Education Amid Stabilization: The Varied Effects of Military Intervention on Public Schooling in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso

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Education Amid Stabilization
The Varied Effects of Military Intervention on Public Schooling in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso

An honors paper for the Department of Government and Legal Studies

By Arjun S. Mehta

Bowdoin College, 2021

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This project and my greater Bowdoin experience would have had little meaning without each of my wonderful professors, especially in the departments of Government and Romance Languages & Literatures, and at the Middlebury School in Cameroon. I have been immensely fortunate to have had such generous, brilliant teachers, whose devotion to scholarship and education is inspiring.

To my Bowdoin friends: what a remarkable four years we have had! I look forward to many more, however far from Maine.

Finally, I owe everything to my parents and grandparents, whose sacrifice, love, and support have made my dreams less fantastical. I hope to make you proud.
Abstract

At the intersection of international relations, comparative politics, and war consequence studies, this paper seeks to evaluate the effects of supportive foreign military intervention on education provision in three neighboring Central Sahel countries: Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. In the wake of a Tuareg insurgency and a 2012 coup d'état in Mali, the proliferation of jihadist violence in the tri-border Liptako-Gourma region has been met by a proliferation of foreign interveners. Does stabilization—the form of intervention in the Central Sahel—improve education provision, as measured by diminishing jihadist attacks on schools and school closures due to violence? This paper hypothesizes that where there is a larger scale of intervention, there is more security—and thus an environment more conducive to education provision. Although insecurity in the three Central Sahel countries has shared origins, each country has a distinct scale of intervention. In placing Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso on a spectrum of stabilization (from largest- to smallest-scale), this paper conducts a comparative test to determine how intervention affects education provision. Qualitative and quantitative data analyses reveal that, while a larger scale of intervention (in Mali) guarantees neither better security nor more favorable education provision, the absence of intervention (in Burkina Faso) facilitates unfavorable security and education outcomes. This paper concludes that destabilizing security-centric conceptions of stabilization may lead to more lasting peace and more accessible education in the Central Sahel and beyond.
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<tr>
<td>ACLED</td>
<td>Armed Conflict Location &amp; Event Data Project</td>
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<td>AFISMA</td>
<td>African-led Support Mission to Mali</td>
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<td>AFRICOM</td>
<td>United States Africa Command</td>
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<td>AMIB</td>
<td>African Mission in Burundi</td>
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<tr>
<td>AQIM</td>
<td>Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb</td>
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<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>ISGS</td>
<td>Islamic State in the Greater Sahara</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISR</td>
<td>Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance</td>
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<td>JNIM</td>
<td>Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin</td>
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<tr>
<td>MINUSMA</td>
<td>United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNLA</td>
<td><em>Mouvement national pour la liberté de l’Azawad</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MUJAO</td>
<td><em>Mouvement pour l’unification et le jihad en Afrique de l’ouest</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organization for African Unity</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSCR</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council Resolution</td>
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Chapter I: Introduction & Literature Review

“Don’t worry
You’re gonna be happy
Keep fighting today
That smile will come one day.”
— Songhoy Blues, “Worry”

The plight of children of war tends not to occupy the forefront of the policymaker’s mind. No matter that definitions and conceptions of war have become murkier in a twenty-first century that is increasingly globalized and technology-driven; it remains true that children in areas beset by conflict are largely invisible to those not on the ground. This is especially so when foreign powers intervene military in faraway countries and when battles over ‘ungoverned spaces’ almost invariably dominate the strategic discourse. Against the backdrop of armed conflict, the inaccessibility of education is seldom seen as an immediate threat to peace and stability.

Yet the tremendous consequence of and opportunity presented by education—to each child, family, and indeed society at large—is undeniable. At the intersection of comparative politics, international relations, and war consequence studies, this paper seeks to evaluate the effects of foreign military stabilization operations on education provision in three countries in Africa’s Central Sahel: Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

The Central Sahel is a vast and uniquely complex region challenged by interrelated crises of insecurity, governance, climate change, food scarcity, and migration, among others. In 2012, the longstanding grievances of the Tuareg people in northern Mali together with the preliminary

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effects of the aforementioned crises helped instigate political unrest, which quickly spiraled into a multidimensional armed conflict that would spread into neighboring Niger and Burkina Faso. In attempt to keep insecurity from spreading beyond the Sahel, the French military and a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force have a combined total of nearly 20,000 troops deployed to the region.²

Map 1: Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso in West Africa³

² A more detailed breakdown of foreign effectives in the Central Sahel, including African contributions, is found in Chapter II.

