

**Houston Area
Model United Nations
Standard Committee**



SPECPOL

**Chair | Manan Khandelwal
Standard Committee Background Guide B
Houston Area Model United Nations 48
February 2-3, 2023**

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Note to Delegates

Delegates,

My name is Manan Khandelwal, and I am ecstatic to serve as your chair at HAMUN 48 this year for the Special, Political, and Decolonization committee!

A little about me: I am a freshman potential computer science major with planned minors in business and statistics at Texas A&M University. As for Model UN, I attended seven conferences as a delegate in high school and chaired one conference, and even served in a leadership position two years in a row. Although I am not a part of the Texas A&M Collegiate Model UN team yet, I

continue to keep myself involved in the activity by staying updated with current events, and of course, chairing HAMUN, which I already plan to repeat in the future!

In this committee, we will be debating over the establishment of state responsibility for objects and activities in space, and terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa. Both topics carry a lot of weight in terms of importance to our future, which is why I look forward to overseeing a fruitful and inclusive debate that churns out amazing, creditable ideas!

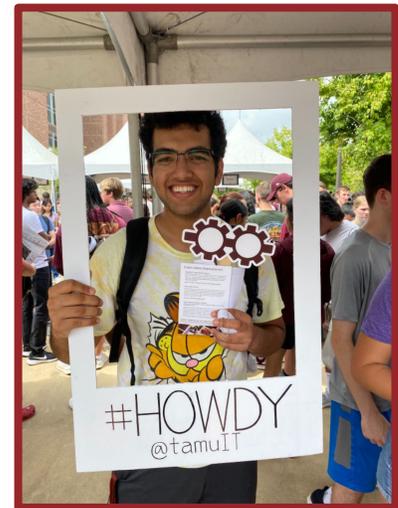
My expectations for all of you as delegates are not to know everything, nor to be the first to signal a motion every time. Instead, I expect you to have fun debating topics you truly enjoy and want to learn more about, and the best way to do that is to simply stay updated and ask questions whenever you can!

If this is your first time at HAMUN, welcome and thank you for choosing SPECPOL! If you are a returning delegate, welcome back, and I hope to see how you can use your experience to shape this committee! If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me and I will do my best to get back to you ASAP. Good luck, and I will (hopefully) see all of you in-person in February!

Best wishes,

Manan Khandelwal

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Topic Overview

Topic A: Curbing Terrorism across Sub-Saharan Africa

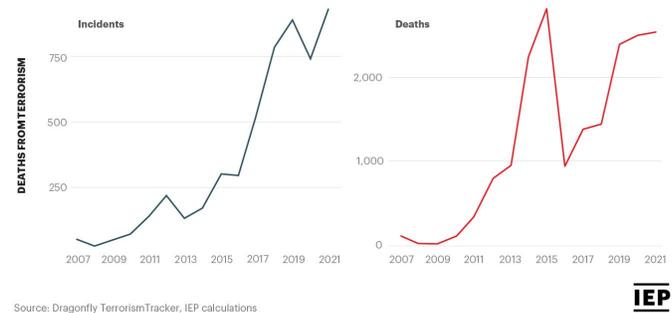
The Sahel is the strip of land under the Saharan Desert but above Central Africa, which encompasses southern Mauritania, northern Senegal, central Mali, northern Burkina Faso, the extreme south of Algeria, Niger, the extreme north of Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea (1). Originally a primary sector economy with most of its economic output consisting of crops, a major drought between 1968 and 1974 plunged millions into deeper poverty and started a mass famine. Another drought then struck the Sahel in 2010, leading to mass crop failure, starvation, famine, respiratory and gastrointestinal disease, dehydration, and record-breaking temperatures this time (2)(3). Over time, rapid desertification from the north, overgrazing, climate warming, and natural soil erosion have all reduced the economic output of the region, and lack of action from the government is one small reason out of dozens that led to the growth of terrorism in the region.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, terrorism is defined as the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against citizens, in the pursuit of political aims, and is enlisted as one of the most serious threats to global peace and security by the United Nations. Attacks and threats from terrorist groups have become commonplace in the 21st century,

including but not limited to 9/11 in the US, the Boko Haram uprising in Nigeria around 2009-2015, the Mogadishu attacks in Somalia, and the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai, India. However, one region in the world stands out, as it is quickly emerging to become the global epicenter of terrorism. As of March 2022, sub-Saharan Africa now accounts for 48% of global terrorism deaths compared to 1% in 2007 and hosts some of the world's fastest-growing and deadliest terrorist groups: Islamic State (IS), Ansaru, Al Qaida, Boko Haram, JAS, and more (4). The graph above is a depiction of this dramatic rise of terrorism in the region between 2007 and 2021 (5).

