

Security and development | What is the purpose of the G5 Sahel?

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Today, the G5 Sahel has become an established feature of the institutional landscape in the Sahel-Saharan strip. Although significant improvements have been made in terms of joint military operations and security cooperation, progress remains insufficient in other areas. While the main purpose of the regional organisation is to develop and improve living standards in the cross-border zone, it is faced with several challenges...

Since its inception in February 2014, the G5 Sahel has delivered a stream of announcements and initiatives commensurate with the image of a rising organisation and with the needs clearly expressed by various stakeholders in the Sahel and their partners.

It does indeed present a number of advantages: It comprises only five countries (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso), which share the same problems; it focuses on the role of border areas and cooperation in dealing with threats with transnational ramifications; the involvement of Sahel countries increases local engagement through a bottom-up rather than top-down approach.



More importantly, in two years the G5 Sahel has established itself as a key security actor in the region (1). However, bearing in mind the aims of the Convention that established the young regional organisation, many challenges remain to be addressed (2). For example, insufficient progress has been made in terms of development, which not only hinders the implementation of planned projects but also – with regard to the numerous strategies pursued in the region – casts doubt on the competence of the G5 Sahel.

An established military actor

The G5 Sahel has made more progress in the field of military cooperation than in any other area. In recent years, the number of joint military operations has increased, with the French military providing back-up and support through operations Serval and Barkhane. Operation Serval takes place in November 2013 and involving the Malian, Nigerian and French armed forces. Almost 15 joint operations have been conducted in the three border areas of the Sahel: Between Mali and Mauritania in the west, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in the centre, and Niger and Chad in the east. Over the course of these operations and of meetings between senior officers from the G5 countries, a regional military community has developed. As a result, confidence has risen, information sharing has increased and cooperation between national armed forces has improved (3). To such an extent that, since October 2015, joint operations have been organised and conducted by armies in the Sahel, without the participation of the French military (4).

In order to “develop permanent cooperation mechanisms in cross-border areas” (5), on 4 November 2015 the General Chiefs of Staff of Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Chad signed a charter governing the operations of the military partnership for cross-border cooperation (PMCT – *Partenariat militaire de coopération transfrontalière*) between the armed forces of the G5 Sahel countries. Ratified by the Sahelian heads of state at the N’Djamena summit on 20 November 2015, the charter provides for bi-annual meetings of the General Chiefs of Staff, organised by each country on a rotating basis, the recording of the directives adopted in a joint coordination report, and quarterly meetings of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Operations. The latter, which are referred to as operational coordination

(1) We would like to thank Amandine Gnanguênon for her input and advice on the preliminary version.

(2) Antonin Tisseron, “G5 Sahel: une simple organisation de plus?”, GRIP analysis note, 25 March 2015 (<http://www.grip.org/fr/node/1607>).

(3) Interviews, security experts, Bamako and N’Djamena, March 2016.

(4) Claude Nougéin, report no. 358 – commissioned by the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces Committee – on the government bill authorising the ratification of the defence cooperation treaty between France and Mali, Senate, France, filed on 3 February 2016 (<http://www.senat.fr/rap/l15-358/l15-358.html>).

(5) Najim Elhadj Mohamed, “La coopération transfrontalière”, *Revue Défense Nationale*, Summer 2016, pp. 34-37, p. 36.



committees, have a fourfold purpose: Conduct a joint “*analysis of the security situation*”, organise future joint operations, perform feedback on current operations and put forward “*solutions*” (6).

Moreover, , one of the main achievements of the N’Djamena summit was the institutionalisation – within the G5 Sahel – of the military cooperation initiated by the French military in the form of a “*broad partnership*” (G5 Sahel States and Barkhane) in order to foster the development of joint action in cross border zones. In fact, the first meeting of the G5 Sahel defence and security committee was held at the summit. The committee originates from the Permanent Secretariat and, in accordance with Article 13 of the Convention establishing the regional organisation, comprises “*the Chiefs of Staff and the officials duly mandated by the Member States to deal with security matters*”.

A growing security role

Although the defence and security committee and the PMCT are the most concrete examples of progress in the area of security, a number of other initiatives exist. A regional war college is being built in Mauritania. The possibility of establishing a threat analysis and early warning centre in the Sahel (CSAMAP – *Centre Sahélien d’Analyse des Menaces et d’Alerte Précoce*) is also being investigated, the goal being to provide technical expertise at regional level and to step up cooperation between national intelligence services. Likewise, following on from cross-border military operations, the leaders of the Member States have announced that they are planning to create a joint military force. Although the matter is still under review and it is not yet clear what form the joint military force will take, one objective could be to offset the lack of regular Malian forces in most areas of northern Mali and at the limits of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) (7), by increasing coordination between armed forces stationed at the borders of northern Mali through the establishment of a joint Chief of Staff (8).

In its efforts to institutionalise security matters, the G5 Sahel enjoys the support of several partners. The European Union which, in June 2015, initiated a strategic dialogue with the G5 Sahel Member States, has announced that it will provide seven million Euros – through

(6) PMCT image brochure, “Agir ensemble pour le contrôle des espaces frontaliers au Sahel”, G5 Sahel website (http://www.g5sahel.org/images/fichiers/20151125_BROCHURE-PMCT-V2.pdf).

