ELUSIVE PEACE AND THE IMPACT OF UNGOVERNED SPACE IN THE SAHEL CONFLICT

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Abstract

The Sahel region has become synonymous with violence over the last three decades. Poverty, rapid population growth, food insecurity, climate change, human trafficking, migration, and poor governance have dominated the literature on the causes of instability in a region also referred to as 'the corridor of conflict. Of concern has been the rapid increase in terror-related attacks as well as violent extremism. According to the Global Terrorism Index ranking, Mali, Niger, and Chad, as well as the neighboring Libya and Nigeria, are among the top 30 countries affected by terrorism. This paper seeks to examine the instability in the Sahel through the ungoverned space theory lenses. It interogates the evolution of the crisis, and the relationship between the ungoverned spaces in the region and the unending conflict. It argues that years of systematic marginalization and ineffective administration have created pockets of ungoverned territories which are being exploited by armed groups. Based on the findings, this paper recommends a multidimensional approach that combines military, social and economic reforms, as well as inclusivity in proportional means to achieve peace and stability in the region.

Keywords *Sahel, Ungoverned Space, Terrorism, Conflict, Peacebuilding*

SAHEL İHTİLAFINDA ZOR BARIŞ VE KONTROLSÜZ ALANIN ETKİSİ

Öz

Sahel Bölgesi (Sahra çölünün kuzey bölümündeki yarı kurak bölge), son otuz yıllık süre içinde şiddetle eş anlamlı hale gelmiştir. Yoksulluk, hızlı nüfus artışı, radikal aşırıcılık, gıda güvencesinin yokluğu, iklim değişikliği, insan kaçakçılığı, göç ve kötü yönetim "ihtilaf koridoru" olarak da anılan bölgedeki istikrarsızlığın nedenlerine dair literatüre egemen olmuştur. Terörle ilişkili saldırılardaki hızlı artış ve şiddet içeren aşırılık endişe konusu olmuştur. Küresel Terörizm Endeksi sıralamasına göre, Mali, Nijer ve Çad ve ayrıca bunlara komşu olan Libya ve Nijerya, terörizmden en fazla etkilenen ilk 30 ülke arasındadır. Bu makale Sahel krizini, kontrolsüz alan teorisinin merceğinden incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makalenin başında, ihtilafın evrimi ve bölgedeki kontrolsüz alanlar ile sonu gelmez ihtilaf arasındaki ilişki gözden geçirilecektir. Makalede, yıllarca süren sistematik ötekileştirmenin silahlı gruplarca istifade edilen küçük çaplı kontrolsüz toprak parçalarını meydana getirdiği iddia edilmektedir. Makale bulgulara dayanarak, barış ve meşruiyetin sağlanması için askeri, sosyal ve ekonomik hizmetler ile kapsayıcılığın orantılı araçlar halinde kullanılması şeklindeki çok boyutlu yaklaşımı önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sahel, Kontrolsüz Alan, Terörizm, İhtilaf, Barış İnşası*

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INTRODUCTION

The Sahel region has been experiencing a series of crises as a result of natural disasters, conflicts and terrorism over the last three decades. Despite the level of suffering by the civilians as well as the negative consequences the instability has on regional and international security, academicians and practitioners seem to give the region little attention. Known as 'the corridor of conflict,' the Sahel region has attracted little attention from international aid organizations while regional and political actors have only begun to respond to what they consider as 'war on terror.' This paper seeks to connect the ongoing violence in the Sahel to a much more deep-rooted problem of ungoverned space.

The definition of the term ungoverned space, especially in relation to states or conflicts, derives different interpretations. There are scholars who consider ungoverned space to be closely related to failed or fragile states and it is not surprising that most studies on ungoverned territories have been coined around failed states (Taylor, 2013). This argument is echoed by Clunan, & Harold (2010) who contend that the term failed state and ungoverned spaces are synonymous. Moore (2015) argues that the term ungoverned space can generate an interesting debate given that the structure of the world is divided into different sovereign territories. Taylor (2016:6) and Hazen, (2010: 371). contends that the ambiguity of the term justifiably makes it application worrisome. Indeed, proponents of the term such as Keister, (2014) opine that ungoverned spaces are not a mere representation of regions that are not governed but point out the little role of the state in such regions as unique to and ungoverned territory.