While the security and geopolitical implications of the Central Sahel crisis have been the focus of much scholarly work, the effects of foreign intervention on education provision have received scant attention. By placing Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso on a spectrum of stabilization (from largest- to smallest-scale intervention), this paper will consider the consequences of intervention on each country’s provision of public education. The number of attacks on schools and the number of school closures will receive particular attention as two metrics to measure education provision amid insecurity.

This paper falls under the purview of war consequence studies, a sub-field that has received not nearly as much attention as the study of the causes of war or of war itself. That policymakers and academics have neglected war consequence studies, however, is not to say that the field is unimportant. If war, despite its profound cruelties, is truly a mainstay in international politics, then those who study, prevent, and wage it should consider how it affects human welfare and governance. The effects of stabilization operations on such metrics as health and education should be a focal point since these are among the United Nation’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by UN member states in 2015.4

Intervention, the act of influencing outcomes in a sovereign state, has long been a consequential tool of statecraft. That intervention is thought of as a tool of statecraft is perhaps emblematic of a larger problem. Although intervention requires both an intervening force and a target country, this phenomenon is consistently studied from the perspective of the intervener, inevitably neglecting the perspective of the intervened. Political science literature has seldom

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considered the wider effects of modern intervention and as a result “we still have little understanding of the type of impacts this typically low-scale force has in target countries.”

The study of war certainly seems geared to policymakers of countries with the capacity not only to go to war but also to mount an intervention of another sovereign state. Although “so much attention has been paid to war initiation… scant energy has been put into developing a systematic understanding of the ramifications of war,” especially for the population subjected to its violence. The limited scholarship on war consequence studies tends “to examine any country conflict spills into but not the presumably contradictory impacts of having allied or enemy armed forces on your soil.” Pickering and Kisangani assert that “cross-national scholarship on the impact that foreign military intervention tends to have on developing states is practically nonexistent,” though they specify two exceptions: First, scholars have sought to evaluate the effects of U.S. military intervention during the Cold War on target state governing institutions. Second, scholars have sought to evaluate the “impact of third party interventions in civil wars”. This paper explores the effects of supportive foreign military intervention on the provision of social services.

**Hypothesis and Methodology**

This paper hypothesizes that supportive foreign military intervention in the Central Sahel ultimately has a positive effect on education provision, as measured by attacks on schools and

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 365.
8 Ibid., 364.
9 Ibid., 364.
school closures due to insecurity. In other words, this paper anticipates that education provision improves as a result of supportive military intervention. The logic here is straightforward: the conflict that instigated intervention has resulted in attacks on schools and school closures, thereby imperiling education provision. Therefore, supportive intervention should improve the security environment, thereby reducing the occurrence of attacks on schools and school closures and thereby resulting in better education provision. At the very least, stabilization operations should have a deterring effect on violence: the closer to a foreign military presence, the more secure the security environment should be and the more likely education provision is to succeed.

To test this hypothesis, this paper will compare intervention and education across Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Table 1 outlines the spectrum of stabilization, with Mali having the largest-scale of intervention followed by Niger with a small-scale intervention and finally Burkina Faso without any intervention. Because the scale of intervention is larger in Mali than in either of Niger or Burkina Faso, this paper hypothesizes that its security environment would be better stabilized and therefore more conducive to education provision. Conversely, with no intervention in Burkina Faso, this paper hypothesizes that that country’s security environment would be less stable and therefore less conducive to education provision. Chapter II will examine whether a larger scale of intervention results in more security. Chapter III will examine how education provision fares amid different scales of intervention.
Table 1: Spectrum of Stabilization

<table>
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<th>Education provision as a function of the spectrum of stabilization (hypothesis)</th>
<th>Large-scale intervention (Mali)</th>
<th>Smaller-scale intervention (Niger)</th>
<th>No intervention (Burkina Faso)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Many interveners working to stabilize the security environment</td>
<td>Fewer interveners working to stabilize the security environment</td>
<td>No interveners working to stabilize the security environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools should suffer few attacks and closures should be minimal</td>
<td>Instances of attacks on schools and school closures should be higher than in Mali but lower than in Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Schools should suffer many attacks and closures should be common</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Questions**

Does supportive military intervention result in lower insecurity? Does supportive military intervention improve human welfare by establishing conditions necessary for education? Is a particular form of stabilization or a particular military footprint more conducive to more robust education provision? How might education provision differ across the spectrum of stabilization in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso? To what degree do longterm social and developmental objectives inform stabilization operations and supportive intervention?

