

# Conflict in the Sahel - New Terrorism Frontier Creating Geopolitical Concerns in Africa

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Date: March 2022

Pages: 15

Price: US\$ 995.00 (Single User License)

ID: C1F079F5B709EN

## Abstracts

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### SUMMARY

The Sahel is a region located in the northwestern region of Africa, below the Sahara, and includes some of the world's poorest nations such as Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Chad. The region is the semiarid strip between the Sahara Desert to the North and savannahs to the South. In the past decade conflict and terrorism has grown in the region with groups emerging in the northern peripheries but gradually increasing their reach south. The Sahel is part of a worrying trend where terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa is on the rise. In each year since 2017 more have been killed in terrorist attacks in the region than in South Asia or the Middle East and North Africa, above the Sahara, and increasing violence in the Sahel is one of the major regions behind this. France is currently the most active western military power in the Sahel but extending conflict and geopolitical considerations may lead to increased western interventions.

### KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Sahelian countries have to join forces to counter the ongoing threat with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger creating the G5 Sahel, a security cooperation framework to battle armed groups. However, due to the lack of resources of these countries the framework is dependent on external funding and therefore it has ended up promoting not European security interests over its own. Initially concentrated in Northern Mali conflict has spread southward to Niger and Burkina Faso and more recently has infiltrated coastal states like the Ivory Coast. Violence in the region which itself has partly stemmed from political

disillusionment has created more political pressures in urban areas where populations are concerned over the growing threat of violence. As a result, numerous governments have been forced out of office through popularly supported military coup d'états.

With conflict not subsiding in the region and armed groups and terrorists extending their influence the region is becoming a central area of geopolitical concern. The French government has been the most active in the region due to its colonial past but increased opposition to its presence is further complicating efforts to intervene. Recently, France has been forced to withdraw its troops from Mali which may leave the region particularly vulnerable. The increasing role of Russian mercenaries in the Sahel is likely to raise concern from NATO with the current war in Ukraine demonstrating Putin's desire for increased geopolitical power and that he is not afraid of rash military intervention and civilian casualties to further his aims. The withdrawal of the 5,000 French troops from Mali has left a huge void in which Russia has sought to fill as it seeks to boost its African presence

The Sahel suffers from issues of, growing income inequalities, malnutrition, low education attainment and widespread unemployment. This presents huge challenges for a young population where limited opportunities impact daily life. When this is coupled with political instability and a growing number are drawn to armed groups. Agriculture is the largest employer in the Sahel with over one in two estimated as employed in the industry. However, despite playing a key role in food security the industry remains substantially underdeveloped and is dependent on rain fall that only occurs at most a third of the year. Being located in close proximity to the Sahara Desert means the region has been one of the most affected by global warming which is already have devastating effects. Through developing the agricultural industry, the Sahel can generate economic and social benefits to aid development and reduce the effects of conflict and climate change.

## SCOPE

Learn how the Sahel region is developing

See the major concerns in the area

Understand why the region needs support

## **REASONS TO BUY**

What is the Sahel?

Why is it badly affected?

How can it be helped?

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