



Security Council

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Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#), in which the Council requested me, in close coordination with the States members of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger) and the African Union, to report on the activities of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. It provides an update since my report of 6 May 2019 ([S/2019/371](#)) on progress made in the operationalization of the Joint Force, international support for the Force, the implementation of the technical agreement signed between the United Nations, the European Union and G5 Sahel States in February 2018, challenges encountered by the Force and the implementation by the G5 Sahel States of a human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework.

2. The period under review was marked by low-intensity activity by the Joint Force due to the rainy season, which hampered the movements of the Force, and the impact of persistent equipment and training shortfalls on its operations. In accordance with resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#), international partners continued to mobilize in support of the G5 Sahel. The attack of 30 September on the Force's base in Boulikessi, Mopti region, central Mali, inflicted heavy casualties. The terrorist group Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.

II. Political, security and humanitarian developments

3. Combating the threat of terrorism was high on the agenda of Heads of State in the subregion. On 14 September, the President of Burkina Faso and Acting President of the G5 Sahel, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, hosted an extraordinary summit of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on counter-terrorism in West Africa. The Heads of State of the five G5 Sahel members attended the summit. Of the 15 members of ECOWAS, 3 (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger) are also members of the G5 Sahel, while Chad and Mauritania participated as observers.

4. In a communiqué issued at the conclusion of the summit, the Heads of State of the members of ECOWAS affirmed the organization's readiness to play a coordination role in the multiple counter-terrorism initiatives in the region, including the Joint Force. They decided to launch joint and simultaneous patrols and operations



along their countries' vulnerable borders and improve intelligence- and information-sharing within the group and tasked their respective ministers of defence and security with assessing the possibility of deploying and using the ECOWAS Standby Force in counter-terrorism operations. The Heads of State pledged to mobilize \$1 billion (2020–2024) for regional counter-terrorism efforts. They also called upon the Security Council to provide the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) with a more robust mandate to combat terrorism.

5. On the margins of the ECOWAS summit, the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel members held a separate meeting and endorsed the “Desert to power” initiative, led by the African Development Bank. The initiative is aimed at connecting 250 million people in the wider Sahel with electricity by 2025, contributing to the reduction of poverty, which remains one of the root causes of violent extremism.

6. On 25 September, the United Nations hosted a high-level meeting on Mali and the Sahel, on the margins of the general debate of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly. The Presidents of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger were in attendance, along with regional and international partners. Participants underlined the urgency to scale up counter-terrorism efforts in the subregion and highlighted the importance of coherence and complementarity among all regional initiatives. They also highlighted the urgency of continued support for the G5 Sahel, including its Joint Force. Some participants reiterated calls for MINUSMA to be given a more robust mandate.

7. The security situation continued to deteriorate across the Sahel region, with attacks by terrorist groups against civilians and security forces and persistent violence along community lines. The aggravation of the security situation caused resentment among sections of the population over the inability of security forces to provide security and protection, which prompted demonstrations both in Burkina Faso and Mali.

8. In Burkina Faso, the number of suspected terrorist attacks increased, especially in the northern part of the country. The increase has forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes and has led to growing discontent. Civilians were victims of extremist violence, including during an attack on a mosque in the town of Salmossi, in northern Burkina Faso, during Friday prayers on 11 October. The attack of 19 August on the military camp of Koutougou, in northern Burkina Faso, was one of the deadliest in 2019. Government sources reported that 24 soldiers had been killed in the attack. The northern and north-eastern provinces remained most affected by intercommunal violence.

9. In Mali, the security situation remained complex. Attacks by terrorist groups in northern Mali continued to target national defence and security forces, MINUSMA and the French forces. Confrontations between armed groups led to violent clashes in the Gao, Ménaka and Timbuktu regions. Violence surged in central Mali, following a marked decrease in incidents in June and July. Conflicts along community lines, exacerbated by the presence of terrorist groups and self-defence militias, resulted in the killing of civilians.

