JUNIOR ACADEMY MODEL UN XI

SOCHUM

TOPIC GUIDE

Scarlett Oh
Isabella Oh

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Welcome, delegates!

My name is Scarlett Oh, and I am a freshman at the Bergen County Academies studying in the Academy for the Advancement of Science and Technology. I will be one of your co-chairs for the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee for JAMUN XI.

During this very conference two years ago, my Model UN journey began. Attending my first-ever conference, I was overwhelmed as a middle schooler. Everything felt new, intimidating, and out of my comfort zone. I barely raised my placard, stumbled through my opening speech, and ended the day feeling like I hadn't done well at all. But instead of discouraging me, that experience lit a fire. Next year, I returned to JAMUN stronger than ever—more prepared, confident, and determined. That growth ultimately motivated me to join the BCA Model UN team the following year. From there, MUN became a space where I honed my leadership, research, and communications skills. Now, after having come full circle, my goal is to help create a similarly impactful experience. I want to create a memory that encourages delegates to step outside their comfort zones, embrace challenges, and grow. It's important to recognize that making mistakes is part of learning and that no delegate starts perfect.

Looking back, thinking how far things have come since my first JAMUN is wild. What started as a shaky conference turned into countless amazing opportunities; I got to staff for AMUN, attend WAMUNC, and grow more with each experience. Being offered those chances helped me build skills I never imagined I'd gain, and now, I'm ready than ever to chair! I can't wait to meet everyone and help make this conference memorable. :-)

Warm regards,
Scarlett, your SOCHUM co-chair

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Welcome to JAMUN XI!

I'm Isabella Oh, a freshman at the Bergen County Academies in the Academy for the Advancement of Medical Science Technology, and I will be your co-chair for the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural committee. I'm currently an active member of the BCA Model UN Travel Team and have attended conferences at the collegiate level, all thanks to JAMUN itself!

The two JAMUN conferences I attended in middle school were almost perfect, but I wish I had done something differently, which you delegates should consider. Don't be afraid to make mistakes; JAMUN is an opportunity to learn, build experience, and discover new passions. I've come to learn that, sincerely, these experiences will be much more valuable than the awards themselves. Raise your placard, make on-demand speeches, and speak with new delegates!

Beyond the activity itself, MUN has given me priceless friendships, experiences, and skills I wouldn't trade for anything else. I've also made some amazing memories with my twin sister, who also happens to be your co-chair! I hope and will work so that this conference will help you explore MUN further, whether it is for the remainder of your middle school career or a new one in high school. Please let me know if you have any questions about MUN, BCA, or anything else; I'd be beyond excited to converse with you!

Best regards,
Isabella, your SOCHUM co-chair

INTRODUCTION

Terrorists affiliated with ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) in the Central Sahel have continually inflicted violence on civilians and national institutions. Such terrorism has grown into a serious issue, adding pressure to unstable regions that are currently battling corrupt governments, poverty, and environmental stress. Extremist groups have further taken advantage of this instability, attacking national institutions and 2.8 million internally displaced individuals in the region.

While foreign governments and organizations such as the G5 Sahel and Operation Barkhane have stepped up with military, security, and development-oriented tasks, a significant challenge remains: How do you keep individuals safe without violating their rights? Past efforts have leaned hard on military movements and emergency laws, but these measures have caused more harm than good, leading to societal mistrust, wrongful arrests, and an increased death toll. Delegates need to think carefully about whether current strategies are genuinely working or merely creating new problems. The focus has to shift toward approaches that reduce violence without causing further instability, protecting human rights and humanitarian aid just as much as national security.

TOPIC:
Addressing the rise of terrorism in the Sahel while safeguarding human rights in counterterrorism operations

Topic History

Origin:

The Sahel displacement conflict involves the Central Sahel, consisting of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, with 2.7 million forced to flee their homes and 13.4 million in need of humanitarian aid [14]. Since gaining independence in the 1960s, countries in the Sahel have lost strong, legitimate governance and economies, in addition to worsening climate change. Consequently, violent extremism surged within the region, even spilling to countries outside of the Sahel region. Finally, outbreaks of violence in Northern Mali and the Arab Spring, including the breakdown of the Libyan state, loosened the border, allowing weapons to be smuggled from Libya to Mali. This ultimately led to the proliferation of the conflict; actors such as jihadist and insurgent groups took advantage of this instability and inflicted terrorism on civilians, attempting to spread their ideologies. However, other actors inflicting violence, such as communal, ethnic, self-defense militias, state forces, and non-state forces, must be noted [15]. As a result of all these factors, millions started migrating from the region and became displaced.