The RAND corporation's definition states that "*Ungoverned territories can be failed or failing states; poorly controlled land or maritime borders or airspace; or areas within otherwise viable states where the central government's authority does not extend*" (Rebasa et al., 2007:3). According to Clunan & Harold, (2010), this form of definition puts the concept of ungoverned spaces within the category of doctrines such counterterrorism; counterinsurgency; reconstruction; stabilization; counter-narcotics and peacebuilding. Thus, the association of ungoverned space and security threat becomes apparent in this case. The definition by America's Department of Defense is preferred for this paper. It states that,

> *"A place where the state or central government is unable or unwilling to extend control, effectively govern, or influence the local population, and where a provincial, local, tribal, or autonomous government does not fully or effectively govern, due to inadequate governance capacity, insufficient political will, gaps in legitimacy, the presence of conflict, or restrictive norms of behavior. "Ungoverned areas" should be assumed to include under-governed, ill-governed, contested, and exploitable areas" (OUSD, 2007).*

The paper argues that historical socio-political and economic problems, coupled with administrative failures and natural disasters such as famine, drought, and floods have created perfect conditions for the emergence of ungoverned territories in the region. These territories are in turn being used by armed and criminal gangs to cause chaos and instability in the Sahel and beyond. The paper also acknowledges that the response by regional and international actors are both inadequate and inefficient.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The term Sahel (in Arabic means shoreline) is used to refer to the region stretching from Sudan to Mauritania on the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. It covers parts of southern Mauritania, southern Algeria, central Mali, Senegal, northern Niger, central Chad, and northern Burkina Faso. The region populated by about 150 million (except Nigeria) people scattered across this immense eco-climatic zone (OCHA, 2016). Historically, the regions' inhabitants and merchants have freely moved across the porous boundaries to reach the ancient city of Timbuktu in Northern Mali. The region first dominated global media in the 1980s when a severe drought affecting over 50 million people in the region killed more than 100, 000 people and leftover one million others surviving on food aid until today. However, the region is back in the global limelight this time as a result of serious cross-border violence that is affecting the majority of the countries in the Sahel.

Volatile local, regional and international aspects have led to the emergence of a security situation in the Sahel region, which is threatening individual, national and international security. The Greater Maghreb conflict, as well as the uprisings in Libya and Mali that have characterized the Arab geopolitical spheres, have directly and indirectly led to a complex relationship between security and political dynamics in the Sahel and North Africa regions (Mattelaer, 2015: 45 -55). The two regions have provided a fertile ground for different groups with local and global grievances to converge and establish movements that have become a threat to the security in many dimensions (Cooke & Sanderson, 2016: 3 -12).

The political vacuum in some of the states in the Sahel combined with the porous and vast boundaries have made the territory ideal for the operations of armed groups (Raleigh & Dowd, 2013:2 -4; Nyadera & Bincof, 2019). In addition, the resentments and grievances towards the national governments by members of local ethnic groups (mostly nomadic ethnic groups) in the Sahel, such as the Arab tribes, Tuareg, Moors, Peul, Fulani and the Songhai communities in Burkina Faso Niger and Mali, have increased their vulnerability to join some of the armed groups in the region.

Allegations of marginalization and oppression of some local groups by the central government have given extremist groups a chance to win the hearts and minds of the local populations. By presenting themselves as defenders of the oppressed seeking liberation from the suffering inflicted to them by the state, leaders of the armed

groups have been able to gain the trust of the local population thus making their operation in the region easier.

According to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service-Academic Outreach (2016) leaders of the al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are using strategies such as marriage and building kinship affiliations with the local population to strengthen their trust. Thus they have also been able to affect local political and security dynamics. The defragmented relationship between central and local authorities among some of the countries in the Sahel has weakened the capacity of local authorities; and terrorist groups are using this as an advantage to undermine the latter, seize more territory and enforce their ideology. Lacher & Steinberg (2015) further argue that the inability of government authorities to provide essential services such as protection, water, sanitation, and healthcare as well as the conflict and escalating tension among the local communities due to competition over natural resources is provides armed groups with sufficient recruits to achieve their goals.