10. On 1 October, two camps of the Malian armed forces in Mondoro and Boulikessi, Mopti region, central Mali, were attacked. The camp in Boulikessi housed a contingent operating under the Joint Force. According to a communiqué by the Government, 25 members of the Malian armed forces were killed, 4 were injured and 60 were reported missing, while 15 assailants were killed during the attacks. The Government also noted that a joint operation by the Malian armed forces and the armed forces of Burkina Faso was under way in central Mali. On 7 October, JNIM claimed responsibility for the attacks in Mondoro and Boulikessi.

11. In the Niger, on 14 June, the Government extended for three months the state of emergency in the Diffa, Tahoua and Tillabéri regions, where terrorist groups are active. On 1 July, unidentified attackers killed 16 members of the national security forces in an attack on a military camp in the western part of the country, near the border with Mali.

12. In Chad, in the light of escalating intercommunal violence in eastern Chad and continued instability in the north, the Government declared a state of emergency on 20 August in the eastern provinces of Ouaddaï and Sila, on the border with the Sudan, and in the northern province of Tibesti, on the border with Libya. On 10 September, the National Assembly extended the state of emergency for four months, until 10 January 2020. Chad closed its borders with the Central African Republic, Libya and the Sudan and deployed 5,000 troops to those areas.

13. Mauritania, which hosts the permanent secretariat of the G5 Sahel and the G5 Sahel Defence College in Nouakchott, continued preparations to assume the rotating leadership of the organization in 2020. Efforts were made to enhance the capacity of the Mauritanian troops operating under the Joint Force, including through training and equipment. The President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, recently outlined the country's holistic approach to fighting terrorism and extremism, taking into account economic and social dimensions, and underscored his commitment to improving the operational readiness of the armed forces and to continue combating terrorism, organized crime and illegal trafficking.

14. The humanitarian situation across the Sahel continued to further deteriorate. At the end of September, more than 1 million people were internally displaced across the five G5 Sahel countries, representing more than twice the number of persons displaced in 2018. Burkina Faso experienced the most significant rise in internal displacement, with more than 486,000 displaced persons compared with 80,000 people in 2018. Humanitarian access has become increasingly difficult, with humanitarian organizations facing increasing difficulties in reaching populations affected by violence, especially in the border areas between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. Across the Sahel region (excluding Mauritania and Nigeria), 12 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance.

III. Operationalization of the Joint Force

A. Deployment update: military component

15. The Joint Force reported the conduct of two operations during the period under review. From 18 to 25 June, Operation Ça'igha 2, involving one battalion, was conducted in the area of Goma Coura and Nampala in the border area between Mali and Mauritania. From 25 May to 8 June, Operation Dessi 2 was conducted in the area of Tantiabongou and Kantchari, 90 km south-west of Niamey in the border area between Burkina Faso and the Niger. Two combat task forces, one from Burkina Faso and one from the Niger, were involved.

16. From 29 September to 7 October, the French forces and units of the Malian armed forces led a joint operation in Tessit, Mali, in the border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, during which arms and ammunition were seized. From 1 to 10 October, the French forces and the armed forces of the Niger operating under the Joint Force conducted a joint operation in the border area between Chad and the Niger. Five suspected terrorists were arrested and a large quantity of arms and ammunition were reportedly seized. More activities may have been undertaken by units operating under the Joint Force. However, there was no official communication in that regard

and such activities were not reflected in the information received through the coordination mechanisms and other channels.

17. A permanent location for the headquarters of the Joint Force in Bamako has yet to be identified. Following a series of protests, the Government of Mali announced on 14 June the transfer of the headquarters from its temporary location in a residential area of Bamako to another neighbourhood. In early September, the headquarters was again relocated on a temporary basis.

