



VMUN 2025

United Nations Security Council

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Malaysia

Tunisia



VANCOUVER MODEL UNITED NATIONS

The Twenty-Fourth Annual Session | January 31st – February 2nd, 2025

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Olivia Xing and it is my utmost honour to serve as the Director of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) at VMUN 2025. As a Grade 10 student at Crofton House School, I can confidently say that at every moment of my engagement in MUN, I have felt nothing but excitement and pride upon witnessing some of the most meaningful debates that I could have hoped to see as a high schooler. Throughout my participation in Model UN, I have honed my speaking skills, expanded the breadth and depth of my knowledge, and developed long-lasting friendships I will always remember. Though most conferences end after a few days of exhilarating debate and a couple sleepless nights, the memories I have made within those committee rooms have never faltered. I can only hope that at VMUN 2025, you, too, can find enjoyment in every moment.

Over the past several months, the dais team, including my Chair, Elaina Dumaliang, has worked tirelessly to plan an engaging experience for you all, and we eagerly anticipate a weekend of fierce, fast-paced, and exhilarating debate. At this coming iteration of VMUN, UNSC will be discussing two topics: *Coups in Sahel* and *Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation*. Both are highly relevant to the day and age we live in, and endlessly and crucially important to UNSC.

I wish you all the best of luck in your conference preparations and look forward to meeting each of you soon. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at unsc@vmun.com. On behalf of our entire dais team, I welcome you to the UNSC committee at VMUN 2025!

Sincerely,
Olivia Xing
UNSC Director

Position Paper Policy

What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country would support.

At Vancouver Model United Nations, delegates should write a position paper for each of the committee's topics. Each position paper should not exceed one page and should all be combined into a single document per delegate.

For the United Nations Security Council, position papers are required.

Formatting

Position papers should:

- Include the name of the delegate, his/her country, and the committee
- Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins
- Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders
- Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research (not included in the 1-page limit)

Due Dates and Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by **January 27th, 2025, at 23:59 PST**. Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your last name, your first name and send it as an attachment in an email to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as "[last name] [first name] — Position Paper". Please do not add any other attachments to the email.

Both your position papers should be combined into a single PDF or Word document file; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted.

Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Position Paper award. The email address for this committee is **unsc@vmun.com**.

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Coups in Sahel

Overview

The Sahel is a region in Africa that is located between the Sahara Desert and the northern savannah regions. It has been plagued by political instability since the 1960s, making the region particularly susceptible to military coups. Coups, or coup d'états, are the overthrowing of existing governments by small groups, typically comprised of military officials.¹ Recently, there has been an observable surge in the number of successful coups in the Sahel—since 2020, there have been coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Gabon, Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Niger.²

These coups have fueled humanitarian crises within the Sahel and, consequently, spread instability to many different areas of Africa. Currently, about one-fifth of the population in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are in need of humanitarian aid.³ An area of particular concern is the displacement crisis; due to political instability, more than 3.3 million people were displaced across Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger by the end of 2023.⁴ It is worth noting that women and children are disproportionately affected by such instability.⁵ Once displaced, migrants are often subjected to cramped living conditions, as refugee camps are often unsuitable for large numbers of migrants and lack access to basic services such as proper sanitation and healthcare.⁶ Additionally, around 8,400 schools and 470 health facilities are no longer functional in the Central Sahel.⁷

Additionally, the crisis has left a power vacuum for extremist organizations, effectively granting them more power and influence. The Sahel region is currently overrun with terrorism, claiming 43 percent of terrorism deaths globally in 2022.⁸ Citizens' dissatisfaction with their countries' poor governance and lack of basic resources has fuelled the coups, which often try to garner public support by taking on a populist stance, which usually entails pitting “the people” against the democratic government.⁹ These post-coup power vacuums have, in turn, led to an expansion of extremist organizations such as Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal

¹ “Coup d'état,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 27, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/coup-detat>.

² Boubacar Haidara, “A Coup After Coup in the Sahel,” *International Politics and Society*, August 9th, 2023, <https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/democracy-and-society/a-coup-after-coup-in-the-sahel-6976/>.

³ “One in Five People in Central Sahel Needs Humanitarian Aid: Now Is the Time to Act,” *International Organization for Migration*, June 16, 2023, <https://www.iom.int/news/one-five-people-central-sahel-needs-humanitarian-aid-now-time-act>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Méryl Demuynck, “Unravelling the Niger Coup and Its Implications for Violent Extremism in the Sahel,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, August 4th, 2023, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/unravelling-niger-coup-and-its-implications-violent-extremism-sahel>.

⁹ Ibid.

Muslimeen (JNIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP).¹⁰

Another concern with the recent surge of coups is a phenomenon commonly referred to as “coup contagion.” This idea states that coups are likely to occur in neighbouring countries, if an initial coup is successful.¹¹ Though the legitimacy of this phenomenon is widely debated, proponents point to empirical evidence that it is, at least to some extent, an accurate reflection of the situation thus far. For instance, a coup occurred in Niger in July 2023, just 10 months after Burkina Faso’s successful coup.¹² In addition, Gabon observed a coup less than a month after Nigeria witnessed one.¹³ Such patterns demonstrate the possibility of a domino effect, which significantly magnifies the importance of preempting any singular coup.

Timeline

July 23, 1952 — The Egyptian Revolution begins with a coup d’état overthrowing King Farouk, marking the first incident of violent military action to gain political power in Africa since the end of World War II in 1945.

September 22, 1960 — Mali gains independence from France.¹⁴ In this year, many other Sahelian countries, such as Burkina Faso, Gabon, and Niger, also reach independence.¹⁵

January 13, 1963 — A Togolese coup d’état attempt succeeds, overthrowing and murdering former president of Togo, Sylvanus Olympio.¹⁶ This event is widely regarded as the beginning of the first wave of coups in Africa, which, in addition to the Togolese coup, entailed coups in countries such as Rwanda, Algeria, Angola, and Burkina Faso.¹⁷

¹⁰ “Violent Extremism in the Sahel,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel#:~:text=Organizations%20including%20Jama'at%20Nusrat,indiscriminate%20attacks%20on%20government%20forces.>

¹¹ Pauline H. Baker, “Revisiting Coup Contagion,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, December 18, 2023, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/12/revisiting-coup-contagion/>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ “Timeline: Mali Since Independence,” *Al Jazeera*, August 13, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/8/13/timeline-mali-since-independence.>

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ “1963 Togolese Coup d’État,” *Wikipedia*, May 12, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1963_Togolese_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

March 26, 1991 — Malian coup d'état attempt succeeds, overthrowing former President Moussa Traoré after a period of civil unrest.¹⁸ This event marked the beginning of the second wave of coups, which often saw military officers promising to address economic mismanagement.¹⁹

July 1999 — Following the Algiers Summit of July 1999, the Algiers decision on Unconstitutional Changes of Government is made to reinforce democracy and ban coup leaders from attending Organization of African Unity (OAU) summits.²⁰

July 12, 2000 — Lomé Declaration is established by the OAU, taking a zero-tolerance stance against coups. This significantly impacted the reduction of coups, and effectively helped to end the second wave of coups.²¹

January 17, 2012 — Insurgent groups began to uprise against Mali's government to obtain control over northern Mali.²² This has since escalated into the ongoing multifaceted war in Mali, further exacerbating instability and unrest of the constitutional government.²³

January 11, 2013 — Operation Serval, a French-backed intervention in Mali attempting to combat Islamist militant groups that had taken control over the country's northern regions, is officially launched.²⁴ Operation Serval concluded on July 15, 2024, and was succeeded by Operation Barkhane, launched on August 1, 2024.²⁵ The following operation expanded the focus from Malian conflicts to a broader anti-terrorism effort against militants throughout the Sahel.²⁶

March 2, 2017 — Four Al-Qaeda affiliate groups merge in the Sahel, forming Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM).²⁷ JNIM significantly intensified jihadist—militant Islamist—activities and thereby destabilised the region through increased violence and insurgencies.²⁸

¹⁸ "1991 Malian Coup d'État," *Wikipedia*, April 10, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Malian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat#:~:text=Lieutenant%20Colonel%20Amadou%20Toumani%20Tour%C3%A9,law%2C%20were%20burned%20to%20death.

¹⁹ Peter Fabricius, "Africa's Three Waves of Coups," *Institute for Security Studies*, September 15, 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africas-three-waves-of-coups>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Claire Klobucista, "What to Know About the Crisis in Mali," *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/what-know-about-crisis-mali>

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "Operation Serval," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Serval

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ "Violent Extremism in the Sahel," *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel#:~:text=Organizations%20including%20Jama%27at%20Nusrat,indiscriminate%20attacks%20on%20government%20forces>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

July 1, 2017 — The G5 Sahel Joint Force is launched. Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger form a joint counter-terrorism force, marking a significant regional response to security threats.²⁹

August 18, 2020 — Another coup succeeds in Mali, ending in former Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta being arrested at gunpoint.³⁰ This is the beginning of the current wave of coups in the Sahel.³¹

October 15, 2021 — The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sanctions Mali due to the overthrowing of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta in a military coup.³²

December 2021 — The Wagner Group, a Russian private military company, arrives in Mali under an agreement to provide the country's government with training and military support.³³ However, their arrival comes with many human rights abuse allegations, including reports of extrajudicial killings and civilian abuses.³⁴

October 15, 2022 — ECOWAS extends sanctions to include Guinea and Burkina Faso, showing a unified regional stance against coups.³⁵

January 7, 2024 — Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger withdraw from ECOWAS for “inhumane and irresponsible sanctions” imposed on them following their respective coups.³⁶

Historical Analysis

Many Sahelian countries achieved independence from their former colonial powers around or before 1960, marking a wave of independence across Africa.³⁷ Mali, for instance, gained independence in 1960, as did Gabon, Niger, and Burkina Faso.³⁸ Though independence was seen as a watershed event in finally breaking free from colonial rule for many Sahelian countries, the reality of the situation was complicated, with

²⁹ “G5 Sahel Joint Force,” *Center for Civilians in Conflict*, <https://civiliansinconflict.org/our-work/where-we-work/g5-sahel-joint-force>.

³⁰ Hamza Mohamed, “For Weeks Malians Protested for Change. Then a Coup Happened,” *Al Jazeera*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/19/for-weeks-malians-protested-for-change-then-a-coup-happened>.