Years of marginalizing certain ethnic groups from political and economic sectors of the government have led to steady growth of informal and black-market sectors that include trade in illegal and contraband goods such as drugs, arms, and human trafficking (Nyadera, 2018) . Extremist groups have benefited from this sector not only to access arms but also to raise finances necessary for their operations. This further widens the recruitment base, meaning the armed groups are recruiting not only locals as fighters but also those involved in the illegal trade which may involve women and children.

The crisis has forced the local, state and international authorities to respond to the Sahel conflict. However, concerns have been raised that the response strategies have been more discriminatory and repressive particularly towards the populations of the hinterland. This has been blamed for further escalation of the conflict as the local population's support for the extremist and armed groups have increased significantly. As the conflict in the region intensified, national security agencies as well as civil servants, withdrew from their stations in the rural areas allowing armed groups and extremists to move and take control of such areas thus filling the power vacuum.

The conflict, together with other factors such as climate change, has made the Sahel region among the most vulnerable in the world. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) survey report of 2019, the Sahel region is among the ten most vulnerable places in the world. Already, there has been increased trends of violence in the region as shown below;
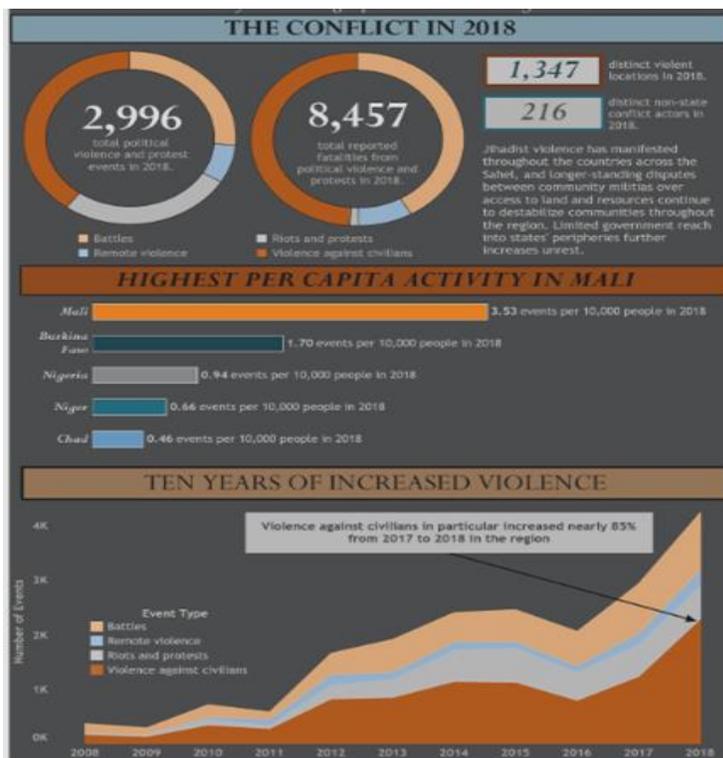
Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 2019

Poverty levels are up 78% in countries such as Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and Mali and according to the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), the number of poor people in Mali and Niger will increase over the next 20 years. The country with the second-highest infant mortality rate in the world is Niger while 39% of children of school going age in Mali are out of school (UNDP, 2017). Between 2018 and 2050 Sahel region is expected to experience its population of 90 million to rise to 220 million in 2050 (see table below). 2.5 million people mainly pastoral and agro-pastoral communities were facing severe water and pasture shortages in 2018. Also, since the end of 2018, 24 million people have needed an urgent humanitarian response; 4.5 million malnutrition children are at risk of death if no immediate measures are taken, and 5 million people have been displaced as refugees (UNHCR, 2018). The United Nations estimates that approximately US$2.7 billion will be needed in 2018 to meet the needs created by the conflict (UNHCR, 2018). Majority of the countries in the Sahel are at the bottom of the annual UN Global Human Development Index. As the table below shows, inequality, poverty, violence and high levels of illiteracy characterize the region.