18. In June, the Defence and Security Committee of the G5 Sahel, a strategic governing body of the Joint Force comprising the five national army chiefs of staff, approved a protocol for the exchange of intelligence among its member States. In July, it approved a plan of operation and a quarterly planning directive.

19. On 17 July, General Oumarou Namata Gazama of the Niger was appointed as the new Commander of the Joint Force, replacing General Hanena Ould Sidi of Mauritania.

20. The tripartite meeting, bringing together the Joint Force, the European Union and MINUSMA, was held on 17 July in Bamako. The Force provided an update on planned operations. The European Union gave a briefing on the status of pledges disbursed and equipment procured thus far. Logistical constraints were also discussed, including the need to identify a permanent location for the headquarters of the Force in Bamako. On 29 August, MINUSMA convened a meeting of the Instance de coordination au Mali, comprising representatives of national and international security presences in Mali.

21. The Joint Force continues to face significant training, capability and equipment shortfalls, which hamper its full operationalization. The lack of air assets, armoured vehicles and transport capabilities and individual protection equipment compounds the threat posed by the use of improvised explosive devices.

B. Deployment update: police and civilian component

22. Countries of the G5 Sahel continued their efforts to operationalize specialized investigation units within national jurisdictions to address cases related to terrorism and transnational organized crime. These units, together with provost brigades, form part of the national police components. In Burkina Faso, 22 officers of the specialized brigade on terrorist investigations and organized crime took up their function during the reporting period. In the Niger, 15 investigators were deployed to a base of the Joint Force in Bankilaré, Tillabéri region.

23. The integration of the provost corps into the ranks of the Joint Force battalions is improving. Chad has, for example, incorporated a provost corps into the battalion deployed in August 2019, while in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, provost officers have been deployed within or in proximity of the Joint Force units.

24. In cooperation with other partners, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continued to assist G5 Sahel member States in developing their police components and strengthening their criminal justice systems to enhance efficiency, accountability and accessibility.

C. Implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework

25. Additional steps were taken to advance the implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework of the Joint Force, with

the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other partners.

26. In June, the Defence and Security Committee approved the status-of-forces agreement of the Joint Force, which sets out the immunities and privileges for the Joint Force troops and is aimed at ensuring compliance with international legal standards, including on the capture, detention and transfer of detainees. The agreement will be submitted to the G5 Sahel countries for endorsement.

27. A standard operating procedure on internal investigations and a doctrine for the provost corps are under development, with support from the European Union capacity-building mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) and the United Nations. Once adopted, these guidelines will contribute to strengthening the internal monitoring and accountability processes of the Joint Force. In addition, specialized training modules on international humanitarian law, international human rights law and refugee law have been refined to ensure that they adequately reflect doctrine and context. Mobile training teams were established by OHCHR, the Joint Force and the G5 Sahel Defence College in support of strengthening regional and national protection training capacities, while additional “training of trainers” sessions were held in Chad, Mali and Mauritania. The permanent secretariat and the Joint Force, supported by UNODC and OHCHR, held a workshop on the integration of women into defence and security forces in G5 Sahel countries and developed a road map to ensure that adequate steps are taken to strengthen the presence of women in national forces.

28. OHCHR deployed staff to Mali and Mauritania to assist contingents of the Joint Force in implementing the compliance framework. The deployment of officers to Chad and the Niger is under way.

29. MINUSMA continued to monitor the human rights situation in the context of operations conducted by the Joint Force in Mali. The Mission documented one alleged violation by the Force in Boulikessi, Douentza *cercle*, Mopti region, following a human rights special investigation mission to Mopti from 6 to 13 August. Preliminary findings indicate that on 30 July members of the Malian armed forces, operating under the Joint Force, may have committed serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions of two men in the village of Boulikessi. The violations were allegedly committed in retaliation for the improvised explosive device attack against the Force, which had occurred earlier in the day, killing one soldier and injuring four. This is the third incident recorded in the area of Boulikessi involving members of the Force. Previous incidents had occurred on 19 May and 28 October 2018. Criminal investigations into those incidents have yet to be concluded.

