot of conflict

are intensified by elements of familiarity, similarity and proximity.

Clearly, sociological and historical commonality means that this area is characterized by coherence and homogeneity. Therefore, it represents a valuable example of the study of mutual connection, influence, and the triangle of geographic dynamics in border areas.<sup>24</sup> This area is characterized by the presence of various communities and socio-professional groups with relations that are complementary and sometimes conflicting.

When considering the triangle of overlapping national borders in the Sahel — Liptako-Gourma, it is useful to imagine a braid. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger constitute a “thread” defined not only by borders, but also by numerous ethnic groups, languages, traditions, and beliefs. These elements are woven into a vast and varied topography that extends from one edge to the other. An examination of the map of this region (see Figure 1) reveals deceptively clear state boundaries, which are contradicted by the reality of porous borders that allow goods and people to move between states, contributing to the patchwork nature of this region. Such fluidity has much significance as problems and events often reverberate across state boundaries (Giroux, Lanz & Sguaitamatti, 2009).

A number of researchers have studied the cross-border connection of pastoralists to violence and insecurity throughout the region.<sup>25</sup> The expansion of threats associated with ethnic

<sup>24</sup> Navigating Borderlands in the Sahel. Border security governance and mixed migration in Liptako-Gourma // MMC Research Report. November 2019. URL: [https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/083\\_navigating\\_borderlands.pdf](https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/083_navigating_borderlands.pdf) (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>25</sup> See: Ending Nigeria's herder-farmer crisis: The livestock reform plan // International Crisis Group. May 4, 2021. URL: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/april-alerts-and-march-trends#niger> (accessed: 21.07.2022); Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism // Institute for Economics & Peace. March 2020. URL: <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022). See also: (Brottem & McDonnell, 2020).

groups such as the Fulani is so interconnected that security threats move so easily between states that their security concerns cannot be effectively addressed separately. For example, the Fulani, who number an estimated 25 million people, range across 21 African countries, with the largest concentration in the Sahel region of West Africa (McGregor, 2017). According to the geographic distribution in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the Fulani are approximately 3 million in Mali (18.5 million residents),<sup>26</sup> 1.6 million in Niger (21 million residents),<sup>27</sup> and 1.2 million in Burkina Faso (19 million residents).<sup>28</sup> About a third of the Fulani continue their traditional semi-nomadic, cattle-rearing lifestyle, which increasingly brings them into conflict with sedentary farmers at a time of increasing pressure on resources such as pasture and water. As a rule, they are armed to protect their herds from hijackers. Indeed, the border that demarcates and distinguishes these countries from one another is linked to a multifaceted conflict hotspot — the neighboring states.

### **Structure of the Regional Security Complex: Unit, Proximity, and Threats**

The essential concept behind RSCs is that “most political and military threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, insecurity is usually related and associated with proximity” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 11). As noted above, RSC is often defined as a group of units (in this case Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) “whose threats are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another” (Reynolds, 2009). It develops where actors (primarily states — Burkina Faso, Mali and

Niger) have inter-subjectively formed issues in a geographic area (in this case Liptako-Gourma) as security threats (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p. 19). The RSCT also suggests how security concerns are intertwined, where geographic is a factor of paramount (Wæver, 2012).

The regions (Liptako-Gourma) near Burkina Faso’s borders with Niger and Mali had the highest number of terrorist attacks, 72% of all attacks in 2021.<sup>29</sup> The second highest number of casualties in the world in 2021 occurred in June 2021, when at least 160 people were killed, including 20 children, and 40 were wounded when gunmen stormed a village on Burkina Faso’s northern border with Niger (known as a jihadist stronghold).<sup>30</sup>

Understandably, incidents of tension and violence between farmers and herders are also present in other countries in the region, including Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Although they have not reached similar levels of violence, the presence of Islamist armed groups in the region has also contributed to tensions between communities. In Burkina Faso, Mali, etc., the Fulani have also been recruited into armed groups, reinforcing the sense that they represent the entire Fulani community. Resentment and mistrust toward the Fulani community increased as attacks by Islamist armed groups became more frequent, allowing violence to spread from urban centers to rural areas.<sup>31</sup>