Table 1: Human Development Index rank of the Countries in the Sahel

Country	HDI rank, out of 188 (2016)	Multidimensional Poverty Index	Education (expected years of schooling)	Employment to population ration (% ages 15 and older)
Chad	186	0.545	7.3	67.6
Burkina Faso	185	0.508	7.7	81.1
Niger	187	0.584	5.4	62.9
Mauritania	157	0.291	8.5	32.5
Mali	175	0.456	8.4	60.6

Source: Human Development Report, 2017, United Nations Development Program

1. STATUS OF THE CONFLICT

The Sahel region has for the most prolonged period been characterized by a strong presence of instability due to both the regional and local factors. The addition of major occurrences that have catalyzed the already existing atmosphere of a Jihad - fuelled conflict within the region, such as the consequences of the Arab springs in North Africa and the intensive strife in Mali and Libya, have brought about a new form of complex relationship regarding the dynamics of security and politics. As a result, these new dynamics have become the foundations for the culmination of domestic and international grievances and the subsequent growth of new transnational non-state actors specifically in northern Mali (Cooke and Sanderson, 2016). Border porousness in the region is ideal for the strategy of these groups as it has simplified their access to ungoverned regions where they have promptly occupied the political vacuums by exploiting the deep resentment of the communities residing in the Sahelian regions toward their respective central governments. These communities include the Fulani found in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the pastoralist Tuaregs, Arab tribes, and Songhai.

These groups have been able to draw the support of the local communities by presenting themselves as the saviors of the communities by defending them against the injustices meted out them purportedly by the state, such as marginalization. In order to maintain the trust and dependency on them by the communities, some of the leaders have entered into marital commitments with the locals and created very strong kinship ties which are a very important and highly regarded aspect of the social life of these communities. This form of arrangement is a dominant feature of the al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Jihadists (Canadian Security Intelligence Service-Academic Outreach, 2016). These terrorist groups have been able to grab the opportunity that has resulted from the failure of governments in providing very basic services, for instance access to proper healthcare, education, and the inability to provide reliable security protection to these communities, such as de-escalating the

serious tensions among the local communities over the management and access to natural resources, such as water sources and grazing fields (Canadian Security Intelligence Service-Academic Outreach, 2016). The consequence of these shortcomings by the state is that there has been sustained resentment by these groups towards their respective central governments and as such the terrorist groups have found themselves in very rich and viable terrorist recruitment bases enhanced by their ability to completely undermine the legitimate local administrations and thereby easily acquiring more territory (Lacher and Steinberg, 2015).

Violence and extremism have been on the rise due to the establishment of an informal economy that profits from illegal trade and exchange of goods such as contraband drugs, illicit arms, human trafficking and black-market sales of basic human commodities. Marginalization of the communities from the formal economy of the states is the primary reason for the growth and subsequent establishment of this informal economy which has continued to draw recruitment from a majority of the young population who join to make ends meet for them and their families. This has continued to work in favor of the terrorist organizations because the government's response towards populations from these regions notably in Northern Mali has been increasingly oppressive and discriminative hence strengthening the support for the militias by the local communities. The border region between Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali (Liptako-Gourma) has been a hotbed of conflict and violent extremism (Centre for Strategic and İnternational Studies, 2017). Withdrawal of national armies from this region led to a vacuum which was promptly filled by the militia groups gaining legitimacy as the alternatives to state power and control.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The rationale of this theory is that the vacuum created as a result of absence of the state is then filled by non -state actors who use such spaces to recruit, plan logistics, settle, generate fund, operate and commit crimes (Nyadera, Salah & Agwanda, 2019). In this regard, states with weak political and economic spheres such as those in the Sahel are vulnerable to having ungoverned spaces thus giving armed groups an upper hand. Indeed, while ungoverned space can be associated with collapsed states, even stable countries may as well have some territories that fulfill the conditions of an ungoverned space (Keister, 2014:766).

Four approaches explain how states decided on how to approach the issue of inclusion, how to utilize space and who will be excluded from state benefits. Herbst (2000) observes that in Africa, states have either unfavorable or favorable political geography which is determined by population distribution, size of the state and resource wealth. According to Herbst (2000) political geography is an important determinant of the extent to which a state has control over its territories and its capabilities. This becomes the basis of another assumption of the theory that predicts higher chances of peace in small countries that have populations which are evenly

distributed as compared to larger states with an unevenly distributed population. There is more likelihood of violence in countries with large uninhabited areas giving the challenge state will face in policing the whole region. Although this assumption is criticized for being static, and that there are other cases where violence has occurred in small countries with evenly distributed populations such as those witnessed in Rwanda, Eritrea, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and others. However, the manner in which one uses the theory of ungoverned spaces in the Sahel conflict proves the theory has significant relevance (Herbst 2000: 273 -280)