Shortly after Libya's fall, the Libyan Revolt of 2011, otherwise known as the Libyan Civil War occurred; there were uprisings against Muammar Gaddafi, who had held power for over 40 years. The Libyans protested with peaceful demonstrations similar to Egypt and Tunisia's movements; shortly, though, this escalated into violence as rebels formed the National Transitional Council (NTC). Eventually, NATO intervened, launching airstrikes to weaken Gaddafi's forces. Even after Gaddafi's capture and death, Libya remained an unstable region [38].

One significant sub-issue concerning the Sahel conflict is the ongoing Mali War. After the fall of Muammar Gaddafi (head of government and military in Libya), armed fighters flowed into the Sahel, especially Mali. Violence had substantially increased within the area. Although the Sahel region faces numerous, various conflicts, the Mali War stands out as particularly significant. It has become the concentration of most global counterterrorism efforts. Since the beginning of this conflict, the war has destabilized far more regions than Mali. Aggression spilled over to neighboring countries such as Burkina Faso and Niger; the increased scope of affected people magnified the severity of the situation [2]. Thus, the necessity to solve was recognized as more than imperative. [10] [18]

Topic History (Cont.)

Perpetrators:

As previously mentioned, jihadist groups took advantage of the Sahel region's instability. One prime example of such a group is ISIS-Sahel. Although originally affiliated with al-Qaeda, it pledged allegiance to ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) instead in 2015, receiving acknowledgement as a branch in 2022. Upon pledging allegiance, ISIS-Sahel aimed to replace governments in the Sahel with rule by Islamic law, aligning with ISIS values [4]. Starting in 2016, ISIS-Sahel has targeted Burkinabe, French, Malian, and Nigerian troops, even killing U.S. and Russian military personnel in the U.S.-Nigerian military patrol and the Wagner Group, which was largely succeeded by the Africa Corps in 2023. Utilizing ambushes, armed assaults, mortar attacks, roadside bombs, vehicle-borne explosives, suicide bombers, and kidnap-for-ransom operations, to target local security forces, civilians, government officials, humanitarian workers, and schools [4]. Since 2019, ISIS-Sahel has competed for resources and territory with the Sahelian branch of al-Qaeda, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, which operates in the same area as ISIS-Sahel: Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger [4].

Al-Qaeda's Sahelian branch, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), formed in 2017 after four extremist groups operating in Mali— Ansar al-Din, al-Murabitun, the Macina Liberation Front (MLF), and the Sahara Emirate subgroup of al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)— merged and pledged allegiance to the amir of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Following al-Qaeda's global jihadist ideology, JNIM seeks to de-Westernize Africa and create a Salafi-Islamist state in West Africa [16]. Attacking civilians, French, multinational, and local security forces, JNIM's approach to terrorizing the Sahel region is expanding influence across West Africa by exploiting economic weaknesses and social divisions. Specifically, local recruitment is at the core of JNIM's operations, especially in economically disadvantaged regions where there is little state penetration. By playing on local grievances and offering services or protection, the group gains support and legitimacy. This enables them to integrate into communities, sustain operations, and challenge state authority with greater ease.JNIM gains funds by ransoming captives, taxing locals, smuggling weapons, and extorting human and drug traffickers [16].

Topic History (Cont.)

Perpetrators:

Caption: Al-Qaeda's Sahelian branch, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) [37]

Despite their differences, these jihadist groups operate similarly; they have assailed citizens with sieges, threats, kidnappings, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and landmines. After bombarding an area with these mechanisms, terrorists have blocked humanitarian aid to citizens, causing starvation. Moreover, taxes have been imposed on civilians by force, alongside persistent destruction and looting, including places of worship, schools, health centers, food reserves, and water services. In addition to military violence, these terrorist groups have enforced abusive ways of governance, imposing their sexist interpretations of Sharia law or Islam's legal system [2].

Combatting Terrorism:

Past attempts to combat these conflicts have included regional and international counterterrorism initiatives focusing on military operations, security cooperation, and addressing similar root causes. The G5 Sahel, a regional, intergovernmental organization founded in 2014 with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, established the G5 Sahel Force in 2017; this comprised troops that came together to address the growing threat of militant groups in the region [7]. Its main objectives are collecting, processing, exploiting, and sharing relevant criminal information, ultimately hindering potential threats to peace and security and encouraging development in the Sahel region [17].