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have experienced some of the bloodiest terrorist attacks carried out by radical Islamists and other militant outfits in Africa. These organizations have exploited porous borders and ungoverned

<sup>26</sup> Africa: Mali // CIA. The World Factbook. 2022. URL: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mali/> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>27</sup> Africa: Niger // CIA. The World Factbook. 2022. URL: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/niger/> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>28</sup> Africa: Burkina Faso // CIA. The World Factbook. 2022. URL: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burkina-faso/> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>29</sup> Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism // Institute for Economics & Peace. March 2022. P. 23. URL: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-04112022.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Conflict and displacement in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso // ACAPS Briefing note. March 22, 2019. URL: <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/conflict-and-displacement-mali-niger-and-burkina-faso-briefing-note-22-march> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

spaces in the region. Free movement across the border is a key element in the functioning of terrorist groups who have used porous borders to smuggle weapons and personnel across the region. Thus, the analysis shows that threats spread easily over short distances. Undeniably, insecurity is usually associated with proximity.

### **Structure of the Regional Security Complex: Patterns of Enmity, Amity and Division of Power**

B. Buzan and O. Wæver demonstrate the important role patterns of enmity and amity, and the division of power in the analysis of RSCT (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 53). The RSC represents a substructure of the international system. It encompasses a distinct dynamic whose security can be either facilitated or hindered by the distribution of power within it. The historical interactions between states are important and “it is thus not enough to look at the distribution of power in order to predict patterns of conflict.” The G5 Sahel share practically same historical interactions.

Thus, patterns of amity and enmity among states can be used to define a region by focusing on their security relations (Stivachtis, 2018). Differences in the concentration and thickness of the RSC, as well as levels of amity and enmity correlate with differences in policies and explain how different states pursue their policies. Growing complex thickness and amity can bring greater collective security, while greater complex thickness and enmity produces greater competition and can result in conflict (Burgess, 2021).

The patterns of amity and enmity arise from a variety of issues ranging from border disputes and ideological alignments to longstanding historical links — whether positive or negative — and which could not be anticipated from a modest consideration of the dissemination of power (Buzan, 1991, p. 190). The Sahel — Liptako-Gourma countries not only share common challenges (refers to “amity” in RSCT) in terms of trafficking, terrorism, but also poverty and lack of national

cohesion. They also support the G5 Sahel task force, except for Mali’s recent decision to withdraw from it in May, 2022.<sup>32</sup> “Amity” according to Buzan denotes inter-state relationships ranging from genuine friendship to expectation of protection or support — thickness and amity can bring greater collective security. The challenges facing the G5 Sahel warrant the expectation of protection or support from the G5 Sahel forces — this is what “amity” means.

According to the theoretical analysis of RSCT, the level of interaction between members of the same RSC is high, while that between members of different RSCs is comparatively low. As noted above, differences in RSC concentration and thickness of power and level of enmity correlate with differences in policies and explain how different states implement their policies. The enmity in this case is explicably obvious with President Mohamed Bazoum of Niger becoming the preferred ally of the West in Sahelian counter-terrorism operations compared to Mali. This is particularly important because the likely projected local anti-French protest against “neocolonialism” would likely have a spillover effect in Niamey, especially after the February 2022 announcement that French-led troops would be transferred to Niger from Mali.<sup>33</sup> The result of this decision is enmity.

Although French troops were initially warmly welcomed when they first arrived in Mali nine years ago, with the sense that France, as the advanced military power, had to solve the terror problem. But the number of terrorist attacks in the country steadily increased, as did

<sup>32</sup> See: Mali government pulls military out of regional G5 Sahel force // Al Jazeera. May 16, 2022. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/16/mali-government-pulls-military-out-of-regional-g5-sahel-force> (accessed: 21.07.2022); Mali’s withdrawal from G5 Sahel, Joint Force ‘a setback’ for the region // UN News. May 18, 2022. URL: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1118582> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>33</sup> Niger: Democratic progress hindered by increasing insurgency // The Africa Report. January 18, 2021. URL: <https://www.theafricareport.com/59827/niger-democratic-progress-hindered-by-increasing-insurgency/> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

the number of Malians joining insurgent groups. The threat from Islamist militants has spread to other countries such as Burkina Faso and Niger, with rebels raiding the region from their bases in the Sahara. Following the steady increase of terror attack, some tagged the presence of troops from the former colonial power an “occupation” while others believe that if France could not address the terror attacks it should withdraw.<sup>34</sup> Citing Buzan’s arguments, the growing complex thickness and enmity produce greater competition and can lead to conflict and lack of cooperation (as in the case of Mali withdrawing from the G5 Sahel force).

