



THE ROLE OF MALI'S FOREIGN POLICY IN ADDRESSING SAHELIAN TERRORISM, 2015-2022

Hart, Akie Opuene, PhD

Email: akiehart@yahoo.com

Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ANYALEBECHI, Shammah Mahakwe, PhD

smanyalebechi@yahoo.co.uk

Department of Political Science, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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<p>Received: September 26th 2023 Accepted: October 26th 2023 Published: November 30th 2023</p>	<p>The Sahel region had been consistently marred by persistent terrorism, which compromised regional stability and security. Mali, a key stakeholder in the Sahel, was significantly impacted by this ongoing crisis. Despite numerous foreign policy initiatives, the rate of terrorist incidents within Mali and the broader Sahel region had not markedly declined. This posed critical questions about the effectiveness of Mali's foreign policy in tackling the root causes and manifestations of Sahelian terrorism. The aim of the study was to rigorously examine the role of Mali's foreign policy in addressing Sahelian terrorism. The research employed the theoretical framework of Neorealism to scrutinize the strategies enacted by Mali's foreign policy apparatus. A qualitative-historical research design was utilized, drawing on a plethora of secondary sources such as government documents, scholarly articles, and reports from international organizations. Content analysis was employed to critically evaluate the accumulated data. The study found that, although Mali's foreign policy was well articulated with its bilateral and multilateral agreements and engagements, its effectiveness in mitigating the scourge of Sahelian terrorism was limited by challenges amongst several other endogenous and exogenous with the economy topping the list. While there had been some incremental gains in regional stability and the establishment of international partnerships, the sheer number of terrorist incidents remained alarmingly high. This underscored the existence of substantial challenges in Mali's counter-terrorism approach. Therefore, the study recommended enhancing domestic economic opportunities to prioritize the welfare of Malians and boost national income, and regional cooperation, optimizing the allocation of resources towards counter-terrorism initiatives, and achieving better alignment between national policies and regional and international obligations as a blueprint for fortifying Mali's foreign policy strategy. It is strongly recommended for the international community particularly the security council members to take a more active role in increasing their funding and technical participation to positively change the narratives on the ground and boast the deliverables on the ground.</p>

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Terrorism, Insecurity, Sahelian-terrorism, Regional Stability

INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy encompasses the strategies, guidelines, and actions that a country employs to interact with other nations and international entities. Developed by the executive branch of a nation's government, often in collaboration with legislative and judicial bodies, foreign policy governs a range of activities from diplomacy and international trade to defence and intelligence. It is typically shaped by a variety of factors such as national interests, geopolitics, and international law, aiming to promote a country's strategic objectives. While the fundamental goal of foreign policy has traditionally been to protect and promote national interests, the modern geopolitical landscape requires a more nuanced approach (Hill, 2003).

In the modern era, the scope of foreign policy has evolved to encompass a broader range of multifaceted, transnational challenges, extending its reach far beyond traditional geopolitical concerns. Issues such as global health, environmental sustainability, cybersecurity, and terrorism have now become integral components of foreign policy agendas worldwide. This shift in focus can be attributed to the phenomenon of globalization, which has created an intricate web of

interconnectedness among nations, both economically and socially (Keohane & Nye, 2000). As countries are increasingly interdependent, their foreign policies are no longer solely geared towards traditional objectives like territorial integrity and national security; they also aim to address these emerging global issues. The rationale behind this expanded scope is twofold. First, many of these transnational issues have direct implications for national security. For example, terrorism is not confined to geographical borders, and infectious diseases can quickly become pandemics without timely intervention (Fidler, 2004). Second, addressing such issues is also a way for countries to position themselves as responsible members of the international community. Failure to engage in these collective challenges can result in diplomatic isolation and could potentially have economic repercussions (Hill, 2003). Thus, modern foreign policy serves as both a tool for safeguarding national interests and fulfilling a nation's broader responsibilities on the world stage.

Terrorism refers to the use or threat of violence to intimidate or coerce societies, often for ideological, political, or religious reasons. It is an asymmetric form of warfare that seeks to create a climate of fear and insecurity among the civilian population, often aiming to disrupt the functioning of states and provoke reactionary policies that further the terrorists' objectives. The tactics employed by terrorists can range from suicide bombings and kidnappings to cyber-attacks and other forms of psychological warfare. Terrorism is a global problem, transcending national boundaries and affecting societies around the world. Its root causes are complex and can include economic disparity, political disenfranchisement, religious extremism, and historical grievances (Hoffman, 2006).

In contrast, Sahelian terrorism is a specific subset of terrorism that occurs in the Sahel region of Africa, spanning countries like Mali, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso. This region has become a breeding ground for various extremist groups, some of which are linked to international terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Sahelian terrorism is influenced by a unique set of local and regional factors, including poverty, weak governance, and the harsh environmental conditions of the Sahel. Armed groups exploit these vulnerabilities to establish control over large swaths of territory, enforcing their interpretation of Islamic law and imposing severe restrictions on local populations. Additionally, the lack of effective state institutions in these areas provides terrorists with opportunities to recruit disillusioned youth, thereby perpetuating a cycle of violence and instability (Onuoha, 2014).

Mali's approach to Sahelian terrorism represents a blend of domestic initiatives and international cooperation, aimed at restoring peace and security not just within its borders but across the Sahel region. The government has enacted several counter-terrorism strategies that involve the military, intelligence agencies, and local law enforcement. In an effort to tackle the root causes of terrorism, Mali has also engaged in national dialogue initiatives and targeted development programs in areas most affected by extremist violence (Lecocq & Schrijver, 2007). However, despite these efforts, the reach and influence of terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) have expanded, complicating Mali's internal security landscape.

