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ZIMUN XII

*Reforming Peacekeeping Operations to Better Respond
to Changing Security Landscapes in the Sahel region*



United Nations Security Council

*[Reforming Peacekeeping Operations to Better Respond to Changing
Security Landscapes in the Sahel Region]*

Committee: United Nations Security Council

Issue: Reforming Peacekeeping Operations to Better Respond to Changing Security Landscapes in the Sahel region.

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, tasked with maintaining international peace and security. It has fifteen members, and each member has one vote. The Security Council has five permanent members – the United States of America, The Republic of China, The French Republic, The Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom — collectively known as the P5.

For ZIMUN XII, the United Nations Security Council will focus on adapting peacekeeping strategies to meet the complex landscape security challenges currently facing the Sahel region.

The Sahel is a vast 6,000km long semi-arid region spanning primarily through the North-Central region of Africa, although broadly includes Cameroon, Eritrea, The Gambia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sudan. The ongoing crisis in the Sahel can be attributed to a scale of factors, including violent armed conflict, climate change, poverty and political and economical instability. The violent competition over slowly diminishing resources, caused by severe climatic conditions has provided ground for non-state armed groups (NSAGs) to expand their influence. The main

goal for this committee is to fix the trust issue between the UN and the respective member states they operate in. The United Nations recently retracted its peacekeepers out of The Republic of Mali (MINUSMA) due to the demand of the Malian military government which seized power in 2020. This withdrawal of UN peacekeeping has further escalated the violence within the region. Increased reports in internal displacement, gender and sexual violence, terrorist attacks, and massive civilian casualties have become more prominent, and require urgent attention. Without a cohesive international regulatory framework, the various risks associated with unregulated peacekeeping in the Sahel region will likely continue to escalate, emphasizing the need for thorough discussion and global advocacy.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Member states are advised to ensure familiarity with the following key terms to foster understanding and meaningful debate.

1. **Blue Helmets:** are active-duty soldiers and police officers which are “loaned” to the United Nations by member states (such as India, Pakistan, Rwanda, or Bangladesh). The primary goal of Blue helmets is to maintain peace and security in areas recovering from conflict.
2. **Climate Change:** refers to the long term, significant shifts in global or regional weather patterns and average temperatures (United Nations).
3. **Desertification:** refers to the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas. It is a gradual process of soil productivity loss and the thinning out of the vegetative cover because of human activities and climatic variations such as prolonged droughts and floods (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification).

4. **Gender/Sexual violence:** gender based violence refers to any harmful act of violence or abuse directed at an individual or group based on their actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Meanwhile, Sexual violence can be defined as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using force, aggression, or without consent, regardless of the perpetrator's relationship to the victim. This constitutes a severe violation of human rights.
5. **Humanitarian corridors:** essentially refers to agreements between parties to the armed conflict to allow for safe passage for a limited time in a specific geographic area. They can allow civilians to leave, humanitarian assistance to come in or allow for the evacuation of the wounded, sick, or dead (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)).
6. **Internal Displacement:** Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are people which have been forced to flee their homes by conflict, violence, persecution or disasters, however, unlike refugees, they remain within their own country (UNHCR).
7. **MINUSMA:** The United Nations multidimensional Integrated Stabilization mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established by Security council *resolution 2100* of 25 April 2013 to support political processes in that country and carry out a number of security-related tasks. The Mission was asked to support the transitional authorities of Mali in the stabilization of the country and implementation of the transitional roadmap (United Nations Peacekeeping).
8. **Peacekeeping:** refers to the efforts made to maintain or restore peace in conflict-affected areas, often through deployment of international forces. This practice involves promoting intercultural dialogue and addressing social and human sciences issues to foster stability. Peacekeeping aims to

protect civilians, support political processes, and facilitate humanitarian assistance in regions experiencing violence or unrest (UNESCO).

