II. Armed conflict and peace processes in the Sahel and Lake Chad region

IAN DAVIS

For the purpose of this section the Sahel and Lake Chad region comprises 12 countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. At least half of them (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria) were involved in armed conflicts in 2019, all of which worsened in terms of conflict-related fatalities (compared with 2018).

The region faces acute security challenges linked to weakness of the states, corruption and non-inclusive governance, which have added to or exacerbated a range of existing problems, including extreme poverty, economic fragility and low resilience. This economic fragility (Niger is at the bottom of the United Nations Development Programme 2019 human development index, while Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali are near the bottom) and the impact of climate change in a region where more than 80 per cent of the population relies essentially on agriculture and pastoral activities have led to increased food insecurity and heightened intercommunal conflict.[1] The conflict dynamics also include irregular migration, illicit trafficking and transnational organized crime, especially where there are weak governmental institutions. The rising violence has also led to schools being targeted by armed groups and increasing numbers of school closures in the region. Between April 2017 and June 2019 for example, the three countries of the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) witnessed a sixfold increase in school closures due to violence, from 512 to 3005.[2]

These security challenges have been increasingly linked to the rise of violent extremism and the proliferation of armed non-state groups, with some important differences between the Sahel and Lake Chad regions. In the latter for example, the main insurgent group, Boko Haram, has spread from Nigeria (see below) across the Lake Chad region, causing a massive humanitarian crisis and increasing internal and cross-border displacement of people.[3] Prior to 2019 the other three main violent extremist groups—Group to Support Islam and Muslims (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, JNIM), Ansarul Islam and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) (see box 7.1)—were mostly confined to the Sahel: Mali, northern Burkina Faso and western Niger, respectively. However, in 2019 following the deterioration in

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[1] UN Development Programme, '2019 human development index ranking', [n.d.]; and World Food Programme, 'Emergency dashboard, Central Sahel', Sep. 2019.

[2] UNICEF, 'Education under threat in West and Central Africa', Aug. 2019.

[3] On the historical processes that produced Boko Haram, see MacEachern, S., *Searching for Boko Haram: A History of Violence in Central Africa* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2018).

Box 7.1. Groups with a Salafist jihadism ideology in the Sahel and Lake Chad region

Ansarul Islam (Defender of Islam)

Ansarul Islam began in 2016 as a localized insurgency in the northern provinces of Burkina Faso. The group is allied to Group to Support Islam and Muslims (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, JNIM), and is led by Abdoul Salam Dicko (although he was reportedly killed in October 2019). Today, it is composed largely of Fulani fighters and also operates increasingly in the tri-border area with Mali and Niger known as the Liptako-Gourma region.

Boko Haram/Islamic State West Africa Province

Boko Haram emerged in Nigeria in 2002 and began its violent uprising in 2009 under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau. The group is allied to the Islamic State. It is based in north-eastern Nigeria, but the group is also active in other countries in the Lake Chad region, including northern Cameroon, Chad and Niger. It split into two factions in 2016: Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) led by Abu-Musab al-Barnawi; and People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad (Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, JAS, but still commonly known as Boko Haram) led by Shekau. Abu Abdallah al-Barnawi became the new leader of ISWAP in March 2019. ISWAP is thought to have 3500–5000 fighters and Boko Haram 1500–2000 fighters.

Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (Group to Support Islam and Muslims)

JNIM was formed in 2017 from four jihadist groups: al-Mourabitoun, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Ansar Dine and Katiba Macina. JNIM acts as the official branch of al-Qaeda in Mali and increasingly operates in Burkina Faso and Niger. It is estimated to have between 1000 and 2000 fighters. The group is led by former Ansar Dine leader Iyad Ag Ghaly.

Islamic State in the Greater Sahara

Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) operates in the tri-border area of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. It was formed in 2015 as a result of a split in the militant group al-Mourabitoun and is estimated to have about 200–400 fighters. It is led by Abou Walid al-Sahraoui.

Sources: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 'Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM)', Backgrounder, 25 Sep. 2018; Warner, J., 'Sub-Saharan Africa's three "new" Islamic State affiliates', *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Jan. 2017), pp. 28–32; International Crisis Group, *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province*, Africa Report no. 273 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 16 May 2019); Le Roux, P., 'Exploiting borders in the Sahel: The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara', Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 10 June 2019; Tobie, A. and Sangaré, B., *The Impact of Armed Groups on the Populations of Central and Northern Mali: Necessary Adaptations of the Strategies for Re-establishing Peace* (SIPRI and Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland: Oct. 2019); and BBC, 'Burkina Faso's war against militant Islamists', 30 May 2019.

the security situation in Burkina Faso (see below), there was a heightened risk that they might spread to coastal West African states, such as Benin, Ghana and Togo.[4] Some of the jihadist groups have been adept at exploiting the grievances of marginalized communities and intercommunal tensions to recruit members. According to one study for example, 'Lack of economic

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[4] International Crisis Group, 'The risk of jihadist contagion in West Africa', Africa Briefing no. 149, 20 Dec. 2019.