Topic History (Cont.)

Combatting Terrorism:

Similarly, Operation Barkhan was a military operation aimed at combating terrorism and improving security within the Sahel [8]. Being France's largest overseas operation, its main priority is counterterrorism and killing jihadist leaders; forces in this operation engage in combat patrols alongside partner militias, intelligence gathering and training, and local development campaigns [19]. In addition, through adopting resolution 2100, the United Nations Security Council launched a peacekeeping mission known as MINUSMA (the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali), supporting political processes and security-related tasks within the country [13]. This mission supported Mali's transitional authorities in stabilizing the country and implementing the transitional roadmap [20]. Moreover, through the adoption of resolution 2164, MINUSMA would focus on ensuring security, stabilization, and protection of civilians, supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation, assisting the reestablishment of State authority, the rebuilding of the security sector, the promotion and protection of human rights in that country, etc. [20].

Lastly, INTERPOL has supported counterterrorism through initiatives to utilize its policing abilities in the G5 Sahel and INTERPOL National Central Bureau countries. For instance, Project FIRST shares terrorists' biometric data, such as facial images, while Project WATCHMAKER provides information on entities involved in the unlawful use of chemicals and explosives [3]. INTERPOL's support, however, consists of many more strategic objectives and projects.

Backlash & Ineffectiveness:

Although these missions and initiatives aimed to prevent violence, they ultimately did the opposite. In particular, the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) aimed to combat Islamist insurgent groups and restore state authority, while the Russian paramilitary group Africa Corps aimed to support allied regimes, expand geopolitical influence, and access natural resources. Both, despite these initiatives, perpetrated war crimes against humanity, such as summary executions, rape and sexual violence, pillaging and torture against civilians [2]. Furthermore, these groups were accused of the systemic murders of the Tuareg and Fulani ethnic groups, who have been caught in the crossfire of counterinsurgency operations.

Topic History (Cont.)

Backlash & Ineffectiveness:

Similar to the FAMA efforts, Operation Serval was launched in 2013 to stop the advance of Islamist militants from northern Mali toward the south. This was due to failed sub-rebellions allowing Islamist groups to strike stronger, which eventually led to France deciding to take action by executing Operation Serval. The French military, with the political assistance of the Malian government, was able to push out Islamist groups from dense, urban areas into remote locations. Thanks to this movement, the risks of violence decreased, helping the tensions diminish. Contradicting its effects, some yet questioned the efficiency of this operation as it allowed militants and extremist groups to develop in terms of technology, strategy, and power in the name of retaliation.

Although the movement completed its task, the operation is often considered controversial. Protection of the area itself did not significantly increase and was not set in stone, while terrorist schemes increasingly intensified and were always one step ahead of modern policy. [18] U.N. and E.U. counterterrorism efforts have also had severe flaws. For example, both the French military Operation Barkhane and the European Union's Common Security and Defense Policy's (CSDP) efforts to train the Sahelian Forces have been deemed failures, alongside the lack of reforms toward democratic control of the army [8].

In addition, the Sahelian army needs structural reforms, as its "train and equip" programmes have led to the development of military coups. Furthermore, the complex MINUSMA mission had focused solely on Northern Mali instead of Central Mali as a whole. On top of that, its deteriorating relationship with Mali as a whole led to the mission's failure [13].

These military initiatives and their failures could be heavily attributed to the misunderstanding of the multidimensional nature of the Sahel crisis. To prevent the spread of these radical Islamic groups, the comprehension of rival affiliations like al-Qaeda and ISIS-Sahel— and how they operate under different ideologies and mechanisms— is necessary. On the other hand, groups and their political rationales have been denied or overlooked, hindering the definition of political objectives in military operations; many insurgents claim to be fighting for representation and independence [8].

Topic History (Cont.)

Additionally, the acknowledgement of diverse actors besides jihadist groups, such as separatist political and military entities, self-defense groups, community-based militias, and common criminals, was lacking.

Beyond this, the states of many nations have been struggling as well with the alarming rise of coups over the past few years, which came to be known as the coup belt. Five military coups succeeded in five countries, in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, and Gabon; Tunisia, Chad, and Sudan had constitutional coups. Simultaneously, coup attempts were thwarted in Gambia, the Central African Republic, Sierra Leone, and the island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe [30]. These coups were said to overthrow the previous regimes for their corruption, economic mismanagement, and failure to confront armed separatist and jihadi movements that constitute a serious challenge to the region's states [30]. Not only has the coup belt undermined regional counterterrorism efforts, but it has also shifted its alliances to Russian forces (i.e., the Wagner Group) and worsened displacement due to deteriorating economic conditions.

