



# Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force

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*Preventing War. Shaping Peace.*

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# Principal Findings

**What's the issue?** Ten months after the Sahel's five countries set up the G5 Sahel joint force (FC-G5S) as a means of settling the armed conflicts within the region, multiple questions have been raised and the force is struggling to find its place in the region.

**Why does it matter?** This force's success or failure will depend on whether it can position itself in the crowded field of armed forces already in the Sahel and gain people's trust in the region.

**What should be done?** The G5 Sahel joint force must also have political support, coordinate its work with other regional and international actors and forces, and receive tangible financial support from its donors.

## *Executive Summary*

Ten months after its launch, the G5 Sahel joint force (FC-G5S), a joint project undertaken by the five countries of the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad), is slowly taking shape. This force is now backed by two UN Security Council resolutions and has its own headquarters; it also carried out its first mission in the border zone of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso in early November. The force represents an important step toward addressing the worrying instability that affects Mali and the Sahel in general, but it remains a work in progress. This raises numerous unanswered questions about its funding, operational capacity, the political cooperation between its five members, and its place in the Sahel – a region crowded by sometimes-competing military and diplomatic initiatives. The backers of the FC-G5S – due to meet on 13 December at the Paris conference aimed at fine-tuning its operationalisation – must grasp the fact that the construction of this force, and more generally the resolution of crises in the Sahel, is not exclusively a matter of weapons and money.

As part of a larger organisation known as the G5, set up in 2014, the FC-G5S is still mainly an experimental force. Its creation is part of a growing appetite both within and outside the continent for this new generation of military response in a global context that is increasingly sceptical of both the effectiveness of the UN peacekeeping doctrine and its suitability to asymmetrical conflicts and terrorism.

Although not completely pulling out of the Sahel, France and other European countries with a presence in this region are attempting to reduce the number of their troops on the ground and to bring down the expense of their overseas operations by delegating them partially to their African partners and replacing them with the use of drones. The Sahel is politically and economically strategic, especially for France and Germany, both of which view the region as posing a potential threat to their own security and as a source of migration and terrorism. As for the African states themselves, they have lost trust in the ability of their own regional and continental organisations to guarantee their security. Instead they are choosing to try out these new collective defence mechanisms, known by specialists as ad hoc forces.

The FC-G5S was created shortly after another ad hoc force, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), was launched by four countries (Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria and Chad). The MNJTF has been fighting against the Boko Haram's uprising in the Lake Chad basin since 2012. Compared to this analogous force, the G5's equivalent has various weaknesses: the respective armies lack capability and its members are much poorer. Whereas the MNJTF can mobilise with discreet support from Western powers against a single enemy, the G5 acts in a region containing more than twenty active armed groups, making it difficult to focus on a common target. This new force will increasingly need to carve out a place for itself in a region where the UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and France's Operation Barkhane already have forces in operation, and in the same theatre as a deployment of U.S. troops, whose exact number remains a mystery.

The success or failure of the new force will largely depend on how it positions itself in this crowded security field, and on its coordination with the armies already

in place since 2013. France's Operation Barkhane will almost certainly guide the development of the FC-G5S, but it is much less obvious how the force will collaborate with MINUSMA (35 per cent of the troops for this UN mission are provided by the members of the G5 states). Any logistical support that MINUSMA might provide could not be regional, for example, because its stabilisation mandate only covers Mali.

Its success will also be contingent on its backers' ability to make it fit into the wider picture with a set of political objectives. In areas where the G5 has operations and comes to secure peace, spaces for negotiation must swiftly be found while channels of communication with certain leaders of jihadist groups from the Sahel should also be maintained or reactivated. The FC-G5S will achieve its objective by isolating jihadist groups from local communities and from other armed groups which currently give them support.

To be effective, the FC-G5S will need the trust and support from local populations, whose rights must be scrupulously respected; its mistakes and abuses will be sure to drive people in this region toward giving their allegiance to jihadist groups, which are skilled at offering protection and promises of revenge. In this sense, the MNJTF provides an example of what not to do: anger or fear incited by acts of brutality committed by its armed forces, particularly by Nigerian troops, caused many people to join the ranks of Boko Haram.

The G5 and its armed force must also earn the trust of Algeria and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). For the time being, these two regional powers prefer the Nouakchott process that groups together eleven West African countries, from the Lake Chad basin and Maghreb, hence it is deemed more inclusive. In their eyes, this process is also more legitimate, having been initiated by the African Union (AU). Unless a better understanding is reached with these two partners, the search for greater regional cohesion will paradoxically lead to new rifts between neighbours. Similarly, given the slow and difficult process of setting up this initiative, and all the effort required, it is important not to forget the peace process already underway and floundering in the north of Mali, and that it is currently the only political solution to a crisis which is more political and social than military. In short, the FC-G5S must not simply become a façade that conceals a lack of political vision.