The lack of information about the crisis within the African population is also a matter of concern. Terrorist attacks are vastly underreported in the media because of threats by groups and the overreporting of Western news in the media, but also because media outlets in Africa are fewer in number and less well-funded. Some data is unreported because the conventional definitions of terrorism exclude activities sponsored or tolerated by governments, which is also common in the Sahel.

Incidents and deaths from terrorism in the Sahel, 2007-2021



Topic Overview

Of course, steps have been taken to attempt and curb the spread of crime in the area. The G5, a coalition between the Heads of State of France, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, was founded in 2014, and operates with the goals of fighting against terrorism, strengthening the capabilities of the Sahel States' armed forces, supporting the return of administrations in the territory, and assisting in development (6). The region also receives support from the UN during insurgencies such as the Boko Haram crisis and is a hotly debated topic and international conferences to determine the degree of assistance needed.

Despite all these measures and attempts to curb terrorism in the region, it still runs rampant in the streets of each country in sub-Saharan Africa, and the threat will spread throughout the continent, if not the world, if strict action is not proposed and undertaken at the earliest.

History

After the Arab Spring and the Libyan Civil War in 2011, several other uprisings began in other countries, especially in the Sahel region. Here are a few examples:

- **Mali:** The Tuareg, a large ethnic group that inhabits the Sahel, began to demand greater autonomy and eventually independence from Mali in 2011 by unofficially declaring their homeland in northern Mali, which they called Azawad (9). Two insurgent organizations - the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and the Islamist Ansar Dine - were subsequently formed from Tuareg rebels to fight against the Malian government. However, Ansar Dine and MUJAO (the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa) began imposing strict sharia law in conquered territories, which came into conflict with the MNLA. In turn, the French government, the Malian government, and the MNLA aligned to push back the Islamic insurgent groups, which succeeded but converted them into active terrorist organizations waiting to strike at the right moment (10). Since March, consistent fighting in the northern regions of Mopti and Gao between terrorist groups have caused around a thousand civilian deaths and have displaced tens of thousands more (11). Additionally, France announced the withdrawal of its last remaining forces from Operation Barkhane on August 15th, 2022, which is symbolic of the growing threat to the Malian capital (more about Barkhane below).
- **Niger:** Niger currently has an ongoing civil conflict between the federal government and Salafi jihadist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (12). It also mainly fights Boko Haram insurgents, but the main cause of the civil war is a spillover of ideologies and motivation from the Malian War.
- **Burkina Faso:** The wars in Mali and Niger also spilled over to Burkina Faso in 2015, beginning with an attack by Boko Haram members. In 2016, another insurgent group (Ansarul Islam) was created, which led to a spike in attacks thereafter. Recently, this crisis has also spilled over into neighboring nations Benin and Togo, after terrorists attacked a national park in Benin in February 2022 and a military base in Togo in May 2022.

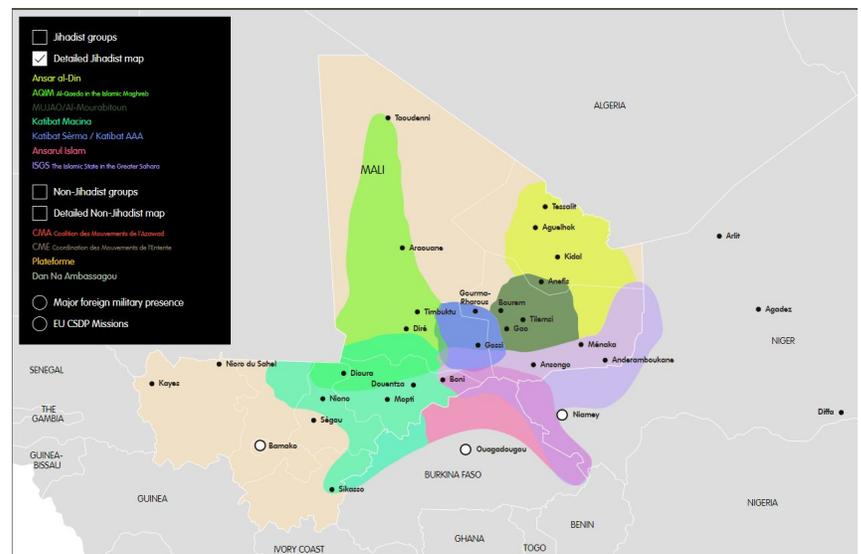
The key terrorist groups in this crisis are:

- **Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS)** - Generated by the outgrowth of a schism within MUJAO, this group pledged its allegiance to ISIS in 2016 (13). Since then, the organization has been operating in western Niger, northeastern Mali, and Burkina Faso, while supporting and likely even working with JNIM (although they have also fought against each other in the past). In recent news, ISGS killed 42 and wounded 22 Malian soldiers in an attack in Tessit, which is now the deadliest attack against the Malian military since 2019. They also lost 37 of their own militants (14).

History

- Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) - JNIM is an umbrella coalition of al-Qaeda aligned groups headed by a Tuareg militant leader, and regularly claims responsibility for attacks throughout Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. JNIM's aim is to drive foreign forces (such as the UN and France) out of the nation and to impose a theocracy based off of Islam and while it has regularly faced losses in skirmishes against the militaries, it continues to wreak havoc on civilian lives as one of the largest terrorist organizations in the Sahel (15).
- Ansar ul-Islam - Beginning as a local insurgent group in the northern provinces of Burkina Faso, it quickly expanded to conduct terrorist attacks in the rest of the country and even in Mali (16). It is not as large as any of the other groups (only around 300-350 members), but the group has claimed responsibility for attacks such as those on two police stations in Tongomayel and Baraboulé in Burkina Faso in 2017 (17).
- Islamic State West Africa Province - A splinter of Boko Haram, ISWAP is currently waging a guerilla war across northeastern Nigeria and around Lake Chad. Unlike other groups, they have established a symbiotic relationship with the Lake Chad area's inhabitants by treating the local Muslims better than Boko Haram. For example, they have dug wells and disciplined abusive soldiers in exchange for an acceptable form of taxation, and some even consider them to be more supportive than the Nigerian government and army since the insurgency began in 2009 (18). As of 2021, it has been at war with Boko Haram, and has launched attacks against them in a struggle for power in the region (19).

- Boko Haram - Like JNIM, Boko Haram (loosely translated to "western education is forbidden") is a Nigeria-based terrorist organization committed to overthrowing the Nigerian government and replacing it with an Islam-based order. Since Abubakar Shekau rose as the group's leader in 2010, Boko Haram has demonstrated increasingly dangerous capabilities, such as the use of explosive devices and suicide bombers against targets including Christians, security and police forces, the media, schools, politicians, and more. After the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls in 2014 in Borno State, Nigeria, a large regional counterterrorism offensive ripped Boko Haram off its strongholds and pushed them back to the Lake Chad region, which is where they remain active today (20).



A map of Mali showing different terrorist groups across the country

Actions taken

Coalitions such as the African Union and the G5 Group, as well as countries like France have been the key players in uniting to support the cause.

One of the most recent actions that the G5 group has taken, for example, is the creation of the International Coalition of the Sahel in January 2020, consisting of the Heads of State of Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Chad, Mauritania, and France, the United Nations Secretary-General, the President of the European Council, the European Union High Representative, the Chairperson of the African Union, and the Secretary General of La Francophonie (French for a group of French-speaking countries) (21). It has been hailed as a strong sign of solidarity within the Sahel states and serves to guarantee long-term support, symbolize the continued effort of the G5 to combat terrorism, facilitate the exchange of diplomatic talks, address all issues of the crisis, allow cooperation for direct approaches to the problem, and facilitate full cross-border humanitarian aid to get help where it is needed the most.

Speaking of France, the country has a history of its own in counterterrorism efforts across the region. One of its most successful missions was Operation Serval (January 2013 - July 2014), which sought to stop jihadist expansion and oust terrorists, especially in the North of Mali in response to requests for strategic assistance by the Malian government (22). There were two

facilitators to Serval's success. First, the French Government had already taken several diplomatic steps to shed light on the Malian crisis since 2011, and they were backed with human and capital resources by the European Union and the United Nations. Secondly, the operation had clearly defined, locally popular, and vastly effective goals, which is why other countries modeled similar strategies on this mission and France made the decision to expand. Although it didn't entirely solve the problem, the mission accomplished its primary goal of repelling the terrorists.