### Regional Security Providers: An Overview

Since 2012, the Sahel has gained prominence as a producer of transnational security threats such as terrorism and illegal migration, a trend that was further reinforced in 2015 by the so-called European refugee crisis. To counter these threats, external stakeholders rely on the Sahelian states’ support and cooperation (Osland & Erstad, 2020). Due to unprecedented international attention in recent years, the Sahelian security complex is characterized by interactions between the national, regional and international levels, with Sahelian countries experiencing varying degrees of external involvement and intervention (Osland & Erstad, 2020).

In this context, the potential pitfalls of international intervention are closely related to what Barry Buzan refers to as the “overlay,” which describes “those spaces where the presence of great powers is so intense within the region that it suppresses all local security dynamics” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 44). In the process of conceptualizing the Sahel region as a subset of the international system, Buzan argues that regional structures can exist in what he called “overlay.”

The United States launched its small-scale counterterrorism policy in West Africa and the

<sup>34</sup> Why are French troops leaving Mali, and what will it mean for the region? // BBC. April 26, 2022. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60419799> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

Maghreb pan-Sahel Initiative in late 2002, merging it into the larger Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) in 2005 and the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) in 2008.<sup>35</sup> They were to support diplomacy, development, and military activities in combating the spread of Islamic extremism in nine countries: Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal, and Nigeria (Burkina Faso was added in 2009). On the other hand, U.S. goals are for military capacity development training and multinational regional cooperation. The TSCTP mobilizes U.S. government resources from a variety of sources, including the State Department, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) (Idahosa, Degtrev & Abidoye, 2018).

Since the U.S. established its Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2007,<sup>36</sup> the U.S. military presence on the continent has gradually expanded from around 2,000 troops based mainly in Djibouti, to roughly 6,000 in 2017,<sup>37</sup> and approximately 7,200 military personnel by the end of 2018.<sup>38</sup>

In April 2018, then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis estimated that the U.S. had as many as 1,000 military personnel in Nigeria, Niger and Mali alone.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Warner L. A. The Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership. Building Partner Capacity to Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism // CAN Strategic Studies Division. March 2014. URL: [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/crm-2014-u-007203-final.pdf](https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/crm-2014-u-007203-final.pdf) (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) // Council on Foreign Relations. May 2, 2007. URL: <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/04/28/605662771/the-military-doesnt-advertise-it-but-u-s-troops-are-all-over-africa> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>37</sup> Watson K. Where does the U.S. have troops in Africa, and why? // CBS News. October 23, 2017. URL: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/where-does-the-u-s-have-troops-in-africa-and-why/> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>38</sup> Browne R. US to reduce number of troops in Africa // CNN. November 15, 2018. URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/15/politics/us-reduce-troops-africa/index.html> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>39</sup> Myre G. The Military Doesn’t Advertise It, But U.S. Troops Are All Over Africa // NPR. April 28, 2018. URL: <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/04/28/605662771/the-military-doesnt-advertise-it-but-u-s-troops-are-all-over-africa> (accessed: 21.07.2022).





**Figure 5. U.S. Military Bases in Africa**

*Source:* (Busch, 2013).

Below is an overview of the current U.S. military presence in the region (Figure 5).

In Niger, after President Barack Obama deployed about 100 U.S. troops in 2013 to “provide support for intelligence collection and... facilitate intelligence sharing.” In November 2017, a memorandum of understanding was signed with Niger to authorize armed drone flights. Over time, it has grown to 800 troops in September.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, as of August 2018, 300 U.S. troops were in Cameroon to conduct reconnaissance and reconnaissance operations in support of the multinational joint task force in the fight against Boko Haram, which also uses drones to gather information<sup>41</sup> in the surrounding areas.

