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Violence, Poverty and the Global Security Dilemma in the Sahel Region

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Abstract:
The Sahel region, stretching from Senegal to Sudan, is caught in a spiral of chronic poverty, ethnic and religious tensions, and pervasive armed violence, despite its vast reserves of oil, gold, uranium, and other natural resources. The interests of Western states and multinational corporations in these resources intersect with local dynamics, helping to sustain conflict. This study aims to analyse, within a theoretical framework, how climate change, rapid population growth, rural–urban inequalities, failed state structures and governance crises generate instability in the Sahel. It employs a qualitative approach based on recent academic literature, reports of international organisations and policy documents. Findings indicate that oil, gold and uranium revenues in peripheral areas beyond effective state control finance jihadist organisations and local militias. Western actors' exploitative interventions further entrench this chaotic environment. Violence and humanitarian crises in the Sahel undermine the stability of neighbouring countries, fuelling irregular migration and terrorism. In conclusion, it is argued that poverty and conflict in the region are driven less by internal dynamics than by the interest-driven manipulation of external actors, and that comprehensive, security-and-development-oriented support from the UN and AU is urgently needed.

Keywords: Sahel region, Security and conflict, Natural resources, Failed states, Migration and poverty.

INTRODUCTION

The Sahel belt stretching across Africa from west to east is one of the world's most notable regions in terms of mineral resources and geostrategic location. Rich in oil, natural gas, gold, uranium, and other minerals, this area is at the same time described as one of the poorest, most fragile, and most conflict-ridden parts of the world. As stated in the United Nations' Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, this political region, comprising ten countries from Senegal to Nigeria and Cameroon, is one of the geographies where the contradiction between natural wealth and chronic poverty is most starkly visible. Countries in the Sahel have been dealing with successive political and humanitarian crises for years. Weak governance and its impact on State institutions, including insufficient border management, have dramatically diminished the capacity of the Sahelian States to effectively deliver basic services, promote broadbased political participation and protect human rights. Widespread corruption, coupled with the inability of States to deliver basic services such as effective policing, justice, access to water, affordable health care and education, has resulted in a widening gap in State-society relations. At the same time, chronic political instability, evident in recurrent unconstitutional changes of government, violent electoral processes and social conflicts, is a direct result of the lack of institutionalized political dialogue, weak parliaments and contested judicial systems. (United Nations, 2013).

This paradox makes the Sahel not only a "regional problem area" but also a region at the centre of global debates on security, development, and governance. Over the past decade, jihadist

insurgencies concentrated particularly in the Mali–Burkina Faso–Niger triangle, successive military coups, and vast territories where state authority has collapsed have come to define the region as one of chronic security crisis. The insurgent wave that began in Mali in 2012 rapidly acquired a cross-border character with the rise of various jihadist organisations (AQIM, JNIM, ISGS, etc.); the violence that has taken shape in the heart of the Sahel now shows a tendency toward "southward expansion" toward coastal states such as Benin and Togo on the Atlantic coast.

The spiral of violence in the region does not stem solely from the activities of armed groups. Weak and fragile state structures, historically externally drawn borders, deep mistrust between central governments and peripheral regions, and exclusionary political orders are among the structural factors fuelling conflict dynamics in the Sahel. In rural areas where state capacity is extremely limited, the absence of security, justice, and basic services both facilitates the ability of armed groups to build a social base and paves the way for the emergence of local militias and criminal economies. Studies by the OECD and other international organisations underline that successive military coups, the weakness of democratic institutions, and human rights abuses committed by security forces have further eroded state legitimacy in the Sahel (Mahmood, 2025).

This fragile political and social landscape is further complicated by the adverse effects of climate change. The Sahel is a transitional belt that is warming above the global average, where rainfall patterns are disrupted and desertification is accelerating. Drought, land degradation, and shrinking water resources dramatically reduce the living standards of communities dependent primarily on subsistence agriculture and nomadic pastoralism; farmer–herder conflicts and competition over pasture and water stand out as incidents of violence fundamentally triggered by climate-related stressors (Ghins et al., 2022: p.10). Climate-induced migration, new settlement pressures, and the expansion of agricultural land into pastoral routes trigger tensions between different communities and may escalate into armed violence.

The distribution and exploitation of natural wealth constitute another critical dimension of the conflict equation in the Sahel. Uranium deposits in Niger, gold reserves in Mali and Burkina Faso, and other energy and mineral resources have turned the region into a strategic magnet for both Western states and multinational corporations. This situation leads the "resource curse" literature to be frequently invoked in the Sahel context; an externally dependent mining economy, opaque contracts, corruption, and deep income inequality all point to the fact that natural resources, instead of generating social welfare, have exacerbated poverty and political instability (Tzinieris, 2018).

In addition to these internal dynamics, violence and poverty in the Sahel are closely intertwined with the security, energy, and migration policies of Western countries. France's Serval and Barkhane operations, support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force[*], and the European Union's Sahel strategies shaped along the security–development–migration nexus reinforce the perception of the region as a kind of "security buffer" for Europe (Doxsee et al., 2022). As the Sahel is also a critical transit zone on irregular migration routes from Africa to Europe, priorities of border security, migration management, and counterterrorism are tightly interwoven in EU policies.

[*] The Sahel Group of Five (G5 Sahel) was established as a regional intergovernmental organization in 2014. It provides an institutional framework to promote development and security in its five member countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

However, in recent years, growing societal backlash against France's military presence, the anti-Western rhetoric of coup regimes, and the entry of new external actors—above all Russia—have reshaped the equation of external intervention in the Sahel. Following successive coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, the expulsion of French forces, the deployment of Russian private military companies, and the activation of alternative security partnerships have made both the regional and global great-power competition dimensions of the conflict more visible. This "geopolitical realignment" has, rather than alleviating the security crisis in the region, generated new risks and uncertainties.

Violence and humanitarian tragedy in the Sahel do not produce effects limited only to the countries of the region. The displacement of hundreds of thousands of people and the exposure of millions to food insecurity and extreme poverty trigger forced migration flows to neighbouring countries; part of these flows become connected to longer routes extending to North Africa and Europe (Oxfam, 2019; Mahmood, 2025). At the same time, the expansion of jihadist organisations' areas of operation towards the coastal states threatens not only the security of the Mediterranean but also the stability of West African states on the Atlantic coast. This picture turns the Sahel into a nodal point where global counterterrorism, organised crime networks, energy and critical mineral supply security, and the international peace and security agenda intersect (Dowd & Raleigh, 2013).