Table 7.1. External national and multilateral peace and counterterrorism operations in the Sahel and Lake Chad region

Launched or established	Name	Contributing countries/ organizations	Force level	Country of deployment
2012	European Union (EU) Capability Mission Sahel Niger	EU member states	115 police and civilians	Niger
2013	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali	United Nations (mainly African countries, Bangladesh, Egypt, China and Germany)	14 438 troops, police and civilians	Mali
2013	EU Training Mission in Mali	EU member states	697 troops and 3 civilians	Mali
2014[a]	Multinational Joint Task Force	Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria	10 746 troops	Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria
2014[b]	Operation Barkhane	France	4 700 troops	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger
2015	EU Capability Mission Sahel Mali	EU member states	127 police and civilians	Mali
2017	Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger	5 000 troops	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger

[a] Initiated as a solely Nigerian force in 1994; expanded to include Chad and Niger in 1998.
[b] Succeeded Operation Serval, which was launched in January 2013 and ended in July 2014.

Sources: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, <http://www.sipri.org/databases/pko/>; van der Lijn, J., 'Multilateral non-peace operations', *SIPRI Yearbook 2018*, pp. 141–42; Dieng, M., 'The Multi-National Joint Task Force and the G5 Sahel Joint Force: The limits of military capacity-building efforts', *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2019), pp. 481–501; French Ministry of Defence, 'Operation Barkhane', Press Pack (French Ministry of Defence: Feb. 2020); and EU Capacity Building Mission in Niger (EU External Action Service), 'Partnership for security in the Sahel', Fact Sheet, 2019.

opportunities, a sense of diminished social status, and the need for protection against cattle theft' were factors that apparently influenced the decision of local people to join ISGS.[5]

[5] Le Roux, P., 'Exploiting borders in the Sahel: The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara', Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 10 June 2019.

Table 7.2. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Burkina Faso, 2013–19

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Battles	1	7	9	36	40	95	782
Explosions/remote violence	0	0	0	0	3	32	109
Protests, riots and strategic developments	2	28	13	7	7	3	12
Violence against civilians	5	1	1	38	66	173	1 295
Total	**8**	**36**	**23**	**81**	**116**	**303**	**2 198**

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, 'Data export tool', [n.d.].

To combat these groups and to prevent them spreading to more countries in the region and beyond, several multilateral peace and counterterrorism operations have been established (see table 7.1).

Burkina Faso

Ansarul Islam has been waging a low-level insurgency in Burkina Faso since 2016, but in 2019 the country became the focal point of the Sahel jihadi crisis, with JNIM and to a lesser extent ISGS significantly expanding their operations in the country.[6] Armed conflict fatalities increased significantly in Burkina Faso in 2019 (see table 7.2). However, attributing responsibility for the armed violence is complex due to several interconnected layers of conflict, including: (*a*) the government's conflict with the heavily armed jihadists, mainly along the northern border with Mali—a spillover from the Mali crisis and retaliation for Burkina Faso's participation in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)—and in the east towards the border with Niger, (*b*) increasing clashes between local self-defence groups (ethnic and village militias) and jihadist groups and (*c*) other sources of violence, such as banditry, farmer–herder competition and land disputes.

After 27 years of uninterrupted, semi-authoritarian rule, public protests in 2014 resulted in the country's first ever civilian-led political transition, including peaceful elections in 2015. However, the government's failure to curb the violence forced the resignation of Prime Minister Paul Kaba Thieba and his entire cabinet in January 2019. The successor government is led by Christophe Dabiré.[7]

As the violence spread to the Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Nord, Est and Nord regions, the Islamist extremist groups were able to exploit divisions among the numerous ethnic groups in Burkina Faso. ISGS and JNIM have

[6] 'Burkina Faso and jihadism in West Africa', *Strategic Comments*, vol. 25, no. 6 (2019), pp. viii–x.
[7] Africa News, 'Burkina Faso: Christophe Joseph Marie Dabiré is new PM', 21 Jan. 2019.

