

A stylized world map composed of a grid of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to indicate specific regions or countries.

Cooperation or Competition?

Security in West Africa between ECOWAS and the G5

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- Established in February 2014, the regional organisation G5-Sahel with its Member States Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad has aroused great expectations with regard to a stabilisation of the Sahel region, which is plagued by numerous conflicts. At the same time, the region has increasingly moved into the focus of (European) public attention in recent years due to its role as a key route for migration to Europe. At present, however, caution is warranted with regard to the creation of new structures and coalitions, as cooperation and links with established security structures such as ECOWAS and the AU remain hazy.
- ECOWAS and G5-Sahel signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which they agreed on cooperation in various areas as recently as July 2018. Both sides stressed that they wanted to avoid duplication of efforts and exploit synergies between the two organisations. What form this ultimately takes in actual practice remains to be seen. There are still considerable misgivings within ECOWAS about the new organisation, as it was not involved in its inception.
- There is a need for a comprehensive strategy to stabilise the Sahel region that does not rely solely on military components, as G5 Sahel is favouring at present. The integration of G5 Sahel into the APSA context, and thus indirectly into ECOWAS as well, is important in a multidimensional approach to stabilising the Sahel. European policy should therefore assign greater support to the systematic leveraging of synergies based on the Memorandum of Understanding concluded by the two organisations, greater political coordination and a stronger role for ECOWAS with its civilian instruments in efforts to stabilise the Sahel region.

Great Expectations Surrounding the G5-Sahel

Great expectations were aroused with regard to a stabilisation of the Sahel Region, which has been ravaged by innumerable conflicts and at the same time moved into the focus of public attention (especially in Europe) for its role as a migration route to Europe over the last few years, when the regional organisation G5-Sahel, with its member states Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad, was established in February 2014.

Peace and security in the Sahel region are fragile commodities; many factors play a role and, moreover, at different levels – from local to regional. The countries involved are having difficulties coming up with adequate responses to the numerous interrelated conflicts and their causes, however. These include weak and corrupt state structures, some of which are also characterised by a dearth of legitimacy. Public services and goods – such as electricity, water supply, education, health and public safety – are furthermore lacking in large expanses of these countries, while terrorism is rife and organised crime is flourishing along key transit routes for international drug-trafficking.

The multidimensional conflict that has been raging in Mali since 2012 has caused the security situation in West Africa to deteriorate even further. New groups and networks have formed and now have entire regions under their control. On top of it all, massive climate-induced changes are taking place, such as advancing desertification in the north and a loss of fertile arable land, while at the same time the region is seeing rapid population growth.

Ad hoc Coalitions: A New Trend on the African Continent

It is against this background that G5-Sahel, a union of five francophone West African states, is seeking to enhance security cooperation and development cooperation as a result of the deteriorating situation in the Sahel region. This is an outcrop of a development that has been ongoing for several years now, in which African states have been looking more for »African solutions to African problems« and initiating structural changes to this end.

G5-Sahel and Force Conjointe (FC-G5S, »Joint Force«, founded in 2017) are also products of a recent trend

toward the creation of new structures and »ad hoc coalitions« to tackle current (security policy) challenges, and are intended to allow rapid responses with military means while operating outside sluggish existing structures. Examples include the struggle against the Lord Resistance Army in Uganda or the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) under the leadership of Nigeria, which is carrying out operations against Boko Haram in the region of Lake Chad Basin. These are essentially combinations of individual states often seeking a military solution to a specific security threat and operating predominantly in their own territories. They do not compete with traditional multidimensional peace missions. Particularly in their incipient phase, they merely constitute loose forms of cooperation which tend to be characterised by cross-border military cooperation. Agreements are rarely underpinned with stable institutional foundations, even though the MNJTF, for example, operates under the auspices of the Lake Chad Commission. The clear strategic objectives of these alliances are often narrowly defined in military terms or even amount to makeshift approaches.

These ad hoc coalitions thus reflect an apparently dwindling confidence on the part of African heads of state and government, and in some cases of their European partners, in the problem-solving capabilities of existing security structures such as the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS) or the African Union's (AU) African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which are unable to respond to security threats in a timely and adequate manner.