This study aims to analyse this complex picture along three main axes. First, drawing on the Sahel's geographical and demographic characteristics, it will question why the region has been unable to break out of a cycle of chronic poverty and violence despite its natural wealth. Second, it will examine the security and economic interests of Western states and multinational corporations in the Sahel and discuss how these external actors have transformed the region's conflict dynamics in terms of security and development. Third, it will assess the effects of conflict and humanitarian tragedy in the Sahel on the stability of neighbouring countries and on world peace, particularly through irregular migration, terrorism, organised crime, and energy/mineral supply chains.

Methodologically, the study is based on a qualitative document analysis drawing on academic literature on the Sahel region, reports of international organisations, policy documents, and field analyses. Within this framework, the aim is to conceptualise the Sahel not merely as a "problematic peripheral geography" but as a region where global power competition, natural resource governance, and climate–security relations intersect, and which is therefore of critical importance for the future of world peace.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section discusses four main conceptual axes that can be used to understand the Sahel region: (i) the resource curse and conflict economy, (ii) weak/fragile state and governance crisis, (iii) climate change and environmental vulnerability, and (iv) post-colonial legacy and external intervention dynamics. This conceptual framework will serve as a reference in the subsequent sections for analysing the cycle of violence and poverty in the Sahel.

Resource Curse and Conflict Economy

The "resource curse" literature demonstrates that natural resource wealth does not automatically guarantee economic growth and political stability; on the contrary, under certain conditions it can increase the risks of low growth, authoritarianism, and civil war (Le Billon, 2001). In economies

dependent on highly lucrative resources such as oil, diamonds, gold, or uranium, the revenues generated from these resources become a powerful "prize" for both state elites and armed groups, thereby fuelling institutional weaknesses and dynamics of violence.

Collier and Hoeffler's "greed–grievance" model emphasises that civil wars are linked not only to identity-based grievances but also to opportunities for capturing shares of easily appropriable natural resource rents (Collier & Hoeffler, 2000). Ross's work, based on in-depth case studies, likewise draws attention to the capacity of oil and mineral revenues to finance secessionist movements, war entrepreneurs, and economies of violence (Ross, 2004). The political ecology of war further suggests that the relationship between conflict and resources is shaped not only by rent abundance but also by the spatial distribution of resources, modes of extraction, transport networks, and the ways in which these are integrated into global markets.

In the Sahel context, this literature is particularly important for understanding how economic structures based on uranium, gold, and other minerals render revenue-sharing between central elites and local communities highly asymmetrical, and how this asymmetry increases both social discontent and the mobilisation capacity of armed groups. OECD studies on natural resource governance in the Sahel show that the most violent areas are also those most dependent on agriculture and mining, where state control is weakest, and that the opaque management of mining revenues deepens fragility (OECD, 2022).

Within this framework, the concept of "conflict economy" offers a useful tool for analysing the complex economic relationships among armed groups, militias, local brokers, and external actors in the Sahel. Activities such as natural resource smuggling, illegal gold mining, fuel and arms trafficking, and migrant smuggling not only provide financing for armed actors but also become "forced livelihood strategies" for the local population, embedding the conflict economy into the social fabric (Le Billon, 2001).

Weak/Fragile State, Governance Crisis and Violence

The fragile state literature emphasises that in conflict-prone countries, the state's capacity to provide core political and social "public goods" is limited, and that this creates a breeding ground for internal violence. According to Rotberg, "failed states" are political entities that are unable to provide their citizens with security, the rule of law, basic services, and opportunities for political participation, where internal violence becomes chronic and sovereignty and legitimacy are fundamentally contested (Rotberg, 2003).

Di John argues that, particularly in the Sub-Saharan African context, the notion of the "failed state" alone may not be fully explanatory; rather, the legacies of colonialism, clientelist–patronage relations, rent-intensive economies, the "gatekeeper state" and neo-patrimonial forms of politics are key to understanding dynamics of fragility and violence (Di John, 2008). This approach requires analysing together the limited institutional presence of the central state in peripheral areas of the Sahel, the gaps in security and justice provision, and the informal actors (chiefs, militias, community leaders, jihadist groups) who fill these gaps.

The OECD's multidimensional fragility framework likewise conceptualises fragility not merely in terms of "weak institutions", but as cumulative risks across economic, environmental, social, political, and security dimensions (OECD, 2022). Within this framework, Sahelian states stand out as "extremely fragile" structures at the intersection of high security risks (armed groups,

terrorism), low institutional capacity, widespread poverty, and environmental vulnerability (Eizenga, 2019).

This literature makes it possible to understand violence and poverty in the Sahel in the context of the breakdown of state–society relations, centre–periphery tensions, and crises of legitimacy. Human rights violations by security forces, corruption, exclusive power-sharing among elites, and the systematic marginalisation of certain ethnic/religious groups deepen feelings of "grievance" and prevent the state from being perceived as an "impartial arbiter". This, in turn, paves the way for jihadist groups and local militias to be legitimised as "alternative providers of order".

Climate Change, Environmental Fragility and Security

The literature on the relationship between climate change and security often conceptualises climate change not as a direct cause of war, but as a "threat multiplier" that exacerbates existing vulnerabilities (Scheffran et al., 2012). In semi-arid regions such as the Sahel, rising temperatures, disrupted rainfall patterns, desertification, and land degradation erode livelihoods based on agriculture and pastoralism, thereby increasing food insecurity, rural poverty, and local-level land–water conflicts.

Raleigh's study on Sahelian states shows that climate change shapes conflict risk not directly through meteorological variables, but through "political fragility" in the context of political exclusion, ethnic inequality, and weak institutions (Raleigh, 2010). Accordingly, climate shocks have more destructive effects on groups that are politically marginalised, insufficiently served by the state, and under-represented; they may increase both these groups' participation in violent acts and their receptiveness to the narratives of radical organisations.

Although African civil wars do not exhibit a strong direct correlation with climatic variables, conflicts can largely be explained by "classic structural factors" such as poverty, political exclusion, and institutional weakness. This assessment highlights the importance of positioning climate change in the Sahel not as a stand-alone cause of conflict, but as a force that further pressures an already fragile socio-political context.

The OECD's "Environmental Fragility in the Sahel" report shows that environmental fragility in the Sahel generates multi-layered risks when combined with food insecurity, rapid urbanisation, and intensive mining activities (OECD, 2022). Regarding the relationship between climate crisis, food systems, and peace in the Sahel, findings indicate that climate shocks weaken agricultural production and rural livelihoods, which both fuel local tensions and can push young people toward armed groups and migration routes.