Table 7.3. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Cameroon, 2013–19

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Battles	17	1 223	959	340	269	983	640
Explosions/remote violence	0	33	202	175	217	31	20
Protests, riots and strategic developments	1	0	0	11	46	7	2
Violence against civilians	14	110	278	195	183	492	543
Total	**32**	**1 366**	**1 439**	**721**	**715**	**1 513**	**1 205**

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, 'Data export tool', [n.d.].

recruited broadly among the Fulani community, for example.[8] In addition, as has been the case in Mali, self-defence groups and vigilantes have become increasingly involved in counter-militancy efforts, triggering intercommunal violence among jihadi groups and the self-defence groups and militias.[9]

Security continued to deteriorate throughout the year as suspected jihadists increased attacks on civilians and security forces, especially in the north and east. In May for example, six people were killed in an attack on a church in the country's north, following months of rising violence targeting schools and public services.[10] In November at least 37 people were killed in an attack on a Canadian mining company's convoy in the east, where the identity of the combatants was unknown, as has increasingly been the case in many of the attacks.[11]

The violence has triggered a sudden humanitarian crisis in the country, with about half a million people (out of a population of 20 million) being internally displaced, lacking healthcare and experiencing food insecurity.[12] Around 1.5 million people in Burkina Faso needed humanitarian aid—protection, food and livelihoods assistance—in 2019, and this is expected to rise to 2.2 million in 2020.[13]

[8] Kishi, R. et al., *Year in Review* (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, ACLED: 2 Mar. 2020), p. 40.

[9] Human Rights Watch, 'Burkina Faso: Armed Islamist atrocities surge', 6 Jan. 2020; *The Economist*, 'States in the Sahel have unleashed ethnic gangs with guns', 2 May 2019; and Kleinfeld, P., 'Burkina Faso, part 2: Communities buckle as conflict ripples through the Sahel', New Humanitarian, 18 Apr. 2019.

[10] BBC, 'Burkina Faso church attack: Priest among six killed', 12 May 2019.

[11] Austen, I., 'Gunmen in Burkina Faso attack Canadian Mining Company convoy, killing 37', *New York Times*, 6 Nov. 2019; and *The Economist*, 'How West Africa's gold rush is funding jihadists', 14 Nov. 2019.

[12] UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Stronger international support needed as Burkina Faso humanitarian emergency deepens', Press release, 11 Oct. 2019; and OCHA, 'Situation report, Burkina Faso', 29 Oct. 2019.

[13] OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2020* (OCHA: Geneva, Dec. 2019), p. 51.

Cameroon

There were two main unrelated armed conflicts in Cameroon in 2019: the anglophone crisis in the west and the Boko Haram insurgency in the north. In June for example, 16 soldiers and 8 civilians were killed in a Boko Haram attack, the deadliest attack against security forces since 2016.[14] However, the highest levels of violence took place in the west as government forces continued efforts to defeat the anglophone separatist insurgency. Conflict-related fatalities in 2019 were at a slightly lower level than in 2018, although violence against civilians increased to the highest levels in the 2013–19 period (see table 7.3).

The conflict in anglophone Cameroon

The origins of the anglophone crisis began almost a century ago. Between 1922 and 1960 France administered most of Cameroon, but the North-west and South-west regions were ruled as a British protectorate. Today, 5 million people in those two regions—about one fifth of the country's population—speak mainly English and have their own legal and educational systems. Long-standing tensions in this part of the country—the anglophone demand for an autonomous republic called Ambazonia, because of a sense of marginalization by the French-speaking majority, dates back to at least 1985—turned violent in October 2017.[15] The confrontation, which started as protests by anglophone teachers and lawyers against the use of French in anglophone schools and courts, was transformed into an armed insurgency by separatist militias after the protests were harshly repressed by the government.

In 2019 violence continued in the anglophone regions, and more than 486 000 people were displaced, with about 105 000 fleeing to Nigeria.[16] The conflict has turned into a significant and complex humanitarian emergency, with about 2.3 million people in need at the end of 2019, an increase of 80 per cent compared with the beginning of 2019 and an almost 15-fold increase since 2018. Attacks on medical staff and infrastructure became a frequent occurrence, and more than 80 per cent of government-run health facilities were closed in the two anglophone regions.[17] In addition, almost 90 per cent of children in the two regions have not gone to school for three years,

[14] Al Jazeera, 'Dozens killed in major Boko Haram attack on Cameroon island', 12 June 2019.
[15] International Crisis Group (ICG), *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads*, Africa Report no. 250 (ICG: Brussels, 2 Aug. 2017). On developments in 2018, see Davis, I. and Melvin, N., 'Armed conflict and peace processes in sub-Saharan Africa', *SIPRI Yearbook 2019*, pp. 124–25.
[16] OCHA (note 13), p. 52.
[17] OCHA (note 13), p. 52.

because of forced displacements and the enforcement of a boycott called for by separatists.[18]

Human rights abuses and violations continued to be reported during 2019, including torture, arbitrary arrest, detention and forced disappearances. Many of the attacks were attributed to government forces, and especially members of the Rapid Intervention Battalion.[19] Increasing violence and the lack of progress towards political solutions to the crisis suggests that further displacement and increased humanitarian needs will continue in 2020.