## *Recommendations*

- ❑ **Ensure scrupulous respect for the rights of people living in zones of FC-G5S's operations**, otherwise a section of these populations, in search of protection, will side with the jihadist groups active in the Sahel. Military personnel, police forces and the judiciaries of the G5 countries must therefore be made aware of fundamental human rights; legal recourses must be made available to families of those killed or arrested in connection to the G5 force's operations; compliance must be ensured with the human rights and international humanitarian law reference framework established by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; those found guilty of human rights violations must be severely punished.
- ❑ **The FC-G5S must be part of a project that is not simply repressive but instead seeks political solutions to crises affecting the Sahel.** Its operations must go hand in hand with local-level negotiations designed to tackle the causes of conflicts and to encourage certain leaders of jihadist groups from the Sahel region to engage in dialogue.
- ❑ **Diplomatic initiatives must be taken in parallel with the use of force by the G5 countries and by France**, the group's main backer. The prime objective of this approach would be to relieve any reservations that Algeria and ECOWAS may have about the creation of the FC-G5S, in order to create a regional unity that spreads beyond the G5 Sahel's borders, while also ensuring that these two regional powers will work alongside the G5, and not against it.
- ❑ **Bilateral military cooperation from the U.S. must be arranged** for improved coordination with the other forces deployed in the Sahel. If the U.S. wishes to fight against jihadist groups, it should strive for its bilateral cooperation not to duplicate but complement the contributions made by France, the European Union (EU), and the UN to the FC-G5S.
- ❑ **The FC-G5S must be given significant financial backing.** It would be better for the donors to provide immediate and tangible funds rather than simply make pledges. They must show themselves to be sufficiently generous by providing more than the amount initially requested, and to guarantee long-term funding to the force.

**Brussels/Dakar, 12 December 2017**

# Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force

## I. What Is the G5?

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Launched in February 2017, the G5 Sahel joint force (FC-G5S) forms part of the regional G5 Sahel organisation. The idea for this new regional body – comprising Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad – was conceived in February 2014. Designed to respond to the security and development challenges facing the Sahel region, it has been supported by France, the most military active European country in this part of the world. Paris has refused to take ownership of this initiative, however, and has gone to some lengths to attribute its existence primarily to the presidents of its five member states.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to give a definitive answer to the paternity question, but ever since the G5 was set up, Paris has clearly been busy making diplomatic efforts in support of the group, and certain regional actors rightly or wrongly perceive that France is behind the initiative.

The G5 is a very fluid and constantly changing organisation. At the time of its creation in 2014, the G5 described itself as a multidimensional grouping with a strong development component. This aspect has gradually slipped into the background as the G5's initiators have turned their attention to the area of most interest to the international community: security. The priority has therefore shifted toward the construction of a joint armed force, a task that has proved very difficult, especially in terms of its financing.

During the G5 summit held in July 2017, France, Germany and the European Union (EU) added a new element to the group called Alliance for the Sahel, which is still a work in progress.<sup>2</sup> Tasked with coordinating the initiatives and mobilising donors, this alliance was created without the G5 officially abandoning its own development objectives. This raises two questions: one concerns the ability of the Alliance and the G5 to work in conjunction with each other, given that the G5's permanent secretariat is “an institutional framework to coordinate and follow up regional cooperation for development”; the other issue relates to the G5's prospects as an organisation.<sup>3</sup> And over time, the G5 is increasingly being reduced to its military component. Even though the G5 and FC-G5S acronyms are not interchangeable and describe two distinct structures, they are still frequently confused. Many writers refer to the G5 as an armed force, something it is not but what it could become in the future.

The FC-G5S separates the Sahel into three sectors: an eastern sector for Niger and Chad, with two battalions; a central sector covering Mali, Burkina Faso and

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<sup>1</sup> Crisis Group interviews, French military officer and European diplomat, Dakar, November 2017.

<sup>2</sup> For further details about the Alliance for the Sahel, see French diplomacy website (in French): <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/defense-et-securite/crises-et-conflits/la-force-conjointe-g5-sahel-et-l-alliance-pour-le-sahel>.

<sup>3</sup> The G5 described itself in these terms in a job advertisement published in early December 2017.

Niger, in which three battalions have been deployed; and a western sector corresponding to Mauritania and Mali, where two battalions will be operating. The battalions will each consist of 650 men. The different zones are equipped with their own tactical command post (PC tactique), while a general command post (PC opératif) has been set up in Mali. The force is led by a commander appointed by the president chairing the G5. Selected from among the G5 member countries' five heads of state, this position has a one-year duration.