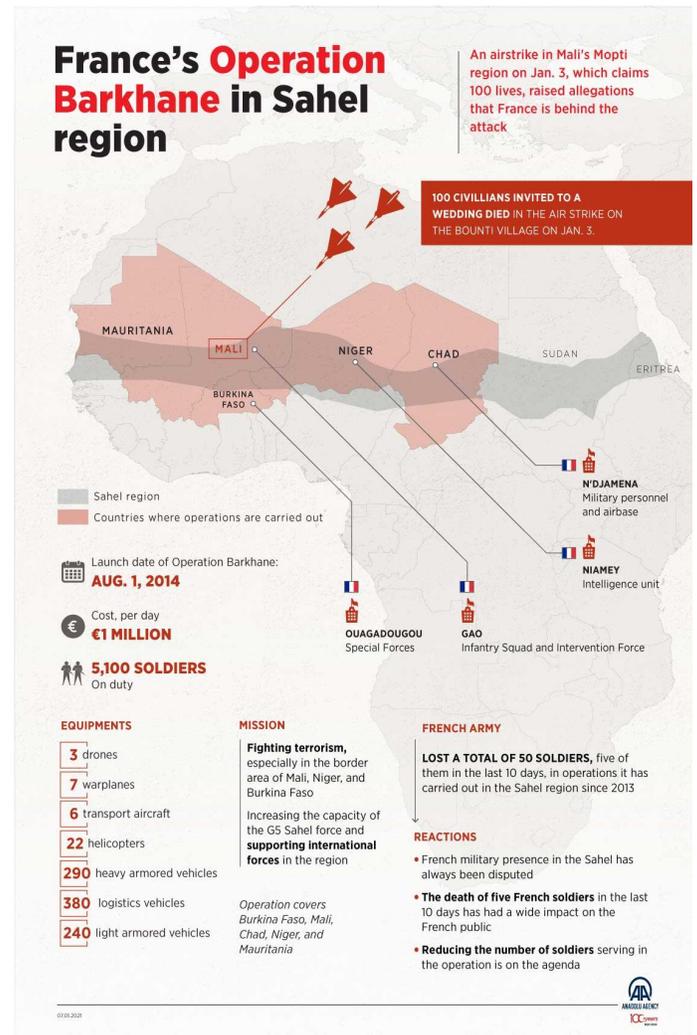


Actions taken

Modeled after Serval, the French military next launched Operation Barkhane, which had the same basic aim but with greater geographic coverage and much more articulate functions to curb the spread of terrorism. Barkhane rapidly became France's largest overseas operation by establishing bases across the Sahel for aircraft takeoff/landing, intelligence collection, and army forward posts, all with a budget of nearly 600 million euros per year (23). However, French President Emmanuel Macron decided to withdraw his forces from Mali in February 2022 after eight years of a war with little to no gain, several coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Chad, and a breakdown of diplomatic relations between the Malian and French governments. Geopolitical experts have cited this withdrawal as a massive failure on part of the nation, primarily due to a misunderstanding of local conflict dynamics, serious political mistakes, operational errors, and an overall failure to contain terrorism from spreading to Burkina Faso and Niger (24). The French government has stated that this move is merely a relocation of the nation's 5100 troops dedicated to the operation and will continue to stand by the Sahel region's side in their fight against terrorism.

The emphasis on more pressing situations and escalations around the world, such as the Russo-Ukrainian War, the current global inflation and impending recession, means that the Sahel stands at a risk of being overseen and being left to deal with this crisis on their own. Regular ambushes and military attacks

continue across the region, jeopardizing civilian lives due to the lack of a functional, democratic form of government in most states, which is why the world must act and increase their efforts to reduce the threat faced by the African people and remove the hindrances to the region's growth on the world stage.



Questions to Consider

1. What are the physical and/or ideological similarities and differences between all of the aforementioned terrorist groups?
2. What are some examples of the complex geopolitical relations that the existing terrorist groups exploit to operate under?
3. To what extent should international powers intervene in this crisis? Should a form of neo-imperialism be allowed to stabilize the Sahel?
4. Are local governments capable of defending themselves and their territorial integrity, and should they continue to depend on international forces for assistance?
5. How will the withdrawal from French forces in Mali affect the rest of the region?

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