In 2018 it was hoped that a proposed anglophone general conference organized by religious leaders would be a first step towards a national dialogue and mediation process. However, the conference was postponed twice during that year, with no clear indication as to when the government might permit it to proceed.[20] On 10 September 2019 President Paul Biya proposed a national dialogue aimed at resolving the crisis, but it was reportedly unlikely to include separatists or other important English-speaking constituencies.[21] The national dialogue event took place from 30 September to 4 October in the capital Yaoundé. Opinion was divided as to whether it offered grounds for optimism or was a facade. Although several separatist leaders pulled out, calling instead for international mediation, a series of concessions and proposals emerged from the dialogue, including a special status for anglophone regions and more regional autonomy. President Biya also released more than 300 separatist fighters and opposition leader Maurice Kamto.[22] However, it seemed unlikely that the concessions would be sufficient to satisfy separatist groups and end the fighting.

Chad

Chad has been an important partner for the international community in the fight against jihadist groups in the Sahel.[23] In 2019 the security situation continued to deteriorate in the country, with a sharp increase in attacks by

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[18] *The Economist*, 'A war of words: English-speaking villages are burning in Cameroon', 7 Nov. 2019; and Maclean, R., 'Stay home or risk being shot: Cameroon's back-to-school crisis', *The Guardian*, 3 Sep. 2019.

[19] Human Rights Watch, 'Cameroon: New attacks on civilians by troops, separatists', 28 Mar. 2019; and Human Rights Watch, 'Cameroon: Government forces attack village', 10 Apr. 2019.

[20] International Crisis Group, 'Cameroon: Proposed anglophone general conference deserves national and international support', Statement, 17 Sep. 2018; and *Cameroon Daily Journal*, 'Ambazonia war: Cameroon misses a golden opportunity to pull out of the anglophone crisis', 23 Nov. 2018.

[21] Ndi, N. E., 'Hope for Western Cameroon as Biya finally talks peace', *East African*, 14 May 2019; and International Crisis Group, 'Cameroon's anglophone dialogue: A work in progress', Statement, 26 Sep. 2019.

[22] Al Jazeera, 'Cameroon dialogue starts as anglophone separatists pull out', 30 Sep. 2019; and Chimtom, N. K., 'Cameroon's conflict: Will the national dialogue make any difference?', BBC, 5 Oct. 2019.

[23] International Crisis Group, *Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, Africa Report no. 233 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 30 Mar. 2016).

Boko Haram, other Chadian armed groups and intercommunal violence—particularly between Arab and non-Arab communities in eastern Chad.[24] These conflicts flowed partly from farmer–herder competition, but also from deeper identity-based rivalries over land and political power. There were over 560 conflict-related fatalities in 2019 (and 450 were combat related), which is the highest level since 2015 (when there were nearly 430 conflict-related deaths).[25] In early February Chadian rebels based in southern Libya launched an incursion into north-east Chad. At the government's request, French air strikes halted their advance—the first direct French military intervention in Chad since 2008.[26] Incidents involving Boko Haram in 2019 included an assault by the group on a Chadian military position in the south-west in March that killed 23 soldiers, and an attack on a Lake Chad fishing village in the country's western region in December that killed over 14 people.[27] In August after dozens of people were killed in communal violence in eastern Chad, the government imposed a six-month state of emergency.[28]

More than 50 000 people were displaced by the deteriorating security environment in 2019, bringing the number of internally displaced in Chad to 175 000. In addition, the country hosted 468 000 refugees from the Central African Republic, Nigeria and Sudan. Legislative elections, originally scheduled for 2015, continued to be postponed, and the country faced many economic challenges, including declining oil revenues and the closure of borders. Food insecurity affected nearly 3.8 million people.[29]

Mali

Since 2015 Mali's central regions of Mopti and Ségou have become the focus of interconnected challenges of governance, development and security. Security in central Mali continued to deteriorate in 2019, whereas the situation in the north (Gao, Kidal, Ménaka, Taoudénit and Timbuktu) generally remained

[24] International Crisis Group, *Avoiding the Resurgence of Inter-communal Violence in Eastern Chad*, Africa Report no. 284 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 30 Dec. 2019).

[25] ACLED, 'Data export tool', [n.d.].

[26] International Crisis Group, 'Rebel incursion exposes Chad's weaknesses', Q&A, 13 Feb. 2019; and Corey-Boulet, R., 'Threatened by rebels, Chad's Deby leans on firepower from France', *World Politics Review*, 8 Feb. 2019.

[27] Reuters, 'Boko Haram militants kill 23 Chad soldiers: Security sources', 22 Mar. 2019; and New Arab, 'Boko Haram launches deadly attack on Chad fishing village', 19 Dec. 2019.

[28] France 24, 'Chad declares emergency in east after dozens die in ethnic violence', 18 Aug. 2019.