Furthermore, Mali is an active participant in regional frameworks designed to counter terrorism, such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force, which also includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger. This military alliance is supported by the European Union and the United Nations, aiming to foster collaboration in addressing the multi-dimensional challenges posed by terrorism and organized crime in the Sahel region (Pezard & Shurkin, 2015). Yet, the effectiveness of these regional frameworks has been limited, due to logistical issues, insufficient funding, and an apparent lack of coordination among member states.

Mali's foreign policy faces a dilemma when dealing with neighbouring countries that are either unwilling or unable to control the flow of terrorists and illicit goods across their borders. Porous borders and the vast, ungoverned spaces of the Sahel make it easy for terrorist groups to operate transnationally, undermining any unilateral efforts by Mali to secure its territory (Molenaar & el-Kamouni-Janssen, 2017). This necessitates a concerted, multilateral approach to Sahelian terrorism, one that aligns national strategies with broader regional and international frameworks.

It is against this backdrop that the Malian State has also looked beyond the region for international assistance. For instance, France's Operation Barkhane has been instrumental in backing Mali's counter-terrorism operations, providing both troops and logistical support. However, there is growing concern over the long-term sustainability of such foreign interventions, as they may inadvertently fuel anti-Western sentiment among local populations and thus contribute to the radicalization process (Charbonneau, 2013). This raises questions about the balance Mali needs to strike between domestic action and international cooperation in the act of using foreign policy as a tool for combating international terrorism. Therefore, it is within this social milieu that this study was undertaken to interrogate the influence of Malian foreign policy in combating Sahelian terrorism with a proportional impact in the Western African region.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this paper is to examine the role of Mali's foreign policy in addressing Sahelian terrorism. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. examine the strategies and frameworks that Mali's foreign policy employs in countering Sahelian terrorism
- ii. assess the effectiveness of Mali's foreign policy in mitigating the impact of Sahelian terrorism both within its borders and in the broader Sahel region
- iii. identify the challenges and limitations that Mali's foreign policy faces in tackling Sahelian terrorism,

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy refers to the set of methods, principles, and activities that a nation adopts in its interactions with other countries and international organisations. Foreign policy is formulated by the executive department of a nation's

government, often in conjunction with legislative and judicial entities (Gilbert, 2013; Hill, 2003). It encompasses a wide array of endeavours, including diplomacy, international commerce, defence, and intelligence. The shaping of national interests, geopolitics, and international law often plays a significant role in determining the strategic goals pursued by a country. The primary objective of foreign policy has historically been the safeguarding and advancement of national interests. However, the contemporary geopolitical environment necessitates a more intricate and sophisticated approach (Hill, 2003).

Foreign policy serves as a critical component of a nation's engagement with the world, shaping its international relations across a spectrum of issues that include diplomacy, trade, defense, and humanitarian aid. Initially, foreign policy was primarily the domain of statecraft, rooted in the realist school of thought that emphasized power politics and national interests (Morgenthau, 1948). However, the post-Cold War era and the advent of globalization have broadened the scope and complexity of foreign policy objectives. Now, modern foreign policy deals not only with traditional geopolitical issues but also complex transnational challenges such as climate change, global health, and cyber threats. The growing interdependence among nations has necessitated this shift, making foreign policy crucial not only for safeguarding national security but also for fulfilling a state's role as a responsible member of the international community (Hill, 2003). Within the framework of international law and norms, foreign policy strategies often revolve around diplomacy, economic agreements, military alliances, and international treaties. These methods are tools to achieve objectives such as securing natural resources, gaining strategic advantages, or enhancing political influence. Countries are increasingly engaged in "soft power" diplomacy, which entails the use of cultural influence, ideological affinity, and economic inducements rather than coercive measures to achieve policy goals (Nye, 2004). In a multipolar world, where power is diffused across multiple actors, this approach has become increasingly relevant. Even the most powerful nations find it challenging to act unilaterally and are often compelled to work in concert with other states, international organizations, or non-state actors to accomplish their foreign policy objectives.

However, the formulation and execution of foreign policy are fraught with challenges and contradictions. National objectives often clash with regional responsibilities or international commitments. For example, the pursuit of energy security might lead a country to form alliances that are controversial both domestically and internationally. Additionally, the emergence of non-state actors, from multinational corporations to terrorist organizations, complicates the traditional state-centric model of foreign policy (Slaughter, 2004). These actors can influence or undermine a nation's foreign policy objectives, necessitating more nuanced and flexible strategies that go beyond diplomatic and military channels. In sum, foreign policy is an evolving field that has extended its reach far beyond its traditional boundaries. The intricate challenges of the 21st century require a multidimensional approach that incorporates economic, social, and environmental considerations along with traditional political and military concerns. Given the increasing complexity and interconnectedness of global issues, foreign policy stands as a vital instrument in defining a country's role and influence in the international community. It is a dynamic interplay of strategic choices that seeks to balance national interests with regional and global obligations, often necessitating difficult trade-offs and careful diplomacy.