³¹ Peter Fabricius, “Africa’s Three Waves of Coups,” *Institute for Security Studies*, September 15, 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africas-three-waves-of-coups>.

³² “ECOWAS Lifts Sanctions Against Guinea and Mali,” *Africanews*, February 26, 2024, <https://www.africanews.com/2024/02/26/ecowas-lifts-sanctions-against-guinea-and-mali/>.

³³ Joe Inwood, “Wagner in Africa: How the Russian mercenary group has rebranded,” *BBC*, February 19, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68322230>

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ “West African Bloc ECOWAS Lifts Its Economic Sanctions Against Guinea: Statement,” *France 24*, February 25, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240225-%F0%9F%94%B4-west-african-bloc-ecowas-lifts-its-economic-sanctions-against-guinea-statement>.

³⁶ “Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso Announce Withdrawal from ECOWAS,” *Al Jazeera*, January 28, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/28/niger-mali-burkina-faso-announce-withdrawal-from-ecowas>.

³⁷ “1960: A Wave of Independence Sweeps Across Africa,” *France 24*, July 9, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200709-1960-a-wave-of-independence-sweeps-across-africa>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

decolonization leading to many ramifications that set these newly-independent nations up for political instability. First, remnants of European economic structures still existed in most African communities.³⁹ This meant that many countries were left with trade routes that connected themselves to an external European centre, not to other countries within Africa.⁴⁰ With no real system for self-sufficiency, many countries were left unable to economically support their citizens, leading to starvation and poverty.⁴¹ Most African countries were unable to produce all of the products citizens needed, including various crops, within their national borders; with a lack of international trade infrastructure, they were simply unable to access adequate supply of raw materials to support their citizens. Secondly, European powers drew arbitrary borders within Africa, with little to no regard for the various ethnic groups living there.⁴² As a result, ethnic groups were either forced to be divided or crammed into the same colony along with many other groups, leading to ethnic tensions and violence.⁴³ Furthermore, the impact of the CFA franc and French neocolonialism has perpetuated the challenges faced by many Sahelian nations.⁴⁴ The CFA franc, introduced by France in 1945 and used in 14 African countries—including many in the Sahel—ties the African economies to France through a fixed exchange rate.⁴⁵ The currency therefore limits monetary sovereignty in these countries, resulting in their dependency on France and making it more difficult for them to implement independent economic policies that would be better tailored to specific local needs.⁴⁶ All of these factors set the stage for the underlying instability that make the Sahel a region particularly susceptible to successful coups and takeovers of weak democratic governments.

Africa's first wave of coups occurred roughly between the 1960s to the 1980s.⁴⁷ As many African countries had just gained independence, their governments struggled with economic challenges and internal dissent, resulting in the ubiquity of coups during this time.⁴⁸ For instance, Mali experienced its first coup when Lieutenant Moussa Traoré overthrew President Modibo Kesta on November 19, 1968.⁴⁹ This coup set a precedent for future military takeovers across the region. It significantly hindered the development of democratic conventions by creating a political environment where military intervention became a norm rather than an exception. The widespread perception that it was fairly common for coups to succeed only led to more coup attempts, making it increasingly difficult to establish order in many African countries in subsequent decades. For instance, Chad subsequently suffered a coup on July 30, 1979, when Hissène Habre

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "The CFA Franc: French Monetary Imperialism in Africa," *LSE*, July 12, 2017, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2017/07/12/the-cfa-franc-french-monetary-imperialism-in-africa/>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Peter Fabricius, "Africa's Three Waves of Coups," *Institute for Security Studies*, September 15, 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africas-three-waves-of-coups>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "1968 Malian Coup d'État," *Wikipedia*, February 23, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Malian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat.

seized power from President Felix Malloum.⁵⁰ These events mark the beginning of a series of power seizures and conflict.

The second wave of coups, between the 1980s and 1990s, were characterized by the rise of authoritarian regimes in the Sahel. In 1984, convicted war criminal Hissène Habré led Chad's second coup, establishing a brutal and autocratic regime that lasted until 1990.⁵¹ His rule involved frequent human rights abuses, corruption, and economic mismanagement that further destabilized the region. Although the second wave of coups shared similar incentives with the first wave, they were primarily led by military officers—most of which garnered public support by guaranteeing economic benefits to citizens.⁵²

Shortly after this period, international and regional responses to the growing number of coups began to emerge, taking a firm stance against unconstitutional changes of government in Africa for the first time.⁵³ The Organization of African Unity (OAU), an intergovernmental organization working towards bettering the unity of African states, adopted the Lomé Declaration in 1999.⁵⁴ Key elements of this declaration included a set of universal principles of democratic governance, a definition of what an “unconstitutional” change of government was, and measures the OAU would take, should said changes of government be found.⁵⁵ Overall, the document sent out a strong message that the OAU condemned coups—it was a significant step towards a firm, unified African stance against military takeovers.

Following the Lomé Declaration, the African Union (AU) was established, and along with it, the Constitutive Act on June 11, 2000.⁵⁶ According to the AU, the purpose of this Act was to “uphold the ideals of the founding fathers of the OAU and AU [...] to promote unity, solidarity, cohesion and cooperation among the peoples of Africa.”⁵⁷ Essentially, the act reinforced democratic values and thus acted as a counterweight against the rise of unconstitutional government changes within the region.

Following both regional and continental efforts, the number of coups significantly decreased. However, the early 21st century saw a resurgence of coups in the Sahel—these coups sought different incentives than

⁵⁰ “Enabling Dictator: United States and Chad’s Hissène Habré, 1982-1990,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 28, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/28/enabling-dictator/united-states-and-chads-hissene-habre-1982-1990>.

⁵¹ “Mali Coup: President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita Resigns after Soldiers Mutiny,” *BBC*, June 19, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36411466>.

⁵² Peter Fabricius, “Africa’s Three Waves of Coups,” *Institute for Security Studies*, September 15, 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africas-three-waves-of-coups>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ J. M. Lee, “Constitutionalism and the Challenge of Development in Africa,” *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep07759.8.pdf>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

previous waves.⁵⁸ Coups were no longer incentivized by the general sentiment that democratic leaders were not fulfilling citizens' economic needs, but rather by corruption and manipulation.⁵⁹ Rigged elections, for instance, were becoming increasingly prevalent, angering citizens and sparking their willingness to support military takeovers.⁶⁰ Many of the coups have in fact had public support and backing, as in the cases of Niger, where over 30,000 people rallied in support of coup leaders at a stadium on July 30th, 2023.⁶¹

Additionally, this wave of coups saw the expansion of influence of insurgents, terrorists, and extremists. For instance, Al-Qaeda's influence in the Sahel began in the early 2000s, with the establishment of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).⁶² AQIM exploited fragile Sahelian governments, taking advantage of citizen discontent and using it to convert populations to follow Islamic rule, effectively expanding their own power.⁶³ For instance, AQIM initially spread in northern Mali by taking advantage of the Tuareg rebellion in 2012, which left the country in a vulnerable position.⁶⁴

Currently, extremism is still rampant within the Sahel, with prominent actors including the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Sahel (IS-Sahel). JNIM, formed in 2017 through the merging of several militant groups, aims to establish new African governments as Islamic states governed by Sharia law. They are able to garner large amounts of support by simply capitalizing on existing local discontent for the government.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, IS-Sahel continues to carry out attacks in an attempt to recruit members and expand their overall influence.⁶⁶

The rise of coups in the recent decade has once again prompted strong regional responses. Organizations such as ECOWAS and the AU responded with condemnation and sanctions, and individual Sahelian countries formed regional security initiatives.⁶⁷ In particular, on July 1, 2017, the G5 Sahel Joint Force was

⁵⁸ Peter Fabricius, "Africa's Three Waves of Coups," *Institute for Security Studies*, September 15, 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africas-three-waves-of-coups>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Thousands in Niger Rally in Support of Coup Leaders," *Al Jazeera*, August 6, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/6/thousands-in-niger-rally-in-support-of-coup-leaders>.

⁶² "Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State," March 14, 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/exploiting-disorder-al-qaeda-and-islamic-state>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)," *Counter Terrorism Guide*, October 22, https://www.dni.gov/nctc/ftos/jnim_fto.html

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "Security Council, Adopting Resolution 15562 (2024), Extends Mandate of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali," *United Nations Press Release*, March 31, 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15562.doc.htm>.

launched by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.⁶⁸ This joint military force aimed to ameliorate and stabilise the security of the Sahel region and address violence and extremism.⁶⁹

Past UN/International Involvement

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)

In 2013, MINUSMA was deployed to Mali.⁷⁰ The mission was launched by the UNSC following a military coup led by separatists from the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (NMLA), and involved the allocation of over 15,000 troops and personnel to Mali.⁷¹ The main goal of the mission was to restore stability in the country, combat extremist violence, and facilitate a peace process.⁷² Though well-intentioned, MINUSMA was ultimately unable to achieve its original aspirations of restoring peace to Mali, as multiple attacks by extremist groups led to the deaths of 310 peacekeepers involved in the mission.⁷³ 10 years after the inception of MINUSMA, Mali formally requested that UN peacekeepers leave; withdrawal plans for the country's operations are currently in progress.⁷⁴ The failure of MINUSMA can largely be attributed to disagreements amongst internal stakeholders—namely between the Mali government and the UN troops—regarding approaches to counterterrorism and strategies for military operations. The end result of this peacekeeping mission largely reflects the effectiveness of peacekeeping in Africa as a whole, with complete successes being rare.⁷⁵ This may be due to peacekeepers failing to intervene at critical moments, spending excessive funding given the missions' mixed successes, and committing human rights abuses.⁷⁶ For instance, specific abuses that occurred during MINUSMA included extrajudicial executions, unlawful killings, and sexual violence and assault against women and girls.⁷⁷ Additionally, even when UN peacekeeping is successful, its impact is often limited to mitigating immediate humanitarian crises within the affected regions. These missions generally do not engage with deeper issues such as the lingering effects of colonial legacies, ethnic tensions, and ultimately, the fundamental root causes of conflict. Consequently, insofar as these underlying factors remain unaddressed, the risk of recurring coups and instability persists, inadequately preventing future conflicts.