9. **Refugees:** A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries (UNHCR).
10. **Regional Security:** refers to the cooperative security approaches among states within a specific geographical area to address shared threats and mitigate conflicts. It involves mechanisms such as regional security organizations, multilateral agreements, and arms control treaties aimed at promoting stability and decreasing the likelihood of interstate conflicts (Science Direct).
11. **Sovereignty:** defined as the autonomy of a state to govern itself, characterized by its independence from foreign authority and the right to determine its own political order. It remains a politically consequential concept, despite being compromised by coercion or voluntary agreements in favor of other principles such as human rights and security (Science Direct).
12. **Terrorism:** can be defined as an action or threat designed to influence the government or intimidate the public. Its purpose is to advance a political, religious or ideological cause. The current UK definition of Terrorism is given in the *Terrorism Act 2006* (Educate Against Hate).

BACKGROUND ON THE ISSUE

The ongoing crisis in the Sahel region in Africa dates back to 2011, following the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi and the Libyan Government. The fallout of the 42-year old regime caused significant issues within Mali and Niger. Thousands of Tuareg fighters which have served the Libyan government returned back to Mali with their sophisticated weaponry, including machine guns, anti-craft cannons, and missiles. On 17th January 2012, these Tuareg fighters formed the National movement for the liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and advocated a revolt for an independent state. This political rebellion was quickly intercepted and hijacked by Al-Qaeda linked extremist groups who “exploited a March 2010 military coup in the capital” to seize the northern two-thirds of Mali (GovInfo). “People began fleeing the central Sahel region in 2011 after an outbreak of violence in Northern Mali. Poverty, unemployment and the presence of armed groups in rural areas of Northern Mali all contributed to an increase in forced displacement”. (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

Over the past decade, the crisis has escalated from a relatively smaller scale, localized Malian conflict into a global emergency. By 2015, the crisis within the Sahel had spread far into Burkina Faso and Niger. The conflict developed into a multifaceted revolt, mostly characterized by “jihadist expansion, ethnic communal violence, and the collapse of state authority” (University of Sussex). There have been international military efforts, such as the French led Operation Barhane, which aimed to provide a temporary security cover but ultimately failed to tackle the root causes of the crisis, including poverty, and marginalization within the rural populations.

Recently (2024-2026), the situation has concerningly escalated following multiple military coups that have significantly threatened regional security. Military forces in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (organized as Alliance of Sahel States (AES)) have abolished western forces in preference of Russian paramilitary partnerships. This escalation of uncontrolled violence and threat resulted in a surge of fatalities. By 2024, the Sahel became identified as the “world’s most impacted region by terrorism”, attributing nearly half of all global deaths from such attacks (Global terrorism Index). Rather than the situation calming down, the violence within the region is now spreading across northern borders of coastal western African member states like Togo and Benin.

This regional instability is currently affecting over 33 million people who require urgent humanitarian assistance. The majority of the population is besieged by multiple threats of extremist attacks, climate-change induced food shortage, and the complete malfunction of public services. As of 2025, over 14,000 schools have been forced to close, and women and children represent the vast majority of these involuntarily displaced persons. These unprotected, vulnerable groups face “extreme risks of gender-based violence and forced labor recruitment” as they attempt to flee conflict zones (UNHCR). The lack of international cooperation, and proper humanitarian aid in these affected areas has left millions of citizens without access to basic medical care and clean water.

Additionally, the Sahel crisis is a relevant global case study for the ongoing “triple threats” of conflict, climate change, and mass migration (UNHCR). The Sahel is currently “warming at 1.5 times the global average”, which has turned the shortage of its natural resources into the primary leading force of war (USA for UNHCR). Lack of agriculture, and traditional means of living such as farming and herding

has significantly collapsed due to desertification, resulting in the involuntary migration of millions of people.