This body of literature makes it possible to connect climate change and environmental degradation in the Sahel with debates on the resource curse and fragile states. When climatic pressures intersect with already mismanaged natural resources and weak public policies, they become catalysts for both local land–water disputes and broader regional migration and urbanisation pressures.

Post-Colonial Legacy and External Interventions

Explaining violence and poverty in the Sahel solely through internal dynamics is insufficient; the region's colonial legacy and contemporary forms of external intervention must also be included in the analysis. Post-colonial literature argues that the arbitrary borders, administrative

structures, and relations of economic dependence established by European powers in Africa have continued in various forms after independence and have significantly shaped current patterns of fragility.

Charbonneau, in his study, examines France's security policy in Sub-Saharan Africa in the context of "new imperialism" debates and shows that security cooperation and military interventions, alongside claims of promoting stability and development, can also reproduce dependency and hierarchical relations (Charbonneau, 2016). Other researchers likewise analyse France's Serval and Barkhane operations in Mali and the Sahel both within a counterterrorism framework and in the context of France's strategy to maintain its historical sphere of influence, discussing the impact of these missions on local politics and conflict dynamics (Chafer et al., 2020).

This perspective makes it possible to interpret Western security initiatives in the Sahel not as "neutral stabilisation" missions, but as practices intertwined with power projection, border management, and energy/migration security priorities. It underlines, for example, that the ways in which security and development agendas are articulated in the Sahel at times contradict the priorities of local actors and fail to sufficiently address the structural causes of violence.

Post-colonial approaches suggest that labels such as "failed state" and "frontline in the war on terror" function to legitimise military interventions in the region by Western-centred actors. The emergence of anti-Western rhetoric following coups in the Sahel, and the growing influence of Russia and other actors in the security sphere, can be seen as a contemporary reflection of these critiques. Thus, the Sahel becomes not only a site of local conflicts, but also a stage on which great-power rivalries and competing "security narratives" collide.

OVERVIEW OF THE SAHEL REGION: GEOGRAPHICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

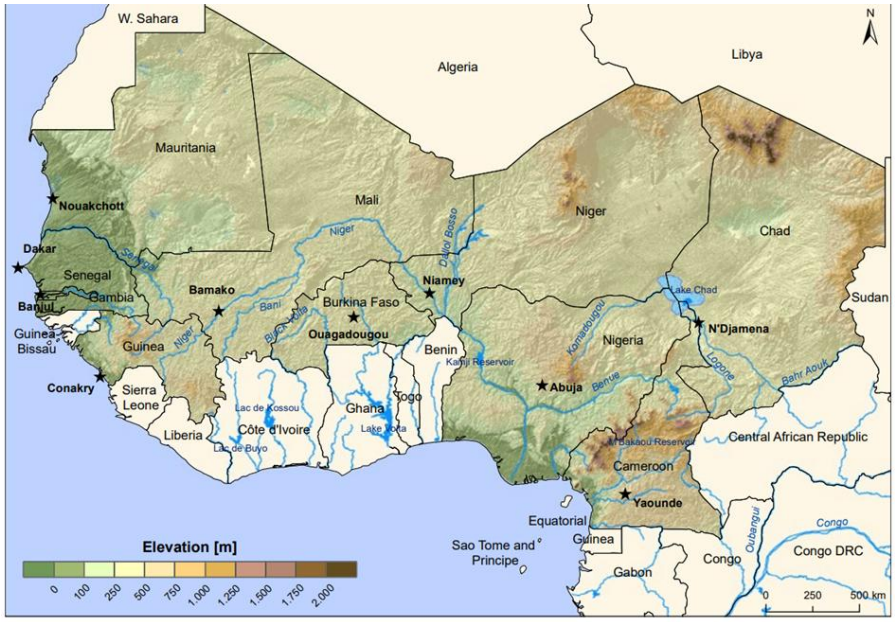

Figure 1: Topographic map of the Sahel.

Definition, Boundaries and Regional Position of the Sahel

Within the framework of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), the Sahel "stretches from Mauritania to Eritrea, including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria,

Senegal and the Sudan, a belt dividing the Sahara Desert and the savannahs to the South" (United Nations, 2013).

Geographically, the Sahel is a "transitional belt" extending between the Sahara Desert in the north and the Sudan–Guinea forest belt in the south, from the Atlantic coast (Senegal, Mauritania) to the Lake Chad basin and the inland areas of Nigeria. Climatically, this belt forms a boundary zone between arid and humid tropical regions (UNCCD, 2021).

According to recent UNDP assessments on the Sahel region, the population of the area is estimated at approximately 340–360 million, with a significant share concentrated in rural areas (UNDP, 2023, 2024). In terms of both demographic scale and geographical extent, this makes the Sahel one of the most critical transit regions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Geographical and Climatic Characteristics

The Sahel ecosystem is characterised by arid and semi-arid climatic conditions, irregular rainfall patterns, and high climate variability. Rainfall is concentrated in a short rainy season, shows substantial interannual variability, and exhibits a marked decreasing trend along a north–south gradient. This climatic structure renders livelihood systems based on rain-fed agriculture and nomadic/semi-nomadic pastoralism extremely fragile, both spatially and temporally.

Analyses by the UNCCD and UNDP indicate that the Sahel is characterised by extensive grassland and savannah areas, an agricultural belt along its southern fringe, and water bodies such as the Niger River and Lake Chad; however, desertification, land degradation, and difficulties in accessing water resources have increased significantly over recent decades (UNCCD, 2021; UNDP, 2023, 2024). The OECD's "Environmental Fragility in the Sahel" report underlines that rising temperatures, declining soil fertility, loss of vegetation cover, and disrupted rainfall patterns have a multiplier effect on food insecurity, rural poverty, and environmentally driven migration (Ghins et al., 2022).

In UNDP's "Regeneration" document, the Sahel is described as "a complex crisis region where extremely high year-round solar and wind potential is intertwined with drought, environmental degradation and cycles of violence" (UNDP, 2023). The Sahel Human Development Report likewise notes that the region possesses one of the highest solar energy potentials in the world; yet energy infrastructure remains severely underdeveloped and energy poverty significantly constrains economic development (UNDP, 2024).

In short, the geographical profile of the Sahel simultaneously contains significant opportunities in terms of renewable energy (solar, wind) and agricultural production, while also being identified as one of the areas most vulnerable to climate change and with the highest levels of environmental fragility.