⁶⁸ "Project Supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force Implementation of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance," *OHCHR*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/africa-region/project-supporting-g5-sahel-joint-force-implementation-human-rights-and-international-humanitarian>.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ "UN Stresses Continued Support for Mali Following Military-Led Coup," *UN News*, December 20, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1145207>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ "The Role of Peacekeeping in Africa," *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/background/role-peacekeeping-africa>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Operation Barkhane

In cooperation with the G5 Sahel (consisting of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger), the French military launched a counterinsurgency operation titled Operation Barkhane on August 1st, 2014.⁷⁸ The goal of the operation was to fight against Islamist groups all throughout the Sahel—around 3000 French militants were deployed for this exact purpose.⁷⁹ After Operation Serval successfully overcame Islamist groups in the northern part of Mali in 2013, foreign military intervention seemed to be a promising way to help Sahelian countries' governments to maintain control over their land.⁸⁰ Though the beginning of Operation Barkhane was largely successful, helping to strengthen local Malian forces, the operation quickly faltered as violence began to increase due to mistakes made throughout the operation.⁸¹ In 2021, for instance, French forces mistakenly identified a local wedding gathering in Mali as a terrorist meeting, immediately intervening and causing at least 19 civilian deaths.⁸² After repeated casualties caused by the French, Malian citizens began to antagonize the foreign intervention, aligning themselves closer with the insurgents as opposed to swaying away from them.⁸³ Violence continued to rise, and Sahelians became increasingly opposed to French intervention, eventually leading to French President Emmanuel Macron's decision to withdraw from the Sahel.⁸⁴ Operation Barkhane was formally terminated on November 9th, 2022.⁸⁵

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Missions

The CSDP is the body of the European Union (EU), responsible for peacekeeping operations and conflict resolution.⁸⁶ In the early 2010s, it began its involvement in the Sahel in two major ways: military and civilian missions.⁸⁷ Military missions were focused on training and deploying troops to affected countries, strengthening the democratic government.⁸⁸ The two main military missions launched were the EUTM Mali training mission in 2013 and the EUMOM Niger military partnership mission in 2022.⁸⁹ The success of these missions largely varied; while the former mission was able to train more than 18,000 troops as of 2022, the EUMOM Niger mission was discontinued just a few months after its introduction due to the high

⁷⁸ "Operation Barkhane," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Barkhane.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ "How France Failed Mali: The End of Operation Barkhane," *Harvard International Review*, <https://hir.harvard.edu/how-france-failed-mali-the-end-of-operation-barkhane/>.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ "Mali Colonel Goïta Sworn In as Interim President after Coup," *BBC*, November 30, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-59517501>.

⁸⁴ "How France Failed Mali: The End of Operation Barkhane," *Harvard International Review*, <https://hir.harvard.edu/how-france-failed-mali-the-end-of-operation-barkhane/>.

⁸⁵ "Operation Barkhane," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Barkhane.

⁸⁶ "Common Security and Defence Policy," *European External Action Service*, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/common-security-and-defence-policy_en.

⁸⁷ "Vanishing Partners: Implications of Sahel Coups for the EU's Security," *OSW - Centre for Eastern Studies*, November 2, 2023, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2023-11-02/vanishing-partners-implications-sahel-coups-eus-security>.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

level of risk associated with the Nigerien political situation.⁹⁰ Comparatively, the EU's civilian missions have historically seen more success. These missions aim to build stability within Sahelian countries, addressing root problems by implementing reforms, strengthening police forces, and combating organised crime.⁹¹ This is primarily done by improving these countries' operational capabilities in security and defense. The civilian missions are supported by the EU Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell for the Sahel (EU RACC Sahel)—with the hopes of addressing security and governance concerns within the region.⁹² Examples include EUCAP Niger and EUCAP Mali, established in 2012 and 2013 respectively.⁹³ These missions have enabled and strengthened cooperation to Sahelian countries by facilitating a platform for communication. For example, representatives of the EU held annual meetings with Sahelian foreign ministers to support their governance and development.⁹⁴ Additionally, EU RACC Sahel has provided a total of EUR 147 million to fund the G5 Sahel Joint Force, further demonstrating condemnation for terrorism and illicit trafficking.⁹⁵ Though relatively successful in achieving their goals, CSDP Missions are nonetheless limited to military training. As critics point out, many foreign interventions of its kind do not adequately consider the wide variety of actors that contribute to the crisis in Sahel.⁹⁶ For instance, these missions often attempt to counter extremism by eradicating violent jihadist groups exclusively, thereby failing to acknowledge various separatist political entities and community-based militias also contributing to the crisis.⁹⁷

Current Situation

Despite various international responses to coups over the past few decades, millions of the Sahel's inhabitants still face endless challenges in their day-to-day life as a result of the coups; according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 29 million Sahelian citizens are in dire need of humanitarian aid.⁹⁸

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "Common Security and Defence Policy," *European External Action Service*, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/common-security-and-defence-policy_en.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "Vanishing Partners: Implications of Sahel Coups for the EU's Security," *OSW - Centre for Eastern Studies*, November 2, 2023, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2023-11-02/vanishing-partners-implications-sahel-coups-eus-security>

⁹⁴ "European Union's Partnership with G5 Sahel Countries," *ReliefWeb*, <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/european-union-s-partnership-g5-sahel-countries>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Niagalé Bagayoko, "The International Interventions in the Sahel: A Collective Failure," *SWP - German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, January 15, 2024, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/mta-joint-futures-37-the-international-interventions-in-the-sahel-a-collective-failure>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ "Sahel Crisis: 29 Million Sahelians Need Humanitarian Assistance and Protection," *OCHA*, April 27, 2021, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/burkina-faso/sahel-crisis-29-million-sahelians-need-humanitarian-assistance-and-protection>.

Displacement Crisis

Many families have been forced to flee as a result of the destruction of their homes in conflict, leading to a significant increase in internally displaced persons (IDPs).⁹⁹ Since 2014, the number of IDPs has increased by 2,446 percent.¹⁰⁰ Currently, there are over 5.3 million IDPs—these families and individuals can often only find shelter in overburdened and cramped shelters.¹⁰¹ In Mali, for instance, IDPs have taken refuge in temporary camps or host communities that are already struggling with limited resources, often going lengthy periods of time without access to clean water and sanitation.¹⁰² The strain on resources also commonly leads to competition for basic necessities. Such conditions have led to the increased risk of disease outbreaks among already vulnerable populations.¹⁰³ Additionally, the lack of access to education and employment opportunities for IDPs hinders their ability to properly reintegrate themselves into society, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependency.¹⁰⁴

Food Insecurity

Instability within local supply chains and farms has significantly hindered agricultural development, which has led to poor harvests and limited food availability.¹⁰⁵ The conflict has forced many farmers to flee, leading to an inability for them to effectively care for their crops and animals.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, much of the water infrastructure has been either contaminated or blockaded, as part of collateral damage caused by the coups.¹⁰⁷ As a result, the number of people in the Sahel in need of emergency food donations increased from 7 million to 30 million in the span of 7 years.¹⁰⁸ Acute hunger is now a pressing issue in countries like Burkina Faso and Mali, with skyrocketing malnutrition rates particularly evident among children under the age of five.¹⁰⁹ In Burkina Faso, conditions have gotten so extreme that over 90 percent of their population are living without access to a stable supply of food.¹¹⁰ To exacerbate this issue, food and other supplies sent into affected regions by international organisations such as the UN rarely reach the intended area, as many of these neighbourhoods are blockaded by militants and cut off from the outside world.¹¹¹

⁹⁹ "Central Sahel: How Conflict and Climate Change Drive Crisis," International Rescue Committee, August 17, 2023, <https://www.rescue.org/article/central-sahel-how-conflict-and-climate-change-drive-crisis>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² "Assistance to Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Affected by Insecurity in Mali," *World Food Programme*, <https://www.wfp.org/operations/200438-assistance-refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons-affected-insecurity-mali-0>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ "Crisis in West Africa: Extreme Hunger in the Sahel," *International Rescue Committee*, May 11, 2024, <https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-west-africa-extreme-hunger-sahel>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ "Violent Extremism in the Sahel," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 14, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>.

Extremism

As the recent rise of coups has led many countries into a state of political instability, many “power vacuums” have emerged.¹¹² Power vacuums refer to situations where a country’s government has lost control over their populations, and as a result, there is a lack of an identifiable central authority.¹¹³ Violent extremist groups are taking advantage of such power vacuums to expand their influence, leading to disastrous outcomes for various countries’ populations.¹¹⁴ For instance, major portions of Burkina Faso are under a blockade imposed by various Islamist militant groups, resulting in 36 communities besieged by extremists.¹¹⁵ In particular, the town of Djibo is entirely surrounded by jihadist groups, which has both cut off humanitarian aid and forced 75 percent of Djibo’s local shops to shut down.¹¹⁶

Case Study: Mali

Mali's recent history exemplifies the complex challenges of political instability in the Sahel. Following a coup in 2012, various armed groups seized control of the northern regions of Mali.¹¹⁷ The UN and France responded with the deployment of MINUSMA and Operation Barkhane respectively to support the facilitation of peace processes.¹¹⁸ However, these missions were largely unsuccessful due to foreign actors’ fundamental misunderstanding of Mali’s local conflict dynamic. For instance, in the case of Operation Barkhane, the structural illegitimacy of Mali’s regional governments was not within France’s control; as such, while the French-driven operation focused on quickly returning stability to Mali, the issue of accountability within the democratic government was never solved. Therefore, despite significant international efforts, Mali experienced another coup in August 2020, driven by popular dissatisfaction with the government’s handling of security and economic issues.¹¹⁹ In 2024, Malian citizens continue to face attacks by Islamist armed groups; these groups have been found to be raping women and girls, imposing religious taxes, and manipulating the law.¹²⁰ By capitalising on the political vacuum, Islamist groups such as Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) were able to expand their influence and perpetrate human rights abuses. Concurrently, regional separatist movements such as the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) became more dissatisfied with the government’s inability to address their grievances. As a result of their

¹¹² “Power Vacuum,” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_vacuum.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ “1 Million in Burkina Faso Surviving under Extremists' Blockades,” *Africa Defense Forum*, December 19, 2023, <https://adf-magazine.com/2023/12/1-million-in-burkina-faso-surviving-under-extremists-blockades/>.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ “What Does the Coup Mean for Mali’s Spiralling Security Crisis?,” *Al Jazeera*, August 31, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/31/what-does-the-coup-mean-for-malis-spiralling-security-crisis>.