[29] OCHA (note 13), p. 54.

Table 7.4. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Mali, 2013–19

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Battles	547	301	316	210	563	759	831
Explosions/remote violence	191	39	27	32	144	177	234
Protests, riots and strategic developments	7	1	5	7	3	28	4
Violence against civilians	138	41	80	71	237	783	818
Total	**883**	**382**	**428**	**320**	**947**	**1 747**	**1 887**

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, 'Data export tool', [n.d.].

stable. However, the security situation remained complex throughout the country.[30]

The situation in northern Mali

The instability in the north has its roots in a long-running Tuareg rebellion and, in 2012, an opportunistic alliance of Tuareg separatists and Islamist militants that seized control of northern cities. International intervention and a 2015 peace accord helped to quell, but not end, the armed conflict in the north, which is now multidimensional and includes three coalitions of armed groups that signed the 2015 peace accord or were included in the subsequent process—Coordination of Azawad Movements, Coordination of Entente Movements and Platform of Movements of 14 June 2014 of Algiers—a network of jihadist groups (mainly JNIM) and various self-defence groups.[31] According to a UN expert panel on Mali, the connections among the various armed groups 'are mainly opportunistic, either motivated by the local political dynamics and balance of power or by criminal interests'.[32] The UN reported in December 2019 that 'the security situation in the north has deteriorated and become increasingly more complex', and highlighted 'increased terrorist activity' in the Ménaka region.[33]

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[30] On the evolution and complexity of the conflict in Mali, see Dal Santo, E. and van der Heide, E. J., 'Escalating complexity in regional conflicts: Connecting geopolitics to individual pathways to terrorism in Mali', *African Security*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2018), pp. 274–91; and Sköns, E., 'The implementation of the peace process in Mali: A complex case of peacebuilding', *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 155–88. On developments in Mali in 2018, see *SIPRI Yearbook 2019* (note 15), pp. 127–29. On the relationship between religion and Malian society, see Lebovich, A., 'Sacred struggles: How Islam shapes politics in Mali', European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief, Nov. 2019. On the role of gender in the conflict, see Gorman, Z. and Chauzal, G., '"Hand in hand": A study of insecurity and gender in Mali', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2019/6, Dec. 2019.

[31] On the political and social dimensions of these armed groups, see Tobie, A. and Sangaré, B., *The Impact of Armed Groups on the Populations of Central and Northern Mali: Necessary Adaptations of the Strategies for Re-establishing Peace* (SIPRI and Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland: Oct. 2019).

[32] UN Security Council, 'Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and extended pursuant to resolution 2432 (2018)', S/2019/636, 7 Aug. 2019, p. 19.

[33] UN Security Council, 'Situation in Mali', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2019/983, 30 Dec. 2019, p. 8.

The situation in central Mali

Since 2015 the centre has experienced a growing rise in social unrest, banditry and intercommunal violence—among the Fulani, Bambara and Dogon ethnic groups in the Mopti and Ségou regions.[34] The dynamics of the conflict in this region are multidimensional, often rooted in conflicts over land use and natural resources. The jihadist groups have been adept at mobilizing support by exploiting local grievances and social fractures. Their spread into the centre and the government's increasing reliance on some ethnically based self-defence groups to fight them has led to increased retributive violence. On 23 March 2019 for example, a Dogon militia attacked the village of Ogossagou and killed at least 157 Fulani civilians, while on 9 and 17 June armed attacks on Dogon-inhabited villages killed almost an equal number of civilians.[35]

Some of the counterterrorism operations of the Malian security and defences forces, which are supported by French forces (Operation Barkhane) and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (JF-G5S), appear to have exacerbated the intercommunal violence. Human rights abuses have been widespread and armed groups and local militias have proliferated, while root causes (such as the lack of public services and a weak governance) remain unaddressed.[36]

The humanitarian impact

In all the regions of Mali affected by armed conflict in 2019, essential services, including schools and health centres, were interrupted or halted. Conflict-related fatalities, including violence against civilians continued to rise in 2019, as shown in table 7.4. There were also heavy casualties in the armed conflict between government and international forces and jihadist groups. In November 2019 for example, ISGS militants killed 53 Malian soldiers and one civilian in an attack on an army base near the Mali–Niger border.[37]

The growing insecurity has also led to a large rise in internally displaced people—from 77 000 in September 2018 to 187 000 in September 2019—and increased food insecurity. The number of children with severe acute malnutrition increased by 20 per cent in the first half of 2019: from 160 000 in January to 190 000 in July.[38]

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[34] Tobie, A., 'Central Mali: Violence, local perspectives and diverging narratives', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2017/5, Dec. 2017; Matfess, H., 'What explains the rise of communal violence in Mali, Nigeria and Ethiopia?', *World Politics Review*, 11 Sep. 2019; and Bodian, M. et al., 'The challenges of governance, security and development in the central regions of Mali', SIPRI Background Paper no. 2020/4, Mar. 2020.