This has brought immediate attention to the global community as the humanitarian emergency continues to surge. The lack of political, economical, and regional stability within the Sahel has larger effects on the international community, specifically European countries and neighboring African countries. Italy, Spain, and Greece remain some of the most heavily affected European regions due to the involuntary migration from the Sahel population. Italy, in particular, remains the most heavily affected due to the “Central Mediterranean Route”. Migrants from Mali and Burkina Faso frequently travel through Libya and Niger to reach Italian shores, such as Lampedusa. Italy has consistently maintained a military mission in Niger (MISIN) even after other European forces were expelled, specifically to “curb irregular migration and human trafficking” (Institut Europeum). On the other hand, neighboring African states such as Benin, Togo, Cote d’Ivoire, and Ghana have played a significant role in providing shelter for the significantly increasing numbers of refugees and displaced persons. Benin and Togo are currently the most affected by “direct jihadist attacks” and the “deliberate and strategic expansion” of groups like JNIM moving out of Burkina Faso (ACLED). The security status in Northern Benin has deteriorated very significantly, to the point of recently fueling an attempted coup as the military grew frustrated with the rising casualties. Although Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire are relatively more stable, they have become major humanitarian shelters. As of 2025, Cote d’Ivoire alone was hosting over 77,000 refugees fleeing insecurity in Mali and Burkina Faso, a circumstance which has pushed northern border regions to the “brink of a humanitarian crisis” (UNICEF).

CURRENT CONTEXT

As of 2026, the Sahel crisis involves state collapse and immense human suffering that has reached its near - breaking point. The crisis is now characterized by a “protracted state of regional fragmentation”, where the collapse of longstanding, multilateral security agreements has left a remarkable power vacuum (Security Council Report). The current situation stems from a major policy shift by the military governments of Burkina Faso, and Niger, who have established the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) as their new governing body. By establishing this new policy, Sahel states have officially ended their partnerships with Western Countries and have completely removed the United Nations “Blue Helmet” peacekeepers from their territories (Africa Center for Strategic Studies) . This peacekeeping withdrawal has removed the primary neutral buffer between the countries in conflict, resulting in the Sahel becoming the “global epicenter of violence extremism,” now accounting for 51% of all terrorism-related deaths worldwide (Global Terrorism Index)

In 2025 alone, political violence resulted in the deaths of over 10,000 people in the central region of the Sahel, while much more recent events such as the 30 January 2026, ISIS-Sahel drone strike on the Niamey International airport, shows the technological escalation that targets the core of state infrastructure (ACLED).

Simultaneously, the region is experiencing a widespread humanitarian crisis that has reached its most critical point in over a decade. The conflict is no longer just restricted to the desert, as it is currently escalating and moving into the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea, where security incidents in Northern Benin and Togo surged by over 1,200% between 2024 and 2025 (UNICEF). This lack of security is

attributed to environmental factors, as the Sahel is warming at 1.5 times the global average. A Statistic that has disrupted farming and food production (USA for UNHCR). By the beginning of 2026, over 33 million people required urgent life-saving aid, with 4.2 million individuals forced to flee their homes (UNHCR). The wider implications of this conflict is seen in the closure of over 8,400 schools across the region, transnational crime and mass migration, posing a direct threat to the overall stability of the African Continent and European borders.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATION INVOLVED

The key actors and organizations involved in the escalation or descalation of this crisis are as follows.

Central to the conflict are the military juntas of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, who have formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) to prioritize national sovereignty and military solutions over Western-backed diplomacy. On the opposing side, extremist insurgencies led by JNIM (Al-Qaeda) and ISIS-Sahel exploit the resulting security vacuum to seize territory and recruit from vulnerable populations, often using advanced technologies like weaponized drones. Following the withdrawal of French and UN forces, Russia has become a dominant military partner through the Africa Corps (Wagner Group), providing "unconditional" security support that is often criticized for increasing civilian casualties.

Concurrently, regional organizations like the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS are attempting to bridge the gap between these factions through mediation and the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2719 for African-led peacekeeping.

Additionally, North African powers like Morocco and Algeria compete for diplomatic influence by offering economic initiatives and peace frameworks, while the UN and the Sahel Alliance remain the primary providers of humanitarian aid

and long-term development grants to the 33 million people currently caught in the crossfire.