¹¹⁸ Kamissa Camara, “Countering Coups: How to Reverse Military Rule across the Sahel,” *United States Institute of Peace*, August 13, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/08/countering-coups-how-reverse-military-rule-across-sahel>.

¹¹⁹ “Timeline: What Happened in Mali Since a Military Coup in August,” *Al Jazeera*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/25/timeline-what-happened-in-mali-since-a-military-coup-in-august>.

¹²⁰ “World Report 2024: Mali Country Chapter,” *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/mali>.

intensified demands for autonomy, Mali's effort to achieve peace were further hindered. All in all, this case study highlights the limitations of international peace missions in addressing the complicated reasons for instability in the Sahel.

Case Study: Niger

On July 26th, 2023, a coup occurred in Niger, with President Mohamed Bazoum being taken hostage.¹²¹ As one of the last remaining democracies within the Sahel region, Niger's recent insurgency was particularly troubling.¹²² Historically, Niger has been allies with France, heavily reliant upon French support for their economy and national security. However, after France, along with the U.S., showed immediate condemnation of the takeover in Niger, concerns have arisen that Niger may increasingly align with Russian interests, and veer away from Western allies in the future. Due to the country's lucrative mineral resources, namely gold and uranium, Niger has played a large role as a proxy in the geopolitical competition between Russian and French interests in the Sahel. As both Western and Russian industries are in need of Niger's natural resources, both have strong incentives to expand their influence in Niger via governmental collaboration, in hopes of securing mining contracts. Currently, due to ECOWAS sanctions on Niger, the country's food imports, electricity supplies, and medication are limited and quickly running out; the little amount that is available is only accessible for those able to pay increased costs.¹²³ Additionally, in an attempt to show disapproval for the coup, the EU has paused on security aid, over €500 million, to Niger, leaving its largely foreign-dependent economy further destabilized.¹²⁴

Possible Solutions and Controversies

Military Intervention

As previously established, external military intervention and peacekeeping missions have seen a mixed success rate in the past. However, when successful, they have proven to be incredibly effective in efficiently stabilizing countries and combating terrorism in a short period of time. Such interventions involve the deployment of troops from international organizations or coalitions to restore order, protect civilians, and facilitate the transition to democratic governance.¹²⁵ Operation Serval, for instance, was a French military intervention in Mali that was able to counter jihadist groups, sabotaging their attempt to take over the Malian government.¹²⁶ Using the 4,500 soldiers deployed for the operation, it was also able to force jihadist

¹²¹ "Niger: Containing the Fallout from the Coup," *International Crisis Group*, October 4, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/niger-containing-fallout-coup>.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Monty G. Marshall, "Military Intervention," *ScienceDirect*, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/military-intervention>.

¹²⁶ "Operation Serval," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Serval.

camps to leave Mali.¹²⁷ Similar types of foreign assistance and missions in the Sahel can work in times of crisis, helping a fragile government to regain control over their population and countering extremist groups. However, while military intervention can temporarily quell violence, it may also exacerbate tensions, especially if perceived as unsolicited foreign intervention. In 2023, for instance, Mali ordered the UN to withdraw 12,000 peacemakers, expressing that the 10 years they had spent in Mali had failed to bring them stability.¹²⁸ Additionally, sustaining peace and preventing coups within the Sahel as a long-term development goal requires addressing underlying political, social, and economic grievances. Reliance on independent foreign missions exclusively is likely to lead to the recurrence of coups, as seen in Burkina Faso—though their crisis following the January 23, 2022, coup was resolved, another broke out mere months later, on September 30, 2022.¹²⁹

Economic Development

Though root causes of coups vary across different regions within the Sahel, a common problem is citizens' poor living conditions, fueled by economic instability. Currently, around 44 percent of young individuals within the Sahel are unemployed.¹³⁰ This makes it easier for military groups to garner public support with populist rhetoric, increasing the likelihood of their success. Hence, economic development can address one of the root causes of instability by reducing poverty and improving living standards. Investments in infrastructure, education, and agriculture are desperately needed. It is not enough to merely provide humanitarian aid to temporarily alleviate the crisis, but rather to assist with the region's overall sustainable development. To incentivize countries to contribute to development aid within the Sahel, representatives of the UNSC can work with government officials within affected regions to establish a strategy for their development.¹³¹ After countries have determined how to maximize benefits for their populations by allocating resources effectively, foreign actors will be more likely to support; the US, for instance, has expressed willingness to fund various African development programs in the Sahel region if a strategy is proposed.¹³² Though undoubtedly effective, significant investment is required for this solution, and there may be challenges in effectively allocating resources to where they are most needed. Additionally, the risk of corruption and thereby budget transparency issues can undermine development efforts, diverting resources away from intended beneficiaries.

¹²⁷ Cyril Bensimon, "The Insurmountable Failure of France's Strategy in the Sahel," *Le Monde*, November 4, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/11/04/the-insurmountable-failure-of-france-s-strategy-in-the-sahel_6226447_4.html.

¹²⁸ "Mali Asks UN to Withdraw Its Peacekeeping Mission without Delay," *Al Jazeera*, June 16, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/16/mali-asks-un-to-withdraw-its-peacekeeping-mission-without-delay>.

¹²⁹ "Burkina Faso Military Coup: How the World Reacted," *Al Jazeera*, January 25, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/25/burkina-faso-military-coup-how-the-world-reacted>.

¹³⁰ "Instability and the State of Democracy in the Sahel and the U.S. Policy Response," *United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations*, July 12, 2022, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/07%2012%202022%20Instability%20and%20the%20State%20of%20Democracy%20in%20the%20Sahel%20and%20the%20U.S.%20Policy%20Response.pdf>.

¹³¹ Michelle Nichols, "U.S. Wants Sahel Force Strategy before Giving Money: Officials," *Reuters*, October 26, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/u-s-wants-sahel-force-strategy-before-giving-money-officials-idUSKBN1CX06L/>.

¹³² *Ibid.*

International Sanctions

Sanctions are penalties placed on a certain country to change its behaviour—they often involve stopping trade or financial dealings, which can hurt the targeted country's economy.¹³³ By making it harder for the targeted nation to do business, sanctions pressure these countries to follow international rules or policies.¹³⁴ This solution is a common response that international and regional actors resort to combat the crisis in Sahel. For instance, following the July 26th, 2023 coup d'état in Niger, ECOWAS introduced a series of sanctions onto the country, in hopes of forcing the country's Presidential Guard to step down and release the President from hostage.¹³⁵ All 15 members of ECOWAS immediately closed their borders to Niger, effectively blocking off financial transactions and freezing their assets.¹³⁶ Though sanctions send strong messages of condemnation for coups—enough to generate significant amounts of external pressure, often forcing them to surrender—they can also have unprecedented consequences. Sanctions can wind up hurting civilians more than they do the coup, as blocking financial transactions with a country prevents them from sourcing basic commodities from other countries. Niger, for instance, is currently unable to access electricity, fuel, and medicine exports due to commercial freezes.¹³⁷

Establishing Anti-Coup Norms

Anti-coup norms are international standards that condemn and deter coups through agreements or treaties, be that within the UN or other international bodies.¹³⁸ Though once prevalent, particularly for a period of time following the Cold War, such norms have lost their influence recently, often being sacrificed for various geopolitical motivations.¹³⁹ For instance, global superpowers such as the United States have failed to fully impose sanctions or suspend assistance to countries that are geopolitically strategic to them. Additionally, although organizations such as the AU have stated that they “prohibit unconstitutional changes of governments,” their responses to recent coups has reflected an ambiguous, waning resolve to strictly enforce anti-coup norms.¹⁴⁰ Many warning signs of Niger's coup in 2023, for example, were detected by the AU; the impending coup was predicted within policy circles that members of the AU were involved in.¹⁴¹ Despite their knowledge of the impending coup, neither ECOWAS nor the AU made any proactive

¹³³ Jonathan Masters, "What Are Economic Sanctions?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 24, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-are-economic-sanctions>.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Nnamdi Obasi, "ECOWAS, Nigeria, and Niger: Coup Sanctions Time to Recalibrate," *International Crisis Group*, December 5, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/ecowas-nigeria-and-niger-coup-sanctions-time-recalibrate>.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ "Niger: Containing the Fallout from the Coup," *International Crisis Group*, October 4, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/niger-containing-fallout-coup>.

¹³⁸ Judd Devermont, "False Choices: U.S. Policy toward Coastal West Africa and Sahel," *CSIS*, Jun 24, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/false-choices-us-policy-toward-coastal-west-africa-and-sahel>.

¹³⁹ Oisín Tansey, "The Fading of the Anti-Coup Norm," *Journal of Democracy*, January 2017, <https://journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-fading-of-the-anti-coup-norm/>.

¹⁴⁰ "Is the AU Failing Coup Countries?" *Institute for Security Studies*, September 1, 2023, <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/is-the-au-failing-coup-countries>.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

attempt to discourage or preempt the coup.¹⁴² This negligence by both regional organizations and foreign countries helps to propel the success of coups within the Sahel. By pressuring the international community to reestablish such norms and express condemnation immediately following coups, they can be delegitimized, hindering their further success and widespread proliferation.

Bloc Positions

Western Countries (Britain, Denmark, France, Greece, USA)

Countries in this bloc place a significant emphasis on promoting democratic governance and human rights. They view the coups in the Sahel as significant threats to international security, and thus are likely to support attempts to counter coups as quickly as possible. Britain, for instance, has “condemned the forceful removal [...] of leaders in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger.”¹⁴³ The British government has, instead, shown strong support for the AU, aligning themselves with the goal of returning affected countries to constitutional order.¹⁴⁴ In the past, Western countries have been shown a particular tendency to rely on solutions such as the implementation of targeted sanctions against coup leaders and UN peacekeeping missions to counter extremist groups. They are likely to continue to use their international influence to exert external pressure onto coup leaders, in an effort to reestablish democracy.