[35] International Crisis Group, 'Central Mali: Putting a stop to ethnic cleansing', Q&A, 25 Mar. 2019; UN Security Council, S/2019/636 (note 32), p. 7; and BBC, 'Mali attack: "100 killed" in ethnic Dogon village', 10 June 2019.

[36] International Crisis Group, *Speaking with the 'Bad Guys': Toward Dialogue with Central Mali's Jihadists*, Africa Report no. 276 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 28 May 2019).

[37] Al Jazeera, 'Mali: Dozens of troops killed in military outpost attack', 3 Nov. 2019.

[38] OCHA (note 13), p. 56.

The peace process and international stabilization efforts

A peace deal signed in 2015 between the government and some armed groups is supported by MINUSMA and international donors. As part of a road map adopted in March 2018 (to implement the 2015 peace agreement) and following the re-election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta a few months later, the Malian Government embarked on ambitious political and institutional reforms. An October 2018 Pact for Peace in Mali between the Malian Government and the UN was meant to accelerate the implementation of the road map. A disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process was launched a month later.[39] In 2019 however, the relevance of these agreements continued to be undermined by the worsening security situation in central Mali, the dire humanitarian situation and the limited implementation of the peace agreement. According to a UN panel of experts on Mali constitutional reforms were delayed and the electoral calendar was scrapped pending an 'inclusive political dialogue'—although there appeared to be limited opportunities for dialogue among the conflicting parties.[40] The expert panel also noted delays to the DDR process, although 63 000 combatants had been registered by mid-March 2019.[41]

The international stabilization effort also appeared to be at a crossroads. Despite years of training and assistance French officials acknowledged that government security forces remained incapable of bearing the anti-jihadist fight.[42] By the end of 2019 the effectiveness and wisdom of the French military mission, Operation Barkhane, was being increasingly questioned in the region and also in France—particularly following the rise of anti-French sentiment in the Sahel.[43] Similarly, the JF-G5S has been criticized for its military-centric approach, poor coordination among partner countries and disagreements over its precise mandate.[44] As noted above, far from stem-

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[39] UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, S/2018/1174, 28 Dec. 2018.

[40] International Crisis Group (note 36).

[41] UN Security Council, S/2019/636 (note 32), pp. 14–15.

[42] Mules, I., 'Anti-French sentiment on the rise in West Africa as security situation deteriorates', *Deutsche Welle*, 12 Dec. 2019. Also see Tull, D. M., 'Rebuilding Mali's army: The dissonant relationship between Mali and its international partners', *International Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 2 (2019), pp. 405–22.

[43] BBC, 'Helicopter collision kills 13 French troops in Mali', 26 Nov. 2019; 'In search of allies', *Africa Confidential*, vol. 60, no. 25, 19 Dec. 2019; and Louet, S. and Diallo, T., 'As France mourns 13 soldiers, top general says full victory in Africa impossible', Reuters, 27 Nov. 2019.

[44] Dieng, M., 'The Multi-National Joint Task Force and the G5 Sahel Joint Force: The limits of military capacity-building efforts', *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 40. no. 4 (2019), pp. 481–501; and Rupesinghe, N., 'The Joint Force of the G5 Sahel: An appropriate response to combat terrorism?', African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, 18 Sep. 2018.

ming the violence, international engagement and the actions of state security forces often appeared to be exacerbating instability.[45]

There have also been questions over the effectiveness of MINUSMA's efforts to help stabilize the country and protect civilians.[46] It is by far the deadliest UN peace operation and continued to suffer more casualties than any other UN mission in 2019.[47] Resolution 2480, adopted by the UN Security Council on 28 June 2019, renewed MINUSMA's mandate for the fifth time, extending it to 30 June 2020. The Security Council decided that the mission's 'second strategic priority', after support for implementation of the 2015 accord, would be to 'facilitate' a future Malian-led strategy to protect civilians, reduce intercommunal violence and re-establish state authority in the centre of the country.[48] Without effective implementation of the 2015 peace agreement and the return of the rule of law and essential services throughout the country, armed attacks and communal violence are likely to continue in 2020.