The joint force's initial mandate includes fighting terrorism, organised crime and human trafficking; restoring state authority; helping displaced persons to return home; contributing to humanitarian operations; and helping to implement development projects. Officially it has a peace-enforcement mandate rather than a peacekeeping one. In fact, the work of the FC-G5S is rather a counter-insurgency operation than a classic peace-enforcement mission. Its rules of engagement fall within the realm of warfare.

The FC-G5S is another example of recent attempts made by African countries to take on responsibility for their own security, which have had varying degrees of success. The trend began with the tentative steps taken in 1978 by an African detachment of troops in Shaba (former Zaire), followed by the first peacekeeping force sent by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, precursor of the AU) into Chad in 1981.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, from the 1980s until the 2000s, initiatives have mostly formed part of peacekeeping missions, enlisting intervention forces rather than fighting forces.

Some major Western actors have been eager to progressively withdraw from the region, due to a combination of their own domestic political and budgetary pressures. This is compounded by new security challenges facing the African continent, such as terrorism and the growing networks of international criminal groups, as well as the declining effectiveness of the UN peacekeeping concept. The situation that has lasted for around a decade has accelerated the pace at which, and significantly changed how, countries in Africa are taking control over their own security.

The G5 is part of a current shift toward the creation of ad hoc forces that go beyond peacekeeping and have a mandate for direct military intervention. The implementation of this new type of force now lies at the heart of the strategy adopted by the AU, whose Peace and Security Council created the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in 2007.<sup>5</sup>

The G5 is keen to address the failures of regional and international military cooperation initiatives that have followed the establishment and expansion of armed groups in Mali and then in the Sahel. These militias spilled out from the Algerian civil war waged in the 1990s, with small groups of uncompromising combatants settling in the Malian desert. More recently, fighters have been spawned by localised conflicts such as intercommunity disputes in central Mali and regional unrest of the kind generated by the chaos in Libya. Despite various efforts, the countries in the Sahel-Saharan region have never achieved a joint security apparatus

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<sup>4</sup> See Romain Esmenjaud and Benedickt Francke, "Qui s'est approprié la gestion de la paix et de la sécurité en Afrique?", *Revue internationale et Stratégique*, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> See Crisis Group Africa Report N°255, *Time to Reset African Union-European Union Relations*, 17 October 2017.



capable of putting a stop to the activities of these groups. The Algerian-led Joint Military Staff Committee of the Sahel Region (CEMOC) has never properly taken off. Lacking resources and without enough mutual understanding among its members, ECOWAS has been unable to deploy troops to the Sahel as part of its own regional security initiative known as the Standby Force.<sup>6</sup> Ill-adapted to asymmetrical warfare, the MINUSMA has also failed to stabilise the country at the centre of Sahel's crises.<sup>7</sup>

Armed groups have not only taken advantage of this ineffectiveness and divisions between countries in the region, but they have also shown an organisational ability superior to the states under attack. Spurred on by a common cause, they are often better than the nation states at making things mesh at a local, regional and international level. The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), created in March 2017, is the most recent example of this state of affairs. This alliance operating under the international banner of al-Qaeda consists of two groups, Ansar Eddine and the Macina Liberation Front, which have a strong presence in northern and central Mali, along with al-Mourabitoun, an organisation active throughout the wider border region of the Maghreb.<sup>8</sup>

These groups have also made the most of Sahel's vast desert landscape by adapting their strategy to the French and international military intervention of 2013. The French operation, carried out within the framework of Operation Serval, chased out armed groups from towns which they had briefly controlled. This also had the effect, as part of a discreet political strategy, of encouraging al-Qaeda supporters, particularly those involved in Ansar Eddine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), to join the Algeria-brokered peace talks or retract their support for these terrorist groups. But these groups have then used one of the most classic stratagems in warfare:<sup>9</sup> they dispersed and started attacking rural targets that had been abandoned by states and rendered vulnerable by local tensions, particularly in the case of border areas. Without joint security initiatives, these areas located largely beyond the reaches of the states are perfectly suited for government adversaries to regroup and move around freely.

The G5 countries want to remedy this lack of regional cooperation and surveillance of these abandoned locales. France and Germany are also concerned by threats to their domestic security and perceive the Sahel as a potential base for those launching attacks on their countries, even though this region has not been the origin of any such attacks in Europe. Both of these countries, as well as various members

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<sup>6</sup> ECOWAS is equipped to undertake military intervention through its Standby Force (Force en attente, FAC), formerly known as ECOMOG. For more information on the role of this force, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°234, *Implementing Peace and Security Architecture (III): West Africa*, 14 April 2016.

<sup>7</sup> "We must rethink the UN's peacekeeping doctrine .... You cannot keep the peace where it doesn't exist". Speech by Senegalese President Macky Sall at the opening of the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa, November 2017.