Caption: Military coups strike strongly; attention is brought to the world stage [37].

Current Situation

Currently, many counterterrorism initiatives have come to see their failures and are drawing out of the Sahel region. For example, in 2023, the G5 Sahel and its force (FC-G5S) were dissolved after Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger's decision to leave the alliance. This mainly resulted from the alliance's meager impacts on the conflict as well as Paris's unfittingly large role in the intervention [21]. Additionally, these nations turned into juntas with Mali in 2021, Burkina Faso in 2022, and Niger in 2023, forming the Alliance of the Sahel States; it allied with Russia and utilized forces from the Wagner Group instead of Operation Barkhane to fight insurgents. Alliances such as ECOWAS became more fragmented after the formation of these alliances.

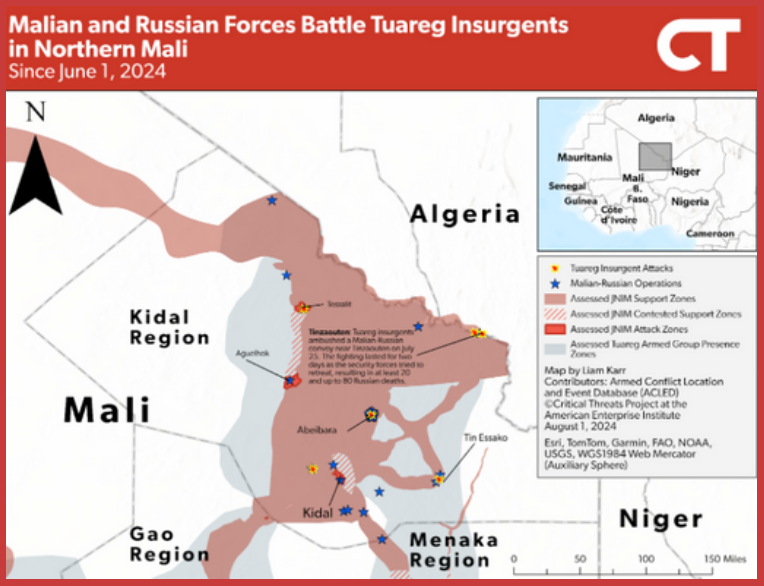
Furthermore, Operation Barkhane ended on November 9, 2022, due to criticism from Mali and other nations. It is universally regarded as a massive French failure; primarily, many report that France's counterinsurgency efforts have increased violence in the areas they traveled to. In one instance in 2021, French air forces mistook a wedding for a terrorist gathering, murdering 19 citizens [22]. Consequently, tensions became strained between France and Mali.

As French President Emmanuel Macron withdrew forces from Mali, he accused the Malian junta of not attempting to solve their growing security conflicts. On the other hand, the Malian junta accused France of their lack of loyalty, stating that this was the reason Mali was seeking aid from the Wagner Group [22]. However, both the Malian forces and the Wagner Group's failure at the Battle of Tinzaparin showed Russian forces' deficiencies.

However, violence hasn't decreased since the withdrawal of these inefficient groups. Known as the epicenter of terrorism, the Sahel represents 43% of global terrorism-related deaths in 2023, 7% more than the year prior [29]. Attacks worsened in 2024, with high-impact or mass-casualty attacks from jihadist groups such as ISIS-Sahel or JNIM. Furthermore, in 2025, the conflict's instability has been escalating not only in magnitude, but also geographically. In Burkina Faso and Mali, state forces have attacked civilians for providing support to jihadist groups. This has strengthened the jihadist groups, who act as protection against these hazardous state forces, and have an influence on the civilians.

Current Situation (Cont.)