Terrorism

Terrorism, as a political tactic and social phenomenon, has taken on a global dimension that profoundly affects international relations, security policies, and individual lives. Traditionally defined as the use of violence or intimidation in pursuit of political or ideological aims, terrorism seeks to create a climate of fear that amplifies the impact of the act itself (Schmid, 1983). This tool of psychological warfare has been used by both state and non-state actors across ideological, religious, and political spectra. The diversity in motivations, tactics, and targets complicates counter-terrorism efforts and often fuels a vicious cycle where reactionary measures can inadvertently legitimize or escalate terrorist acts. In the age of global interconnectedness, terrorism is not only a domestic issue but a transnational challenge requiring coordinated international responses (Hoffman, 2006).

While the intent behind terrorism remains consistent, the methods and platforms have evolved dramatically, especially with the rise of technology. The internet has provided terrorist organizations with an unprecedented global reach, from recruitment to radicalization and even execution of attacks. Social media platforms, encrypted messaging apps, and the dark web have become the new battlegrounds in the fight against terrorism (Weimann, 2015). Technology not only assists terrorists in reaching global audiences but also poses significant challenges to intelligence and law enforcement agencies. The democratization of technology means even small groups or lone actors can cause substantial damage, further complicating counter-terrorism efforts. For example, drone technology has allowed terrorist groups to carry out precision attacks with reduced risk to the perpetrators.

The consequences of terrorism are devastating and manifold, affecting both the immediate victims and society at large. Beyond the loss of life and physical destruction, terrorism aims to disrupt social order and create a sense of insecurity, thereby exerting pressure on governments to act. In response, states often adopt robust security measures, sometimes compromising civil liberties and human rights (Jackson, 2005). The introduction of such policies can lead to social division, with minority groups or specific religious communities often being unfairly targeted or profiled, which can further radicalize individuals and perpetuate the cycle of terrorism. Furthermore, the economic impacts are significant, including loss of investment, increased security costs, and reduced tourism, which have long-term repercussions for the affected regions.

Counter-terrorism strategies vary depending on the nature of the threat and the capabilities of the actors involved. Common approaches include military interventions, intelligence gathering, law enforcement action, and even negotiations in some cases. However, addressing the root causes of terrorism, such as political disenfranchisement,

social inequality, or ideological extremism, is often considered the most sustainable solution (Crenshaw, 1981). This involves a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating diplomacy, education, and social reform to counter the underlying ideologies that fuel terrorist actions.

In conclusion, terrorism is a complex and multifaceted issue that defies easy solutions. It is a global challenge that requires a coordinated international approach, respecting both human rights and national sovereignties. As terrorism continues to evolve, especially in the digital age, there is an ongoing need for rigorous academic inquiry and policy analysis to understand its dynamics and devise effective counter-strategies. Despite the enormous challenges it presents, it is crucial for society to confront terrorism in all its forms, mindful of the balance between security and the liberties that define democratic societies.

Terrorism and Regional Stability

The impact of terrorism on regional stability is profound and intricate, raising significant concerns for global peace and international relations. Terrorism poses an immediate threat to human life and the social fabric of affected areas, but its ramifications reverberate through political, economic, and social dimensions at a regional scale. Acts of terrorism can destabilize governments, fuel conflicts, and create an environment conducive to further violence, thereby necessitating a closer examination of its role in regional dynamics. Sandler (2011) suggests that terrorism undermines political systems by eroding public confidence in governance structures, hence heightening the likelihood of internal strife or conflict between nations sharing a region.

The terrorist landscape itself is evolving, employing increasingly sophisticated methods and tactics. Technological advancements have amplified the reach of terror groups, who are now able to coordinate and execute complex attacks across national borders, thereby bringing an added layer of complexity to regional stability. Transnational networks that share expertise, financial resources, and recruits have been notably impactful in areas such as the Sahel region in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. The globalization of terrorism accentuates its impact on regional stability by drawing neighbouring countries into the conflict, either as collaborators in counter-terrorism efforts or as unwilling participants caught in the crossfire (Enders & Sandler, 2006).

As regional actors grapple with direct terrorist threats, there is a concomitant impact on economic activity and social cohesion. The economics of terrorism is a vicious cycle: as terrorism disrupts local economies and hampers investment, it creates fertile ground for recruitment and further radicalization, especially among disenfranchised youth (Abadie, 2006). The regional ripple effects can include mass migration, straining resources in neighbouring countries, and necessitating humanitarian intervention. This can lead to secondary consequences, such as the militarization of borders and disputes over refugee resettlement, which can compromise regional stability further (Bandyopadhyay & Younas, 2011).

Addressing terrorism's impact on regional stability necessitates a multi-faceted approach that extends beyond immediate counter-terrorism operations. Long-term stability requires that underlying issues—political, economic, and social—be addressed to neutralize the allure of radical ideologies. This often requires regional cooperation, including intelligence sharing, harmonized legal frameworks for prosecuting terrorism, and coordinated economic development programs (Savun & Phillips, 2009). Unfortunately, such cooperation is often stymied by political considerations and longstanding animosities between regional actors, thereby underlining the complex interplay between terrorism and regional stability. In sum, terrorism is an insidious challenge that significantly undermines regional stability across multiple dimensions. Its impact is felt beyond the immediate loss of life and property, affecting political systems, economies, and social structures both within and across national boundaries. Given the transnational nature of modern terrorism, regional stability cannot be isolated from the global context, necessitating a coordinated approach that addresses not only the symptoms but also the root causes of terrorism. While achieving this is fraught with challenges, including political rivalries and divergent national interests among regional actors, the urgent need for stability makes it an imperative goal.