Niger

Niger has been a key transit point for armed criminal and extremist Islamist groups operating in the Sahel region. Since 2015 the Nigerien army has been subject to increased attacks by such groups: by Boko Haram on the eastern part of the country, and since 2017 by groups near the borders with Burkina Faso and Mali.[49] French Operation Barkhane and United States forces support the Nigerien armed forces in counterterrorism operations inside the country.[50] Armed violence by non-state armed groups in neighbouring countries—Mali and Nigeria in particular—continued to spill across the border in 2019, and insecurity and attacks severely disrupted essential social services, exacerbated food insecurity and led to significant displacement. As

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[45] See e.g. Watson, A. and Karlshøj-Pedersen, M., *Fusion Doctrine in Five Steps: Lessons Learned from Remote Warfare in Africa* (Oxford Research Group: Nov. 2019); Raineri, L., *If Victims Become Perpetrators: Factors Contributing to Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Central Sahel* (International Alert: June 2018); Hickendorff, A., 'Civil Society White Book on Peace and Security in Mali', English summary, SIPRI, July 2019; and Dörrie, P., 'Europe has spent years trying to prevent "chaos" in the Sahel. It failed', *World Politics Review*, 25 June 2019.

[46] van der Lijn, J. et al., *Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali/MINUSMA* (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs: Oslo, 2019).

[47] See chapter 2, section II, in this volume.

[48] UN Security Council Resolution 2480, 28 June 2019. On the role of MINUSMA, also see Smit, T. 'Regional trends and developments in peace operations', *SIPRI Yearbook 2019*, pp. 163–64.

[49] On the role of the illicit economy and trafficking in fuelling violence in Niger, see International Crisis Group, *Managing Trafficking in Northern Niger*, Africa Report no. 285 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 6 Jan. 2020).

[50] Kelly, F., 'Joint France-Niger air and ground operation near Tongo Tongo kills 15 "terrorists"', Defense Post, 30 Dec. 2018; and Correll, D. S., 'Armed drones to fly out of Niger air base now operational after delayed completion', *Air Force Times*, 1 Nov. 2019.

Table 7.5. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Nigeria, 2013–19

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Battles	2 326	4 031	3 329	2 191	1 779	2 470	2 484
Explosions/remote violence	255	1 311	1 938	681	1 424	759	770
Protests, riots and strategic developments	66	252	366	138	144	161	110
Violence against civilians	2 039	5 794	5 285	1 886	1 599	2 853	2 075
Total	**4 686**	**11 388**	**10 918**	**4 896**	**4 946**	**6 243**	**5 439**

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, 'Data export tool', [n.d.].

of October 2019 at least 440 000 people had been internally displaced and were living in vulnerable conditions across the country.[51]

In December 2019 at least 71 Nigerien soldiers were killed in an attack by an unknown jihadist group in the west near the Malian border, the deadliest single attack against security forces in the country's history.[52] Conflict-related fatalities in Niger increased to over 700 in 2019 (including nearly 490 combat-related deaths), the highest level since 2015.[53] There was also increased use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by armed groups, especially ISGS, in western Niger.[54]

Nigeria

The conflict dynamic involving government forces, Boko Haram and other non-state armed groups have devastated communities in north-east Nigeria, and the resulting humanitarian crisis remains one of the most severe in the world. Armed conflict, forced displacement and grave human rights violations, including killings, sexual violence, abduction and recruitment of child soldiers, have been widespread in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states over the last decade.[55] Insecurity in Nigeria is also fuelled by other complex security challenges, including separatist aspirations in eastern Nigeria, violence between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders in the country's Middle Belt (an area that stretches across the middle third of the country

[51] OCHA (note 13), p. 57.

[52] Armstrong, H., 'Behind the Jihadist attack in Inates', International Crisis Group Q&A, 13 Dec. 2019; and BBC, 'Niger army base attack leaves at least 71 soldiers dead', 12 Dec. 2019.

[53] ACLED (note 25).

[54] Pavlik, M. et al., 'Explosive developments: The growing threat of IEDs in Western Niger', ACLED, 19 June 2019. On the efforts to address the IED threat, see chapter 13, section I, in this volume.

[55] On the gender question in the Boko Haram insurgency, see Okoli, A. C. and Nnaemeka Azom, S., 'Boko Haram insurgency and gendered victimhood: Women as corporal victims and objects of war', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 30, no. 6–7 (2019), pp. 1214–32; Okolie-Osemene, J. and Okolie-Osemene, R. I., 'Nigerian women and the trends of kidnapping in the era of Boko Haram insurgency: Patterns and evolution', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 30, no. 6–7 (2019), pp. 1151–68; and International Crisis Group, *Returning from the Land of Jihad: The Fate of Women Associated with Boko Haram*, Africa Report no. 275 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 21 May 2019).

from east to west) and the re-emergence of armed militant groups in the Niger Delta.[56] The threat landscape in Nigeria may also be evolving with a burgeoning Shia inspired group, the Islamic Movement in Nigeria.[57] In February 2019 election-related violence occurred around Nigeria's presidential election, leaving at least 40 dead. President Muhammadu Buhari won a second term, but his main challenger Atiku Abubakar rejected the result.[58]