**Structure of Thesis**

To answer the above questions, this first chapter will conduct a literature review to consider key theories and paradigms of foreign military intervention and stabilization on the African continent. It will then consider a state’s ability to project power in areas characterized by fragility and difficult political geography. Chapter II will trace the roots of conflict in the Central Sahel, outline the primary foreign interveners in the region, and measure the realities of insecurity against the spectrum of stabilization. Chapter III will consider the history of education...
provision in the Central Sahel, recent attacks on education, and how the spectrum of stabilization has affected education provision. Chapter IV will offer concluding remarks and further analysis.

**Literature Review**

*Military Intervention in International Relations*

The term ‘intervention’ is as unspecific as its connotation is negative. In international relations, intervention is generally thought to be carried out by a sovereign state or a multilateral coalition of states against another sovereign state. Such intervention can revolve around political, economic, military or other objectives, or a combination thereof. Regardless, the prevailing assumption is often that intervention is a coercive act that violates the sovereignty of the intervened state. Coercive or hostile interventions may well be the most recurrent variety throughout history. This paper, however, is concerned with supportive military interventions and their effects on education provision.

Intervention “occurs when a dominant country or organization uses force or pressure to exert power over a weaker sovereign entity or when a weaker entity requests external assistance to restore order.”10 Pickering and Kisangani provide a number of helpful definitions. First, they note that “foreign military intervention is a distinct and presumably much less destructive phenomena than war,” with an emphasis on the qualifier ‘presumably’.11 They describe unilateral foreign military intervention as “the dispatch of national armed forces to another sovereign state

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in attempt to influence political, economic, or social conditions in the target country.”

Multilateral interventions, on the other hand, are “those that are under the leadership of an international command structure and are composed of more than a few national participants.” In practice, the distinction between unilateral and multilateral intervention can be blurred.

The ramifications of military intervention on governance and social service provision have received little scholarly attention. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Pickering and Kisangani assert that “hostile military intervention will not often create the type of stable domestic political environment that fosters democratization, economic growth, and rising quality of life.”

Although this seems like a logical conclusion, the reverse may not necessarily be true. Supportive military intervention is not guaranteed to create a domestic political environment suitable to a robust provision of social services. Indeed, in the context of the African continent, there is broad consensus that “foreign political and military intervention in Africa often did more harm than good.” But because with supportive interventions foreign forces seek to assist the target government, there is reason to hypothesize that such an operation would have a positive effect on governance outcomes (such as the provision of social services) since a key objective is presumably to establish a more secure environment.

Although the ramifications of military intervention have received little scholarly attention, the literature examining intervention itself is almost as plentiful as examples of foreign

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13 Ibid., 366.

14 Ibid., 365.

military incursion throughout history. Even so, not all varieties of intervention have been subject to equal scrutiny or consideration. Pickering and Kisangani note that the preponderance of research on intervention “fails to distinguish military missions with hostile intent from those intended to support the target government.”  

Hostile interventions “oppose the target government” whereas supportive interventions assist them. A rival intervention “occurs when one or more states intervene to oppose the target government while other states intervene to support it.”

*Military Intervention in Africa*

Having outlined some foundational typologies of military intervention, it is now necessary to consider the broader history of military intervention in Africa in order to better understand the cases of Mali and Niger. In *Foreign Intervention in Africa After the Cold War*, Elizabeth Schmidt provides historical context to recent interventions on the continent. Following the wave of independence that swept the continent in the 1960s, “many postcolonial African leaders were autocrats who used state resources to bind loyalists to them in a system called neopatrimonialism.” According to Crawford Young, “the bureaucratic authoritarianism of the colonial state legacy became the patrimonial autocracy” pervasive by the 1970s. As a result, African economies were largely mismanaged, ripe with corruption, and reliant on the export of

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17 Ibid., 364.