(7) On 29 June 2016, the UN Security Council increased the force levels of MINUSMA by 2 500 troops. It also invited peacekeepers to “*adopt a more proactive and robust posture*” to carry out their mandate and emphasised that their priority should be to protect civilian populations, keeping in mind the limitations on the UN forces’ mandate and the operational consequences of the preponderance of peacekeepers from southern countries.

(8) Mahamadou Issoufou, “Pour le président du Niger, ‘Boko Haram reste très dangereux’”, *Le Monde*, 16 June 2016, interview by Christophe Châtelot.



a third organisation – to establish the previously itinerant Sahel Security College in Bamaka (9). In November 2015, the security college was placed under the supervision of the Permanent Secretariat of the G5 Sahel. The United Nations, which provides technical support through the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel (10). In addition, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is taking capacity-building measures for the benefit of the Sahel countries, encompassing border controls, counter-terrorism, criminal justice reform, and the prevention of human trafficking, people smuggling and corruption (11).

One of the measures taken by UNODC is the establishment of a secure communication system called the Security Cooperation Platform (SCP). The SCP is designed to promote the exchange of information on Jihadist groups and on cross-border organised crime. This project is expected to meet three objectives in particular: Strengthen security cooperation and intelligence sharing in the Sahel-Saharan strip by operating on a smaller scale, compared with the Nouakchott Process (12) which is hindered by distrust between some of the partners; encourage – through provision of tools – a “give and take” of information between intelligence agencies, without which long-term cooperation is impossible; support the creation of a Sahelian intelligence community.

What about development?

Even if the Sahelian G5 has become a major player in terms of security, it is not so restricted. In fact, according to the Permanent Secretary, the regional organisation is a “development instrument”, “the originality of which lies in the coupling [...] of defence and security on the one hand, with development on the other (13). Thus, the Permanent Secretary has defined a development and security strategy comprising multiannual action plans that

(9) The Sahel Security College is a European Union initiative proposed in November 2011 to Mauritania, Mali and Niger. Extended to include Chad and Burkina Faso, it aims to provide a common forum for discussion between the State Parties, as well as training for security actors (https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/af-eutf-regional-support-to-the-g5-countries-regional-cooperation-and-to-the-sahelian-security-college-2016_fr.pdf).

(10) In early 2016, the Office of the UN Special Envoy for the Sahel merged with the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) to create UNOWAS (UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel).

(11) UNODC, *Sahel Programme 2013-2017. Strengthening the Sahel against crime and terrorism*, progress report, January 2016 (https://www.unodc.org/documents/westandcentralafrica/Programme_Sahel_-_Rapport_dactivite_Janvier_2016.pdf).

(12) Established in 2013 by the African Union, the Nouakchott Process comprises 11 Member States: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Libya, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Senegal.

(13) Najim Elhadj Mohamed, *art. cit.*, p. 34.

should be implemented through the Priority Investment Programme (PIP) (14). Consisting of projects developed by the Permanent Secretariat or the national focal points (15), the PIP identifies actions needed in the areas of security, economic resilience, infrastructure and governance. The first phase should be implemented from 2016-2018. The supervising ministers are those in charge of economic development.

Although the G5 Sahel is developing frameworks for development actions, the implementation of regional projects in this area has to overcome two main obstacles. Firstly, regardless of the decades-old structural impediments to official development assistance in the Sahel region (16), insecurity tends to push development actions into the background. It affects not only the deployment of teams and projects; the latter being put on the backburner in favour of emergency aid, but fosters a focus on security. Secondly, the first objective of the Sahel G5 is, the partners, to strengthen internal security forces and regional security cooperation. This creates a discrepancy between what is said about the importance of tackling the sub-region's deeply ingrained challenges, the expectations of local populations, and what is actually being done (17).

Furthermore, addressing development challenges at regional level is not an easy task. For example, although the European Union multilateralises its activities and debates with its partners in the Sahel, and advocates regionalisation, in practice it favours direct relations with state actors both because of the way its delegations work and for pragmatic reasons. In view of the problems already encountered when encouraging the states to cooperate with one another, any regional approach tends to be limited to binational cooperation (18). As for the G5 Sahel, it is very often reduced to a forum of political leaders, which automatically relegates the Permanent Secretariat to the side-lines of European action, even if it has been invited to several meetings and is provided with "technical support" (19). Regarding the Sahel countries, the provisional version of the PIP, established in early 2016, reflects a tension between different conceptions. In addition to regional projects concerning, for example, the interconnections between the Member States, there are other, exclusively national projects. While the transnational and national scales are, by definition, complementary, their overlap within the G5 Sahel raises questions. Deriving from the decisions of five heads of state, the regional approach is divided between the

(14) "Feuille de route pour le renforcement du dialogue et de la coopération entre le G5 Sahel et l'Union européenne. Premier bilan semestriel et perspectives 2016/2017", 16 June 2016 (http://www.g5sahel.org/images/Docs/Feuille_de_route_UE-G5_2016-2017_V16.06.16_VF.pdf).