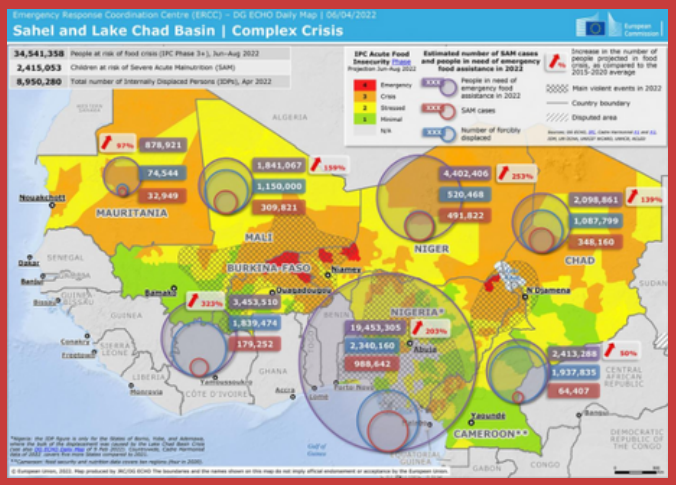
The status quo also suggests the introduction of new actors in the conflict, such as the previously discriminated Tuareg, Toubou, and other rebels across the borders of Mali and Niger. Although they currently hold little influence over civilians, experts believe they could soon overwhelm the already-flawed state military forces.



Caption: Map Displaying Malian and Russian Forces' Battles with Tuareg Insurgents in Northern Mali [9].

The Sahel conflict has increasingly impacted urban centers; militant groups then utilize less secure urban outskirts as gateways, strategically targeting these areas seems to maximize the militant ambushes' consequences. The security of such regions must be considered. Moreover, technological advances in the conflict, such as remote violence by non-state actors, pose further perils to human security and essential infrastructure [23].

Particularly, modified commercial drones for surveillance, reconnaissance, filming propaganda videos, and targeted strikes by state and non-state armed groups demonstrate the shift in the conflict's fighting tactics from traditional and rudimentary guerrilla warfare to emerging, sophisticated technology.



Map Displaying Acute Food Insecurity in the Sahel Region [27].

Due to instability, citizens are suffering from issues outside of terrorist strikes. Specifically, over 35 million people are currently struggling to find enough food in the Sahel region, including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Nigeria. Millions of children are at risk of malnutrition [27].

Current Situation (Cont.)

The EU is providing emergency food and nutrition assistance. Furthermore, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the price of food, fertilizers, and fuel has been increasing exponentially; particularly, 45 African and least developed countries import at least 1/3 of their wheat from Ukraine or Russia, with 18 of those importing at least 50% [27]. Dehydration has also been exacerbated with water availability dropping by 40% for approximately the last twenty years [28]. When the 2012 conflict in Mali led technical services to flee the north, access to water was destroyed, looted, or left to be abandoned. So, many migrated to where water was available, worsening the displacement crisis. When populations increase in the host villages offering shelter to those displaced, additional pressure is placed on the already scarce water resources [28]. Reconciliation efforts that aim to restore access to water and food are crucial to prevent further cases of displacement. These efforts will not only prevent suffering, but they will also allow a foundation for recovery and security to grow. Outside of starvation and dehydration conflicts, other armed initiatives have imposed social costs such as mass displacement, loss of intercommunal confidence, and breakdown of traditional social organizations.

Country/Delegate Policies

Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger:

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger's current policies on the Sahel focus on national sovereignty and regional cooperation. In 2022, the nation's approach to the Sahel conflict changed significantly due to the imbalance of foreign military control in the area. This led to a shift from Western alliances to greater self-reliance within bodies in the Sahel. Later, in collaboration with Mali and Niger, Burkina Faso established the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), a defense policy that targeted enhancing mutual security cooperation. The AES has worked together to deploy a greater military force that is equipped with better resources, such as weaponry, land, and intelligence, to address the extremist violence. [24]. Governments similarly turned to non-Western allies such as Russia and Turkey for support. These partners succeeded in doing so by providing military technology such as drones and technical aid. Outside of external affairs, military campaigns in the north increased in the north. [26]

Chad:

Chad, under President Mahamat Idriss Déby, ended its military pact with France and is diversifying partnerships, including with Hungary. These actions display Chad's goals to assert more independence and self-reliance within its military while also looking for trustworthy security alliances that will not build foreign leverage. It remains active in regional efforts through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and grapples with a major humanitarian crisis, hosting over 1.1 million refugees. Because of this issue, a significant strain on its sources and infrastructure complicated its efforts to advocate for humanitarian rights [31].