The failure of the governments in the Sahel region to enforce their monopoly on the use of force as well as fulfill basic obligations to their citizens has given room for other groups to emerge and act as alternatives to the state (Clunan and Trinkunas, 2010: 15 -9). The presence of non -state actors who are working as an alternative to the state has made some scholars question whether these territories are ungoverned. For this paper, we will rely on the state-centric approach to understand the Sahel conflict. Clunan and Trinkunas (2010) opine that any efforts to counter the non -state actors who have established themselves within the ungoverned territories will be counterproductive. Instead, they urge cooperation between the non -state actors and the state to defeat other groups which threaten national and global peace. In other words, governments need to collaborate with other actors within the ungoverned territories to make such regions unconducive for terrorists and other armed groups (Rabasa et al., 2007: 1-12).

Clapham (1986) gives an important opinion that has relevance in understanding the Sahel conflict. He argues that while the region is characterized by ungoverned territories, other unique features contribute to the problem. One of them is changing regimes which come with different interests emanating from their support base. Therefore, Sahel's political geography should also be examined based on shifting political, economic and physical interests. Boone (2003) agrees with Clapham's observation and assets that governments in West Africa have four characteristics namely where the state is non-incorporated, indirectly present and non-extractive, indirectly present and extractive, and directly present and extractive (Boone, 2003: 22-29). Mehler (2004) characterizes institutions within the states in Africa as being based on multiple power sources and holders of all which are interconnected by a web of productive relationships, hierarchies, and alliances. For Mehler, (2004: 542-6) this is what determines the depth and extent of power across the state's boundaries.

Observations by Mehler, (2004) on African countries' political geography have a similar conclusion that central governments have limits to the amount of power and control of territories. Their assumptions indicate a fixed case of constraints and opportunities for these states but a differing depth, special presence, and application of governance. This means that under such constraints, some groups will be in government agenda while others will be marginalized. Those who don't benefit from government programs end up on the periphery and are prone to poverty and political

insignificance (Raleigh, 2010:5). Based on this narrative and the characteristics of the Sahel region countries which are large and unevenly underpopulated, one can conclude that there is a relationship between the ungoverned spaces and the violence being witnessed (Bourne, 2011).

The theory of ungoverned space and conflict still has more prominence in explaining the violence in the Sahel even though some scholars may want to emphasize other factors such as climate change (Raleigh and Dowd, 2013:5 -11). The severe impact of adverse climate change in the Sahara region cannot be underestimated. Indeed, until the various conflicts in the Sahel overlapped in 2011, most of the reported incidences of violence emanated from the scarcity of rain and pastures in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL). However, the impact of climate change shows little significance to the causes of the conflict. For example, there were severe droughts in the Sahel in 2010 and 2012, and if the assumption of climate change was causing conflict, then it would be expected that the number of violent incidences would have increased.

This was however not the case. Statistics show that there was nomuch difference in the violence during the accelerated drought even though over 50% of crop harvest were lost in Chad and Mauritania (Oxfam 2012). On the contrary, Chad and Mauritania were relatively peaceful in 2012. The link between conflict and environment has been a dominant cause for a decade as noted by Swift (1996). Scholars such as Keita (1998: 102 -113), Herrero (2006); Homer-Dixon (2001) Bennett (1991); and Baechler (1999) have for decades attempted to link land degradation, unfavourable rainfall, and conflict while others have attempted to link impacts of climate change to the marginalization of certain communities in the Sahel. Benjaminson (2008); Turner (2004) and Raleigh (2010) argue that while marginalization is a significant recipe for violence, it is not very clear whether the marginalization in the Sahel is an outcome of the climate change. What is clear, however, is that the failure of Sahel states to adequately respond to the suffering brought about by the drought creates a situation of ungoverned territories and hence other actors will step in and offer services that should have been provided by the government.

Ungoverned space is also blamed for providing a breeding ground for indoctrination and rise of religious extremism. Traub (2012: 51 -54) and Wege (2012) point out that religious extremism thrives in regions where states have failed and left regions in the Sahel by themselves, and they believe that the circumstances surrounding states in West Africa are good enough for extremist groups to spread their ideology. Closely related is the issue of ethnicity and racism in the vast continent of Africa that are blamed for the marginalization of communities especially those perceived not to be pro-government as well as provide a sense of unity among some races that consider themselves minorities, in this case, the Arabs. These challenges combined with others such as criminalization and delegitimization of the

state, elite factionalism, poor economic performance, low levels of civil liberties and democracy lead to state failure, ungoverned territories and eventually violence (Menkhaus 2010).