As of August 2019 nearly 2 million people were internally displaced, and another 240 000 were refugees in neighbouring countries. At the end of 2019 an estimated 7.7 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, an 8 per cent increase from the end of 2018. An estimated 3 million people were food insecure as of September 2019, an increase from 2.7 million people since October 2018.[59] In 2019 conflict-related fatalities in Nigeria were the fourth highest in the world at 5439 (see table 7.5), with the highest number of fatalities attributed to armed conflict (battles) between the Nigerian military and Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP, a Boko Haram splinter group).[60]

Insurgency in the north-east

Although territory controlled by Boko Haram was recaptured by the Nigerian armed forces during 2015–16, and President Buhari has repeatedly claimed that the group has been defeated, it remained a serious threat in 2019.[61] ISWAP was particularly active with several military successes, deepening roots in the civilian population and a growing membership (estimated at 3500–5000 fighters).[62] In 2019 Borno state continued to be the epicentre of the conflict.

[56] Beaumont, P. and Abrak, I., 'Oil-rich Nigeria outstrips India as country with most people in poverty', *The Guardian*, 16 July 2018.

[57] Gray, S. and Adeakin, I., 'Nigeria's Shi'a Islamic Movement and evolving Islamist threat landscape: Old, new and future generators of radicalization', *African Security*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2019), pp. 174–99.

[58] Searcey, D., 'Dozens dead in Nigeria as election results are delayed', *New York Times*, 25 Feb. 2019; and *The Economist*, 'Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari wins a second term', 28 Feb. 2019.

[59] OCHA (note 13), p. 58.

[60] Kishi et al. (note 8), p. 20.

[61] On developments within the Boko Haram insurgency in 2017–18, see Davis, I. et al., 'Armed conflict in sub-Saharan Africa', *SIPRI Yearbook 2018*, pp. 95–96; and *SIPRI Yearbook 2019* (note 15), pp. 121–23. On Nigeria's failure to defeat Boko Haram, see Banini, D. K., 'Security sector corruption and military effectiveness: The influence of corruption on countermeasures against Boko Haram in Nigeria', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2020), pp. 131–58; Mickler, D. et al., '"Weak state", regional power, global player: Nigeria and the response to Boko Haram', *African Security*, vol. 12, no. 3–4 (2019), pp. 272–99; Chidubem Iwuoha, V., 'Clash of counterterrorism-assistance-seeking states and their super power sponsors: Implications on the war against Boko Haram', *African Security Review*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2019), pp. 38–55; and Botha, A. and Abdile, M., 'Reality versus perception: Toward understanding Boko Haram in Nigeria', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 42, no. 5 (2019), pp. 493–519.

[62] International Crisis Group, *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province*, Africa Report no. 273 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 16 May 2019). On the political–military character of ISWAP, see Stoddard, E., 'Revolutionary warfare? Assessing the character of competing factions within the Boko Haram insurgency', *African Security*, vol. 12, no. 3–4 (2019), pp. 300–29. On the splintering of Boko Haram, see Zenn, J. 'Boko Haram's factional feuds: Internal extremism and external interventions', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2019).

For example, at least a dozen soldiers were killed in an assault on an army base by ISWAP in June 2019, and the group carried out a series of attacks on the Nigerian army in northern Borno throughout September.[63] In July a Boko Haram attack on a funeral and villages near Maiduguri in north-east Nigeria killed over 70 people.[64] To end the insurgency the International Crisis Group suggested that the Nigerian Government will need to supplement its military campaign with measures that address the factors that contribute to the insurgency, including weak governance and a lack of basic services.[65] Corruption and political misuse of Nigeria's security sector will also need to be addressed.[66]

Communal violence and resource conflicts

Communal violence in Nigeria involves numerous actors and occurs across the country. In particular, conflicts over how to manage natural resources have spiralled into attacks on civilians by ethnic militias. In the Niger Delta region there is a conflict between militants and federal government over the control of petroleum resources. In the Middle Belt region and part of the north-west armed conflicts have occurred between mostly Christian farmers and predominantly Muslim herders, who have been migrating southward because of desertification, insecurity and the loss of grazing land to expanding settlements.[67]

[63] New Arab, 'Militants kill 15 soldiers, raid Nigerian military base', 19 June 2019; and Kelly, F., 'Nigeria: Islamic State claims "tens" of military casualties in 2 Borno attacks', Defense Post, 11 Sep. 2019.
[64] Sawab, I. et al., 'Nigerians flee after men on motorbikes shoot down mourners', *New York Times*, 29 July 2019.
[65] International Crisis Group (note 62).
[66] Page, M., 'Nigeria's struggles with security sector reform', Chatham House, 2 Apr. 2019.
[67] Ajodo-Adebanjoko, A., 'Political economy and national security implications of resource-based conflicts in Nigeria', *African Security Review*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2019), pp. 56–71.