18 Ibid., 364.


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cheap commodities while still importing “expensive manufactured goods.” In the face of global economic crises in the 1970s and 1980s these poorly managed economies did not fare well, and African countries became heavily indebted. Although international financial institutions and foreign governments did provide relief in the form of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), these “required African countries to reduce state involvement in the economy as a condition for loans.” SAPs adversely affected the poor and among other things caused food shortages, inflation, and unemployment. In tandem with political repression and systemic corruption, economic hardship catalyzed pro-democracy movements across the continent in the 1990s. All the while, “neopatrimonial states could no longer preform their basic functions” as new actors and parties vied for political control. According to Schmidt, “the ensuing chaos provided fertile ground for a new wave of foreign intervention, both internal and external to the continent.”

Schmidt offers two paradigms that foreign actors—either individual states or multilateral institutions—have used to justify post-Cold War military intervention in Africa. The first conceives of intervention as a response to instability. Beginning in the early post-Cold War period, “foreign powers and multilateral institutions took note when domestic turmoil was perceived to jeopardize international peace and security.” According to Schmidt’s logic, foreign powers not only had an interest in preventing faraway instability from metastasizing into a threat capable of jeopardizing their own interests; they also developed and adopted a responsibility to protect (R2P). The R2P doctrine asserts that “diplomatic and military interventions were often

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22 Ibid., 3.
23 Ibid., 4.
24 Ibid., 4.
25 Ibid., 25.
justified on the grounds that outside actors had both the right and the responsibility to guarantee international peace and security if individual states failed to do so.”

Still, the decision to pursue or abstain from mounting a humanitarian intervention remains controversial. As will be examined in detail below, the response to instability paradigm can involve hostile interventions that seek to coerce the target state or supportive interventions that seek to strengthen it.

The second paradigm conceives of intervention as a response to the global ‘War on Terror’. Schmidt outlines the history of U.S. funding and support for mujahideen and other Islamic fundamentalist factions during the Cold War in order to “challenge Soviet rule in Afghanistan and undermine its authority in adjacent Soviet republics.”

This covert support arguably catalyzed the spread of terrorist networks such as al-Qaeda throughout the Middle East and Africa. The response to terrorism paradigm typically involves supportive interventions that seek to assist the target country in stabilizing a region in order to govern more effectively and prevent further spread of terrorist and insurgent violence.

In practice, these paradigms are helpful tools of analysis but it is difficult to ascribe specific interventions to just one paradigm. For example, the French intervention in Mali and U.S. operations in Niger— although very different in their scope and footprint— share elements of both paradigms; that is, they are simultaneously responses to instability and responses to terrorism.

In their indispensable 2018 article Taming Intervention: Sovereignty, Statehood and Political Order in Africa, de Oliveira and Verhoeven trace the evolution of foreign military

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27 Ibid., 32.
intervention in Africa from an expressly negative, imperialistic endeavor to one that seeks to bolster existing regimes to the benefit of both the intervener and the intervened. The authors label this recently-accepted form of intervention as ‘stabilization operations’, which in the context of the African continent have a particular history and a number of defining characteristics.

Paradoxically, despite its heavy baggage as the epitome of sovereignty infringement, intervention “is now perceived by African decision-makers as a way to enhance sovereignty.”28 By the same token, the notion that military intervention “has historically been considered an existential threat to weak governments” has been reversed in Africa, both in theory and in practice.29 A historical explanation of this important epistemological shift is in order.

In the decades following Africa’s wave of independence in the 1960s, African states were emphatic both in defending their sovereignty and in attempting to limit, albeit with little success, extracontinental intervention. This postcolonial sentiment and the fervor for African sovereignty were only natural given the continent’s dark history of colonization and subjugation to external interference. Three developments buttressed African states’ legitimacy and sovereignty in the post-colonial era: (i) a “normative change that gave colonies the right to internationally recognized statehood merely by virtue of having been colonized”;30 (ii) the formation in 1963 of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), which further institutionalized African states’ post-colonial sovereignty; and (iii) the Cold War trend of the United States and the Soviet Union

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 11.
providing aid to African states as opposed to coercing them. A largely global “consensus around non-intervention” lasted through the 1980s and eschewed foreign interference in the political sphere, with the notable exception of criticism of white minority rule in Zimbabwe and South Africa.31