<sup>40</sup> Gibbons-Neff T., Schmitt E. After Deadly Raid, Pentagon Weighs Withdrawing Almost All Commandos from Niger // *The New York Times*. September 2, 2018. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/02/world/africa/pentagon-commandos-niger.html> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>41</sup> Kimmons S. Small Army Post Supports Counterterrorism Fight in Africa // U.S. Department

In the same vein, in April 2018, a team of 12 U.S. soldiers performed a limited mission to train Nigerian soldiers. In May 2014, the U.S. sent 80 officers to Chad to assist in the search for Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram. In early 2017, about 2,000 U.S. troops took part in a military exercise in Chad with regional forces. As for Mali, the U.S. Army Special Forces operation was tasked to assess the need to train Malian forces to fight terrorism and provide intelligence on militant groups in Mali to the U.S. Embassy in Bamako to protect its personnel from attacks. In November 2018, the Pentagon announced that it had approved a plan to reduce the number of U.S. troops conducting counterterrorism operations in Africa. However, there is, as of yet, no evidence

of Defence. December 11, 2017. URL: <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1393481/small-army-post-supports-counterterrorism-fight-in-africa/> (accessed: 21.07.2022).



on the ground that this strategy is being implemented.<sup>42</sup>

France contributes and is the sole provider of legitimate security in its former colonies, and exerts a level of influence in sub-Saharan Africa that it cannot provide anywhere else in the world (Charbonneau, 2016; Idahosa, Degterev & Abidoye, 2018; Tafotie & Idahosa, 2016). This level of security provider and influence over sub-Saharan Africa, according to some critics, has been achieved through corrupt ties between French political elites and several African states to always rely on France in case of problems (Filippov, 2017; Trunov, 2022).

France is firmly engaged in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region through Operation Barkhane and with the G5 Sahel forces (on bilateral bases), as well as at the European level and within the UN. This operation is aimed at empowering the states of the region to gain the capacity to ensure their security independently. It aims to support the G5 Sahel armed forces in their actions to combat and prevent terrorists and non-state armed groups and rebuilding their safe havens in the ungoverned territories in the Sahel.<sup>43</sup> The French-led counter-terrorism force is fighting the spread of the jihadist threat in the Sahel region (Idahosa & Abiodun Bakare, 2022). Barkhane's commitment to the Liptako region began in 2017 after ISIS<sup>44</sup> began targeting the border region. And more recently, they began operating in the Gourma region. In April 2019,

they (Operation Barkhane) built a new base in Gossi and participated in multiple joint security operations with Malian and Burkinabe forces. Despite the increased French presence in the area, military successes and achievements remain limited.

The French defense minister announced the creation of the international special operations task force Takuba in November 2019 to advise, assist and accompany the Malian armed forces in coordination with G5 Sahel partners and other international actors on the ground.<sup>45</sup> Of course, this calls into question the goal of creating an African force to counter the threat in the Sahel with the French Barkhane combined with the G5 Sahel Joint Force. French President Emmanuel Macron threatened to pull his troops out from the region, but later promised to deploy an additional 600 soldiers to join the 4,500 already in the region.<sup>46</sup> However, things went so far in its relationship with Mali which eventually led to the expulsion of France and Operation Barkhane from Mali. France alongside other EU states, including Canada, announced its withdrawal of troops and military resources from Mali.

Following the increased attacks on Westerners in the Sahel region in 2010—2011 and the fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the European Union (EU) has faced a number of challenges that could create political instability, insecurity and humanitarian problems in the Sahel region.