Demographic Structure, Urbanisation and Human Development

The Sahel has one of the youngest and fastest-growing populations in the world. According to UNDP's programmatic reports on the Sahel, roughly two-thirds of the region's population is under the age of 25; young people and women together account for approximately two-thirds of the total population (UNDP, 2023). The Sahel Human Development Report estimates that, as of 2023, the population of Sahel countries stands at around 340–360 million; it notes that nearly half

of this population lacks access to electricity, while energy demand has increased by more than 4% per year on average over the past decade (UNDP, 2024).

The UN Support Plan for the Sahel and UNDP assessments indicate that the rate of urbanisation in the region is rising rapidly; by 2030, it is projected that around 40% of the population will live in urban areas. As in West Africa more broadly, rural–urban migration in the Sahel stands out as an adaptation strategy to both climatic pressures and security risks. The World Bank's Groundswell study estimates that climate-induced internal migration in West Africa alone could reach up to 32 million people by 2050 (World Bank, 2021).

This rapid demographic growth and urbanisation process stands in sharp contrast to the region's human development indicators. In the Sahel countries, energy poverty, lack of access to education and health services, high child and maternal mortality, widespread income poverty, and persistent gender inequalities remain significant challenges (UNDP, 2024). The OECD report shows that Sahel countries rank at the top of multidimensional fragility indices and face a "cluster of risks" in which political, economic, social, and environmental vulnerabilities reinforce one another (OECD, 2022).

The age structure and rapid growth of the population are viewed as both an opportunity and a serious risk for the Sahel. If employment, education, and avenues for political participation for young people can be expanded, the "demographic window of opportunity" could be leveraged in favour of economic growth and innovation. Conversely, if unemployment, exclusion, and precarity persist, this demographic profile may create a conducive environment for fragility, migration, and violence (UNDP, 2023, 2024).

Natural Resources and Economic Structure

The economic structure of the Sahel is largely based on primary sectors such as agriculture, livestock, and mining. Agricultural production is carried out predominantly through small-scale, rain-fed family farming, with key crops including millet, sorghum, maize, groundnuts, and rice (UNCCD, 2021). Pastoralism and transhumance (seasonal nomadic herding) remain the main livelihood strategies for communities living particularly in the northern belt of the Sahel.

In parallel, the region possesses significant mineral and energy reserves. Niger stands out with its uranium deposits; Mali and Burkina Faso with gold; and Chad, Nigeria, and Mauritania with oil and natural gas resources (OECD, 2022; UNDP, 2024). The OECD report on natural resource governance in the Sahel highlights that the mining sector accounts for a substantial share of total export revenues. Nevertheless, it stresses that the added value generated by mining remains limited in local economies and that most of the revenues are captured by a narrow politico-economic elite and transnational corporations.

The UNDP Sahel Human Development Report characterises the region's solar energy potential as "among the highest in the world" and considers it a strategically important renewable energy basin in the context of the global energy transition (UNDP, 2024, p. 7). Yet electricity generation and consumption per capita are far below the global average. For example, electricity generation in the Sahel is around 35 watts per capita, a figure significantly below the world average.

This picture shows that the Sahel is a region that is "rich in natural resources and renewable energy potential, but poor in terms of economic diversification, industrialisation, and

infrastructure development." (OECD, 2022) finds that the opaque management of mining revenues, low agricultural productivity, climate pressures, and security risks render Sahelian economies fragile and highly exposed to external shocks.

In summary, the geographical and demographic profile of the Sahel consists of a large youth population, rapidly increasing urbanisation, a strong yet fragile natural resource base, and an economic structure intertwined with high environmental risks. This framework is of critical importance for understanding the background of the conflict dynamics and the violence–poverty cycle that will be examined in the following section.

MAIN CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN THE SAHEL

Violence and instability in the Sahel constitute a complex structure that cannot be reduced to a single cause. Historical legacies, fragile state structures, climatic pressures, the rise of radical armed groups, and criminal economies intersect to produce a "multi-layered conflict zone" (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2022).

Historical Legacy and Centre–Periphery Tension

Many of the current lines of conflict observed in the Sahel are closely linked to the legacy of the colonial period. Through the arbitrary borders they drew without taking into account ethnic, linguistic, and economic networks, French and British colonial administrations created the present geographical skeleton of states such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and Nigeria; this led to the fragmentation of ethnic groups across different states and the disruption of traditional authority structures (Foucher, 2025).

The OECD's analysis of borders and conflicts in North and West Africa shows that the most intense clusters of violence in the Sahel—particularly in the Burkina Faso–Mali–Niger triangle and the Lake Chad basin—are concentrated in areas where historical trade routes and migration corridors intersect and which were turned into "administrative borders" in the colonial period. In these areas, the historical presence of the central state has been limited, and security and justice have often been provided by traditional authorities, local militias, or, today, jihadist groups (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2022).

Centre–periphery tension is the contemporary reflection of this historical fragility. Political and economic power concentrated in capitals such as Bamako, Ouagadougou, or Niamey is perceived by communities living in the northern and border regions of the Sahel as a "distant and alien authority"; inadequate roads and insufficient education, health, and security services weaken the legitimacy of the state. This situation creates a favourable environment for non-state actors to gain strength under the claim of providing "alternative governance" and "justice".

Weak State Capacity, Coups and Governance Crisis

At the core of conflict dynamics in the Sahel lie fragile state structures and chronic governance problems. The OECD's 2024 report "Military Coups, Jihadism and Insecurity in the Central Sahel" shows that the coups that took place in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger between 2020 and 2023 have further eroded already weak institutions and deepened the politicisation of the security apparatus (OECD, 2024).

According to UN Security Council reports, successive coups in these three countries have been justified by the promise to halt jihadist violence; however, not only have the number of attacks on

the ground not decreased, but in many areas public officials and teachers have withdrawn for security reasons, expanding "vacuum zones" where the state is effectively absent (Security Council Report, 2025). The same trend is observed in wide areas around Ménaka and the Liptako-Gourma region, where both jihadist groups and ethnic self-defence militias exercise de facto authority. In recent years, the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the International Criminal Court and ECOWAS[†], the narrowing of security cooperation with Western partners, and the growing prominence of Russia-linked actors all point to both a "geopolitical realignment" in foreign policy orientation and a weakening of human rights and accountability mechanisms. A 2025 Reuters report notes that these three countries have described The Hague as a "tool of colonialism" and withdrawn from the ICC, while simultaneously establishing a new bloc among themselves under the name "Alliance of Sahel States (AES)" (Balima and Mazou, 2023).