The Sahel region provides local and international armed groups with roaming space from which they can perpetuate their plans and attacks. The use and type of space in which groups involved in a conflict operate from have significant effects as to whether they win or not. McColl (1969) stresses the importance of unpopulated spaces for armed groups especially during their first stages when they need to secure finances, determine logistics and gather strength. He adds that the strength of the militant group in comparison to the state will also determine the duration and size they can control in the space, including the proximity of the space to urban areas.

What makes a particular space attractive to armed groups include, but not limited to, access to critical installations of military and political relevance such as provincial headquarters, territories with disorganized and weak local authorities, regions with multiple power centers, for example, overlapping boundaries, suitable for training and economically self-reliant. Unstable national and local authorities are important conditions for making an area suitable for armed groups. While the abovementioned conditions may not necessarily be met, armed groups tend to priorities areas that provide space for hit and run attacks as well as military engagements (McColl, 1969: 23). In choosing a space, armed groups are also keen on ensuring that once the core insurgent has been established, daily provisions and necessities can be accessed.

McColl's (1969) arguments play an important function in explaining contemporary conflicts such as the one in the Sahel by showing the rationale behind armed groups choosing to occupy ungoverned and underpopulated spaces, the impacts and political benefits therein. Large spaces are specifically important not only because they are suitable for hit-and-run attacks, but they are also equally useful for displacing populations in an entire region. While some may criticize hit and run attacks as signs that the group is weak, Bosi (2013:81 -86) opines that once a group has found a safe territory, they would not use them to perpetuate continual political violence but rather establishing a persistent and long-term attack. The Sahel belt has similar characteristics meaning demography, space, multiple and overlapping authorities, which makes it ideal for armed groups to establish their bases and make it extremely difficult to achieve for government operations to defeat them.

Armed groups in the Sahel are largely regional and local, which depends on ethno-regional characteristics in utilizing the space. To maximize the use of space and benefits, most of the armed groups opt to carry out attacks in major towns and centers such as Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal in Mali. Civilians are often targeted as these groups seek to displace more populations and capture more space (Kalyvas, 2006: 158 -201). Space, therefore, becomes an essential tool in maximizing ability and strength to perpetuate political violence.

3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The theory adopted for this study is the one that has significance lessons and applications on the Sahel conflict. On the one hand, it associates the increasing cases of armed conflicts to the growing number of ungoverned spaces, particularly in developing countries. This is based on the assumption that the absence of state authority, in terms of inadequate security personnel, failure to provide essential and necessary services such as health, education and food security; or in case of systematic marginalization of particular communities or territories, allows armed groups to infiltrate such regions through propaganda, force or manipulation and establish parallel structures. It is these parallel structures that then offer these armed group the legitimacy and space to operate. Therefore, to end or at least reduce instances of armed groups working in one's country, there is a need to ensure that ungoverned spaces are minimized. The assumption is that state presence in all territories within its jurisdiction will not only provide the inhabitants of such areas the needed security and basic need but also displace all forms of armed non -state actors by giving them no room to operate, recruit or generate revenue.

By enforcing the law adequately, state authority in ungoverned spaces is likely to reduce, significantly, the activities of armed groups within a state's territory. The figure below shows the relationship between the operations of armed groups in ungoverned space and the level of state authority.

Figure 1: Model of Pacifying Ungoverned Spaces.
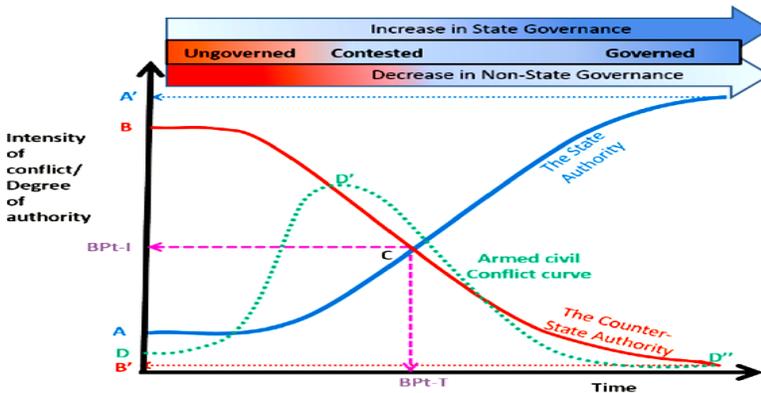
Author Compilation