The relative absence of foreign interference in Africa was driven away in the 1980s by systemic reliance on extracontinental financial assistance, neopatrimonialism, and political repression. As African states amassed debt following the economic crises of the 1970s, structural adjustment programs offered by international financial institutions “represented an unprecedented degree of foreign intrusion in the post-colonial era.”32 Amidst “the precipitous decline of African states in the 1990s,” external actors became less surreptitious in their involvement on the continent than they had under the previous decades’ consensus around non-intervention.33

The end of the period of non-interference in Africa roughly coincided with the end of the Cold War. Following the Black Hawk Down incident in Somalia and the Rwandan genocide “at the start of which ten Belgian peacekeepers were murdered,” the United States and the UN both became averse to military intervention in Africa.34 Interestingly, this was in the same era as the Gulf War during which the U.S. deployed thousands of military personnel to the Middle East, creating the impression that Africa was “too unruly for… direct external intervention.”35 Despite

32 Ibid., 12.
33 Ibid., 12.
34 Ibid., 13.
Western disinterest in military intervention in Africa, three political developments on the continent led African leaders themselves to adopt a more favorable view of intervention. First, the notion that “the OAU’s emphasis on absolute sovereignty… contributed to Africa’s international marginalization” gained traction. Political movements inspired by Pan-Africanist socialism witnessed the power of regional interventions in promoting pro-democracy revolutions. Second, the splitting of Eritrea from Ethiopia and South Sudan from Sudan was “indicative of the growing erosion of the principles of non-interference, border integrity and sovereignty” that had characterized the continent since the 1960s. Third, a generation of prominent Pan-African politicians professed “a belief in the necessity of African self-reliance” coupled with the importance of humanitarian intervention.

The OAU thus evolved into the African Union (AU) in 2001. Importantly, the Constitutive Act of the African Union— the treaty signed in 2000 that serves as the organization’s constitution— gave the AU a mandate to intervene in its member states in response to atrocities. This marked a significant departure from its predecessor (the OAU), which was barred from interfering “in issues considered to be within the jurisdiction of its member states, unless it was explicitly invited to intervene.” The Protocol on the Amendments to the Constitutive Act, adopted in 2003, revised Article 4, subparagraph (h), to specify:

the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuit to a decision of the Assembly in respect to grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity

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37 Ibid.

as well as a serious threat to legitimate order to restore peace and stability to the Member 
State of the Union upon recommendation of the Peace and Security Council.39

This “right of the Union to intervene” is widely understood to include military 
intervention, though neither the Constitutive Act nor the Protocol on the Amendments provide 
further clarification. The Protocol on the Amendments to the Constitutive Act also created the 
AU’s Peace and Security Council (PSC), the organization’s decision-making and conflict-
resolution body.40 The PSC is in essence the AU’s response to the United Nations Security 
Council (UNSC) and was created with intracontinental intervention in mind, specifically to 
“operationalize the shift from non-interference to non-indifference.”41 The ratification of these 
treaties by each of the AU’s 55 member states save Morocco and South Sudan crystallized what 
can only be described as a “counter-intuitive shift towards embracing intervention not only in 
practice but also in theory.”42 Similarly, the AU’s “constitutional commitment to R2P and the 
Human Security paradigm” evince the notion that “the sovereignty of states is conditional,” 
thereby challenging the realist theory of international relations.43

Since its founding in 2001, the AU and its subregional organizations have launched 
intracontinental military interventions in Burundi, Comoros, Sudan, and Somalia, all largely 
focused on peacekeeping operations.44 The African Mission in Burundi (AMIB) was the AU’s

39 African Union, “Protocol on the Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union,” February 3, 
40 Ibid.
41 Ricardo Soares de Oliveira and Harry Verhoeven, “Taming Intervention: Sovereignty, Statehood and 
Political Order in Africa,” Survival 60, no. 2 (March 4, 2018): 16, https://doi.org/ 
42 Ibid., 26.
43 Annemarie Peen Rodt, “The African Union Mission in Burundi,” Civil Wars 14, no. 3 (September 2012): 
44 Ibid., 373.
first military intervention in a member state; the operation lasted from April 2003 to May 2004 and consisted 3,335 personnel, including military forces from South Africa, Ethiopia, and Mozambique and observers from five other member states.45