In this context, weak state capacity is not limited merely to administrative and military shortcomings; it also refers to a multidimensional legitimacy crisis that includes corruption, elitist power-sharing, the weakness of the rule of law, and the systematic exclusion of certain ethnic/religious groups. This crisis enables both jihadist organisations and "self-defence militias" to emerge, in the eyes of local populations, as alternative providers of security and justice.

Climate Change, Land and Water Conflicts

In the Sahel, climate change functions less as a direct cause of conflict than as a "threat multiplier" that deepens existing fragilities. According to a Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) report on climate change and conflicts in the Sahel, rising temperatures, irregular rainfall, and recurrent drought periods reduce agricultural productivity and shrink pasture and water resources for livestock; this, in turn, fuels farmer–herder conflicts, internal migration, and rural poverty (Tesfaye, 2022).

Studies by the UN Economic Commission for Africa and other institutions on farmer–herder conflicts show that competition over land and water in the West African Sahel has turned into violent incidents particularly in northern Nigeria, western Niger, and central Mali; these conflicts are often politicised along ethnic and religious lines, triggering the emergence and mobilisation of militias. When environmental fragility is combined with rapid population growth, the southward movement of pastoral communities in search of new pastures, and the defensive reactions of sedentary farming communities seeking to protect their land, the risk of conflict increases.

Tesfaye stresses that rising levels of violence in the Sahel are linked not only to climate change but also to political exclusion and weak institutions, arguing that the climate–conflict nexus must be addressed without neglecting its "political background" (Tesfaye, 2022). This perspective shows that climate pressures have more destructive consequences in contexts where adequate adaptation policies are lacking and where the state has historically neglected peripheral areas; therefore, climate adaptation needs to be considered together with security and governance reforms.

[†] Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): Considered one of the pillar regional blocs of the continent-wide African Economic Community (AEC), the stated goal of ECOWAS is to achieve "collective self-sufficiency" for its member states by creating a single large trade bloc by building a full economic and trading union. Additionally, ECOWAS aims to raise living standards and promote economic development.

The Rise of Radical Groups and Jihadist Violence

One of the most visible dimensions of conflict dynamics in the Sahel is the rise of jihadist organisations linked to al-Qaeda and ISIS. According to the European Parliament's report on jihadist networks, jihadist violence in the Sahel initially took shape in the early 2000s through groups that emerged from the "wreckage" of the Algerian civil war and gradually evolved into hybrid structures that exploit local grievances (European Parliament, 2021).

Today, the jihadist landscape in the Sahel is dominated mainly by two formations: Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), affiliated with al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), or the more recently restructured "IS Sahel" branch linked to ISIS (Haidara, 2023). Other studies show that these groups are particularly concentrated in the Liptako-Gourma triangle (the border area between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger), where attacks targeting state officials, village militias, and civilians have caused thousands of deaths (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2024).

The CFR's "Global Conflict Tracker" describes radical organisations in the Sahel as among the fastest-growing hubs of violence in Africa, noting that since the 2010s tens of thousands of people have been killed and millions have been displaced (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). According to OECD and DIIS studies, three factors are particularly prominent in explaining how these groups gain strength at the local level: (i) a narrative of "protection" against state violence and arbitrary practices, (ii) the claim to resolve disputes in the absence of local justice mechanisms, and (iii) the provision of access channels to a war economy that offers income and status to young people (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2022).

In recent years, jihadist violence has spread beyond the Sahel region toward "coastal countries" such as Benin, Togo, and northern Côte d'Ivoire. Analyses by ACLED and humanitarian organisations show a marked increase in attacks particularly in the border areas between Benin, Niger, and Nigeria, indicating that Sahelian violence is now forming a "southward front" toward the Atlantic coast. This trend demonstrates that jihadist violence in the Sahel is not only a domestic security issue but also an increasing risk for the regional security architecture and for global peace.

Organised Crime, Smuggling and the Conflict Economy

One of the key dynamics sustaining conflict and violence in the Sahel is the criminal economy. According to a 2025 analysis by ISS Africa, illegal gold mining, arms trafficking, fuel and drug smuggling, and migrant smuggling play a central role in financing both jihadist groups and local militias in many parts of the Sahel (ISS, 2025). UNODC's report "Gold Trafficking in the Sahel" shows that illicit gold trade is channelled into global markets via hubs such as Ghana, Togo and the UAE, and that armed groups, local intermediary networks and actors within the state apparatus can cooperate in this process (UNODC, 2022).

The OECD's natural resource governance report stresses that, in the Sahel, artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), due to insufficient regulation and oversight, contributes both to environmental degradation and to the diversification of armed groups' revenue sources (OECD, 2022). A joint 2024 study by the Global Initiative and ACLED likewise finds that illicit economies in West Africa not only provide financial resources to armed groups but also allow these groups to build legitimacy in the eyes of local populations as providers of "jobs and protection" (Global Initiative & ACLED, 2024).

Empirical evidence on the relationship between Salafi-jihadist violence and artisanal mining in the Sahel indicates that as illegal gold mining intensifies, terrorist attacks also increase, and that state interventions aimed at repressing mining sometimes push local communities into closer relations with jihadist groups. ISS Africa's study similarly notes that violent economies in the Sahel are adopted not only by "criminals" but also by parts of the insecure population as a survival strategy (ISS, 2025).

This picture shows that security strategies that do not target conflict economies in the Sahel will have only limited impact. As long as the structural drivers of illicit gold, fuel and human trafficking (unemployment, poverty, corruption, weak regulatory capacity) are not addressed, the main financial channels of jihadist groups and militias will remain largely open.

INTERESTS AND INTERVENTIONS OF WESTERN COUNTRIES

Since the early 2000s, the Sahel has become a "frontline" where the security, energy, and migration policies of Western countries intersect. France's military operations, the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, the United States' counterterrorism programmes, and associated development/aid initiatives constitute the main pillars of Western engagement in the region (Charbonneau, 2016). However, in recent years the effectiveness of these interventions has increasingly been called into question; the rise of anti-Western discourse in local societies, a wave of coups, and Russia's growing presence through Wagner/Africa Corps have been reshaping the balance of power in the Sahel (Carnegie Endowment, 2023).

Western actors' presence in the Sahel is examined below along four main axes: (i) security and counterterrorism missions, (ii) energy and mineral interests, (iii) the nexus between migration, border security, and European domestic politics, and (iv) problems of legitimacy, anti-Western narratives, and the rising role of Russia.