(15) These are national officials tasked with liaising between the G5 Sahel and their administrations.

(16) See Serge Michailof (*Africanistan*, Paris, Fayard, 2015) and information report no. 728, produced by Senators Henri de Raincourt and Hélène Conway-Mouret at the request of the the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces Committee (Senate, 29 June 2016, <https://www.senat.fr/rap/r15-728/r15-7281.pdf>).

(17) Interviews, diplomats and international experts, Dakar and Paris, April and June 2016.

(18) Email conversation with Bérangère Rouppert, a researcher who specialises in the European Union's West African policy, June 2016.

(19) "Feuille de route pour le renforcement du dialogue et de la coopération entre le G5 Sahel et l'Union européenne", *op. cit.*

desire to transcend borders (as embodied by the Permanent Secretariat), the perspective of ministerial officials in charge of economic development, and “*the opportunism shown by the heads of state in their efforts to defend their national interests*” (20) using frameworks developed by external actors (21).

An asset in terms of coordination

Ultimately, the complex connection between security and development in the region raises a key question: What is the purpose of the G5 Sahel? Numerous strategies have already been developed by both nation states and international organisations. Furthermore, they have the same perception of the main challenges in the sub-region, which creates a risk of competition detrimental to coordination (22). In this context, establishing a new regional organisation would not necessarily be straightforward, if it was not triggered by dissatisfaction. Thus, there is still a great deal of reticence within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), especially since the G5 Sahel came at the same time as a West African strategy for the Sahel (23). Although some boundaries seem to have shifted since then, the African Union was very reserved towards the G5 Sahel, as it appears to compete with and undermine the legitimacy of the Nouakchott Process.

Within this tangle, however, the G5 Sahel is characterized by reduced capacities. As Permanent Secretary Najim Elhadj Mohamed points out, the regional organization is above all a forum for “*discussion and for the political and technical coordination of activities at regional level [...] in order to increase the focus on remote and cross-border areas*” (24). Its role

(20) Amandine Gnanguênon, “La coopération entre l’Union africaine et les Communautés économiques régionales: un défi pour l’opérationnalisation de l’architecture de Paix et de Sécurité Africaine (APSA)”, from the 2014 edition of the Forum de Dakar (<http://www.dakarforum.org/fr/cooperation-union-africaine-communauté-economique-regionale-gnanguenon/>).

(21) In Niger for instance, one of the perverse effects of « development rent » represents the introduction of collection and integration strategies based on mimicry with -institutional, theoretical and mental- frameworks which are pointed out by the landlords. That results in anesthetizing local initiatives and weakening humanitarian aid project’s implementation by local workers. As secondary concern, the question of programs’ effectiveness and relevance in order to favor financing arises (see in particular Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, « Niger : les quatre prisons du pouvoir », *Marianne*, January, 4, 2016, <http://www.marianne.net/agora-niger-les-quatre-prisons-du-pouvoir-100239202.html>).

(22) Damien Helly *et al.*, “Sahel strategies: Why coordination is imperative”, Institute for Security Studies/ecdpm, policy brief 76, March 2015 (<http://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/Strategies-Sahel-ISS-ECDPM-Mars-2015.pdf>).

(23) See Amandine Gnanguênon, “ECOWAS and The Sahel Action Plan (PCAR): A tool for regional integration in the Sahel?” in Cristina Barrios and Tobias Koepf (dir.), *Re-mapping the Sahel: Transnational security challenges and international responses*, Report no. 19, EUISS, June 2014, pp. 59-66 (http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Report_19_Sahel.pdf).

(24) “Mot du Secrétaire Permanent”, G5 Sahel website, 20 October 2015 (<http://www.g5sahel.org/index.php/homepage/mot-du-secretaire-permanent>).

is to intervene in a limited area with interested donors, using an approach centred on advocacy, the mobilisation of financial resources for individual states, and the development of synergies based on the coordination and monitoring of transnational projects implemented by national governments. It is a support organisation that focuses on intra-regional cooperation and aims to open up remote areas, encourage cross-border and regional actions, and coordinate these actions by taking on a project management role at intra-regional level; by supervising the implementation of actions, it is able to ensure their coherence.

From this perspective, the G5 Sahel is not without interest. On the contrary, it could play a valuable role in meeting three challenges through its Permanent Secretariat: Develop transnational projects in the Sahel; increase coordination between state actors by monitoring their actions; depending on its scale, help to strengthen the links between development and security. Roads, which are one of the main focuses of the PIP, are important in this respect. They represent far more than just labour-intensive infrastructure projects. Roads reinforce security and territorial control by enabling defence and security forces to move around and by making it more difficult to lay explosive devices. They promote development by opening up remote areas and facilitating the transportation of goods between different places To sum up, there are two pitfalls that must be avoided. Firstly, reducing the G5 to a mere forum of heads of state or ministers, as it is far more than that Secondly, granting it competence to address issues that do not fall within the scope of either transnational policy or regional cooperation, which would drive up employee numbers and running costs without delivering any real operational advantage.

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