Despite the achievements of the AU and its regional organisations in the areas of peace and security, this loss of confidence is partly understandable, as the African Standby Force, for example, has not yet attained full operational capability. At its special summit held in November 2018, the AU attempted to revive the debate over reform initiated under the chair of Rwandan President Paul Kagame. The discussion within the AU is therefore intended to also go beyond traditional peace missions and sound out how the new security initiatives can be more tightly integrated into the APSA context.

Interaction between New and Old Structures Remains Unclear

At present, however, caution is warranted with regard to the establishment of new structures and coalitions,

as cooperation and links to existing security structures such as ECOWAS and the AU remain hazy. In its capacity as the driving force behind the creation of G5-Sahel and FC-G5S, France has mobilised substantial financial resources through the EU to fund the organisation. As a result, G5 Sahel is not being funded through AU structures, but rather directly by bilateral partners, making integration into regional structures more difficult. In addition, ECOWAS and Algeria have misgivings about G5 Sahel – qualms which to date have only been allayed to a limited extent. Finally, overlapping memberships of various countries in security mechanisms and organisations in West Africa pose a number of challenges that are to be explored in the following.

ECOWAS as a Regional Security Actor

ECOWAS was founded by Nigeria and Togo in 1975 to strengthen economic cooperation in West Africa. It is made up of 15 countries from the region. ECOWAS was catapulted into the role of regional security actor at the latest in the context of the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s. Under the aegis of the AU's APSA, ECOWAS has become one of the key regional organisations on the continent and has gained considerably in efficacy. Not only does it have its own intervention force – it also disposes over early-crisis-detection and election-observation instruments. Most recently, ECOWAS was successful in assuring that an election outcome in the Gambia was respected, persuading the ruler at the time, Yahya Jammeh, to step down – albeit by threatening the use of military force, but peacefully in the end.

The Difficult Role of ECOWAS in Mali

ECOWAS, on the other hand, is still playing a very diverging role with regard to resolution of the conflict in Mali. After the fall of Mali's President Amadou Toumani Touré in March 2012, it suspended Mali's membership and put the ECOWAS intervention force on alert. At the same time, it launched a diplomatic offensive under the leadership of the president of Burkina Faso at the time, Blaise Compaoré, to resolve the conflict peacefully, but failed.

ECOWAS negotiated deployment of the intervention force with the AU, the United Nations (UN) and bilateral

donors such as the USA, France and the EU. Although the UN Security Council gave the green light at the end of 2012 in the guise of Resolution 2058, planning had not yet proceeded far enough. Logistical problems and material bottlenecks hampered rapid deployment, *inter alia* because ECOWAS had difficulty mobilising the planned 3,300 soldiers. The mission ultimately failed because ECOWAS and other African states lacked financial resources. Moreover, ECOWAS' military planners had not expected rebel and jihadist groups to advance on central Mali, further impeding a speedy reaction.

Only when the operation was turned into a UN mission in the summer of 2013 – by which time France's intervention under codename »Serval« had stabilised the country to a certain extent – was the funding question finally resolved. With Western support, around 5,000 soldiers were despatched to Mali in the first half of 2013. But at the latest with the intervention of France, the importance of ECOWAS as an actor in the Mali conflict had begun to wane. ECOWAS had already underpinned its regional importance at the beginning of the conflict, intervening quickly by diplomatic means. It was only able to involve key actors outside established structures, such as Algeria, which is not itself a member of ECOWAS, to a very limited extent, however.

In addition, latitude for action was also constrained by unresolved conflicts between member states within ECOWAS, in particular between Francophone and Anglophone countries. While ECOWAS is demanding more autonomy in conflict-resolution efforts, countries like Nigeria prefer to pursue independent conflict-resolution while involving individual countries. Nigeria's focus has also been on domestic policy challenges such as combating Boko Haram (outside the ECOWAS framework). Thus ECOWAS has only been able to adopt a uniform and clear position to a limited extent and has been unable to leverage its full diplomatic clout.