D. Trust fund for the Joint Force

30. The trust fund for the Joint Force is now operational, with all staff administering the fund deployed to Nouakchott. The fund has received a total contribution of €16.5 million, including from Rwanda, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, the West African Economic and Monetary Union and ECOWAS. In August, the fund placed its first order for 84 transport vehicles for the Joint Force, which are expected to be delivered by 2020.

IV. International support for the Joint Force

A. Support from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

31. Following the adoption of Security Council resolution [2480 \(2019\)](#) on 28 June, MINUSMA put in place arrangements to provide life-support consumables to all contingents of the Joint Force, provided that the Force or other partners take the responsibility of ensuring the delivery of the consumables to their respective areas of operation outside Mali. On 3 October, MINUSMA received a request for fuel and rations from the seven battalions of the Force operating in all three sectors, including in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and the Niger, for the period from October to December. The request included 34,800 combat ration packs and 428,600 litres of fuel and lubricants, for approximately \$1.28 million. On 19 October, MINUSMA briefed the Force on the need to first conduct a risk assessment, as mandated under the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces, and is expecting to provide assistance to the Force before the end of October 2019. As at 1 October, of the \$6.2 million disbursed by the European Union to MINUSMA for support to the Force in line with the technical agreement, \$528,087, or 8.5 per cent, has been expended. Once the requests of 3 October are considered, this percentage should rise in line with the increased pace of planned Joint Force operations in 2019 and into 2020.

32. Discussions are under way to ensure the alignment of the technical agreement with relevant provisions of resolution [2480 \(2019\)](#). In addition, an aide-memoire has been prepared, setting out the modalities, steps and limits of the support that MINUSMA is mandated to provide to units operating under the Joint Force.

B. Multilateral and bilateral support

33. According to the European Union coordination hub, of the more than €430 million pledged by donors and partners in support of the Joint Force, equipment worth €56 million has been delivered to the Force to date, including individual protective equipment, vehicles and capabilities to be used in efforts to counter the use of improvised explosive devices.

34. Within the framework of the African Peace Facility, the European Union continues to support the operationalization of the Joint Force through €100 million in funding. Funds have been earmarked for the provision of equipment, services and infrastructure to the Force through Expertise France for an amount of €75 million. In this regard, the European Union is scheduled to deliver armoured vehicles to the Force before the end of the year. The other areas of support include MINUSMA support (€10 million), the implementation of the human rights compliance framework (€10 million) and the G5 Sahel governance structure, for which support is provided through the German Agency for International Cooperation (€5 million).

35. On 9 July, in Burkina Faso, the G5 Sahel and the European Union held their fifth meeting of ministers for foreign affairs, during which the European Union announced a pledge of an additional €120 million for the Joint Force and €18 million for the establishment of the police component of the Force.

36. The United States of America provided equipment and training to troops operating under the Joint Force, including \$15 million to the armed forces of Chad, \$15 million to Mauritania and \$21 million to the Niger. Other bilateral donors continued to support individual States members of the G5 Sahel.

V. Observations

37. I remain deeply concerned about the spiralling violence in the Sahel, which has spread to coastal States of West Africa, along the Gulf of Guinea. Terrorist groups have strengthened their foothold across the Sahel region, making large swathes of territory unstable and stoking ethnic violence, especially in Burkina Faso and Mali. The challenges are caused by poverty, marginalization, impunity and weakened State presence and are compounded by the impact of climate change and the scarcity of natural resources. Civilians bear the brunt of the surge in deadly attacks and violence. The numbers are shocking. Since January alone, more than 1,500 civilians have been killed in Burkina Faso and Mali. In addition, more than 1 million people have been internally displaced across the five countries, representing more than twice the number of persons displaced in 2018.