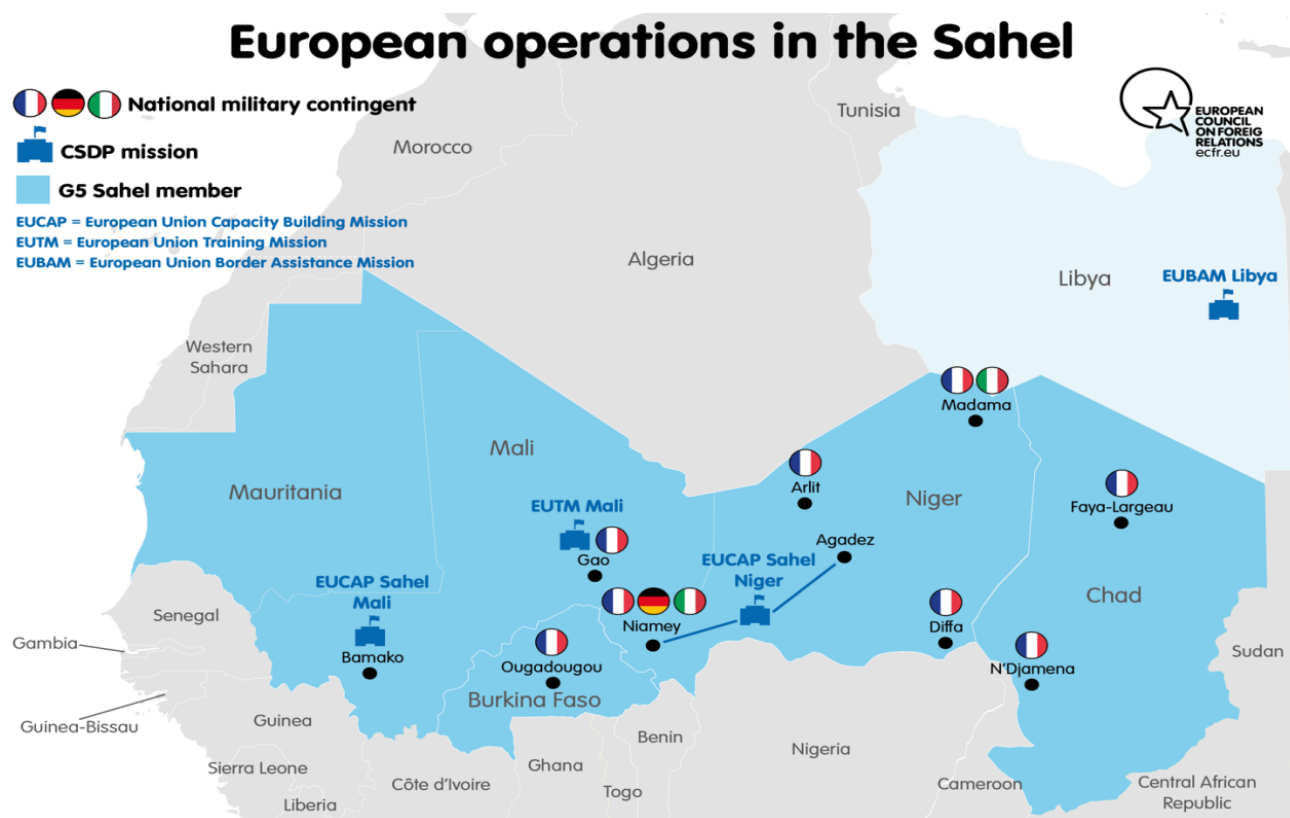
<sup>42</sup> See: Browne R. US to reduce number of troops in Africa // CNN. November 15, 2018. URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/15/politics/us-reduce-troops-africa/index.html> (accessed: 21.07.2022); Idrees A. Pentagon to cut hundreds of troops in Africa as U.S. focuses on China, Russia // Reuters. November 15, 2018. URL: <https://reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFL2N1XP1M8> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>43</sup> Operation Barkhane // Ministère des Armées de la République Française. November 11, 2015. URL: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/bande-sahelo-saharienne/operation-barkhane> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>44</sup> Hereinafter, an organization included in the list of terrorist organizations in the Russian Federation is mentioned.