<sup>8</sup> "Open Letter to the UN Security Council on Peacekeeping in Mali", Crisis Group, 24 April 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Exerting pressure on the enemy's void is the subject of an entire chapter of Sun Tzu's treatise on military strategy, *The Art of War*. A few lines of this classic work perfectly sum up the current strategy adopted by the armed jihadist groups operating in the Sahel: "Emerge from the void; attack undefended places; you can ensure the safety of your defence if you only hold positions that cannot be attacked ...".

of the EU, are keen to stem the flow of migrants from this area and envisage the FC-G5S as a more global strategy to bring migration under control. From this perspective, the initiative appears logical and sensible.<sup>10</sup>

The group's operational phase began with the inauguration of its general headquarters in Sévaré in Mali and its first mission (named Hawbi) to the border area of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in early November. Yet the details remain vague for how this extremely complex new security apparatus will work in practice; it is more experimental than effective, and raise many unanswered questions. It will take time to build. And even the partial replacement of the French troops – as awaited by a France that is tired and short of solutions – is set to be a lengthy process. It must also succeed where similar initiatives have failed, and create something that few regional groupings have achieved: a common defence.

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<sup>10</sup> France, and the EU in general, has been trying to attribute the origin of the G5 to the countries in the region and minimise the role played by Paris in its gestation. Crisis Group interviews, French military officer and European diplomat, Dakar, November 2017.

## **II. Operational Capabilities and Limited Funding**

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The G5 was set up soon after the regional Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was established and began operations to tackle the Boko Haram uprising in the Lake Chad basin.<sup>11</sup> This is often cited as an example to be followed given its relative success at containing the expansion of Boko Haram.<sup>12</sup> The G5 will have many difficulties emulating the MNJTF, for at least three reasons.

Firstly, the armies' capabilities are not comparable. The MNJTF has benefited with everything from the Nigerian army's manpower and weapons, Chad's veteran soldiers, and the long experience of one of Cameroon's army units that enjoys unconventional funding, the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR).<sup>13</sup> Conversely, three of the G5's armies (from Burkina, Niger and Mali) have more weaknesses than strengths.

Burkina Faso's army and intelligence services are immersed in a restructuring process after President Compaoré's downfall in October 2014. Niger's army must operate with a budget that has a chronic deficit, at a time of tense relations with the political establishment, and the obligation to have a permanent presence along three borders (with Mali, Libya and Nigeria). And although the Malian army exists on paper, its operational capability is feeble. Its reorganisation process is progressing very slowly, and it largely remains the same disorganised armed force as it was before Captain Sanogo's coup d'état in March 2012. As before, some of its members sell their equipment to the highest bidder and commit abuses against the civilian population.<sup>14</sup>

Although not as weak as its neighbours in the central Sahel region, the armies of Mauritania and Chad are far from being beacons of hope. Despite boasting a good reputation for its intelligence services and rapid intervention units, Mauritania has not participated in any major combat situations for the past four years. Chad's soldiers also may not be quite as sharp as they were in 2013, fatigued by multiple deployments and financially weak after the fall in oil prices. Despite having superior capabilities than the G5's other members, both of these armed forces are distanced from the current flashpoints in the central sector, around the Liptako-Gourma region near the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. This creates a paradox where the cornerstones of the G5, its weakest links, must initially be the ones that take on most of the work.

Secondly, the G5 lacks a donor from among its members able to disburse an important sum of its own money, as happened in the case of Nigeria and the MNJTF.<sup>15</sup> Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad rank in the last five places of the UN Development Programme (UNDP)'s human development index (HDI). Mauritania and Mali are not much higher. The G5 therefore faces a similar paradox to AMISOM: its member countries must take responsibility for their own security while still relying on foreign financing backing.

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<sup>11</sup> This is a joint force consisting of four countries from the Lake Chad basin: Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria and Chad.

<sup>12</sup> Crisis Group interviews, EU officials, Addis Ababa, March 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Set up in 1999 to combat banditry and cross-border crime, the light intervention battalion became the rapid intervention battalion in 2008. It is funded by the national state oil company.

<sup>14</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Malian combatants, Kidal, July 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Nigeria has put \$100 million into the MNJTF.

For the time being, the force's initial budget is set at €423 million for its first twelve months of operations. This amount is broken down as follows: 230 million for investments, 110 million to cover initial operations, and 83 million to pay the troops. Even if the budget is severely cut, as a number of sources have indicated will be the case,<sup>16</sup> it is still far from being exercised.<sup>17</sup> The EU has donated €50 million, not including France's 8 million, and the G5's member countries have contributed 10 million each, while Saudi Arabia has pledged to donate €84.8 million.