Sahelian Terrorism

Sahelian terrorism has emerged as a multidimensional challenge with far-reaching implications for regional stability, human security, and geopolitics. The Sahel, a semi-arid region stretching across Africa from Senegal to Sudan, has become a breeding ground for various militant groups. Some of these groups are affiliates of larger terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, while others are more locally focused, drawing upon ethnic, economic, and social grievances to fuel their campaigns. According to Briscoe and Chiti (2020), the Sahel's porous borders, coupled with weak governance structures and local economies, make it a hotspot for terrorism and organized crime. As Sahelian states struggle to exert control over their territories, terrorist organizations exploit these vulnerabilities to establish strongholds, carry out attacks, and even provide some level of governance in areas where the state is absent.

The recruitment tactics employed by terrorist groups in the Sahel often capitalize on existing grievances, poverty, and lack of opportunity in the region. With states unable to provide basic services or economic prospects, terrorist organizations offer an alternative, albeit a perilous one. These groups not only offer material incentives but also ideological and religious narratives that appeal to those who feel marginalized or persecuted (Botha & Abdile, 2019). Furthermore, the modus operandi of these groups is becoming more complex. They are not only relying on traditional terrorist tactics like suicide bombings and kidnappings but are also increasingly employing sophisticated digital propaganda campaigns and complex logistical operations. This shows a level of organizational maturity and access to resources that can be destabilizing for the region in the long term.

The counterterrorism strategies employed in the Sahel, often with international support, have had mixed results. Military interventions, such as France's Operation Barkhane, aim to neutralize terrorist threats but sometimes exacerbate local tensions. This military-centric approach has been criticized for being insufficiently attuned to the local complexities and often worsening the situation by causing civilian casualties, thereby creating new grievances that terrorist groups can exploit (Lebovich, 2018). Efforts have been made to involve local communities in counterterrorism initiatives and to enhance governance as part of a broader counterterrorism strategy. Nevertheless, such efforts often fall short due to a lack of resources and political will, both at the national and international levels (Bøås, 2015).

An under-discussed aspect of Sahelian terrorism is its impact on human rights and development. Constant conflict disrupts education, healthcare, and economic activities, trapping populations in a cycle of poverty and violence. Women and children are particularly affected, facing forced marriages, sexual violence, and recruitment as child soldiers. Moreover, the chaos wrought by terrorist activities precipitates other forms of criminality, such as human trafficking and drug trade, further undermining social fabric and governance structures (Aning & Pokoo, 2019). In the absence of a comprehensive, multi-layered counterterrorism strategy that addresses these human dimensions, it is unlikely that the Sahel will break free from the grip of terrorism in the near future.

In summary, Sahelian terrorism is a complex issue that defies simplistic solutions. Its roots are deeply intertwined with local grievances, state fragility, and geopolitical interests. Counterterrorism efforts have been partially and inadequately attuned to the multifaceted nature of the problem, often aggravating existing vulnerabilities. A shift towards a more holistic approach that addresses the root causes of extremism, and that integrates military, governance, and development initiatives, is crucial for mitigating the scourge of terrorism in the Sahel. Given the cross-border nature of Sahelian terrorism, regional cooperation and international support are indispensable for the success of such a comprehensive strategy.

Theoretical Underpinning

The theoretical framework that examined "The Role of Mali's Foreign Policy in Addressing Sahelian Terrorism" is Neo-Realism, also known as Structural Realism. Founded by Kenneth Waltz in his 1979 seminal work, "Theory of International Politics," Neorealism assumes that the international system is anarchic and states are the primary actors concerned with their security and interests (Waltz, 1979). It posits that states act rationally and are primarily motivated by the need for survival, often through the accumulation of power, which in contemporary terms can extend to forming alliances and treaties.

Neorealism's assumptions offer a relevant lens through which to analyze Mali's foreign policy strategies. Firstly, Mali's involvement in bilateral and multilateral agreements, such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force, can be seen as a rational act aimed at preserving national security. The anarchic nature of the Sahelian region, marred by non-state actors and terrorist groups, necessitates a security-centric approach (Mearsheimer, 2014). The Malian state, recognizing its limitations, aligns with other nations to mitigate threats, echoing Neorealism's view that states collaborate based on self-interest and security needs.

Furthermore, Neorealism focuses on the structural constraints that states operate under. This is particularly pertinent when considering the limitations Mali faces in its counter-terrorism efforts, such as resource constraints and geopolitical complexities. Mali's policy constraints are not just a result of domestic inadequacies but are structured by its position in the international system, specifically the Sahel region where terrorism is transnational (Keohane & Martin, 1995). This mirrors Neorealism's emphasis on the limitations imposed by the anarchic structure of the international system.

Additionally, the Neorealist perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of the contradictions between Mali's national priorities and its regional and international obligations. According to Neorealism, states may enter alliances but these alliances are temporary and based on the national interest at a given time (Waltz, 1986). Mali's obligations, whether regional or international, are therefore seen as fluid and are expected to adjust as the security dynamics in the Sahel change.

The theory also accounts for the external actors, often from the developed world, who get involved in Sahelian counter-terrorism for their strategic interests (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). In Neorealist terms, this is in line with the understanding that in an anarchic international system, stronger powers will often exert influence over regional security issues, either through direct involvement or partnerships. Mali, a relatively weaker state, therefore finds itself not just navigating its immediate regional security landscape, but also the broader international security architecture.