Security Dimension: Counterterrorism Missions and Military Engagement

The most visible face of Western engagement in the Sahel has been France's military operations. Launched in 2013 to halt the jihadist insurgency in Mali, Opération Serval quickly stopped the advance of al-Qaeda-linked groups towards the south; it was then transformed in 2014 into Opération Barkhane, which targeted a broader geography (Wing, 2016). With around 5,000 French troops deployed across the Sahel–Sahara belt and operating out of bases in Mali, Niger, and Chad, Barkhane consolidated France's role as the region's "permanent security provider" (Tanvé, 2020).

However, academic literature and field reports indicate that Barkhane has been limited in its ability to sustainably reduce jihadist violence; the number of attacks continued to rise after 2015 (Abass, 2025). Between 2021 and 2023, the coups that brought military juntas to power in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger led to a radical redefinition of relations with France, culminating in the withdrawal of French forces and the formal termination of Barkhane.

Alongside France, the European Union has deployed three main missions under the Common Security and Defence Policy: EUTM Mali (a military training mission), EUCAP Sahel Mali, and EUCAP Sahel Niger (strategic advice and capacity-building for internal security forces and relevant ministries). Officially, these missions aim to strengthen Sahelian states' own security capacities and to promote "local ownership" in counterterrorism. Yet the deterioration in security

indicators and the suspension of cooperation following the coups have raised serious questions about the effectiveness and sustainability of EU missions.

The United States, for its part, has been more "in the background" but nonetheless influential through several key programmes. The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), launched in 2005, is a multi-actor initiative designed to enhance the counterterrorism capacity of Sahelian and North African countries (Warner, 2014). The 2022 TSCTP Program Act sought to provide this initiative with a comprehensive five-year strategy and a stronger institutional framework. Recent academic assessments, however, emphasise that while U.S. counterterrorism activities in the Sahel have been effective in areas such as military training and intelligence sharing, they have not been able to engage deeply with local governance and socio-economic problems (Zhu, 2024).

In summary, although the security-focused interventions of France, the EU, and the United States have succeeded at certain times in pushing back jihadist groups, they have fallen short of breaking the cycle of violence in the Sahel. In some cases, they have even contributed to legitimacy problems by reinforcing, in the eyes of local populations, perceptions of a "protracted war" and "externally dependent security.

Energy and Mining Interests: Uranium, Gold and the Green Transition

The second major dimension of Western interests in the Sahel concerns energy and mineral resources. Niger's uranium reserves have historically been of critical importance, particularly for France's nuclear energy system. The French state-owned company AREVA/Orano has for decades been the dominant actor in uranium extraction in Niger; given France's heavy reliance on nuclear power for electricity generation, this resource has been considered strategic (Fofack, 2023).

OECD and other studies show that mining activities in the Sahel are often conducted on the basis of non-transparent contracts, weak regulatory frameworks, and limited local value added. Niger's uranium, the gold reserves of Mali and Burkina Faso, the oil of Chad and Nigeria, and Mauritania's iron ore and potential gas fields together shape the map of economic interests pursued by European and other global actors in the Sahel (OECD, 2022; UNDP, 2024).

The European Union's green transition and critical raw materials agenda makes the Sahel newly significant in the medium and long term. The EU's draft Critical Raw Materials Act and related strategic documents place the security of supply of minerals such as uranium, cobalt and rare earth elements at the centre of EU energy and industrial policy; in this context, the Sahel and the broader Sahelo–Saharan belt are identified among potential supply regions (European Commission, 2023; OECD, 2022). From a local perspective, however, this picture is frequently intertwined with "resource curse" dynamics. The lack of transparent sharing of mining revenues, environmental degradation, displacement and violations of workers' rights fuel social discontent and enable armed groups to mobilise a narrative of "unjust resource distribution". For this reason, Western countries' energy and mining interests in the Sahel emerge not only as an economic issue but also as a geostrategic matter with political and security dimensions.

Migration, Border Security and European Domestic Politics

The Sahel is a strategic transit belt on irregular migration routes from Africa to Europe. Observation and field reports indicate that the Sahel constitutes a complex "mobility corridor"

composed of countries of origin, destination and transit (World Bank, 2021). Security crises, rural poverty and climatic pressures in the Sahel increase both internal displacement within the region and migratory pressure toward North Africa and, via the Mediterranean, toward Europe.

In this context, the European Union's Sahel policy has been explicitly designed along a "security–migration–development" axis. The European External Action Service (EEAS) Sahel page and EU strategy documents describe the EU's approach to the region as a package that simultaneously addresses counterterrorism, state capacity-building and the fight against irregular migration (Venturi, 2017).

A recent French strategic study finds that, particularly in EUCAP Sahel Niger activities around Agadez, training and equipment support focused on migration and border control have come to the forefront; as a result, the "comprehensive security–development approach" emphasised in official EU documents is, in practice, often reduced to a "migration and border security priority." It is frequently underlined that this migration-centred framework is directly linked to the rise of anti-immigration and populist movements in European domestic politics. A report by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly notes that irregular migration originating from the Sahel feeds security- and identity-focused debates in European public opinion, and that this situation has pushed the EU's Sahel policy toward security-oriented reflexes such as the "forward defence of external borders" (NATO PA, 2020).

In conclusion, from Europe's perspective the Sahel is positioned not only as a theatre of counterterrorism, but also as a migration–border security space where "external borders are extended"; this, in turn, leads to a partially securitised and instrumental tone dominating the EU's policies toward the region.

Crisis of Legitimacy, Anti-Western Narratives and New Actors

The interventions of France, the EU and the United States in the Sahel have faced a growing legitimacy crisis in the eyes of local societies and political elites. Protracted jihadist violence, civilian casualties, human rights violations committed by security forces, and the limited nature of tangible development gains have all fed a perception of Western actors as offering "low security returns at high cost" (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2022).

In this context, the anti-Western narratives that gained strength after the coups in the Sahel have provided fertile ground for portraying French and EU missions as "neo-colonial interventions," "projects to protect Western interests," or attempts "to turn the Sahel into a buffer zone to stop migration" (Togola, 2023). Attacks on French symbols, the storming of embassies, and the forced withdrawal of French troops in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are street-level manifestations of these narratives.