The focus on the force's budget has ended up as a distraction from another issue: its future funding and durability. The refusal of the Americans and British to fund the force through a regular and enduring UN mechanism places the G5 in a permanently precarious financial situation.<sup>18</sup> As noted by a diplomat recently, "if the funding is raised by a donor conference, there will be funds for a year or two, not much longer".<sup>19</sup> The poor countries of the G5 must maintain over a long period of time costly equipment (sophisticated vehicles, latest-generation weapons, high-performing intelligence structures, seasoned troops) normally reserved for the world's most well-endowed armies.

Funding the G5 also raises the question of its member countries' ability to absorb significantly large sums of money for them, without suffering the consequences. The G5's initial budget, if it remains at €423 million for the first year, corresponds to about one year of the total budget of all the armies put together. No mention is made of how this inflow of money will fuel the corruption that has undermined the G5 member countries in the past, heightened tensions both internally and between the countries in the region, and increased manipulations among the political elites wanting to help themselves to some of this windfall of cash. Some of the G5 countries' armies are already struggling to cope with the plethora of training courses offered to them since the war started with Mali. Officers and non-commissioned officers from the member countries are spending longer in training or preparatory missions than in doing their actual jobs.<sup>20</sup>

Thirdly, the MNJTF is fighting against a single common enemy, Boko Haram, isolated in a relatively confined area in the Lake Chad basin. The G5 countries will be facing a different reality. Their troops will be fighting in a far wider area containing a proliferation of armed groups that are intertwined and often split up into different factions, making it hazardous even just pinpointing the actual target: "Right now, we don't really know who we're going to be fighting against", admitted a high-ranking member of Burkina Faso's army last October.<sup>21</sup> The shifting meaning of the word "terrorist", referred to in Resolution 2359 of the UN Security Council, makes it a notoriously difficult term to define. The comings and goings of some

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<sup>16</sup> This initial budget might be reduced to around €250 million. Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Ouagadougou, October 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Paris, October 2017.

<sup>18</sup> The U.S. has committed to providing €51 million of funding to certain member countries of the FC-G5S. Eighty per cent of this amount must be allocated to Burkina Faso within the framework of bilateral cooperation. Crisis Group interview, political counsellor, Paris, November 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Crisis Group interview, New York, November 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Crisis Group interview, high-ranking officer of the gendarmerie, Ouagadougou, December 2016.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

combatants between different groups blurs the picture and may lead to the G5 forces attacking armed groups that do not even appear on any list of terrorist movements. On 7 November, after the G5's first operation, some members of the Coordination of Azawad Movements (known by its French acronym, CMA), a signatory of the 2015 Bamako Convention, were arrested before being released four days later following an angry response from the CMA.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, in the same way the MNJTF is supported by units of armed civilians, the G5 increasingly uses militia or proxies to fight those it has designated as the enemy.<sup>23</sup> It is uncertain whether all of the member countries consider these militias as their allies.<sup>24</sup> By the same token, national interests will continue to prevail over the common interest. Chad in particular will certainly refrain from taking part fully unless its president considers that the country's vital interests are under threat. And Mauritania, geographically the most westward country in the G5 grouping, is currently a long way from the armed attacks to the east; this makes it highly improbable that it will immediately enter the fight against groups posing no direct or immediate danger to it.<sup>25</sup>

Political leadership is also missing in the G5, since none of the member countries predominate over the others to agree on the way ahead. For the moment at least, the five members of the G5 do not share the same views on which direction the group should take going forward.<sup>26</sup>

The fight against transnational criminal groups, included in Resolution 2359, is also a hard-to-reach goal. It is likely to be held back by conflicts of interest arising from collusion between segments of the member states and traffickers. This can include the direct involvement of certain influential national leaders in lucrative trafficking, or more distant relations based on political patronage or the practical reality of obtaining and exchanging information.

More broadly, the G5 states will have to fight against a trafficking that forms the backbone of the economy in certain disadvantaged regions within their territory,

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<sup>22</sup> "Mali: libération des membres de la CMA arrêtés lors de l'opération Hawbi", Radio France Internationale (RFI), 12 November 2017. The Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) is an alliance of Malian Touareg and Arab rebel groups, created in 2014 and including (among others) the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA); the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA); a branch of the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA); the People's Coalition for Azawad (CPA) and a wing of the Coordination of Patriotic Resistance Movements and Forces (CMFPR).

<sup>23</sup> See Crisis Group Africa Report N°244, *Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram*, 23 February 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Niger for example uses Touareg and Doosaak groups based in Mali to combat jihadist groups. It is uncertain whether these groups are all allied with the Malian government.