In conclusion, Neorealism offers a robust theoretical framework for analyzing Mali's foreign policy in the Sahelian context. It encapsulates the state's rational efforts at self-preservation, its structural constraints, and the influence of external actors, all of which are fundamental to understanding the intricacies of Mali's strategies and limitations in combating Sahelian terrorism.

Methodology

The study utilized a combined qualitative and historical research methodology to delve into the intricacies of Mali's foreign policy strategies aimed at combating Sahelian terrorism from 2015 to 2022. This multi-faceted approach offered a nuanced understanding of the subject by not only allowing for the collection of in-depth qualitative data but also by tracing the evolution of policy decisions and their impact over the specified period. Employing these research techniques made it possible to scrutinize Mali's foreign policy both at a macro level—how it aligns with regional counter-terrorism initiatives—and at a micro level—how it addresses specific local issues related to terrorism within the Sahel region. This methodology thereby provided a comprehensive view, incorporating temporal dynamics and qualitative insights, to assess the effectiveness and limitations of Mali's foreign policy in the complex landscape of Sahelian terrorism.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Strategies and Frameworks that Mali's Foreign Policy Employs in Countering Sahelian Terrorism

Mali, like other Sahelian nations, faces an unprecedented security crisis, largely driven by the operations of various terrorist groups in the region. The country has responded by employing a multifaceted foreign policy strategy aimed at countering Sahelian terrorism. Among these measures are bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries, focusing on joint military operations, information sharing, and capacity building. These bilateral ties act as the first line of defence against cross-border terrorist activities and provide immediate operational benefits, such as access to intelligence and human resources (Lacher, 2012). However, the efficiency of these agreements often depends on the political stability and military capabilities of the partner nations, limiting the scope of these arrangements.

Mali's approach to tackling Sahelian terrorism isn't restricted to unilateral actions or bilateral agreements; it also involves a strong multilateral dimension, chiefly through its participation in the G5 Sahel Joint Force. This cooperative military initiative, which also involves Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger, serves as a regional counterterrorism mechanism designed to facilitate a coordinated response to extremist threats. The advantage of such a multilateral approach is manifold. For one, it leverages the diplomatic and military strengths of multiple nations to create a unified and potent force against terrorism. As Lebovich (2018) notes, this collective strategy considerably boosts the operational capabilities of the force by pooling resources, intelligence, and military assets.

However, the multilateral approach is not without its challenges. These platforms often become entangled in bureaucratic red tape, slowing down decision-making processes and operational efficiency. Additionally, the disparity in national interests among the member states can create friction and hinder the implementation of collective counterterrorism strategies. Adequate funding remains another significant issue. Unlike bilateral agreements where commitments might be more straightforward to uphold, multilateral arrangements require a more complex financial model that often faces delays and even shortfalls (Brown, 2020; Williams, 2021).

These challenges illustrate the nuanced role that multilateral platforms play in Mali's foreign policy concerning Sahelian terrorism. While they provide an expanded scope for counterterrorism efforts and create opportunities for shared responsibilities, they also introduce complexities that could hamper swift and effective action. Therefore, multilateral efforts in counterterrorism should be pursued with a clear understanding of both their potential and their limitations, and with strategies in place to mitigate the challenges that inevitably arise (Johnson, 2020).

The international dimension also plays a significant role in Mali's counter-terrorism strategy. The country has actively sought cooperation with external actors, like France and the United States, who provide military aid and training, intelligence sharing, and logistical support. The advantage of these international partnerships lies in the access to sophisticated weaponry, training, and global intelligence networks, crucial for fighting well-equipped terrorist organizations (Bøås, 2015). However, dependence on external actors can compromise national sovereignty and may align poorly with the specific needs and socio-political contexts of Mali.

In a concerted effort to tackle the root causes of terrorism, the Malian government has taken proactive steps to roll out special initiatives, particularly targeting impoverished regions susceptible to extremist activities. These initiatives go beyond military interventions and counterterrorism activities to focus on comprehensive development projects. Such projects aim to create economic opportunities through vocational training, employment generation, and microfinance programs, which in turn reduce the allure of radical ideologies and recruitment into extremist organizations (Smith, 2017).

A key partner in these developmental counterterrorism strategies has been the United Nations. The international body not only offers financial resources but also lends its extensive expertise in peacekeeping, human development, and poverty alleviation (Keita, 2019). This collaborative approach amplifies the initiatives' effectiveness by bringing global best practices to local contexts. In the intricate web of global terror networks, international involvement like that of the UN becomes crucial for the scalability and cross-border effectiveness of such interventions (Brown, 2018).

It's crucial to understand that these initiatives are intrinsically long-term endeavours. Unlike direct, tactical counterterrorism measures, which often yield immediate but temporary results, these development projects aim for a long-lasting peace and stability (Johnson, 2020). This poses a distinct set of challenges, primarily in maintaining sustained investment and political will from both national and international stakeholders. Success in these initiatives demands a protracted commitment that remains unwavering despite the often-latent nature of their impact (Williams, 2021). These long-term developmental initiatives are essential for not merely controlling but eradicating the deep-seated causes of extremism, thereby contributing to a more enduring solution to the multifaceted issue of terrorism in Mali and the broader Sahel region.

Furthermore, Mali collaborates with regional bodies like the African Union and ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) for policy guidelines and additional military support. These bodies often act as mediators and provide frameworks for regional cooperation, which Mali adopts and integrates into its national strategies (Aning & Pokoo, 2014). The advantage here lies in the shared sense of purpose and collective identity, which enhances regional stability. Yet, these frameworks sometimes fall short in addressing the uniqueness of Mali's situation, being broad-based policy recommendations.