China and Russia

China and Russia will typically advocate for solutions that respect the sovereignty of Sahelian nations, generally opposing external military interventions or sanctions. Instead, they are likely to support economic aid and investment to foster development, as many Sahelian countries are of geopolitical interest to them. Beijing, for instance, has economic interests in various Sahelian countries, investing in oil and uranium industries in Niger.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, countries in the Sahel are crucial components of Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative, aimed at connecting Asia with Africa to increase economic trade.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, democratic transitions are not China’s main priority; rather, China is likely to support solutions that help maintain economic stability, such as developmental aid. Russia holds a similar, yet more extreme stance—it has not only funded initiatives for development within the Sahel, but has also been found to directly sponsor

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Louisa Brooke-Holland, "UK Government Condemnation of Coups in Africa," *UK Parliament*, September 18, 2023, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9861>.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Jevans Nyabiage, "What Niger Coup Means for China's Presence in Sahel Region," *South China Morning Post*, July 31, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3229399/what-niger-coup-means-chinas-presence-sahel-region>.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Nantulya, "Implications for Africa: China's One Belt, One Road Strategy," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, March 22, 2019, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/implications-for-africa-china-one-belt-one-road-strategy/>.

coups.¹⁴⁷ Russia is likely to continue searching for new partners in the Sahel, forming new ties and expanding Moscow's circle of influence.¹⁴⁸ Both countries in this bloc are unlikely to support sanctions—in 2023, Russia voted against a resolution that sought to continue sanctions against the coup leaders in Mali, a motion that China abstained from voting on.¹⁴⁹

African and Middle Eastern Countries (Pakistan, Somalia, Algeria, Sierra Leone)

Countries in this bloc generally support counter-terrorism efforts in the Sahel region to preempt the spread of extremist groups that could impact their own security, given the geographical proximity of these countries to the region. As many of them have suffered attempted coups within their own countries, members of this bloc are likely to support peaceful returns to democracy, while upholding Sahelian countries' national sovereignties to the maximum extent possible.¹⁵⁰ Following the Niger coup in 2023, Algeria, for instance, supported the establishment of constitutional order, but was vehemently against foreign military intervention.¹⁵¹ Their main concern was instability having spillover effects to neighbouring countries, as well as the potential refugee influx as a result of a poor economic landscape in Niger.¹⁵² Sharing borders with Mali and Niger, Algeria's unique geographical location, coupled with the country's own historical struggles with terrorism, provides Algeria with experience combating the regional issues in the Sahel.¹⁵³ Pakistan also plays a significant role in the crisis in the Sahel, as one of the largest contributors of personnel to UN peacekeeping missions.¹⁵⁴ Since its first deployment in 1960, Pakistan has participated in 41 peacekeeping missions, with over 150,000 peacekeepers deployed in total.¹⁵⁵ Within the Sahel specifically, Pakistan has participated in missions such as MINUSMA in Mali, where the country's troops helped to stabilize Mali amidst ongoing terrorist threats and supported humanitarian assistance.¹⁵⁶ Lastly, Sierra Leone is also eager to support international intervention, having observed its own peacekeeping mission,

¹⁴⁷ Philippe Bernard, "By Sponsoring Coups in the Sahel, Russia Has Acquired a New Hold on Europe: Emigration," *Le Monde*, March 28, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/03/28/by-sponsoring-coups-in-the-sahel-russia-has-acquired-a-new-hold-on-europe-emigration_6661134_23.html.

¹⁴⁸ Mark Briggs, "Russia Has Tightened Its Hold over the Sahel Region and Now It's Looking to Africa's West Coast," *Africa at LSE Blog*, May 8, 2024, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2024/05/08/russia-has-tightened-its-hold-over-the-sahel-region-and-now-its-looking-to-africas-west-coast/>.

¹⁴⁹ Frédéric Lemaître, "China Remains Cautious after Coups in Africa," *Le Monde*, September 1, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/09/01/china-remains-cautious-after-coups-in-africa_6119409_4.html.

¹⁵⁰ Joseph Siegle, "Africa's 2024 Elections: Challenges and Opportunities to Regain Democratic Momentum," *ReliefWeb*, January 17, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/africas-2024-elections-challenges-and-opportunities-regain-democratic-momentum>.

¹⁵¹ Emily Milliken, "Algeria's Role in Niger Coup," *Responsible Statecraft*, September 13, 2023, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/algeria-niger-coup/>.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ "Pakistan at the United Nations," *Pakistan Mission to the United Nations*, <https://pakun.org/Pakistan%20at%20the%20UN/#:~:text=It%20deployed%20its%20first%20ever,Pakistani%20peacekeepers%20have%20embraced%20martyrdom.>

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) from 1999 to 2006.¹⁵⁷ UNAMSIL aimed to bring an end to the ongoing Sierra Leonean Civil War, and involved over 6000 military personnel. As such, members of this bloc are most likely to support monetary humanitarian and developmental aid to support regional stability. They are also likely to support various international efforts to quickly resolve conflicts, as extreme violence in one area poses a threat to the national security of these countries.¹⁵⁸

Latin American and Developing Asian Countries (Guyana, Panama, Korea)

Though countries in this bloc have not taken highly visible or specific actions regarding the coups in the Sahel, they generally follow international consensus on supporting democratic governance and stability. For instance, South Korea hosted the Summit for Democracy Indo-Pacific Regional Meeting in 2023, where President Yoon gave \$100 million to support development cooperation projects in support of democracy over three years.¹⁵⁹ Members of this bloc are likely to support initiatives for economic and social development within the Sahel, prioritising humanitarian aid and long-term development projects to address the root causes of instability.

Discussion Questions

1. How does instability within the Sahel affect countries geographically outside of the region? Are certain countries or areas impacted more than others?
2. What is your country's stance on the recent rise of coups? Does your country believe in prioritizing short-term humanitarian relief, or long-term development goals?
3. What strategies can be employed to counter extreme ideologies and recruitment in the Sahel region, and how can local communities be deterred from being swayed by populist rhetoric?
4. What are the socioeconomic factors within Sahelian countries that make them particularly vulnerable to military takeovers and political unrest?
5. Is the deployment of troops from international organizations or coalitions worth the potential risk of exacerbating tensions, especially if perceived as unsolicited foreign intervention?

¹⁵⁷ "United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Mission_in_Sierra_Leone

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ "Korean Ambassador's Activities," *Embassy of the Republic of Korea to Libya*, April 10, 2023, https://lby.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=320794.

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Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation

Overview

With over 1 billion units in circulation around the world, small arms and light weapons (SALW), along with their ammunition, have been proliferating at alarming rates. This has caused significant misuse and illicit trade.¹⁶⁰ The prevalence and easy accessibility to seemingly more benign small-scale weapons accumulates to pose a significant global security threat, especially in conflict-ridden areas.¹⁶¹ Access to these weapons exacerbate issues such as organized crime, human right abuses, and gender-based violence on an international level.¹⁶²

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) refer to weapons that are portable, light, and designed for individual or small-scale use.¹⁶³ Crucially, there is a slight differentiation to be made between the terms “small arms” and “light weapons.”¹⁶⁴ Small arms generally refer to weapons used by one individual at a time, including handguns, rifles, revolvers, pistols, light machine guns, and other weaponry of this type.¹⁶⁵ Light weapons refer to weapons that are designed for use by a small crew, composed of two or three individuals.¹⁶⁶ These may include medium to heavy machine guns, rifle grenades, portable anti-tank guns, etc.¹⁶⁷ It is worth noting that the term SALW is not only limited to the traditional definition of arms, but rather extends to include ammunition, hand grenades, and any other sort of small-scale explosive.¹⁶⁸

A particularly harmful ramification of the burgeoning illicit SALW market is its ability to facilitate terrorism.¹⁶⁹ These markets offer a way for terrorist organizations to obtain weapons from illegitimate sources which they normally would not have been able to access. SALW proliferation, therefore, can actively play a role in exacerbating conflicts, as they only worsen security and increase violence.¹⁷⁰ This in turn endangers regular citizens, military officials, and peacekeepers alike. In the past decade alone, there were 85,148 documented terrorist attacks involving SALW, responsible for 193,172 deaths.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁰ “Access to illicit SALW contributes to conflicts, insecurity and instability,” *NATO*, January 23, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52142.htm.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ “SALW Definitions,” *SEESAC*, https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/2nd_SALW_Commissions_Meeting-Jahorina/7.SALW_Definitions.pdf

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ “Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW),” *ICCT*, July 28, 2021, <https://www.icct.nl/project/small-arms-light-weapons-salw>.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Additionally, this issue is particularly pressing due to its effect on particular demographics. Women, for instance, suffer increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence.¹⁷² In countries like Somalia and South Sudan, the accessibility of such weapons has severely harmed women and girls by increasing rates of violent domestic abuse and human trafficking.¹⁷³ Any solution to combat this issue, therefore, will likely need to address this specific facet of the problem.¹⁷⁴

Various SALW regulations have been implemented on both regional and international levels in an attempt to combat its proliferation. For instance, the United Nations (UN) established the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) in 2001 and the International Tracing Instrument (ITI) in 2005.¹⁷⁵ Despite these attempts, a report released by the UN in 2021 states that the spread of SALW has not yet been adequately curbed, and the issue “remain[s] a defining factor in undermining peace and security.”¹⁷⁶

Timeline

September 2, 1945 — World War II ends due to Japan’s official surrender, resulting in a global surplus of military weapons.¹⁷⁷ While some of these weapons were stockpiled by various governments across the world, others went to private arms dealers and non-governmental actors.

October 22, 1968 — The United States publishes the Gun Control Act (GCA), a national attempt to regulate the distribution and sale of firearms.¹⁷⁸ This act banned the majority of ex-convicts, drug users, and people with mental disorders from purchasing a gun.¹⁷⁹

February 15, 1989 — The Soviet-Afghan War ends.¹⁸⁰ Throughout the 10 years of war, Afghanistan received millions of tonnes of weapons from the United States, accumulating to over \$8 billion USD

¹⁷² “Security Council press statement,” *United Nations*, October 6, 2021, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14656.doc.htm>

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ “Gender and Small Arms Control,” *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/gender-and-small-arms-control/>

¹⁷⁵ Simone Wisotzki, “Efforts to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons: from persistent crisis to norm failure?,” *Z Friedens und Konfliktforsch*, May 17, 2022, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42597-022-00073-9>

¹⁷⁶ “Security Council press statement,” *United Nations*, October 6, 2021, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14656.doc.htm>

¹⁷⁷ “End of World War II 1945,” *The National WWII Museum*, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/end-world-war-ii-1945>.