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

20 October 2011- Collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya:

Following the death of Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan State collapsed, triggering the return of hundreds of thousands heavily armed Tuareg fighters to Mali.

17 January 2012 - Outbreak of Tuareg Rebellion in Menaka, Mali:

The national movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) launched a coordinated assault on the Malian military garrison at Menaka. This marked the official outbreak of the crisis, as rebels and Islamist groups began a campaign to seize the northern two-thirds of Mali.

22 March 2012- Military Coup d'état in Bamako:

Junior Malian officers, who were frustrated by the lack of equipment to fight northern rebels, overthrew President Amadou Toumani Toure. The loss of control and authority allowed extremist groups to “exploit the chaos” and seize the northern two-thirds of the country within weeks (GovInfo).

11 January 2013 - Launch of Operation Serval (French Intervention):

By request of the Malian government, France launched a major military intervention to stop extremist groups from reaching the capital, Bamako. While it regained major cities, the operation inadvertently caused the “regionalization” of the crisis as the militants spread over into neighboring countries Burkina Faso and Niger (International Crisis Group).

15 May 2015 - Signing of the Algiers Accord (International Agreement):

A peace agreement was signed between the Malian government and several Tuareg rebel groups in Algiers. However, the exclusion of jihadists from the deal allowed extremist groups to present themselves as true opposition, and resulted in the surge in recruitment and rural violence across the central Sahel (United Nations).

28 August 2020 - Release of the “Global Terrorism Index” Sahel report (Research findings):

This research report officially identified the Sahel as the Global epicenter of jihadist violence. The data showed that for the first time, deaths from terrorism in the Sahel had increased by over 1,000% since 2007, shifting the terrorism focus from the middle east to west africa (Global Terrorism Index).

26 July 2023 - Military coup in Niger:

The overthrow of president Mohamed Bazoum by the Presidential Guard created a new region surrounded by multiple coups across the sahel. This led to the immediate suspension of western security aid and the eventual expulsion of French and U.S. troops (Council on Foreign relations).

16 September 2023 - Formation of the alliance of Sahel States (AES):

The military juntas (parties) of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger signed the Liptako-Gourma Charter, establishing a mutual defense pact. This new regional organization was created to bypass traditional Western-aligned blocs like ECOWAS (Alliance of Sahel States).

10 January 2024 - Mass protests in Bamako and Ouagadougou:

This was a domestic protest where thousands of citizens took to the streets in Mali and Burkina Faso to support the military juntas' decision to withdraw from ECOWAS. These protests displayed the public domestic resentment toward regional and western institutions, displaying a significant shift in public opinion across the Sahel (Briefing on the Sahel region - Amani Africa).

30 August 2024 - Release of UNICEF “Central Sahel Outflow” Report (critical statistics):

UNICEF released data confirming that the crisis had spilled into the “Sahel Plus” countries. The report stated that security incidents in the northern regions of Benin, Togo, and Ghana had increased by over 1,200% since 2021, demanding a \$76.8 million emergency funding appeal (UNICEF).

20 December 2025 - Inauguration of the FU-AES (New policy/Military force):

The Alliance of Sahel states formally launched the “United Force of the Alliance of Sahel States” (FU-AES), a 5,000- member joint military force. This policy shift replaced the G5 Sahel and showed the region's transition to a more self-reliant security coordination supported by Russian military instructors.

30 January 2026 - ISIS - Sahel Drone attack on Niamey Airport Islamic:

Islamic state militants used “low-cost, high impact drones” to strike the international airport in Niger’s capital. This event confirmed that extremist groups now possess the technology and means to strike at the “very heart of state power,” displaying a deadly new phase of the conflict (Council on Foreign Relations).

31 December 2030 - UN SDG Goal 16 Deadline (upcoming International deadline):

The international community faces the deadline for sustainable Development Goal 16, which aims to “significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates.”