In conclusion, Mali's foreign policy in countering Sahelian terrorism is a complex tapestry woven from bilateral, multilateral, and international threads, backed by special initiatives and regional frameworks. Each element brings its unique strengths and weaknesses to the table. The overarching challenge remains to synchronize these various efforts

coherently to create a holistic strategy that not only neutralizes immediate threats but also addresses the underlying causes of terrorism, ensuring long-term regional stability.

Effectiveness of Mali's Foreign Policy in Mitigating the Impact of Sahelian Terrorism

Mali's foreign policy, aimed at mitigating the impact of Sahelian terrorism, operates within an intricate web of regional instability, porous borders, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. A cornerstone of this policy is the G5 Sahel Joint Force, a regional military alliance that includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger, aiming to pool resources and intelligence for a more effective counterterrorism strategy (Lebovich, 2018). Theoretically, this initiative should amplify the counterterrorism operations' impact by introducing collective responsibility and coordination. While the G5 Sahel has indeed shown some effectiveness in resource pooling and operational coordination, the body's impact on reducing terrorist incidents remains inconclusive (Williams, 2021). According to statistics, the Sahel region has witnessed a troubling escalation in terrorist incidents over the past few years, challenging the effectiveness of the G5 Sahel and, by extension, Mali's foreign policy in achieving its primary objective (Brown, 2020).

Besides regional alliances, Mali has also entered into various bilateral agreements with countries like France and the United States, which have provided military assistance and intelligence-sharing capabilities. The presence of foreign troops and the technological support, particularly from France's Operation Barkhane, have indeed helped the Malian army in its combat against extremist factions. Yet, these interventions have been criticized for not having a long-lasting impact on the ground situation and for potentially contributing to anti-Western sentiments that could be exploited by terrorist organizations (Johnson, 2020). Moreover, bilateral agreements often serve the interests of the more powerful countries, raising questions about their ultimate effectiveness in promoting Mali's security and regional stability (Smith, 2019).

International organizations like the United Nations and the African Union are other platforms through which Mali seeks to mitigate the impact of Sahelian terrorism. These bodies have provided not only military and financial resources but also platforms for dialogue aimed at fostering regional stability (Keita, 2019). Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these international interventions is debated. Critics argue that while these organizations may bring short-term stability, their long-term impact is minimal due to structural inefficiencies and a lack of localized context in their strategies (Williams, 2021).

Moreover, Mali has tried to address the root causes of terrorism through development projects aimed at impoverished regions prone to extremism. International organizations like the United Nations are often involved in these long-term initiatives, aiming to provide economic opportunities and thereby reduce the lure of extremist organizations (Lebovich, 2018). However, the success of these projects is difficult to quantify, given their long-term nature and the need for sustained commitment from all stakeholders (Smith, 2019).

In evaluating Mali's foreign policy effectiveness in countering Sahelian terrorism, one must scrutinize multiple interrelated variables: the incidence of terrorist attacks, advancements in regional stability, and the fortification of international partnerships geared towards counterterrorism. Recent data complicate the narrative, however. According to the Global Terrorism Index, Mali experienced a 37% increase in terrorist incidents from 2018 to 2019 alone (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020). At the same time, the region of Sahel has observed a staggering 250% increase in violent extremist events between 2015 and 2020 (ACLED, 2021). These alarming statistics cast doubt on the overall efficacy of Mali's current foreign policy initiatives in reducing terrorist activities. While Mali has successfully forged multiple international alliances—evident from its involvement in the G5 Sahel Joint Force and bilateral partnerships with countries like France and the United States—the increase in terrorist incidents indicates that these diplomatic efforts have not translated into a meaningful reduction in extremist activities (Brown, 2020; Johnson, 2020).

Furthermore, the issue of regional stability appears equally troubling. The UN reports that more than two million people are internally displaced in the Sahel due to conflict, a situation that exacerbates the terrorist threat and poses a severe challenge to regional stability (UNHCR, 2022). It's crucial to underline that Mali's bilateral and multilateral agreements have somewhat succeeded in providing military support and securing financial commitments for anti-terrorism activities. However, the increasing rates of displacement and violent incidents in the region signal that these partnerships have not fostered long-term stability as envisioned (Smith, 2019; Lebovich, 2018). The rise in such incidents and human displacement shows a gap between Mali's foreign policy objectives and the on-the-ground realities, calling for a more effective, holistic strategy to counter Sahelian terrorism.

In conclusion, Mali's foreign policy in mitigating Sahelian terrorism offers a layered narrative of initiatives, alliances, and challenges. Although the policy is multi-pronged, involving bilateral and multilateral agreements as well as developmental projects, its effectiveness in significantly reducing terrorist activities and fostering long-term regional stability remains inconclusive. It raises the question of whether a revised, more nuanced approach is required to tackle the intricate issue of Sahelian terrorism effectively (Johnson, 2020).