38. The responsibility to combat terrorism cannot be outsourced to the G5 Sahel countries, the region or the continent. Terrorism is a global issue, and the entire international community has a responsibility to contribute to the collective effort of tackling extremist violence in the Sahel, along with other cross-border challenges, including trafficking in persons, illicit goods, weapons and drugs, and migration and displacement.

39. I am particularly encouraged by the commitment made by the leaders of ECOWAS during their extraordinary summit of 14 September in Burkina Faso to step up their efforts to combat growing insecurity and terrorism. The meeting, and the multilevel process that preceded it, mobilized all the stakeholders – including civilian actors – necessary for an effective and durable response to rising violent extremism. The pledge made by the participants of \$1 billion dollars to fight terrorism and extremism over the next five years illustrates a willingness to take ownership and address the challenges facing their countries. I also welcome the new partnership for security and stability in the Sahel announced in August by the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, and the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, on the margins of the summit of the Group of Seven in Biarritz, France. This new initiative has the potential to further strengthen the Priority Investment Programme of the G5 Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel and help to ensure that security operations and development programmes are planned and programmed in an integrated manner.

40. I applaud the leadership of the European Union in managing the coordination hub and commend all stakeholders involved for their willingness to collaborate. My gratitude also goes to all donors who have contributed generously to the trust fund for the Joint Force, as well as to my Special Representative for Mali, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, and MINUSMA colleagues for their steadfast support for the Joint Force.

41. In this context, it will be important to enhance existing joint security mechanisms, such as the Joint Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. The Joint Force remains an important part of a series of national, regional and international security responses in the Sahel. I commend steps taken to further operationalize its police component, which will be a critical component of the Joint Force, including through the new partnership for security and stability in the Sahel. I would also like to commend the Joint Force for operationalizing its own trust fund, which is an important step towards effective ownership.

42. I commend the progress made by the Joint Force towards the implementation of its human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework, which will help to enhance the security of civilians and mitigate risks of violations by the Force. Adherence to the compliance framework is critical to winning the hearts and

minds of the populations affected by operations. Timely investigations into allegations of violations by units of the Force are important and will only strengthen its credibility. In this context, I call upon the authorities of Burkina Faso to investigate serious allegations of extrajudicial executions and reiterate my call upon the Malian authorities to conclude the investigations into incidents involving their contingent. The United Nations remains committed to supporting national authorities in the development and implementation of judicial cooperation measures and training for the investigation and prosecution of cases related to terrorism and transnational organized crime.

43. In order to fully play its role and yield more tangible results, the Joint Force will need more support. The Security Council's decision to lift geographical restrictions with regard to the provision by MINUSMA of life-support consumables to the Force was an important step in the right direction. I urge partners to urgently and promptly honour their pledges to the Force. I am encouraged by the comprehensive request received from the Force for all battalions, which illustrates readiness on the part of the Force to step up operations in the near future. MINUSMA is making every effort to respond quickly and favourably to all requests for support, in compliance with the human rights due diligence policy. However, this alone will not be enough, and I reiterate my call for the provision of predictable and sustained funding to the Force.

44. I condemn in the strongest terms the attack against the Malian contingent operating under the Joint Force in central Mali, during which at least 25 soldiers of the Malian armed forces were killed. I pay tribute to the dedication and courage of all security personnel operating in the Sahel as part of the Joint Force, as well as to members of national and international forces who continue to serve at great risk and sacrifice.

45. Addressing violent extremism and terrorism through security measures is essential but must be accompanied by development programmes and civilian capacity-building activities. It requires offering people, in particular young people, a perspective that goes beyond their daily needs to ensure development, promote gender equality and ensure access to economic opportunities and social services. The time has come to urgently mobilize in order to support the countries and the people of the Sahel. In this context, I call upon all partners to ensure prompt disbursement of the funds committed and to support the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. Investing in sustainable and inclusive development efforts is the most effective way to address the root causes of conflict, violent extremism and terrorism.