<sup>45</sup> Çonkar A. B. Development and Security Challenges in The Sahel Region. Report of Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group (GSM) // NATO Parliamentary Assembly. December 2020. URL: [https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2021-02/042%20GSM%2020%20E%20rev%202%20fin%20-%20DEVELOPMENT%20AND%20SECURITY%20CHALLENGES%20IN%20THE%20SAHEL%20REGION\\_0.pdf](https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2021-02/042%20GSM%2020%20E%20rev%202%20fin%20-%20DEVELOPMENT%20AND%20SECURITY%20CHALLENGES%20IN%20THE%20SAHEL%20REGION_0.pdf) (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>46</sup> Maclean R. Crisis in the Sahel Becoming France's Forever War // The New York Times. March 29, 2020. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/29/world/africa/france-sahel-west-africa.html> (accessed: 21.07.2022).



**Figure 6. European Operations in the Sahel**

*Source:* Lebovich A. Halting Ambition: EU Migration and Security Policy in the Sahel // European Council on Foreign Relations. September 25, 2018. URL: [https://ecfr.eu/publication/halting\\_ambition\\_eu\\_migration\\_and\\_security\\_policy\\_in\\_the\\_sahel/#a2](https://ecfr.eu/publication/halting_ambition_eu_migration_and_security_policy_in_the_sahel/#a2) (accessed: 21.07.2022).

The close proximity of the Sahel region to Europe constitutes a potentially much more (Sour, 2015) geopolitical interests of European Union Member States in the region.<sup>47</sup> According to the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), the EU “will invest in African peace and development as an investment in its own security and prosperity.”<sup>48</sup>

The EU Sahel Strategy includes four lines of action — development, security, political and military action (Figure 6). These actions are carried out under the aegis of the same

framework as articulated in its documents to support security and stability in the region within three CSDP missions. In March 2011, the EU adopted a two-page Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel for Mali, Mauritania and Niger. In 2014, the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) was initiated. In early 2015, the EU Council launched a second civilian mission to support the Malian internal security forces in ensuring constitutional and democratic order and EUCAP Sahel Niger, launched as the civilian mission in 2012 with the objective of helping that country to fight terrorism and organized crime.<sup>49</sup>

The EU (military) Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) launched in 2013, aims at

<sup>47</sup> Lebovich A. Halting ambition: EU migration and security policy in the Sahel // European Council on Foreign Relations. September 25, 2018. URL: [https://ecfr.eu/publication/halting\\_ambition\\_eu\\_migration\\_and\\_security\\_policy\\_in\\_the\\_sahel/#a2](https://ecfr.eu/publication/halting_ambition_eu_migration_and_security_policy_in_the_sahel/#a2) (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>48</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European’s Union Foreign and Security Policy // European External Action Service. June 2016. P. 36. URL: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs\\_review\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf) (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>49</sup> Annual Report on the Sahel Regional Action Plan // Council of the European Union. December 23, 2016. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5009-2017-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

strengthening the internal security forces' capacity to fight against terrorism and organized crime and supporting the Malian and Nigerien governments in managing migration flows and border security.<sup>50</sup> However, the possible withdrawal of the European Union mission, EUTM Mali, should be noted.<sup>51</sup> The three CSDP missions in the area have adapted to the EU's new priorities,<sup>52</sup> and have done so as part of a broader transformation of such missions (Venturi, 2019).

In the context of the Africa — EU partnership, in April 2016, the European Commission decided on funding of 50 million euros from the African Peace Facility (APF) to support the Lake Chad Basin Commission's MNJTF in its fight against Boko Haram, as mandated by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU).<sup>53</sup> In an effort to address the refugee crisis, the EU reconfigured the Sahel Strategy, the EUCAP Sahel Niger, to limit migration flows (Davitti & Ursu, 2018). EUCAP Sahel Niger operations focus on migration, combined with its work of strengthening Niger's border security and police capacity.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Biscop S. The EU Global Strategy: Realpolitik with European Characteristics // Egmont Security Policy Briefs, June 2016. URL: <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2016/06/SPB75.pdf?type=pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>51</sup> Tull D. M. Calling Time on the EU Mission to Mali // Internationale Politik Quarterly. May 9, 2022. URL: <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/calling-time-eu-mission-mali> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>52</sup> Annual Report on the Sahel Regional Action Plan // Council of the European Union. December 23, 2016. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5009-2017-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>53</sup> Joint Communiqué by Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative and Vice-President; Neven Mimica, EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development; and Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for peace and security // African Union, Peace and Security Department. August 1, 2016. URL: <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/joint-communication-eng.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>54</sup> "The Sahel is a strategic priority for the EU and its member states": Council adopts conclusions // Council of the EU. May 13, 2019. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/05/13/the-sahel-is->