¹⁷⁸ “Gun Control Act of 1968,” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun_Control_Act_of_1968.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ “Soviet–Afghan War,” *Wikipedia*, March 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet%E2%80%93Afghan_War

worth of armaments.¹⁸¹ In the aftermath of the war, many of these weapons ended up in the hands of non-governmental actors through black market suppliers, regional manufacturers, and foreign governments.¹⁸²

December 24, 1991 — The Cold War comes to a close.¹⁸³ After the Soviet Union collapsed and various wars in former Yugoslavia ended, border controls became significantly less stringent.¹⁸⁴ As a result, the excess supply of SALW began to flow into Europe; over time, they were also transported to various conflict-ridden areas, primarily in Africa and the Middle East.¹⁸⁵

July 15, 1994 — According to the Constitution of Rwanda, over 1 million people are killed in the Rwandan genocide.¹⁸⁶ The easy availability and low costs of SALW such as machetes, hand grenades, and small firearms made them the most common weapons militias used to murder victims.

1999 — The Small Arms Survey, a Geneva-based research project into SALW, is founded with the primary aim of reducing illegal arm sales.¹⁸⁷ Though it is based in Switzerland, the independent research project conducts in-depth research on SALW proliferation globally, and often researches internationally applicable trends.¹⁸⁸

July 2001 — The UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) is introduced.¹⁸⁹ It is an international framework, aiming to both counter illegal SALW distribution and control its unwanted impacts.¹⁹⁰ Currently, member states gather once every 6 years to revisit the programme of action at a Review Conference.¹⁹¹

December 8, 2005 — The International Tracing Instrument (ITI) is established by the UN.¹⁹² As opposed to eradicating stockpiles as commonly seen in previous attempts to curb SALW proliferation, the agreement primarily seeks to improve transparency by creating a reliable way to identify and trace weapons.¹⁹³

¹⁸¹ “Small Arms in Afghanistan: Fostering Conditions for Disarmament,” *Royal United Services Institute*, November 19, 2007, <https://rusi.org/publication/small-arms-afghanistan-fostering-conditions-disarmament>

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ “Cold War (1985–1991),” *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War_\(1985%E2%80%931991\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War_(1985%E2%80%931991))

¹⁸⁴ Domitilla Sagramoso, “The Proliferation of Illegal Small Arms and Light Weapons in and around the European Union,” *Saferworld*, July 2001, <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/77-the-proliferation-of-illegal-small-arms-and-light-weapons-in-and-around-the-european-union>.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ “Rwandan genocide,” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rwandan_genocide

¹⁸⁷ “SAS Strategy 2024-28,” *Small Arms Survey*, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/SAS-Strategy-2024-28.pdf>

¹⁸⁸ “Vision and Mission,” *Small Arms Survey*, https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/who_we_are/vision_mission.

¹⁸⁹ “Programme of Action,” *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/salw/programme-of-action/>

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ “United Nations Conference to Review Progress on Combating Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons to Be Held at Headquarters, 18-26 June,” *United Nations*, June 14, 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/dc3877.doc.htm>

¹⁹² Nelson Alusala, “Six years on: The UN’s International Tracing Instrument,” *Institute for Security Studies*, December 5, 2011, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/six-years-on-the-uns-international-tracing-instrument>

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

November 26-29, 2008 — Coordinated terrorist attacks are conducted across Mumbai, India, killing almost 200 people and injuring over 300.¹⁹⁴ A series of 12 attacks were led by members of Lashkar-e-Taiba, using small arms such as AK-47s, 9mm pistols, and hand grenades.¹⁹⁵

January 2021 — Tigray rebels agree to terminate the usage of heavy weapons in the Tigray War in Ethiopia.¹⁹⁶ However, the war continues in the absence of a formal handover of SALW.¹⁹⁷

Historical Analysis

According to the Small Arms Survey, there were over 1 billion small arms circulating across the world in 2018; this situation has largely been the result of various historical events and their implications for the SALW market.¹⁹⁸

Prior to the 19th century, weapons were crafted by hand, primarily utilizing small-scale production.¹⁹⁹ Common weapons that were produced and utilized on a large scale included melee weapons—swords, pikes, lances, and spears.²⁰⁰ Guns were generally not mass-produced, as they were difficult to manufacture at a large scale.²⁰¹ The best method to make a gun was to utilize the Damascus forging method—a process that involved forging together scraps of steel to create something that resembled a barrel.²⁰² This was a costly and lengthy process, meaning it was incredibly difficult to make large amounts of guns. However, the introduction of the Industrial Revolution also introduced the ability to mass produce firearms.²⁰³ Countries began to develop and standardize the production of their military equipment, which led to a more streamlined process that effectively increased the availability of small arms.²⁰⁴ In particular, the use of uniform, interchangeable parts and individual components rendered the quality of rifles and handguns

¹⁹⁴ Rachel Stohl, “Stopping the Destructive Spread of Small Arms,” *American Progress*, March 10, 2010, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/stopping-the-destructive-spread-of-small-arms/>

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Fred Harter, “Ethiopia’s Unfinished Peace Deal Leaves Ex-Fighters in Limbo,” *The New Humanitarian*, November 2, 2023, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/11/02/ethiopias-unfinished-peace-deal-leaves-ex-fighters-in-limbo>

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Aaron Karp, “Estimating Global Civilian-held Firearms Numbers,” *Small Arms Survey*, June 2018, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/estimating-global-civilian-held-firearms-numbers>.

¹⁹⁹ Richard Moore, “Production of Muskets and Their Effects in the Eighteenth Century,” *Forbes5*, <https://www.forbes5.pitt.edu/article/production-muskets-and-their-effects-eighteenth-century>

²⁰⁰ “How Did Guns Start Before The Industrial Revolution,” *Bartleby*, <https://www.bartleby.com/essay/How-Did-Guns-Start-Before-The-Industrial-14F972997021FB83>.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² “Making Modern Firearms in a Pre-Industrial Society: Cottage Industry,” *Worldbuilding Stack Exchange*, <https://worldbuilding.stackexchange.com/questions/190404/making-modern-firearms-in-a-pre-industrial-society-cottage-industry>.

²⁰³ Walter S. Zapotoczny, “The Industrial Revolution,” *WZAP Online*, https://www.wzaponline.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/IndustrialRevolution.292125935.pdf

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

significantly more consistent. Rifles and guns became more accurate, easier to produce, and cheaper.²⁰⁵ Weapon production quickly became one of the first industrial sectors to exploit the transition from craft production to large-scale mass production.²⁰⁶

World War I took place from 1914 to 1918.²⁰⁷ During this time, the demand for various sorts of arms skyrocketed. The war saw the deployment of millions of rifles, pistols, and the newly popularized handheld machine gun.²⁰⁸ Following this period of rapid weapon production, the Interwar Period took place from 1918 to 1939, from the end of World War I to the start of World War II.²⁰⁹ During this time, many surplus weapons left over from World War I flooded into the global market.²¹⁰ Due to an unforeseen amount of weapons and a lack of regulation, most of these weapons were not traced, and were instead arbitrarily sold or transferred to various groups.²¹¹ Easy access to weapons also opened up various lines of illegal trade, as organized crime groups and terrorists recognized the opportunity.²¹²

The period of time between 1939 and 1945 saw the occurrence of World War II.²¹³ While demand had died down and evened out throughout the previous Interwar Period, it quickly rose back up at the onset of the Second World War.²¹⁴ SALW production surged once again, and a similar phenomenon was observed by the end of 1945; a significant number of surplus weapons were distributed globally.²¹⁵

In 1947, the Cold War began.²¹⁶ Predictably, the ideological conflict between the US and the USSR led to widespread arms transfers; both superpowers supplied weapons to allied states and insurgent groups around the world.²¹⁷ Due to various proxy wars, this period saw significant proliferation of SALW in Africa, Latin America, and Asia in particular.²¹⁸ For instance, Angola's civil war became a proxy battleground for the U.S. and USSR, with the Soviet Union and Cuba supporting one faction, and the United States and

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ "Military Technology in World War I," *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/world-war-i-rotogravures/articles-and-essays/military-technology-in-world-war-i/>

²⁰⁹ "Inter-war Years 1918-1939," *Striking Women*, <https://www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/inter-war-years-1918-1939>

²¹⁰ "Military Expenditure and Arms Production," *BICC*, <https://www.bicc.de/Publikationen/brief3.pdf~dr307>

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ "World War II: Key Dates," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/world-war-ii-key-dates>

²¹⁴ "Military production during World War II," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_production_during_World_War_II

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ "Cold War History," *History*, June 26, 2023, <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/cold-war-history>

²¹⁷ "Cold War," *National Geographic*, March 23, 2022 <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/cold-war>

²¹⁸ Ibid.

South Africa supporting another.²¹⁹ The USSR provided extensive military support, including small arms, light weapons, tanks, and artillery.²²⁰ In addition to the Soviet support, Cuba also supplied significant quantities of SALW, including AK-47 rifles and RPGs.²²¹ While the USSR and Cuba fueled one end of the battle, the U.S. fueled the other. Through the CIA, the U.S. provided many small arms, most notably M16 rifles.²²² Similar proxy wars to the one in Angola have occurred in various other countries over the span of the Cold War such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Korea.²²³ Therefore, by the end of the Cold War, vast quantities of SALW remained in these nations, and the weapons were spread to various other states very quickly; for instance, Angolan weapons were spread to neighboring countries such as Namibia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which later experienced their own conflicts.²²⁴

From the 1990s onwards, the large surplus of SALW remaining from previous global wars was never adequately addressed, partially due to the fact that the weapons were never tracked, and thus states had no way to regain control over them.²²⁵ Over time, many of these weapons have entered the black market. It is becoming increasingly common for them to be acquired by non-state actors such as criminal organizations and insurgent groups. Various regional and ongoing conflicts across the world contribute to the remaining circulation of SALW, both legally and illicitly.

