



NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL

SENSE OF THE COMMUNITY MEMORANDUM

12 October 2022

SOCM 2022-21670

(U) Sahelian Instability Spreading to Coastal Countries

Sahelian governments almost certainly will be unable to prevent terrorist groups from gaining additional territorial control through 2023, endangering the stability of Sahelian capitals and increasing the prospects of violence in coastal West Africa. Terrorist groups are capitalizing on Sahelian poor economic conditions, a shift in foreign partnerships away from the United States and Europe, and the cumulative effects of six undemocratic transfers of power since 2020.

Burkina Faso's Government acknowledged that it controls only 45 percent of the country's territory and expected to lose more ground in the coming months,

- Terrorist attacks across the region continue to increase. Since January, terrorist groups in the Sahel have conducted about 2,000 attacks, already exceeding the number of attacks in 2021, and are operating closer to the Burkinabe, Malian, and Nigerien capitals, according to an open-source attack database.^a Since 2020, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb's arm in the Sahel, has expanded its reach into coastal West Africa,

conducting at least 19 attacks in Benin, 20 in Cote d'Ivoire, and seven in Togo,

- Mali has moved closer to Russian private military company Vagner, which has disrupted broader US, UN, and European security efforts in the Sahel.

While no other West African state has opted to follow suit, some leaders in the region have suggested that at some point, Vagner may be their only option.

- Violence has led to refugee flows to coastal states and increased food insecurity. During the last year, internally displaced persons nearly doubled in Burkina Faso and grew by 22 percent in Niger, which drove a sharp increase in refugee flows into Togo. Increased violence in Mali, partially stemming from Vagner's military actions, has caused a refugee camp in Mauritania

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to grow to its largest size since 2013. The refugee crisis is compounding food insecurity, with West Africa experiencing its worst food crisis in a decade.

- [REDACTED] We assess that the risk of political instability, including coups, will increase in coastal West Africa. Many of the root causes underpinning the recent Sahelian coups,

[REDACTED] also are present in coastal West Africa, [REDACTED]

National, Multilateral Institutions Challenged To Respond

[REDACTED] The intensity and pace of growth of terrorist groups in the Sahel threatens to overwhelm national and multilateral efforts across the entire West Africa region.

- [REDACTED] Coastal West African militaries have decades of experience conducting peacekeeping missions, but little-to-no experience with counterterrorism. While coastal West African states have taken steps to address security challenges in their northern border areas, logistical and budgetary issues have hampered sustained military operations, [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED] West African states have not conducted multilateral operations outside of UN missions in more than 10 years and probably will face continued impediments to building a formalized multilateral security architecture [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Cross Border Operations Into Burkina Faso Key

[REDACTED] We assess that coastal West African states' ability to stem the spread of instability from the Sahel during the coming year will depend on their ability to conduct cross-border operations into Burkina Faso without alienating local populations. Burkina Faso and its southern neighbors have planned cross-border operations to fill gaps in the south's security presence since the start of this year, but have yet to project force in a sustained manner across borders, [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] West African states would benefit from external support, from both traditional and non-traditional partners.
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] The rapid escalation in domestic counterterrorism operations increases the possibility for civilian casualties, human rights abuses, and openings for terrorist recruitment. For example, operations in Benin and Togo this year

[REDACTED]

resulted in high-profile instances of security forces
targeting vulnerable populations. Training focused
on the military's role in safeguarding the
population [REDACTED] enhance central
governments' credibility with local communities

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]