The actor that has benefited most from this legitimacy crisis has been Russia. According to an analysis by the Carnegie Endowment, Moscow has rapidly expanded its influence in Mali and Burkina Faso through the Wagner Group; capitalising on Western failures, anti-French sentiment and the security deficits of junta regimes, it has positioned itself as an "alternative security provider" (Weiss, 2023). The 2025 EUISS report underlines that Russia's engagement in the Sahel is particularly concentrated in Mali and Burkina Faso, and that by 2024 Wagner had been restructured into a new formation, "Africa Corps," more directly subordinated to the Russian Ministry of Defence (EUISS, 2025).

A 2025 Reuters report states that the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) – comprising Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger – has requested military support from Russia for a joint force of 5,000 troops, and that Moscow has openly backed this alliance with commitments of heavy weaponry and training support (Reuters, 2023). Thus, the junta governments that have curtailed their relations with France and Europe are experiencing a marked shift of axis toward Russia in the fields of security and foreign policy.

However, analyses by Carnegie and other independent researchers indicate that the security assistance provided by Russia through Wagner/Africa Corps has not sustainably reduced jihadist violence; on the contrary, there are cases in which civilian casualties have increased, human rights violations have deepened, and jihadist groups have responded with new attacks. This suggests that the turn toward Russia as an alternative to the West in the Sahel risks making the security architecture even more fragmented and externally dependent, rather than addressing the structural causes of conflict.

In conclusion, Western countries' interests and interventions in the Sahel are grounded, on the one hand, in objectives such as counterterrorism, energy security and migration management, while on the other hand generating local legitimacy problems, power asymmetries and new arenas of geopolitical competition. The security-centred approach of France, the EU and the United States, together with Russia's increasingly visible security partnerships, has turned the Sahel into a space where "competing security projects collide." This framework is of critical importance for understanding the impact of conflict and humanitarian tragedy in the Sahel on neighbouring countries and on global peace, which will be examined in the next section.

THE EFFECTS OF CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE SAHEL ON NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES AND WORLD PEACE

The deepening security and humanitarian crisis in the Sahel produces multilayered regional and global consequences that go far beyond the countries of the region. The spread of jihadist violence toward coastal West African states, the record levels of forced displacement, the reshaping of irregular migration routes, and vulnerabilities in nuclear energy supply chains based on uranium all make the Sahel crisis a strategic focal point for world peace and global governance.

Spillover of Regional Instability

In recent years, it has been increasingly underlined that violence in the Sahel is showing a "southward" expansion, particularly toward coastal West African countries such as Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Reports indicate that jihadist groups based in Burkina Faso regularly cross into northern Ghana and use this area as a logistical and medical support hub; although there have not yet been large-scale attacks in the coastal states, rising incidents in Benin and Togo point to growing security pressure. ACLED's 2025 field analysis shows that groups such as ISSP and JNIM have opened new "frontlines" along the Benin–Niger–Nigeria border corridor and that security incidents and attacks on civilians in border regions have increased markedly (ACLED, 2025). The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) likewise notes that the break of Sahel junta regimes from ECOWAS and the establishment of the "Alliance of Sahel States" (AES) have weakened the collective security architecture; it stresses that more than 500 violent incidents have been recorded in the coastal states (especially Benin and Togo), highlighting a deepening of regional instability.

European think tanks regard the "contagion risk" of Sahelian instability to coastal states as critical not only in terms of security but also in view of rising economic and humanitarian pressures. In EUROPEUM's[‡] strategic culture analysis, the increase in fragility in the Sahel is said to heighten the risk that terrorism, irregular migration and illicit activities will spread to coastal states and Europe. In this framework, the Sahel crisis is described as a "regional seismic zone" that erodes the West African regional security architecture and renders the traditional mediating role of ECOWAS increasingly contested.

Humanitarian Crisis, Forced Displacement and Food Insecurity

Today the Sahel is the site of one of the fastest-growing displacement crises in the world. UNHCR's Global Trends report shows that, as of the end of 2024, there were 123 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, a significant share of whom are concentrated in West and Central Africa. According to UNHCR and partner organisations, by the end of 2024 approximately 3.8 million people were forcibly displaced in the Sahel region alone (UNHCR, 2025).

UNHCR's Sahel Emergency page notes that there are 921,800 refugees and asylum seekers in the region, in addition to around 2.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Sahel countries, and emphasises that 62% of this population consists of women and children. Looking at West and Central Africa as a whole, UNHCR's June 2025 report indicates that the number of people who are forcibly displaced or in a stateless situation has reached 12.7 million, representing a 48% increase over the past five years (UNHCR, 2022).

This mass displacement places severe pressure on the fragile infrastructure, public services and local labour markets of neighbouring countries. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly's report on the Sahel stresses that refugee and IDP flows strain education, health and housing capacities in border regions that already suffer from limited resources, and that this can generate tensions between local communities and displaced populations (NATO PA, 2020). At the same time, security risks and climate shocks are deepening the food security crisis. UNHCR and other humanitarian actors report that millions of people in and around the Sahel are facing acute food insecurity, and that restricted access to agricultural production areas due to insecurity is increasing the risk of famine (Mishra, 2025). In this respect, the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel is not merely a matter of "aid", but a structural security issue that directly affects the legitimacy and capacity of regional states.

Migration Routes, European Security and Global Governance

The Sahel constitutes a key intersection point on irregular migration routes from Africa to North Africa and, via the Mediterranean, to Europe. The NATO PA report identifies terrorism and irregular migration as the two main reasons for the international community's interest in the Sahel, and emphasises that addressing these two phenomena within the same policy framework often generates conceptual and practical problems.

From the perspective of the European Union, the Sahel is a focal area for policies shaped along the "security–migration–development" axis. A study by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) shows that the EU's financial and military engagement in the Sahel has exceeded 5 billion euros,

[‡] EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe.

with the fight against irregular migration and border management occupying a central place within this engagement (Venturi, 2017). Frontex's 2024/2025 Annual Risk Analysis assigns a special place, among future threats, to the potential impact on European security of irregular migration, cross-border crime and terrorist activities originating from the Sahel. According to data from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), the first quarter of 2025 saw a 30% decrease in irregular crossings into Europe compared with the same period of the previous year; however, it is noted that this decline is largely the result of deterrence-focused policies and that it encourages a shift toward more dangerous routes. Europe's strategy of "externalising" migration has had severe humanitarian consequences, including increased human rights violations and deadly sea crossings in countries such as Libya and Tunisia (Frontex, 2025).