Mauritania:

Mauritania is a key advocate for conflict prevention and climate resilience in the Sahel, with a goal of a national peace model. This approach, which focuses on active campaigning, community engagement, and sustainable development, aims to address the root causes of instability in the region. Like Chad, the country faces challenges from refugees fleeing violence in Mali and other neighboring states, which strains its resources and infrastructure. Additionally, Mauritania's relations with Mali have become increasingly tense, due to security concerns and differing approaches to counterterrorism. [32]

Nigeria:

Nigeria continues to fight Islamist extremist groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP while navigating ethnic and religious violence domestically. A recent attack in Plateau State has escalated these internal tensions, highlighting the deepening divisions within the country. At the same time, Nigeria signed a security agreement with Niger to enhance cooperation despite past political rifts, signaling a desire for regional collaboration in counterterrorism efforts. Both Nigeria and Niger's policies reflect a balance between addressing internal instability and fostering security partnerships, with each country working to maintain national security while contributing to broader regional stability [33].

Russia:

Russia has deepened its involvement in the Sahel by supporting the military of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, forming the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). It has also deployed private military contractors, such as the Africa Corps (which succeeded the Wagner Group), in exchange for access to natural resources. These partnerships are an effort by Russia to gain greater geopolitical leverage. Likewise, Moscow has hosted AES leaders and confirmed cooperation with their governments, even accusing Ukraine of supporting terrorism in the region. While Russian backing offers an alternative to former Western partners, it has sparked concerns about long-term stability due to its militarized approach. It is argued that Russia's presence may only deepen the region's instability [34].

China:

China has expanded its presence in the Sahel region. Beijing's strategy surfaces non-interference and sovereignty, which appeals to military-led governments like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Through its Global Security Initiative (GSI), China offers military training, arms, and infrastructure support, positioning itself as a key partner in regional security efforts. At the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China signed multiple agreements with Sahelian countries, focusing on energy, infrastructure, and defense projects, including significant deals with Chad and Senegal. However, China's growing involvement has not been without challenges; for instance, Niger expelled Chinese oil executives over labor disputes, highlighting tensions in bilateral relations [35]. In addition, the presence of Chinese workers is increasing within Sahel regions as they are involved with infrastructure and mining projects. Political instability has deepened as militant groups grow increasingly hostile toward foreign presence, with Chinese workers often targeted in acts of violence. Interference in labor operations has disrupted the progress of the Belt and Road Initiative and other Chinese mining investments, worsening tensions and delaying project execution. [40]

Potential Solutions

Regional responses have previously shown success in the Sahel conflict, and look promising towards the future as well. For instance, regional organisations such as ECOWAS, CILSS, and UEMOA have created alliances to improve the state of the relevant countries' borders by addressing climate change and environmental degradation. Regional responses help form partnerships that utilize comparative advantages, have a stronger focus on border areas, support community resilience through a combination of measures to strengthen peace and stability, connect peripheral communities to urban centres, restore economic activities and public services, and help sustain livelihoods in case of climate shocks [25]. Otherwise, inefficient measures, even contradictory to other executed initiatives, could be taken.

To further support such regional causes, more funding is necessary for such initiatives. Currently, regional organisations are dependent on international donor funding, which is unsustainable, lacks flexibility and systematic anchoring in local processes, and has other flaws. Sahel countries themselves must increase financing for the efficiency of these regional organizations; however, local, national, and international authorities can also increase support for local resilience efforts by becoming more flexible on criteria, planning, and procedures [25].

Questions to Consider

- Framing the Conflict:
  - What steps were initially taken for the Sahel Conflict to build up? Do these beginning factors still impact the center of the issue today?
  - To what extent does geography play a role in the Sahel Conflict? Do sub-conflicts solely emerge because of geography?
  - What actors have proliferated tensions in the past? Is this issue a black-or-white situation where one side/country/region/actor is in the wrong?
- Counterterrorism Strategies:
  - How have governments, militaries, and organizations structured their counterterrorism missions? Do all movements follow the same format and goals?
  - Has foreign intervention stabilized or further destabilized the region? Could unsuccessful counterterrorism efforts have exacerbated the conflict(s)?
  - What are a couple of successful versus unsuccessful counterterrorism efforts? Is there a common trend and pattern that enables a mission to be efficient?

Questions to Consider

- Protecting Human Rights and Other Civilian Protection:
  - How has the conflict affected civilian life and access to humanitarian rights?
  - Disregarding general counterterrorism efforts, are there any strategies in place to protect civilians who are victims of violence? If so, have they shown success in the past?
  - In what ways has displacement due to conflict undermined humanitarian sub-conflicts such as access to education, healthcare, and other essential services for civilians? Are there targeted policies or humanitarian initiatives that have successfully addressed these challenges in the past?

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