AMIB was launched in response to Burundi’s civil war, which had its origins in the Tutsi minority’s disproportionate representation in the government and military despite accounting for under 15% of the country’s population. Since independence in 1962, successive waves of ethnic violence claimed upwards of 200,000 lives, predominately Hutus. The violence that sparked the civil war began in 1992 “shorty after the introduction of a multi-party system.”46 Following the death of Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira and Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana when their plane was shot down, the Great Lakes region became embroiled in conflict; the Rwandan genocide killed at least 800,000 while violence in Burundi killed approximately 300,000.47 Diplomatic solutions brokered by regional powers— including summits and ceasefires— failed to bring lasting peace to Burundi. An AU force was intended to be deployed to Burundi by December 2002 but did not arrive in its entirety until October 2003. These delays were attributed to the AU’s nascent bureaucracy and financial challenges.48 Despite initial struggles, AMIB’s operations and its deterrent presence were successful in creating “a secure environment conducive to peace.”49

Shifting threats also played a role in cementing the continent’s newfound appreciation of the value of supportive military intervention. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s both African

46 Ibid., 377.
47 Ibid., 377.
48 Ibid., 382.
49 Ibid., 374.
and Western policymakers agreed that rogue regimes presented the gravest threat to the continent’s security. The 1994 genocide of the Tutsi minority in Rwanda, facilitated in part by the Hutu-led regime, is one example. But after the early 2000s, weak states replaced rogue regimes as the gravest threat to the continent’s security. This trend, however, was not unique to the African continent. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 catalyzed Western states’ assessments that weak states posed greater security challenges than rogue ones. In 2009, for example, the “US National Security Assessment identifie[d] the world’s primary threats as stemming from weak and fragile countries rather than strong or authoritarian ones.” These developments corroborate Elizabeth Schmidt’s two paradigms for post-Cold War military intervention in Africa: intervention as a response to instability and intervention in response to terrorism.

The instability born in weak states is particularly dangerous because it respects no borders and is unconventional in nature, oftentimes comprised of fourth generation warfare (4GW) involving highly-mobile non-state actors including terrorists, rebels, and insurgents. Traditional hostile interventions, however, are not of much use in quelling instability in weak states. This is due to a number of factors, including the reality that reducing instability is accomplished more easily by strengthening a regime than by attacking or coercing it, as is the objective of the traditional hostile intervention.

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Instead, supportive interventions can attempt to aid the governments of weak states in reducing such instability. Stabilization operations entail “state enhancement by external actors who provide support [and military assistance] to the formal holders of state power.”

In other words, stabilization operations are supportive interventions that seek to maintain the status quo, that being keeping the existing regime in power and preventing the spread of instability, particularly terrorism and insurgency. In this regard, the interests of great powers and African states are aligned. In the early 21st century, then, intervention “reframed as stabilization” is not a threat to African sovereignty but rather “a way of strengthening incumbents.”

It is clear how such instability endangers African states. But for great powers in North America and Europe, terrorism, migration crises, and the fragmentation of authority that emanate from weak states can reverberate well beyond their original source. This dynamic is explored in the following subsection.

**Defining Stabilization Operations**

Having considered a brief history of how stabilization operations have come to be accepted as a form of supportive intervention that bolster African sovereignty as opposed to violating it, an examination of this foreign-led phenomenon is in order. Perhaps unsurprisingly, stabilization operations (also called stabilization interventions) do not have a clearcut, universally agreed-upon definition. What is clear, however, is that they seek to stabilize unstable or ‘fragile’ zones. According to Robert Muggah,

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53 Ibid., 20.
The phenomenon of fragility is more easily described than defined. Its causes and characteristics are surprisingly diverse with most descriptions focusing on the extent to which weak governments are unable or unwilling to deliver core services... Fragility is typically associated with a combination of sharp social and economic inequality, demographic pressures, poor governance and the instability generated from a bewildering array of ‘violence entrepreneurs’ — from gangs and organised crime syndicates to insurgents and terrorists.\footnote{Robert Muggah, “Stabilising Fragile States and the Humanitarian Space,” in \textit{Adelphi Series}, vol. 50, 412-413, 2010, 34, \url{https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2010.515143}.}