The EU has also spent millions of euros on its strategy for development and security in the Sahel. Thus, 147 million euros was spent as part of the funding already allocated for the G5 Sahel Joint Force — the Union supports the operationalization of the former.<sup>55</sup>

While the EU and its member states provided G5 Sahel countries with 8 billion euros to support development cooperation between 2014 and 2020, 930 million euros was mobilized through the EU Trust Fund for the region. See the table below for a breakdown of the EU development fund for the G5 countries for the period 2014—2020. The distribution of aid from the European Development Fund to the G5 countries in 2014—2020 is as follows: 686 million euros were allocated to Niger, 628 million euros — to Burkina Faso, 664 million euros — to Mali, 542 million euros — to Chad, and 160 million euros — to Mauritania.<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

The findings of this paper illustrate the multiple security threats in a geographically connected region — the Sahel. The G5 Sahel reveals itself as the nexus of these security interactions through its links to the states with shared borders.

The application of RSCT theory contributes significantly to the understanding of these regional security issues in the Sahel region. The complex connections between the threats lead to the conclusion that a broader approach is necessary, since it is not possible to confront these threats separately. The regional nature of security threats strongly supports the claim that geographic proximity is a major factor in promoting security interaction. All security threats emanate from the near vicinity of the states involved, and the individual security of each state cannot be separated from that of their

a-strategic-priority-for-the-eu-and-its-member-states-council-adopts-conclusions/ (accessed: 21.07.2022).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

neighbors. While RSCT presents a plausible and applicable framework in terms of understanding regional security, it is undeniable that with the rise of regional insecurity and international terrorism, a region's security is not confined solely within regional complexes.

Therefore, it is supposed that both mutual and rival interests can contribute towards the formation of such a region and a more robust regional security initiative that combines the fight against a common threat, such as terrorism and, in this case, ensuring security in the Sahel would be one of those mutual interests.

The analysis of the paper examines the presence and intensity of great powers such as United States, France and the EU, in the local security dynamics of the Sahel region. These powers have the capacity to “largely transcend the logic of geography and adjacency in their security relationships” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Consequently, the international military presence will probably prevent the territory from being taken over by rebels or terrorist groups. However, it should be noted that the increased external military presence personnel has not prevented or reduced terrorism and instability in the region. Similarly, the risk associated with a foreign military presence is that it could prolong the status quo.

Consequently, the authors of this paper with regards to “amity” and “enmity” of the RSC argue that the power relations and patterns of amity and enmity among the states (Burkina

Faso, Mali and Niger) constitute the basis for assessing whether a regional security complex does exist. To this end, the authors argue that the reason (suspicion) for the sore relationship between Mali and France and France's request to leave Mali, as well as the reason for Mali to pull out of the G5 Sahel Forces security formation and collaboration in the fight against trafficking, terrorism, etc., despite the common challenges shared by Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali (as observed above) constitute enmity. As ‘Enmity’, according to Buzan denotes inter-state relationships conditioned by suspicion and fear. This raises the question: Does the reason for Mali's withdrawal from the G5 Sahel Forces security formation and collaboration amounts to suspicion and fear of what France might do — enmity?

Thus, the major benefit of the RSCT is that it allows analysts to confront common conceptions and discuss security concerns between members of a given security complex in the hope of addressing the overall regional security dynamics associated with heightened threat. Therefore, the elements of the security threats — RSCT discourse and measures that have been empirically applied contribute to an understanding of how security is constructed by the states involved. This paper, hence, contributes not only to an understanding of how RSCs emerge and evolve in the Sahel, but also allows the RSCT to move out of the realm of theorizing into the realm of empirical utility.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 21.11.2021

Revised / Доработана после рецензирования: 02.06.2022

Accepted / Принята к публикации: 19.12.2022

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