G5 Sahel as a Response to ECOWAS Deficits

The establishment of G5-Sahel in February 2014 must therefore also be understood to constitute a response to the military and diplomatic deficits of ECOWAS. ECOWAS was not able to stabilise the Sahel region, nor was it able to come up with a sufficient and successful political and military response to the war looming in Mali. After

the establishment of G5-Sahel, cooperation with ECOWAS remained completely undecided and unclear for a long time. Only in July 2018 did ECOWAS and G5-Sahel sign a Memorandum of Understanding in which they agreed to cooperate in various areas. Both sides stressed that they wanted to avoid duplication of efforts and exploit synergies between the two organisations. What this is ultimately to look like in actual practice remains to be seen.

G5-Sahel: A New Security Actor in the region

G5 Sahel is intended to coordinate security and development activities of its Member States. Its mandate is fairly sweeping and includes the fight against terrorism and organised crime as well as restoration of government authority and the return of refugees. France is one of the driving forces behind the creation of the G5-Sahel. This raises the question of ownership, as G5 Sahel is heavily dependent on financial and logistical support from Paris.

At the Heart of G5-Sahel: the Intervention Force

At its core, G5-Sahel revolves around the deployment of an intervention force of up to 5,000 man strong. Some initial small successes were registered at the beginning of 2017. The international community has contributed additional momentum in the form of wide-ranging funding commitments. In addition, the first operations have been carried out in cooperation with the French anti-terror mission, *Barkhane*. The G5 Sahel countries scarcely have any well-functioning armed forces: only Chad has a well-trained army. Chad is also furnishing troops for the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the MNJTF, however, which is stretching the country's capabilities. Financial incentives are being offered by UN missions, however, enabling the country to earmark considerable financial resources for its own defence budget. Mali's armed forces, on the other hand, are going through a period of turmoil and upheaval. The country is only slowly building its own army with the support of the international community. Burkina Faso's armed forces are also in a weakened state following the toppling of former President Blaise Compaoré.

Unlike other missions in the region, G5 Sahel lacks a strong leading nation, like Nigeria in the MNJTF – a leading country which has financial resources and wields political power. Algeria has positioned itself as a cooperation partner and potential member of G5 Sahel; it is doubtful, however, whether in view of wide-ranging domestic political challenges and the political power struggles going on in the region the country can also assume a leadership role that has the blessing and recognition of the G5 countries. There are still considerable reservations in this regard.

Although G5 Sahel enjoys the political support of the AU and UN – both organisations have mandated the deployment of G5 Sahel troops – the latter are not providing any additional support – for example of a logistical nature. G5 Sahel is only being funded by bilateral grants and not receiving any resources from the AU. Aside from the Declaration of Intent signed in July 2018, it remains questionable what political backing G5-Sahel will receive from ECOWAS. There are still considerable reservations within ECOWAS about the new organisation, as it was not involved in the incipient stages. In contrast, MNJTF is also successful because it receives political backing from the AU, which channels financial support from the EU to it.