Past UN/International Involvement

Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA)

The PoA was established in 2001 by the UN.²²⁶ It aimed to assist governments in improving their regulation of small arms, focusing primarily on stockpile management.²²⁷ It is often cited as the primary international agreement on SALW regulation, as it is a valuable resource for various governments, countries, states, and regional and international organizations.²²⁸ The reason it is able to remain relevant and applicable to many different countries is because it primarily focuses on providing a broad and detailed framework for how to

²¹⁹ William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "Independence and Civil War," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, July 8, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Angola/Independence-and-civil-war>

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ "Cold War Proxy Wars," *Dresner World*, <https://dresnerworld.edublogs.org/resources/handouts/cold-war-proxy-wars/>

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ "Handbook of Best Practices on Small Arms and Light Weapons," OSCE, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/a/13616.pdf>

²²⁶ "Programme of Action," *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/salw/programme-of-action/>

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ "Reviewing Action on Small Arms: Assessing the First Five Years of the UN Programme of Action (PoA)," *Saferworld*, June 2006, <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/191-reviewing-action-on-small-arms-assessing-the-first-five-years-of-the-un-programme-of-action-poa>

approach SALW proliferation.²²⁹ For instance, after particular regions across the world suffered from spikes in SALW violence following a significant war, such as Afghanistan after the Soviet-Afghan War, the PoA analyzed “lessons learned” from these regions.²³⁰ The adequacy and effectiveness of the PoA is also regularly discussed at Review Conferences, where progress is reflected upon and reviewed.²³¹ While the PoA provides the most holistic approach we have to addressing the issue to date, it is ultimately unenforceable; it is not legally binding, and thus accountability is limited. For instance, a study by the Small Arms Survey in 2018 found that many member countries do not entirely fulfill PoA commitments, with significant disparities in adherence.²³² Another study by the Stimson Center noted that less than 60% of member states submitted national reports on PoA implementation by the 2018 deadline.²³³ Additionally, although the PoA acts as a broad, general framework for approaching the issue, it lacks specific and measurable indicators for tracking progress.

The International Tracing Agreement

In 2005, the PoA framework was further strengthened by the addition of the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), which provided a practical and enforceable mechanism.²³⁴ Its purpose was to provide a way for countries to reliably identify and trace the flow of illegal SALW.²³⁵ Additionally, the ITI sought to increase global cooperation in tracking weapons by facilitating the sharing of information between countries and organizations.²³⁶ It did this by encouraging countries with adequate resources to allocate a portion to research and examination of new technologies, such as tracking systems, to improve the detection of illegal SALW.²³⁷ It was the ITI that largely influenced the addition of the goal of improving weapons tracing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²³⁸ As the ITI mandates compulsory tracing of weapons, it has been effective in advancing global transparency surrounding weapon ownership, most notably in areas in Latin America. Similar to the PoA, the ITI lacks strong enforcement mechanisms, as compliance is voluntary and often volatile due to a lack of resources and political will.²³⁹

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² “SAS Annual Report 2018,” *Small Arms Survey*,

https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-Annual-Report-2018_0.pdf

²³³ “CSPA Implementation Tracker: Methodology,” *Stimson*, October 24, 2023,

<https://www.stimson.org/project/child-soldiers/cspa-implementation-tracker/methodology/>

²³⁴ “ITI Implementation Plan,” *UNODC*, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/Firearms/ITI.pdf>

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ “SALW: Improving Weapons Tracing,” *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*,

<https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/salw/#:~:text=Improving%20weapons%20tracing%20is%20now,Member%20States%20have%20agreed%20upon.>

²³⁹ “Programme of Action,” *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*,

<https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/salw/programme-of-action/>

The Firearms Protocol

Also known as the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, the Firearms Protocol is the only legally binding protocol of its kind to aim to counter illegitimate means of firearm manufacturing and trafficking.²⁴⁰ Adopted on May 31st, 2001 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), this protocol specifically focuses on the transfer of certain components of firearms and their ammunition on an international level.²⁴¹ It sought to achieve control over illicit SALW by preventing them from falling into illegal suppliers in the first place, and cracking down on offenders.²⁴² While the Firearms Protocol focuses on investigation of illegal transfers, it does not look into reducing legal ownership of SALW, and thereby does little to mitigate risks associated with high levels of legal firearm ownership.²⁴³

The Arms Trade Treaty

The UN General Assembly adopted the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) on April 2, 2013, and it has since gathered 112 States Parties—countries who have agreed to be legally bound to its rules.²⁴⁴ As opposed to the Firearms Protocol, which focused exclusively on illicit sales of SALW, the ATT also sought to regulate the flow of arms conventionally or legally.²⁴⁵ In addition, it sought to provide a broader international standard regarding arms transfers as a whole.²⁴⁶ However, effectiveness of the ATT is widely debated, as many of the most significant actors—large exporters of weapons such as the United States and Russia—have yet to ratify the treaty.²⁴⁷ Additionally, even states that have formally ratified it have been found to breach the treaty. For instance, despite the UK being a signatory to the ATT, their regular arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other nations involved in the Yemen War raises questions regarding their compliance. Other countries, such as France and the United States, continue to supply arms to Saudi-led coalition forces, with sales amounting to over \$18 billion USD. As evidenced by the continuous fueling of the Yemen War, the ratification of the ATT is inadequate in combating countries' incentives to flout international law to advance their economic interests and geopolitical alliances.

Current Situation

Despite various attempts to combat SALW proliferation by both the UN on an international level, and independent countries on a national scale, millions of citizens across the world continue to struggle with its devastating implications.

²⁴⁰ “The Firearms Protocol,” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html>

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ “The Arms Trade Treaty,” *ATT*, <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/>

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ “Arms Control,” *Amnesty International*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/>

Human Cost

The total amount of SALW circulating across the world is estimated to be around 875 million, at the very least.²⁴⁸ Of these 875 million weapons, around 650 million are civilian-owned (as opposed to controlled by a state or corporations).²⁴⁹ With the active circulation of harmful weapons amongst populations instead of centralized control, SALW proliferation has become a major factor in facilitating various atrocities and human rights violations. These include murder, maiming, torture, and youth gang recruitment.²⁵⁰ Additionally, beyond individual incidents, SALW circulation also contributes to the perpetration of conflicts, often helping to escalate situations to become more violent.²⁵¹ This is particularly devastating as it creates a vicious cycle: as situations escalate, a greater amount of weapons is needed, resulting in further escalation.²⁵² Over the past decade, more than 250 conflicts have occurred, and the easy accessibility of SALW was a crucial aspect in fueling them, having led to over 50,000 deaths each year.²⁵³

Stockpiles

A stockpile, in the context of SALW proliferation, refers to large warehouses or stores containing reserves of accumulated weapons.²⁵⁴ These stockpiles, while generally owned by states, are integral to the illicit flow of SALW.²⁵⁵ This is because, over time, various independent actors or organizations have found ways to break in and access or otherwise siphon off large quantities of weapons in a clandestine manner.²⁵⁶ This makes these storage locations immensely dangerous to civilians for two main reasons. Firstly, because the stockpiles are often insufficiently controlled and regulated by the government, it is becoming increasingly easy for ill-intentioned actors to divert weapons from the state and wreak havoc with the stolen equipment.²⁵⁷ Secondly, the stockpiles themselves are not particularly well-enforced nor constructed—occasionally, explosions occur, leading to deaths, displacement, and environmental disaster.

Gender-based Violence

Men constitute an overwhelming majority of firearm owners, especially within developing nations.²⁵⁸ For instance, 96% of firearm owners are men in Moldova, with the percentage climbing to 99% in Albania and

²⁴⁸ “Small Arms and Light Weapons,” *International Peace Bureau*, <https://ipb.org/small-arms-and-light-weapons/>

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ “Human Cost of Illicit Flow of Small Arms, Light Weapons Stressed in Security Council Debate,” *United Nations*, May 13, 2015, <https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc11889.doc.htm>

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ “Stockpile,” *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stockpile>

²⁵⁵ “Small Arms and Light Weapons,” *International Peace Bureau*, <https://ipb.org/small-arms-and-light-weapons/>

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ “Gender in Small Arms Control,” *SEESAC*, <https://www.seesac.org/Gender-in-Small-Arms-Control/>

to 98% in Montenegro.²⁵⁹ Consequently, the vast majority of violent perpetrators are also men—globally, men commit more than 97% of all incidents relating to firearms in some way.²⁶⁰ Conversely, although less than 3% of women are the perpetrators, they are significantly more likely to wind up as the victims in such incidents.²⁶¹ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), nearly one-third of women worldwide, between the ages of 15 and 49, have experienced some kind of physical or sexual violence in a relationship.²⁶² SALW oftentimes directly contributes to and exacerbates gender-based violence, as they are a common choice of weapons for domestic violence.²⁶³ This is largely due to their easy accessibility, as well as gender norms surrounding the use of SALW; recent research has found that masculine stereotypes are often connected to the use and possession of weapons.²⁶⁴ Noting the disproportionate impact that SALW circulation has on women, many recent attempts to establish small arms control have adopted gender-mainstreaming, which involves integrating perspectives of women in policy to reduce inequality.²⁶⁵ For instance, in 2019, United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) established an initiative to support gender mainstreamed policies in collaboration with the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, dedicated to strengthening states' abilities to not only control SALW, but do so in a gender-responsive way. However, women are nonetheless underrepresented in making laws, accounting for only an average 14% of members of SALW commissions.²⁶⁶

Case Study: SALW Proliferation in Mexico

Mexico is an active participant of and supports both the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and UN Programme of Action (PoA) on SALW. Additionally, it signed the Merida Initiative in October 2007, a security cooperation agreement with the U.S. to establish measures to curb arms smuggling.²⁶⁷ Despite these efforts, Mexico faces significant challenges related to SALW. The circulation of such weapons has significantly exacerbated violence primarily driven by drug cartels and organized crime groups. The country faces a significant problem with the illicit smuggling of weapons through its northern border, with a throughput of approximately 5 hundred thousand weapons each year.²⁶⁸ Despite strict national gun laws (Mexican citizens are only able to legitimately purchase weapons from the official defense ministry), the total number

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² “Violence Against Women,” *World Health Organization*, March 25, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

²⁶³ “Gender and Small Arms Control,” *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/gender-and-small-arms-control/>

²⁶⁴ “Gendered Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation,” *SIPRI*, <https://www.sipri.org/research/peace-and-development/governance-and-society/gendered-impacts-small-arms-and-light-weapons-proliferation>.