As of 2026, the UN reports that the Sahel is currently “dangerously off-track,” with violence increasing rather than decreasing, making this the region’s most pressing diplomatic challenge (UN Sustainable Development).

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES, & EVENTS

1. [June 2013] United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS)
Source: Annex: [Annex United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel](#)
2. [April 2013] UNSC Resolution 2100: Establishment of MINUSMA
Source: [S/RES/2100 \(2013\) Security Council](#)
3. [June 2017] UNSC Resolution 2359: Support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force
Source: [S/RES/2359 \(2017\) Security Council](#)
4. [December 2017] UNSC Resolution 2391: Coordination of International support
Source: [S/RES/2391 \(2017\) Security Council](#)
5. [June 2021] UNSC resolution 2584: Focus on the “Central region of Mali”
Source: [S/RES/2584 \(2021\) - Security Council - the United Nations](#)

6. [June 2023] UNSC Resolution 2690: Termination and Withdrawal
Source: [S/RES/2690 \(2023\) Security Council](#)
7. [December 2023] UNSC Resolution 2719: Financing African-led Peace Operations
Source: [Security Council resolution 2719 \(2023\)](#)
8. [January 2026] UNHCR Sahel+ Strategy 2026-2027
Source: [Document - Ukraine Situation - Moldova: Food Security Sub-Working Group Meeting Minutes \(26 December 2023\)](#)

PREVIOUS ATTEMPT TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Below are brief descriptions of efforts made by member states, organizations and other actors to resolve this issue.

Since 2012, international efforts to stabilize the Sahel have relied on a "security-development nexus" that combined military force with massive financial aid. Key attempts included the Algiers Accord (2015), a peace treaty designed to grant Northern Mali autonomy, and Operation Barkhane, a French-led counter-terrorism mission involving 5,000 troops. Regionally, the G5 Sahel (2014) and its Joint Force sought to secure borders with Western backing, while the Sahel Alliance coordinated over €29 billion in development grants to address poverty and infrastructure. However, these initiatives largely collapsed by 2024 following a series of military coups, the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from regional blocs, and the forced termination of the decade-long MINUSMA peacekeeping mission.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Three possible solutions to be considered by the committee to address the given agenda:

1. Implement and enforce Military and Peacekeeping missions

The Security Council should move away from traditional United Nations peacekeeping models and instead authorize the activation of UNSC Resolution 2719 to establish a new framework for African-led peace operations. This solution permits the UN to provide up to 75% of the annual budget through assessed contributions for missions managed directly by the African Union, ensuring they have the financial stability that previous regional efforts lacked. By utilizing troops from non-belligerent African nations, the mission would act as a neutral buffer between the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and coastal regions, enforcing border security while maintaining the local legitimacy required by current Sahelian military governments.

2. Aid and Development Grants

To address the "governance vacuum" that facilitates extremist recruitment, the UN must transition from emergency-only spending to a coordinated system of resilience-based development grants. These grants would be funneled through the Sahel Alliance and the UN's Integrated Strategy for the Sahel to restore essential state services, such as the reopening of the 8,400 schools currently closed due to insecurity. By providing direct financial support to local municipalities and non-governmental organizations rather than central military authorities alone, the international community can ensure that aid reaches the 33 million people in need, thereby rebuilding the social contract and reducing the influence of non-state armed groups.

3. Sahel region Economic zones

The Security Council should facilitate the creation of Special Economic Resilience Zones (SERZs) in volatile cross-border areas, specifically targeting the Liptako-Gourma tri-border region. These zones would receive specialized UN and World Bank investment to build "Climate-Smart" infrastructure, such as solar-powered irrigation and communal livestock corridors, to mitigate the effects of the region warming at 1.5 times the global average. By providing sustainable employment and food security for the youth population, these economic zones create a "peace economy" that directly competes with the financial incentives offered by insurgent groups, turning the current cycle of resource scarcity into a model for regional trade and stability.

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