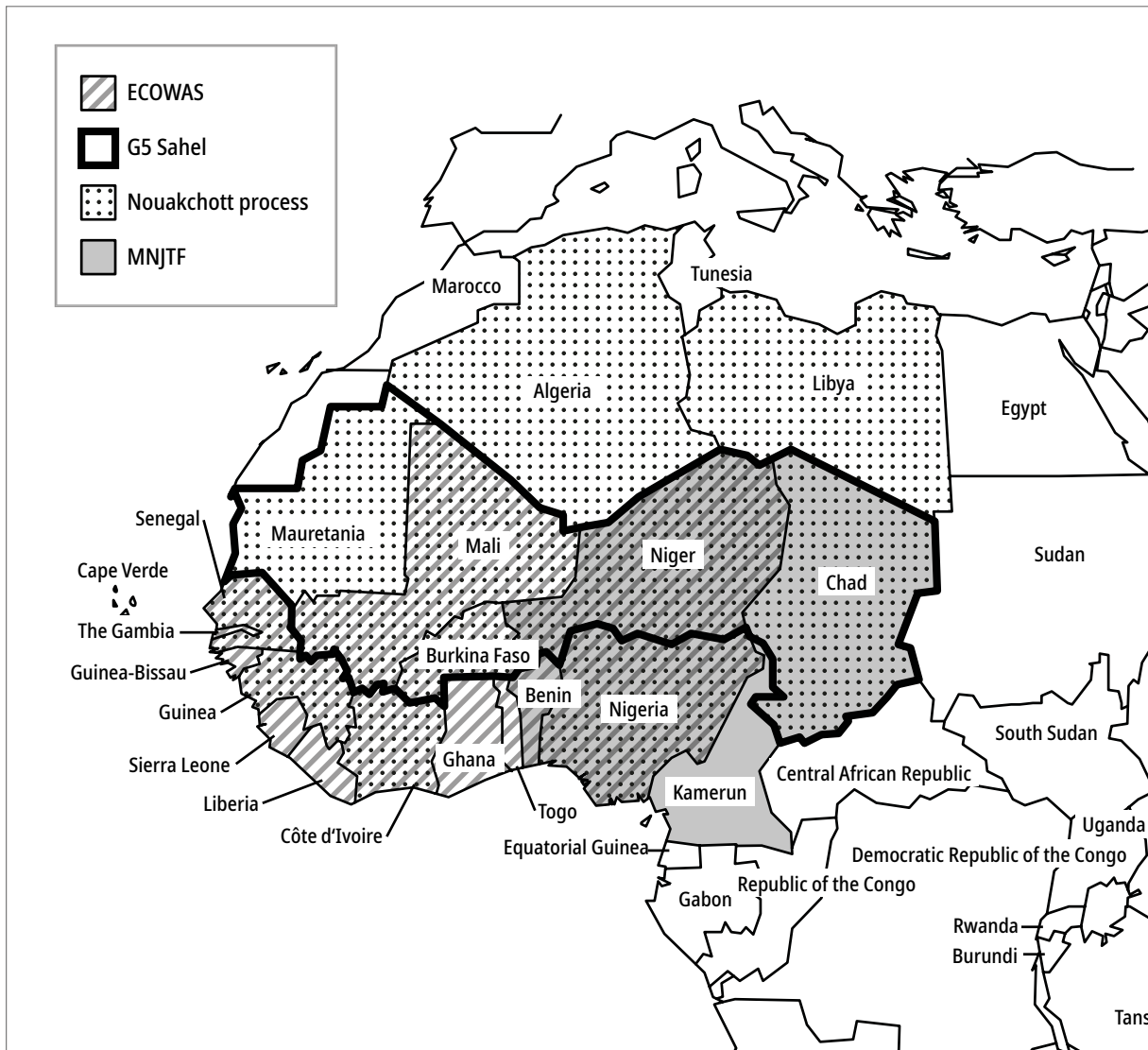
Focus on a Military Approach

G5 Sahel's military approach is being buttressed by its Western donors in the guise of the Sahel Alliance, which was founded in 2017 by France, Germany and the EU with the aim of tightly linking the security, stability and development spheres. The alliance focuses on five core areas: Youth employment, rural development, climate and energy, governance, basic services and decentralisation.

The greatest challenges are to be found in the border regions, where the respective governments face overwhelmingly rejection. Moreover, the dearth of professionalism in the armed forces goes hand in hand with human rights violations perpetrated on the civilian population, intensifying criticism of the state. In May 2018, according to the UN, Malian soldiers operating under the auspices of G5 Sahel arbitrarily shot twelve civilians at a market square in a reprisal. This obviates the need for rapid implementation of the Human Rights Com-



Figure 1: Overlapping Security Structures in Western Africa



pliance Framework within G5 Sahel, which is meant to guarantee more effective implementation and monitoring of human rights within the G5 Sahel armed forces.

In order to tie these regions more closely to the state in the long term, however, the population needs to have trust and confidence, especially in the government's ability to satisfy its basic needs. Here the Sahel Alliance can help fill in a gaping void. Pure combat operations in the fight against terrorism and organised crime will not stabilise the region; What is needed is a development plan whose cornerstones include an expansion of agriculture, the creation of jobs for a large number of

young people and the provision of government services such as water supply and access to electricity as well as medical care.

Target Missed

On balance it is all rather sobering: The G5-Sahel development agenda is stagnating, while roughly one year after the start of FC-G5S military forces are only partially combat-ready despite progress and some deployment of troops. Instead, there is still a great dependence on support from the French *Barkhane* operation and other

military actors. No end to dependency is in sight for the time being. Nor has much been achieved so far in the area of development or in the way of greater stability in the border regions.