From the above figure, line BCB (the red curve) represents the authority of armed groups in ungoverned spaces, the authority of the state is described by curve ACA (the blue curve) and point C represents the breaking point. The conflict

intensity is represented where BPt-I (Breaking Point Intensity), BPt-T (Breaking Point Time) and the DD'D' curve intercept.

At point B, the authority of the armed group on the ungoverned space is at its peak, and it has full control of the territory. Despite the complete control of the armed group on the territory at point B, the state has a monopoly over the legality of the territory even if the armed group has established a parallel structure. Point A represents the origin and reserved legal authority of the state. This simply means that the authority of the state cannot be zero irrespective of the circumstance of the ungoverned space. The curve indicates the period when the state embarks on trying to liberate the territory, thus turning it into a contested zone. The curves will be shaped depending on the outcome of the contest between the armed group and the state over the control of the ungoverned territory. In the event the state's use of force enables it to take control of the whole or some of the contested territory back, the curves will intersect at the BPt-I, BPt-T (meaning the breaking point).

As the authority of the armed group diminishes, and the state takes more control of the territory, there will be a point where the authority of both the state and armed group are equal. This is represented at point C. The trend will continue from point A to C and then to A (the blue curve) if the countermeasures employed by the state are succeeding in pushing out the armed group from its territory and recapturing the ungoverned space. In this scenario, the authority of the armed group will decline from B to C and then B (the red curve) which is the point where the armed group loses all its authority.

The state strategies that can ensure full recapture of the ungoverned territory need not to only rely on the use of force only, but necessary adjustments must be adopted at the various stages of the contest to gain the full trust of the local population. For example, at the earlier stages of state efforts to recapture the territories, the use of military force is legitimate. This stage is represented in the figure by curve D to D' visible between the state's authority curve (A to C) and the armed group curve (B to C). When the conflict enters the second stage represented between D and D just slightly above C, it indicates that the state is gaining more ground in the territory, and so the use of force needs to be reduced. What the state needs to do is introducing social services, law enforcement agencies, infrastructure, economic activities and political reforms such as organizing local elections, which will go a long way in promoting the legitimacy of state authority.

Despite state efforts to recapture the territory through the use of non -lethal force especially in the second stage, there will always be opposition to the government presence, and that explains why the conflict intensity curve cannot go to zero. What is observable in most conflicts is that most cases of the conflict's climax, indicated by D, occur slightly before BPt-T, BPt-I (that is, the breaking point). The reason for such an occurrence is that just before the state embarks on

countermeasures on armed groups, the conflict's intensity is at the highest level before the militant group's surrender or dissolve. However, it is at this point, when the state's advances have intensified, and the armed groups are losing ground that the latter may opt to employ its most severe tactic with the assumption that this may reduce or perhaps stop the state's advancement. If it fails to change the tides of the countermeasures by the state, the armed group will be forced to leave, and the state's authority will become more visible in the territory.

The figure below suggests a model which the state can use to regain authority in ungoverned spaces;

Figure 2: Model of the State vs the Population—Social Contract.
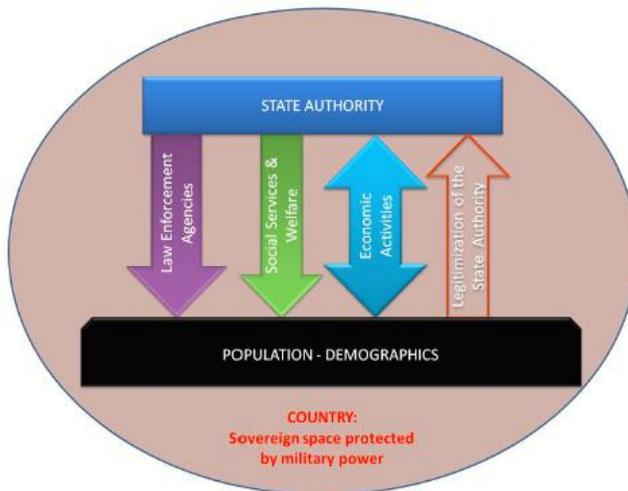
Author Compilation