<sup>25</sup> Mauritania may become more active in future stages of G5's operations when its forces may be able to move swiftly into the regions affected by the activities of terrorist or criminal groups. The president of Mauritania is concerned about the movements of certain criminal groups specialising in drug trafficking, which are operating in Mali's Timbuktu region with representatives operating in his country, notably around the city of Nouadhibou. Crisis Group interview, political counsellor, Paris, November 2017.

<sup>26</sup> In his October 2017 report, the UN Secretary-General emphasised, for example, that Chad and Niger consider that the first phase of the force's operations must be completed before progressing to the second phase, whereas Mali and Burkina Faso show support for planning the second phase while the first is still underway.

for which they have few alternative or attractive proposals. To break these illicit channels, especially those of migrants, without providing compensation, is to take the risk of turning a large segment of the local population against the state. And the G5 needs the support of its own populations to succeed.

This local support will be crucial for the future of the G5 and is already a concern for many diplomats in the region.<sup>27</sup> It will mean not only considering the economic interests of local populations, but also respecting their rights. The challenge, in fact, is to avoid pushing more people into the arms of armed groups through frequent misconduct and abuse against civilians during counter-insurgency operations or while attempting to curb illicit trade. This risk is even greater as armed groups are now anchored among populations that often perceive them as protectors, and are sometimes open to their messages of struggle against what are deemed occupying forces. In this regard, the MNJTF is a bad example to follow, since the action of its armies, especially that of Nigeria, has incited thousands of men and women to join the ranks of Boko Haram, seeking revenge or protection against the abuses they suffered.

Another lesson to retain is that of the Malian army's brutal action in the centre of the country, an important factor in the deterioration of the situation.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, many problems in this region arose because what were essentially police tasks were undertaken by the army, particularly those concerning cattle theft, an inexhaustible source of local conflicts. The G5 forces must be made up of as many police forces as possible, with the investigative capacities and tact that the military does not possess. Although the enemy is difficult to define, it must not be the population of the countries concerned, even if they hold sympathies for certain armed groups.

It is also essential that the FC-G5S act in accordance with the points mentioned in UN Resolution 2391 regarding its obligations under international law and human rights. The force will have a strong interest in working within the human rights and international humanitarian law framework as defined by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group interview, U.S. diplomat, Ouagadougou, October 2017.

<sup>28</sup> See Crisis Group Africa Report N°238, *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?*, 6 July 2016.

### III. A Security Bottleneck and Political Vacuum

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A further aspect of the situation in the Sahel sets apart the MNJTF from the G5. The MNJTF has settled in an area where it is the main force operating on the ground. This has greatly facilitated its mission. In contrast, the FC-G5S operates in a region where the military forces of France, the UN and the U.S. are already present. Moreover, the G5 must undertake its mission while avoiding being at odds with a growing number of regional and continental initiatives. Without a greater cohesion between the different forces on the ground, deploying the FC-G5S could aggravate what increasingly resembles a security and institutional bottleneck.

The FC-G5S will first have to find the best possible way to collaborate with MINUSMA. With nearly 35 per cent of MINUSMA contingents coming from G5 member states, there is a need for discussion between the UN and these countries regarding their respective roles. It is evident that the G5 members will be unable to provide contingents comprised of thousands of men to both forces for very long. They lack the means to do so.

The question of collaboration between the two structures is also far from settled. France is of the opinion that tasks could be divided up between the FC-G5S and MINUSMA as follows: the former would provide security and border control while the latter would oversee the hinterland.<sup>29</sup> For their part, some G5 members, such as Burkina Faso and Chad, have a different view of the situation. They would prefer to see some of their MINUSMA troops return home to provide security within the framework of the FC-G5S or at the national level.<sup>30</sup>

This last option remains very hypothetical for the time being and raises some serious issues. Bringing home current MINUSMA troops would mean that these countries would no longer receive automatic financial contributions from the UN. This could lead to cash flow problems for their respective Ministries of Defence. Such a situation could strongly demotivate unstable armies, which have often used UN missions as safety valves. G5 countries face a dilemma: maintain their troops in MINUSMA and hold on to the associated benefits while lacking troops to secure their own territories, or repatriate these forces, at the risk of losing a source of income and of creating tensions within their militaries.

The possibility of MINUSMA providing logistical support for the FC-G5S is also a matter of debate. Diplomats first point out that aid for water, food, fuel and medical services could only be provided within Mali, given that MINUSMA's stabilisation mandate does not apply beyond Malian borders. On this point, an arrangement could in theory be made with the U.S., which is planning to provide logistical support for some member countries of the FC-G5S as part of its bilateral collaboration. But even if this arrangement is agreed upon, the logistical support provided by MINUSMA will likely encounter funding issues, since the U.S. strongly opposes any increase in MINUSMA's budget and all recourse to mandatory contributions. The question that could be asked is whether MINUSMA has the capacity to support another force besides itself.