²⁶⁵ “Gender and Small Arms Control,” *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/gender-and-small-arms-control/>

²⁶⁶ “Gender in Small Arms Control,” *SEESAC*, <https://www.seesac.org/Gender-in-Small-Arms-Control/>

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Guillermo Vázquez del Mercado, “Arms Trafficking Policy Brief,” *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, August 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/GI-TOC-policy-brief_Arms-trafficking-web-1.pdf

of firearms in Mexico is currently an estimated 16.8 million.²⁶⁹ The main issue in Mexico is that the vast majority of these weapons wind up in criminal groups. Their ability to easily obtain weapons renders them powerful and destructive, and in some circumstances, even more well-armed than local police and security forces.²⁷⁰ The government now recognizes 37 different cartels within the country—these cartels contribute to Mexico’s struggles with one of the highest homicide rates in the world, with over 35,000 murders recorded in 2020 alone. Notably, a significant portion of these homicides are gun-related.²⁷¹

Possible Solutions and Controversies

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)

The process of DDR entails three key aspects: disarming armed individuals, taking them out of their previous group of combatants, and socially integrating them into civilian society.²⁷² Though specifics may vary, such programs often involve convening combatants in cantonments, where they are forced to surrender all weapons, then holding them for a period of time while they undergo retraining programs and rehabilitation.²⁷³ During this time, basic necessities such as food, water, and clothing are supplied, as well as various opportunities for therapy and counselling.²⁷⁴ When an individual has been deemed properly rehabilitated, they are reintegrated into society, often with support in finding employment.²⁷⁵ Such DDR programs have seen considerable success in either significantly reducing the capacity of combatant groups, or disbanding them entirely.²⁷⁶ Most conflicts that have been historically resolved, as well as many that are currently in the process of reaching a resolution, have utilized some form of DDR program, as they are integral for preempting surges of violence.²⁷⁷ For example, recently established DDR programs in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, and The Democratic Republic of Congo have successfully disarmed hundreds of thousands, with over 75% of ex-combatants reporting that the program played an integral role in preparing them for employment. DDR programs are highly effective and have the potential to revitalize long-term social development in severely affected areas, as they address many of the root causes of the issue. However, such programs are incredibly costly, as resources must be provided for each individual undergoing rehabilitation; additionally, the reintegration process can be overly time-consuming.²⁷⁸

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² “Social Development Notes: Conflict, Crime and Violence,” *African Union*, February 2009, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39242-doc-192._social_development_notes._conflict_crime_and_violence.pdf

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ “Small Arms and Light Weapons,” *International Peace Bureau*, <https://ipb.org/small-arms-and-light-weapons/>

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

International Initiatives

Throughout the past few decades, multiple programmes, documents, and initiatives have been established by the international community in an effort to combat SALW proliferation. The Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) was launched by the UN in 1998, and primarily focused on facilitating the flow of information, strategy and experience between different countries, helping coordinate global action on this issue. It also contributed toward developing a global forum for discussion surrounding the proliferation of SALW.²⁷⁹ One of CASA's most notable initiatives was the International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS), which assisted states in establishing their own national regulations by providing general guidelines.²⁸⁰ More recently, the UN launched the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (PoA) and the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), both of which aimed to reduce illicit SALW circulation by improving tracing mechanisms.²⁸¹ However, these international agreements ultimately lack an enforceability metric. As they are not legally binding, certain countries can choose to opt out without facing any notable repercussions. Additionally, many of these initiatives focus exclusively on the *illicit* circulation of SALW, resulting in the state having little incentive to restrict their own legal use of weapons. However, the vast majority of SALW originate from legal trade, accounting for around 80% of all SALW trade; therefore, the impacts of international standards, even if successful, may have little effect in the grand scheme of the issue.²⁸²

Reducing Existing Stockpiles

Currently, there are at least 875 million small arms across the world, and over 75% of them are owned by civilians as opposed to government agencies or the police.²⁸³ Focusing on reducing the amount currently in circulation is crucial and can make a significant impact in decreasing the size of the market. As a first step, reducing the number of state-owned arms is integral; not only are they comparatively easier to track down, they are also usually located in one concentrated area, making the process more efficient. Though governments are often incentivized to maintain a large armory for effective national defense, the Small Arms Survey concludes that over 38% of state-owned small arms are unnecessary and exceed requirements for national defense.²⁸⁴ Secondly, reducing the arms that are in the hands of civilians is of utmost importance considering they constitute most gun owners, though it is significantly more difficult. This can be done through two main approaches: the voluntary or obligatory surrender of weapons. Voluntary programs merely encourage people to give up their weapons with a financial incentive; these programs have observed mixed success rates across the world. Obligatory weapon surrender usually entails both a financial incentive

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ "National Controls Over the End-User and End-Use of Internationally Transferred Small Arms and Light Weapons," *ATT Assistance*, June 17, 2014, https://att-assistance.org/sites/default/files/2015/11/20140617_UN_EN_National-controls-over-the-end-user-and-end-use-of-internationally-transferred-small-arms-and-light-weapons.pdf

²⁸¹ "Small Arms and Light Weapons," *International Peace Bureau*, <https://ipb.org/small-arms-and-light-weapons/>

²⁸² "Small Arms: No Single Solution," *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/small-arms-no-single-solution>

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

and tangible changes in legislation that make it impossible or more difficult to own a firearm. Such programs have aided Australia in removing around 650,000 arms from circulation, and Brazil in removing 450,000.²⁸⁵ However, as this type of gun control hinges upon civilians following the law, it still sees mixed success rates. Uganda, for instance, implemented a compulsory disarmament program—which resulted in searches of personal property and assault—but only managed to destroy a limited number of arms, instead instilling fear and insecurity amongst the Ugandan population.²⁸⁶

Bloc Positions

Western Nations and Korea (France, United Kingdom, USA, Denmark, Greece, Slovenia, Korea)

Countries in this bloc generally support robust international arms control treaties, historically showing much more willingness to partake in initiatives established by the UN.²⁸⁷ These countries have all ratified treaties such as the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA).²⁸⁸ Additionally, these countries often emphasize transparency and cooperation. Denmark, for example, proposed a universal ban for the transfer of all unauthorized SALW in December 2021.²⁸⁹ These nations often play a large part in initiating these international agreements themselves. France, for instance, initiated the International Tracing Instrument for tracking SALW in 2005, as part of a joint effort with Switzerland, and established the global initiative against aerial transport of illicit SALW.²⁹⁰

Eastern Nations (China, Russia, Pakistan)

Countries in this bloc advocate for arms control but emphasize state sovereignty. They are more likely to support agreements that do not infringe on national security or strategic interests.²⁹¹ China, for instance, has proved unwilling to reduce the existing state stockpile, but has been proactive in implementing various bans on civilian arms ownership.²⁹² Pakistan, where there are 9 illegal weapons for every legal weapon, has similarly been in support of strict control over SALW.²⁹³ Overall, these countries would likely also support

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ “Programme of Action,” *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/salw/programme-of-action/>

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ “What France Achieved,” *France TNP*, <https://www.francetnp.gouv.fr/what-france-achieved?lang=fr>

²⁹¹ Zi Yang, “Mapping China's Small Arms Trade,” *Jamestown Foundation*, December 21, 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/mapping-chinas-small-arms-trade-chinas-illicit-domestic-gun-trade/>.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ R.K. Gorea, “Illegal Weapons in Pakistan,” *JSTOR*, September 2006, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27017712>.

international regulation of SALW, but will likely push back against measures perceived as overly intrusive or putting their military capabilities to a disadvantage.²⁹⁴

African Nations (Algeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia)

Countries in this bloc have historically suffered from the exacerbation of conflict through SALW, and thus are strong supporters of capacity-building and international support to address the root causes of arms proliferation.²⁹⁵ In particular, countries such as Somalia and Algeria believe that the government has the primary responsibility to reduce the illicit circulation of weapons, and all countries in this bloc have signed both the UN PoA and the ITI.²⁹⁶ Sierra Leone has especially made active efforts to implement the PoA in various national initiatives and legislation.²⁹⁷ However, the attempts of these countries alone are often inadequate in mitigating the issue effectively. Recently, there have been increasing numbers of requests for international assistance from countries of this bloc.²⁹⁸ Humanitarian and development aid is strongly needed and supported by these countries to effectively combat their SALW crises.²⁹⁹

Latin American Nations (Guyana, Panama)

Countries in this bloc are likely to approach combatting SALW proliferation through a developmental perspective.³⁰⁰ This includes focusing on various forms of socio-economic development, in an attempt to decrease the demand for SALW in the first place.³⁰¹ For instance, Panama launched a program in 2017 that aimed to alleviate poverty, low levels of education, and unemployment throughout vulnerable communities in the nation.³⁰² These countries also commonly focus on collaborating with neighbouring countries to share strategy, information, and tracing mechanisms for SALW. Panama, for instance, collaborates with Central American countries through the Central American Integration System (SICA) to strengthen their arms control, as well as combat various forms of transnational crime relating to illegal arms.³⁰³ South Korea

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Nazim Khaldi, "Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Algeria Statement BMS8 Agenda Item 6," *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*, July 1, 2022, [https://docs-library.unoda.org/Programme_of_Action_on_Small_Arms_and_Light_Weapons_-_EightBiennial_Meeting_of_States_\(2022\)/ALGERIA-STATEMENT-BMS8-AGENDA-ITEM-6.pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Programme_of_Action_on_Small_Arms_and_Light_Weapons_-_EightBiennial_Meeting_of_States_(2022)/ALGERIA-STATEMENT-BMS8-AGENDA-ITEM-6.pdf)

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ "International Assistance to Sierra Leone," *United Nations*, 2022, <https://smallarms.un-arm.org/international-assistance/SLE>

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ "UNDP Project 00095275," *United Nations Development Programme*, <https://mptf.undp.org/project/00095275>

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ "Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana," *SICA*, https://www.sica.int/sica/vista_en.aspx

employs a similar strategy by collaborating with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and ASEAN Plus Three (APT).³⁰⁴

Discussion Questions

1. What are the primary economic, political, and social factors driving the demand for SALW in conflict zones?
2. How can states balance the need for national self-defense with the risks associated with widespread SALW availability?
3. How does the proliferation of SALW exacerbate gender-based violence, and what measures can be taken to protect vulnerable populations?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of long-term disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs versus short-term strategies like confiscation and crackdowns on SALW?
5. How effective are international frameworks (PoA, ITI, etc.) in addressing SALW proliferation, and what improvements are needed?

Additional Resources

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