This picture shows that instability in the Sahel is linked to world peace and global governance not only through the volume of migration, but also through the normative framework of migration management. Pressures originating in the Sahel call into question the EU's human rights obligations, the balance between border security and humanitarian protection, and the future of the global refugee regime.

Energy Security, Uranium and Global Supply Chains

One of the most strategic global implications of the Sahel concerns nuclear energy supply chains and the uranium market, particularly via Niger. According to various analyses, Niger accounts for approximately 4–5% of global uranium production, making it the third-largest producer in Africa and one of the key suppliers worldwide.

A 2025 report by the Shaf Center notes that major mines such as Arlit and Akouta, as well as the Imouraren project, are critical not only for Niger but also for Europe – particularly France – in terms of nuclear energy security, and that Imouraren is considered one of the largest known uranium deposits in the world (Hassan, 2025). According to Nuclear Business Platform's "Sahel's Nuclear Gambit" analysis, Niger's output constitutes roughly 5% of global uranium supply and lies at the heart of plans by the AES bloc countries in the Sahel (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso) to establish a regional nuclear fuel chain through Russia's Rosatom.

Developments following the 2023 coup have made vulnerabilities in uranium supply chains more concrete. Analysts stress that the military coup in Niger has created risks for uranium supplies to the EU and that, should political tensions escalate into regional intervention, this could trigger a broader migration and energy crisis (Ninajova, 2023). In 2024, Reuters reported that French nuclear fuel company Orano had lost control of the Somair mine and that the suspension of production in Niger was straining the company's supply plans, forcing Orano to shift more heavily toward production in Canada and Kazakhstan. In 2025, AP News reported via Reuters that the Nigerien government had nationalised Somair and accused Orano of "unfair profit-sharing"; this move was presented as signalling a new period in which resource nationalism and geopolitical tensions increasingly intersect.

In a context where global uranium demand is expected to double by 2040, political instability and geopolitical realignments in key supplier countries such as Kazakhstan and Niger are seen as generating serious supply risks for Western energy companies. An analysis published in Discovery Alert notes that the expropriation of uranium assets in Niger could lead to disproportionate price volatility in markets, even if Niger's production represents only about 5% of global supply, due to high concentration and rising demand (Hidayat, 2025).

A 2025 report in Le Monde shows that, as Western companies' presence on the ground weakens, China has rapidly expanded its influence in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger through lithium, gold and uranium projects; this is shifting resource competition in Africa toward a Russia–China axis and creating new vulnerabilities for Europe and the United States.

These developments indicate that the political and security crisis in the Sahel may have important consequences for the global energy transition based on nuclear power, as well as for nuclear security and non-proliferation. Disruptions in uranium supply chains constitute a strategic source of stress particularly for European countries seeking to accelerate their energy transition.

Global Peace, Normative Frameworks and Multilateral Responses

The crisis in the Sahel has become one of the priority items on the international peace and security agenda for the United Nations and other multilateral organisations. UN Security Council and General Assembly documents emphasise that the combination of terrorism, criminal networks, irregular migration and climatic pressures in the Sahel threatens peace and security both in Africa and in the Mediterranean basin.

European think tanks likewise increasingly conceptualise the Sahel as a "multi-actor arena of competition." The 2025 EUISS briefing notes that, due to terrorism, human and drug trafficking, and international rivalry over uranium and other minerals, the region remains strategically important for the EU (Klyszcz and Marangio, 2025). As highlighted in EUROPEUM's work, instability in the Sahel has the potential to indirectly affect European security through terrorism, irregular migration and illegal activities, and therefore must be addressed not only with military tools but within a comprehensive framework that prioritises good governance, human rights and sustainable development.

UNHCR data on global trends in forced displacement show that the Sahel and its surrounding regions constitute a key "focal area" within the landscape of growing displacement and cross-border crises worldwide. In this respect, the Sahel is not only a problem of African security and development, but also a normative test ground at the intersection of global solidarity, the refugee protection regime, energy security and climate justice.

CONCLUSION

This study has analysed the contradiction between natural wealth and the chronic cycle of violence and poverty in the Sahel within a comprehensive framework extending from the region's geographical and demographic structure to its conflict dynamics, Western interventions, and the regional/global repercussions of the crisis. The findings show that the Sahel cannot be explained by a single variable; rather, it constitutes a multilayered crisis zone in which the resource curse, fragile statehood, climate pressures, criminal economies and post-colonial power relations are tightly intertwined.

The geographical and demographic analysis demonstrates that, due to the Sahel's semi-arid transitional character, livelihoods based on agriculture and pastoralism are highly vulnerable to climate change; at the same time, the region, which hosts one of the youngest and fastest-growing populations in the world, is caught between a "demographic opportunity" and a "demographic risk." UNDP and OECD data indicate that economic poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation and uncontrolled urbanisation deepen food insecurity and social tensions.

The conceptual framework has shown how resource wealth is transformed into a conflict economy through non-transparent natural resource governance and narrow, elitist power blocs, and how weak/fragile state structures, due to their limited capacity to provide security and justice, create wide room for manoeuvre for jihadist organisations and militias. Jihadist groups draw legitimacy from narratives of unjust resource distribution and state violence, positioning themselves at the local level as alternative providers of order.

Although Western engagement in the Sahel is grounded in strategic objectives such as counterterrorism, energy security and the management of irregular migration, it has produced legitimacy problems on the ground and new arenas of geopolitical competition. French-led military operations, EU missions and the United States' counterterrorism programme have failed to stop armed militias and jihadist groups; prolonged foreign military presence and limited socio-economic gains have strengthened perceptions of "neo-colonial intervention" in the region. This legitimacy gap has enabled new actors, above all Russia, to emerge as alternative security providers and has turned the Sahel into a theatre of multi-actor, multi-aligned competition.

The effects of the Sahel crisis are reflected, through forced displacement, irregular migration and food insecurity, in the fragile infrastructures of neighbouring countries and in the rise of security-oriented narratives in Europe's domestic politics. Mineral and energy resources—in particular uranium—place the Sahel at the centre of debates on the global energy transition, nuclear security and supply security.

At the policy level this points to the need (i) not to base the security approach solely on military instruments, but to adopt holistic strategies that address structural drivers such as poverty, exclusion and poor governance; (ii) to transform natural resource governance around the principles of transparency, accountability and the generation of local value added; and (iii) to view the Sahel not merely as a "terrorism and migration corridor," but as a shared security and development space that requires regional ownership and multilateral cooperation. In this sense, the Sahel is not only a regional file, but also a test ground for global peace, multilateralism and the agendas of climate and justice.

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