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<sup>29</sup> Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Paris, October 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Crisis Group interviews, politicians and senior officers of the Burkinabe army, Ouagadougou, September 2016.

The G5 countries will also have to consider their membership and obligations to other organisations. Niger and Chad have two irons in the fire: the FC-G5S and the MNJTF, which is currently facing a resurgence of Boko Haram attacks. The complaints coming from Chad, which considers that too much is being asked of it, must be taken very seriously, and not merely seen as a clever ploy to raise the stakes and sell its commitment at a higher price.<sup>31</sup> This country already supplies 1,390 men to MINUSMA and about 2,000 men to the MNJTF. If they are badly handled, the issues generated by these multiple commitments may eventually weaken, or even shatter, the FC-G5S or MNJTF.

The G5 will also have to deal with two major players in the Sahel-Saharan region: ECOWAS and Algeria. ECOWAS is unhappy that it was not involved in crucial choices concerning its own turf, and that three of its members created the G5, an organisation seen as competing and non-inclusive. ECOWAS unofficially supports another structure, the Nouakchott process, which it considers to be more inclusive, effective and sustainable than the G5.<sup>32</sup> The Nouakchott process brings together West African and Maghreb countries and, as a result, would appear to be better suited to manage conflicts such as the one in Mali, whose causes and repercussions extend far beyond the borders of West Africa. As a major regional player, Algeria goes even further by making its support for the G5 conditional on its integration into the Nouakchott process, which it considers more legitimate, since it was initiated by the African Union.<sup>33</sup> As usual, the country is observing this initiative supported by France with considerable concern.<sup>34</sup> Finally, Algeria is worried about the impact, whether positive or negative, of G5 activities on the implementation of the 2015 Bamako Agreement.

An adverse situation could be created if, while seeking stronger regional cooperation, the G5's arrival on a very crowded scene were to trigger new divisions among the region's countries. There is a real risk of this occurring. An ECOWAS member country recently objected to the G5's request to loan equipment belonging to the Standby Force of the West African regional organisation.<sup>35</sup> As the MNJTF did by erasing some of the animosity between Nigeria and Cameroon, the G5 will have to overcome past disputes between its members, but also between these members and their neighbours. The security effort will not suffice unless it is also supported by constant and patient diplomatic work, aimed at defusing the points of contention between the region's countries and easing frustrations.

Above all, the construction of the G5 and its armed forces cannot overshadow the need to pursue attempts to settle the Sahel crises by political means. There is a

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<sup>31</sup> "Idriss Déby menace de retirer ses troupes des opérations de la Minusma et du G5 Sahel", *Jeune Afrique*, 25 June 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Initiated by the African Union Commission in March 2013, the Nouakchott process was launched in March 2017. It is a mechanism designed to strengthen both security cooperation between Sahel countries and the operational implementation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) in the Sahel region. It brings together eleven countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Chad.

<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interview, diplomat, New York, November 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, New York and Ouagadougou, October and November 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Crisis Group interview, ECOWAS executive, November 2014.



danger today of choosing the security-based solution and giving up on the difficult search for non-warlike solutions to problems that are eminently political and social.

As the G5 and its force prepare to receive millions of investment dollars, they should not forget that a peace process has been launched in Mali, and that it is stagnating. This process does not cover other areas of conflict where the FC-G5S is supposed to intervene. In central Mali as in northern Burkina Faso, local conflicts are the breeding ground for terrorist groups. The FC-G5S needs to fit into a larger framework with policy objectives. If it manages to pacify the areas where it operates, local spaces of negotiation must be created to deal with the causes of conflicts between communities. Jihadist groups thrive on these local conflicts, and they must therefore be a priority. Attempts should be made to re-engage with some local leaders of jihadist groups from the Sahel region, with a view to reopening negotiations. The success of the FC-G5S is connected to this political agenda and to the need to isolate jihadist groups from local communities and other armed groups.