Challenges and Limitations that Mali's Foreign Policy Faces in Tackling Sahelian Terrorism

Mali's foreign policy is characterized by several substantial challenges and limitations when it comes to addressing Sahelian terrorism effectively. Foremost among these are resource constraints. Although Mali is an active participant in regional initiatives like the G5 Sahel Joint Force, financial and logistical constraints have often hindered the realization of such collective security arrangements. For example, the initial operational capacity of the G5 Sahel Joint Force has consistently been hampered by inadequate funding, leading to delays and limitations in its anti-terrorism activities (Lebovich, 2018). Military budgets in Mali have been overstretched, further exacerbated by economic challenges

including poverty and an over-reliance on agricultural income which is subject to climate variability (Brown, 2020). Given this resource crunch, the government struggles to balance domestic welfare commitments with necessary investments in defense and counterterrorism operations.

Furthermore, the geopolitical complexities of the Sahel region pose another substantial challenge to Mali's foreign policy. Terrorism in this region is not merely a national concern for Mali but a transnational issue affecting several countries, including Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. The asymmetric nature of Sahelian terrorism, characterized by non-state actors operating across porous borders, makes coordination among these countries imperative yet challenging (ACLED, 2021). In some cases, Mali has faced issues in the alignment of strategies with its neighbours due to differing national priorities and objectives, thereby reducing the effectiveness of regional counterterrorism initiatives (Smith, 2019).

A third limitation is the possible contradictions between Mali's national priorities and its regional or international obligations. For instance, while foreign aid often comes with conditionalities that require Mali to adhere to specific counter-terrorism strategies, these conditionalities sometimes contradict the government's broader policy aims or traditional modes of governance (Johnson, 2020). The resulting dissonance can lead to the ineffective application of resources and may even create local resentment, further complicating anti-terrorism efforts. In essence, balancing national priorities with external obligations remains a critical challenge for Mali's foreign policy.

Further complicating matters are the internal divisions within the Malian government and military, which have been exacerbated by repeated coups and political instability (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020). These internal conflicts create a lack of coherence in both domestic and foreign policies, diminishing Mali's capacity to lead or participate effectively in regional counter-terrorism initiatives. Additionally, institutional weaknesses, characterized by corruption and a lack of transparency, erode public trust and impede effective governance, including the implementation of foreign policy initiatives aimed at countering terrorism (UNHCR, 2022).

Moreover, Mali's counter-terrorism strategy has been further hamstrung by an overwhelming reliance on military solutions at the expense of addressing the root causes of extremism such as poverty, lack of education, and social inequality. This narrow focus often leads to human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and detentions, which can breed resentment among local populations and potentially drive more individuals toward extremism (Brown, 2020).

Domestic Economic challenges.

One of the significant challenges facing Mali is the state of its economy, which currently lacks sustainability. The poor condition of the economy poses a threat to regional integration, as substantial funds are required to finance international engagements. For Mali to effectively participate in these engagements, it must first bolster its domestic economy to provide for the welfare of its citizens. This approach mirrors the situation in Nigeria, where economic considerations play a pivotal role in foreign policy and regional integration. Hart (2022) noted, "Nigeria stands to gain if her foreign policy is well-articulated and grounded in economic considerations, as economic benefits of regional integration will flow into Nigeria, which is undoubtedly the region's financial powerhouse" (Hart, 2022). This perspective is equally applicable to Mali, adhering to the principle that 'charity begins at home,' with a strong domestic economy serving as the foundation for all international engagements.

Currently, Mali's economic system is exceptionally weak, characterized by low Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and National Income. This financial fragility places the country in a precarious position, lacking the capacity to finance robust counter-terrorism efforts or engage actively in international affairs. The World Bank's 2023 Economic Update for Mali, titled "Strengthening Financial Resilience of Pastoralists to Drought," revealed that the GDP growth was estimated at only 1.8%, spurred mainly by the recovery in food agriculture and the resilience of the gold and telecommunications sectors. Additionally, average annual inflation rose to 9.7% in 2022, primarily due to increasing prices (World Bank, 2023).

Despite these challenges, the situation is not without hope. With appropriate domestic policies and international support, Mali's economy can recover. The World Bank, in its release dated July 26, 2023, stated, "Mali's economy showed signs of resilience despite sanctions and climate change" (World Bank, 2023). However, an economy that is merely showing resilience is still struggling, and further regional commitments, on top of global ones, could overburden Mali's economy. It is crucial for Mali, and other developing countries, to prioritize their domestic economies to ensure their people's welfare before pursuing extensive external engagements beyond routine bilateral and international commitments.

Due to these economic challenges, Mali has been relatively inactive in the international arena. This observation was echoed by former President Modibo Keita, who remarked, "Taking into account the fact that since its inception, it has had to face a variety of difficulties, both internal and external, in affirming its sovereignty and at the same time in maintaining its territorial boundaries, it has not yet had time to assert itself in the international field and to put forward in a clear, precise form for an affirmation of its foreign policy" (Keita, date unknown). This statement highlights the constraints Mali faces in establishing a more pronounced role on the global stage.

While Mali's foreign policy aims to counteract Sahelian terrorism through regional cooperation and international partnerships, its effectiveness is considerably constrained by issues of resource and its corresponding socioeconomic dislocations, geopolitical complexities, and internal democratic governance that led to a military coup. Aligning national priorities with international obligations and transitioning from a primarily militaristic approach to a more balanced strategy that also addresses the root causes of extremism are critical for improving the impact of Mali's foreign policy on Sahelian terrorism. An interplay of local, national and international factors militates against a result-oriented foreign policy.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Mali's foreign policy in combating Sahelian terrorism is anchored in both bilateral and multilateral agreements, most notably through its participation in the G5 Sahel Joint Force, which involves cooperation with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger. Moreover, Mali collaborates with international bodies like the United Nations in special initiatives aimed at countering extremism. However, the frameworks are not fully effective in real-time operation due to financial constraints and logistical challenges.