Although scholars of security and governance studies have experienced difficulty in crafting a nicely-packaged definition of fragility, there is near-global consensus that in a world as interconnected as the twenty-first century’s, fragility can easily spread beyond its original geographic source, thereby compounding existing problems in other regions while also causing new ones. Multilateral institutions— including the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)— and great powers such as the United States have stressed that one country’s internal fragility can lead to international instability.\footnote{Ibid., 40.} As described in Chapter II, the crisis in the Central Sahel clearly illustrates how the effects of regional fragility reverberate across international borders. In particular, jihadist groups and cross-border migration have sparked security concerns across Europe, in addition to deteriorating humanitarian crises within the Sahel.\footnote{Rasmus Alenius Boserup and Luis Martinez, “Europe and the Sahel-Maghreb Crisis” (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2018), 7, \url{https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr.ceri/files/europe-sahel-maghreb.pdf}.} In the most simple of terms, then, stabilization operations are responses to instability; they are thought at least in theory to be mutually beneficial to both weak states (the intervened) and foreign powers and multilateral institutions (the interveners): weak states receive aid in restoring order and
projecting power while foreign powers attempt to contain fragility before it further spreads and destabilizes their own interests.

With this description of fragility in mind, Muggah asserts that instability and fragility can be defined loosely as “the absence of development.” Consequently, if stabilization operations seek to stabilize fragile zones they must address the root “causes and manifestations of underdevelopment,” which in areas beset by armed conflict is often thought to require direct military force. Chapters II and IV further discuss the military-centric nature of stabilization.

Like fragility, stabilization operations are difficult to define principally because they can involve many forms and configurations. As a result, such operations are more easily defined by their primary objectives, of which there are two: (i) to reduce the causes of underdevelopment and (ii) to bolster state legitimacy, capacity, and de facto sovereignty, oftentimes by (re)establishing territorial control. In the context of the African continent, these objectives are seen as mutually reinforcing and (as described above) they are shared by African governments and foreign powers alike, especially in hopes of preventing fragility from engendering further instability.

With regards to the first objective of stabilization, reducing the causes of underdevelopment can take many forms. These can include ‘soft’ forms of intervention such as promoting infrastructure development, delivering humanitarian assistance, and attempting to improve governance via democracy promotion. Still, direct military operations and security force assistance are the elements of stabilization that receive the most attention. These forms of

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 35.
‘hard’ intervention often involve counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations.\textsuperscript{60} The logic here is simple: zones beset by insurgency or terrorism are more ‘fragile’ and stabilization with military force can reduce or eliminate the conflict that causes fragility (as is the case with counterinsurgencies, for example).

The second objective of stabilization is closely associated with the first. To yield the maximum effect, bolstering state legitimacy must naturally be focussed in zones “where state authority and legitimacy is contested.”\textsuperscript{61} That stabilization by definition involves strengthening incumbent regimes again explains why African leaders have come to view this supportive intervention as a way of buttressing African sovereignty and keeping state power in the hands of elites and established institutions.

The objectives of stabilization are mutually reinforcing. Reducing underdevelopment (and by extension, fragility) increases state legitimacy and capacity. Meanwhile, increasing state legitimacy and capacity reduces fragility. With both outcomes, the intervened (the target state) and the intervener (the foreign actors) stand to benefit from bolstered state legitimacy and from preventing state fragility from leading to international instability.

This form of stabilization that is so heavily reliant on military intervention is not without controversy. There is also the question of whether counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, in eliminating adversaries militarily, even address the root causes of instability— this is a topic worthy of its own dissertation. Muggah notes that stabilization operations heavily reliant on military interventions are increasingly “coming under scrutiny for the extent to which


\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
they contribute (or not) to outcomes such as improved civilian protection.”62 This paper, of course, is examining whether stabilization improves state provision of education.