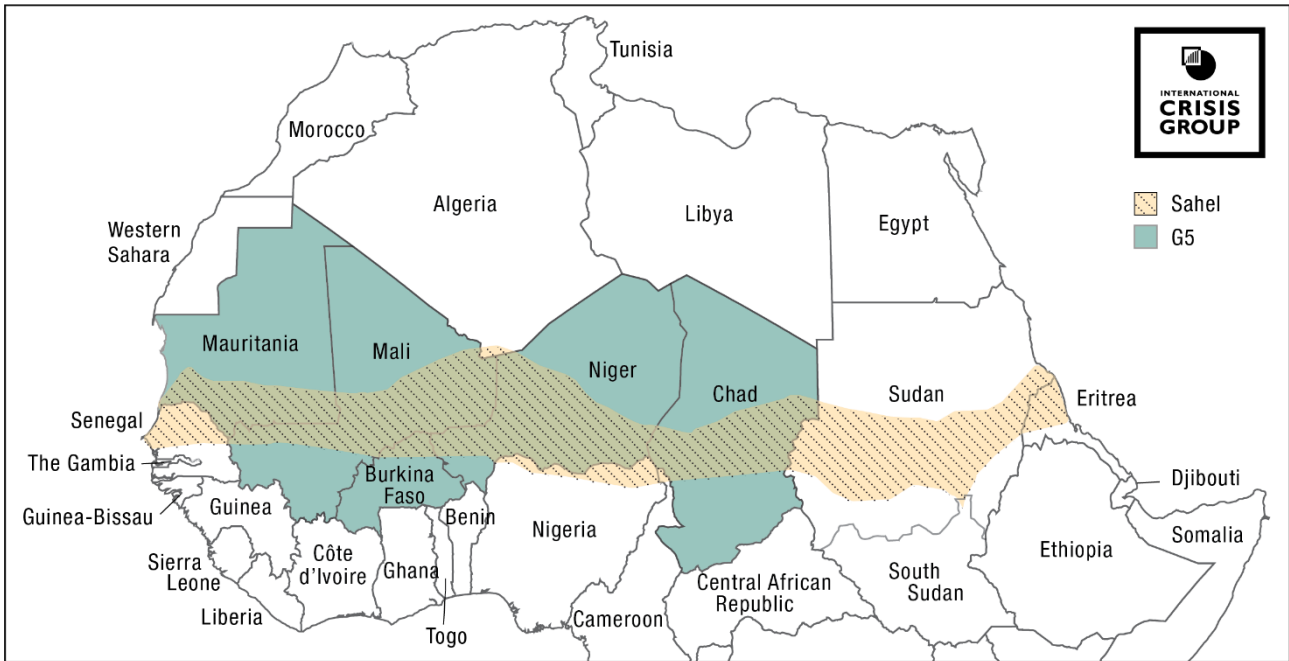
#### **IV. Conclusion**

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Attempting to respond to the deficit in regional military cooperation, the FC-G5S is also a default response to a situation characterised by a lack of political and diplomatic solutions to the current crises in the Sahel. This initiative, which is an important component of the Sahel conflict resolution strategy, can only succeed if it adapts to the region's security landscape by coordinating with the forces involved at the strategic and diplomatic level, respecting the populations whose support is essential, and benefiting from solid financial support.

**Brussels/Dakar, 12 December 2017**

Appendix A: Map of Sahel



The borders, names and headings used in this map do not imply any official approval or recognition by International Crisis Group.

## Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

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The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown. Its Vice Chair is Ayo Obe, a Legal Practitioner, Columnist and TV Presenter in Nigeria.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, served as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in ten other locations: Bishkek, Bogota, Dakar, Kabul, Islamabad, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Sanaa, Tblisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Defence, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, German Federal Foreign Office, Global Affairs Canada, Irish Aid, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

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**December 2017**

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### Special Reports

*Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

*Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

*Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid*, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

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*Fields of Bitterness (I): Land Reform in Burundi*, Africa Report N°213, 12 February 2014 (only available in French).

*Fields of Bitterness (II): Restitution and Reconciliation in Burundi*, Africa Report N°214, 17 February 2014 (only available in French).

*The Security Challenges of Pastoralism in Central Africa*, Africa Report N°215, 1 April 2014 (also available in French).

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*South Sudan: A Civil War by Any Other Name*, Africa Report N°217, 10 April 2014.

*Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War*, Africa Briefing N°99, 26 June 2014.

*Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?*, Africa Briefing N°100, 8 August 2014.

*Kenya: Al-Shabaab – Closer to Home*, Africa Briefing N°102, 25 September 2014.

*South Sudan: Jonglei – "We Have Always Been at War"*, Africa Report N°221, 22 December 2014.

*Sudan and South Sudan's Merging Conflicts*, Africa Report N°223, 29 January 2015.

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*Côte d'Ivoire's Great West: Key to Reconciliation*, Africa Report N°212, 28 January 2014 (also available in French).

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*The Central Sahel: A Perfect Sandstorm*, Africa Report N°227, 25 June 2015 (also available in French).

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*The Politics Behind the Ebola Crisis*, Africa Report N°232, 28 October 2015.

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*Double-edged Sword: Vigilantes in African Counter-insurgencies*, Africa Report N°251, 7 September 2017.

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*The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North*, Africa Report N°254, 12 October 2017 (also available in French).

October 2017 (also available in Arabic).

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	<b>Marika Fahlén</b>	<b>Surin Pitsuwan</b>
	<b>Stanley Fischer</b>	<b>Fidel V. Ramos</b>