Despite the extensive cooperative arrangements at both the bilateral and multilateral levels, Mali's foreign policy has shown limited success in substantially reducing the number of terrorist incidents within its borders and in the broader Sahel region. There have been modest gains in regional stability and the formation of international partnerships against terrorism, but these efforts have not led to a dramatic downturn in terrorist activities due to the challenges from endogenous and exogenous factors that need to be addressed first, and the positive turn around of these factors, will provide the platform for effortless delivery of an efficient and result oriented policy that is lacking.

Arising from above, it is obvious that Mali's foreign policy faces a multiplicity of challenges in tackling Sahelian terrorism effectively. Resource constraints significantly limit operational capacity and the socioeconomic challenges that led to the military coup need to be addressed first to create a platform and effective delivery mechanism to prosecute a robust foreign policy and to meet up with its commitments at regional levels. Furthermore, the geopolitical landscape of the Sahel also poses difficulties due to the transnational nature of terrorist activities. Additionally, there are contradictions between national priorities and obligations at the regional and international levels, which complicate Mali's efforts to form a coherent and effective foreign policy against terrorism. The key issue remains the economic challenges in the inability to stimulate growth in the economy and to put the welfare of the Malians as a top priority to reduce social discontent as disillusionment of the citizenry creates security challenges at the global level that inhibit counter-terrorism strategies.

CONCLUSION

Mali's foreign policy in countering Sahelian terrorism from 2015 to 2022 has been a multifaceted endeavour, encompassing bilateral and multilateral agreements as well as special initiatives in cooperation with international bodies. Prominent among these are Mali's participation in the G5 Sahel Joint Force and collaborations with the United Nations. Despite these measures, the policy frameworks have not translated into full-scale operational effectiveness, largely due to issues related to financial constraints and logistical impediments. Therefore, while Mali's approach has been inclusive and collaborative in theory, the practical execution falls short, revealing the complexities of implementing counter-terrorism measures in a region beset by political and economic vulnerabilities. Addressing the economic vulnerabilities first time to provide the domestic capacity and platform holds much more promise than depending on the international community to find regional operations wholly and thereafter dictate the tunes.

Secondly, the effectiveness of Mali's foreign policy in mitigating the impact of Sahelian terrorism has been mixed at best. Although there has been some progress in the form of international partnerships and slight improvements in regional stability, these initiatives have not translated into a significant reduction in the number of terrorist incidents. This raises questions about the sustainability and long-term impact of the current foreign policy measures. For a region that has been a hotbed of terrorism and extremism, the absence of marked reductions in terrorist activities following years of multi-layered foreign policy initiatives highlights the need for more effective strategies that go beyond diplomatic to more active participation by stronger regional powers with the economic and military muscle to make a significant impact because the huge impacts at its disposal.

Lastly, Mali's foreign policy is inhibited by multiple challenges that hinder its effectiveness in tackling Sahelian terrorism. These challenges range from resource constraints to geopolitical complexities and conflicting national and international priorities. The inadequacies in resources make it difficult for Mali to sustain long-term counter-terrorism operations effectively. The geopolitical intricacies of the Sahel region, with its transnational terrorist networks, further complicate Mali's foreign policy objectives. Additionally, the internal contradictions between Mali's national priorities and its regional and international obligations highlight the need for a more coherent policy approach. To conclude, while Mali has taken notable steps in formulating its foreign policy, considerable gaps remain in its practical application, necessitating a reevaluation and potential recalibration of strategies to effectively counter Sahelian terrorism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the identified findings, the following recommendations were offered:

- 1) Given that financial constraints and logistics impede the effectiveness of Mali's counter-terrorism frameworks, it is imperative to secure the increased active participation of developed countries and the corresponding funding from them, This could involve partnerships with the affluent for them to invest to revamp the economy and to fund counter-terrorism or seeking grants from international to stimulate the productive sectors. Adequate funding would enable the Malian government to overcome logistical challenges, such as insufficient manpower and equipment, thereby enhancing the operational effectiveness of bilateral and multilateral agreements like the G5 Sahel Joint Force.
- 2) Since Mali's foreign policy has not led to a significant reduction in terrorist incidents, there is a need for a comprehensive review and restructuring of existing cooperative arrangements. The focus should be on operationalizing these arrangements to deliver tangible results, perhaps through performance metrics and

regular audits. The country should consider forming specialized units within its military and intelligence apparatus that focus solely on counter-terrorism efforts within its borders and in the broader Sahel region, leveraging international expertise if necessary.

- 3) Addressing the challenges posed by the geopolitical complexities of the Sahel requires Mali to adopt a more nuanced foreign policy approach. A national counter-terrorism strategy needs to be developed that is both flexible and adaptable to changing conditions. This strategy should seek to reconcile the contradictions between Mali's national priorities and its regional and international obligations, possibly through diplomatic dialogue and consensus-building measures with its regional and international partners. This would contribute to the formation of a coherent and effective foreign policy that accounts for the complex and transnational nature of Sahelian terrorism.
- 4) The prioritizing of the welfare of Malians through the attraction of Direct foreign investments, stimulation of the productive sectors of the economy, increased GDP, and creation of an enabling domestic environment for investments and employment. The combined effects of these policies will create the platform for successful foreign policy and effective counter-insurgency operations

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