Many Chemists, But They All Have Different Formulas

The following must be taken into account if the Sahel region is to be stabilised on a long-term, sustainable basis:

1. There is a need for a comprehensive strategy to stabilise the Sahel region which does not rely solely on military elements, as is being favoured at present by G5-Sahel. The AU should be supported in its quest to implement the same comprehensive approach, which provides for police and civil instruments as well as – based on the Nouakchott Process¹ – involvement of more countries. Purely military approaches to challenges that often have major political components will not provide solutions when it comes to deeper causes of conflict. Integration of G5 Sahel into the APSA context, and hence indirectly into ECOWAS as well, is a linchpin in a multidimensional approach to stabilisation of the Sahel.
2. Overlapping memberships in the various regional organisations and security structures in West Africa could cause problems to crop up in the medium to long term. When resources are scarce, conflicts flare up, while at the same time interests within countries continue to diverge. Depending on their importance to a country's own policy field, political attention may focus more on ECOWAS or G5-Sahel.² At the same time, key actors like Algeria are neither members of ECOWAS nor of G5-Sahel. European policy should therefore lend greater support to systematic leveraging of synergies between the two organisations based on the Memorandum of Understanding, tighter political coordination and an enhanced role for ECOWAS with its civil instruments in stabilising the Sahel region.
3. The Sahel Alliance's development agenda must be more conceptually embedded in the activities of G5 Sahel. To date, the Sahel Alliance remains a collection of development projects that is only partially aligned with the agenda of G5 Sahel. More development strategies are needed for those border regions where FC-G5S operates to stabilise these fragile areas in a speedy, long-term and sustainable manner. Although these precarious border regions are increasingly being integrated into the activities of donor nations, it remains questionable to what extent this has been coordinated with G5 Sahel. Military solutions, which G5-Sahel apparently prefers at present, will scarcely be able to foster more statehood in these regions. What is required instead is a political will on the part of governments to institute programmes to integrate local communities into the political system. At the same time, a stronger focus of development policy on G5 Sahel could weaken ECOWAS's role as an organisation of economic cooperation and regional integration.
4. The EU and the Federal Government should promote regional learning under the leadership of ECOWAS. In its current phase, the MNJTF is more successful than it was at the beginning of its operations because it has involved local communities in a more targeted way through a civil component, clearly defined strategic and tactical goals and improved operational capabilities in border regions. G5 Sahel, on the other hand, does not yet have a strategy on how to involve civil instruments and local communities more closely. This is why human rights violations by security forces must also be strictly prosecuted and put to a stop. This is an indispensable prerequisite for success – i. e. stabilisation of the region. ECOWAS, with its civil compo-

1. The Nouakchott process is being led by Algeria, but under the auspices of the AU, and is intended to improve security cooperation between eleven countries in West Africa.

2. There are in addition, for example, MNTJF and CEMOC. At the present juncture, Benin, Togo and Burkina Faso seem to be contemplating setting up a new organisation.

ment of the ECOWAS Standby Force, can also make a contribution to sustainable stabilisation above and beyond Mali. Furthermore, the Federal Government should support the AU in better embedding ad hoc coalitions in APSA. This could also strengthen ownership.

5. A whole host of actors play an important role in Mali and the Sahel region. Some observers are already calling it a »security traffic jam«. Their closer networking is an important precondition for a long-term solution to the complicated conflicts afflicting not only Mali, but the entire region. ECOWAS will only be able to assume this role to a limited extent; the misgivings and doubts of states like Mauritania, Chad and Algeria – none of which are members of the organisation – are too strong.

With its intervention in Mali, France has been reinforcing its status in the region and expanding its military presence, particularly through the *Barkhane* anti-terror mission, since August 2014. In the long term, France will help shape the fate of the region, even though Paris is viewed rather critically by large sections of the population. The government in Paris played a crucial role in the switchover of the African-led intervention force to a UN mission. Algeria has strong reservations about French policy in the Sahel, however.

There is trust and confidence in the AU in the region, however, which would make it the more suitable actor. The Nouakchott Process, in which numerous West African countries have joined together under the aegis of the AU, is a possible platform with which to strengthen links between actors in the region. But the AU will hardly make it alone; it needs political and financial support of international partners. A common formula for the future of African security structures, however, will be the crucial factor.



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