The above model provides a framework through which state authority and legitimacy can be regained, quantified and measured. Thus one can be able to measure the extent to which a state is in control of a specific space at the same time gives an idea of how a country can regain control of areas that it had lost control of previously. For example, if one wants to measure law enforcement, variables such as police agencies, prisons, courts, and border posts or if one is to measure welfare, then variables such as local governments, health facilities, and schools can be examined. This article, therefore, considers the state authority which includes among other things the presence of law enforcement agents, economic activities, social welfare, etc, as important aspects of undermining the presence of armed groups in its territories. This is because the absence of such elements gives some of the radical and armed groups sufficient conditions to recruit members of the public to their organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the prolonged crisis in the Sahel using the ungoverned space theory. The theory argues that when there is little government presence in a particular region of a country, the territory can become ungoverned over time. This means that whenever people begin to feel isolated, marginalized by the government even during difficult times such as drought and famine, they become vulnerable to radicalization. Armed groups and terrorist organizations find it very easy to use propaganda and gain the support of people who feel isolated in the country. Indeed, this paper reveals that there is a high level of poverty, low human development index, lack of essential services in all the violent hot spots in the Sahel region. This means that the local population feels very little presence of the government in the region, therefore, creating a room that has been exploited by armed groups and extremists to recruit locals and operate in these areas.

The detachment is not only seen in the lack of social welfare services in the region, but the territories that are experiencing the violence are also geographically detached from the center meaning most of them are along the border within the country. Before these regions were overrun by armed groups, there was little or no presence of border police and security forces who could have repelled the initial attacks. Seemingly, governments in the region did little to collect intelligence in the areas considered to be in the periphery, since that way we could have witnessed insufficient response from the government before the large scale take-over of the hotspots. How non -state actors manage to infiltrate not one or two but almost five countries in the same region and the governments could only respond after these groups had settled and established operational positions is a question of concern. What is clear though is that these governments had an insufficient presence in the captured regions.

With regards to the issue of what made the communities in these regions vulnerable to supporting armed groups or even accepting to be recruited, one needs to look back at the very definition of the state, its roles, and responsibilities. Of course, the impact of some communities being marginalized or feeling not well represented in the government or that their interest is not being addressed sufficiently is enough to understand why they are justifying the use of violence. On the one hand, governments can claim that their inability to provide much-needed resources and social welfare in all parts of the country is caused by the weak economy. This is a valid justification; however, the point is not about whether there is a strong economy or not but whether national resources are shared in a manner that promotes inclusivity and equity. The result is conflict that has left thousands dead and millions displaced. These challenges need to be solved using sustainable strategies and this paper recommends the following measures;

First, the governments, particularly those involved in the G5 Sahel operations, should recognize the limitations of countering terrorism and other forms of contemporary violence solely with military or hard power strategies. These strategies have in several attempts failed in their objectives. A structured form of dialogue should be given a chance based on the revelation that governments play a role in the emergence of ungoverned spaces. Robust means of identifying priority areas for people in the regions is considered important especially with regard to the provision of public goods such as health facility, clean water, education, and sanitation facilities. It is important to note that the resurgence of Boko Haram and other terrorist attacks in 2019 are a big blow to political solutions as this will lead to further violence. That is why it is important to adopt new counterterrorism strategies that will render the group's narratives irrelevant and disable their operation capacity.

Secondly, legal channels should be explored in dealing with those responsible for committing crimes in the region. Just as there is a regional counterterrorism force, cooperation between regional countries and international actors to ensure that there is a broad legal coalition that will ensure justice for the victims and suspects of violent acts in the Sahel region.

Third, countries constituting the Sahel need to reflect on their domestic challenges and be bold enough to acknowledge areas of weaknesses and seek support towards a sustainable solution for the same. In conclusion, the affected governments need to broaden their response to violence. There is a need to have room for compromise as well as dialogue. Territories that have been recaptured need to have sufficient government institutions and services. More specifically security and intelligence agencies, as well as social services, need to be improved. Public participation in policy processes in addition to the adoption of short, medium and long term strategic and development strategies will have a positive impact.

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