A historical overview of stabilization is helpful to better understand the evolution of this phenomenon and its current geographic distribution. Fundamentally, stabilization was born out of concern that faraway disorder and fragility risks spiraling into instability that can threaten ‘Western’ interests. This concern began in the late nineteenth century when elites in European metropoles fretted about unrest in their colonies.63 In the second half of the twentieth century this concern took the form of Cold War-era “fears of the (presumed) linkages between poverty and communism and later, liberation theology and incipient nationalist independence movements.”64 Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the ‘War on Terror’ has led global powers, the United States chief among them, to deploy significant military and developmental resources to weaker states that may harbor terrorists. Clearly throughout the past 150 years ‘Western’ governments and institutions have exhibited a sustained interest in stabilizing fragile states, which are almost exclusively postcolonial or post-conflict societies.

Today, debate and study of stabilization are often focussed on the aftermath of the large-scale invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. In reality, though, “if understood to include a wide-spectrum agenda” to stabilize so-called ‘fragile’ states, then stabilization operations “extend far beyond Central Asia and the Middle East to encompass well over a dozen

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63 Ibid., 39.

64 Ibid., 39.
countries in South and Central America, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the South Pacific.”

Although Africa is home to more ‘fragile’ states than any other continent, stabilization operations have been staged around the world. Still, more foreign interventions have been mounted in Africa than in any other continent or region. Of the 58 past UN Peacekeeping operations, 24 (50%) where in African states. Of the 12 active UN Peacekeeping operations, 6 (50%) are in African states. Of all of past and active UN-sanctioned operations, four have been officially designated “Stabilization Missions” and three— those in Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Central African Republic— are ongoing operations in Africa. (The fourth UN Stabilization Mission, in Haiti, ended in 2017). Despite UN involvement in stabilization operations, ”nowhere in UN policy or doctrine is the term ‘stabilization’ formally defined.” Additionally, “between 1990 and 2009, more than 60 peace operations,” which ran the gamut from monitoring assignments to peacekeeping to stabilization operations, “were undertaken on the African continent by numerous actors, including the UN, the European Union,


69 Ibid.


71 Ibid.
the OAU/AU and Africa’s subregional organizations” like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).  

Ultimately, stabilization can entail a broad range of foreign-led activities that often rely on direct military force. These operations seek to reduce state fragility and bolster state legitimacy, meaning they are a form of supportive intervention. At its core stabilization aims to increase stability; regardless of the configuration of these operations or the preponderance of military versus civilian-led initiatives, one would hope that they have the effect of improving state provision of social services. It is not unreasonable to suppose that a robust provision of services such as education and healthcare would both reduce fragility (underdevelopment) and increase state legitimacy. Following this logic, multilateral institutions and foreign states engaged in stabilization would be wise to ensure that their operations directly and indirectly facilitate a more robust provision of social services.

The lack of a clear conceptual understanding of stabilization has meant that, in practice, such operations take a number of different forms. There is a “palpable difference between the ‘hot stabilisation’ of military-led counter-insurgency in Afghanistan and the far ‘cooler’ forms of reconstruction and development touted in other settings.” In the end, the logic of all stabilization operations are premised on the same assumptions: that “state institutions are the legitimate source of authority and order, and must be shored up with force against the non-state

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forces of disorder and chaos, regardless of how abusive or illegitimate the state may be.””74 That weak states receiving foreign support in the form of stabilization may in fact be “abusive or “illegitimate” is best exemplified by the case of Chad, Niger’s easterly neighbor in the Sahel. Despite the atrocious human rights record and resounding unpopularity of Idriss Déby, Chad’s late president, France launched a limited military intervention in February 2019 to prevent Déby from being swept from power. More precisely, Chad’s former colonizer launched airstrikes “from France’s airbase on the outskirts of N’Djamena to destroy a column of advancing rebels.””75

The moral and strategic justifications for stabilization are fascinating, especially because “African elites and outside actors have both championed the new interventionism, each for their own reasons, but nevertheless in tandem.””76 This represents a rare confluence of interest: while African elites seek to bolster state legitimacy and capacity, outside actors seek to contain fragility. Each is understandably motivated by their own self-interest. But what are the long-term effects of stabilization, particularly on the target state’s provision of social services?

State Power in Zones of Fragility and Difficult Geography

Unfortunately, extant literature on the provision of social services in fragile or conflict zones is scarce. This is not to say, however, that the topic is unimportant. The Fragile States Index, which measures state fragility, takes into account public service provision. The index’s

public services indicator measures health, education, access to shelter, infrastructure, and general public services.\textsuperscript{77}

Given the lack of research on the effects of military intervention on social service provision, it is helpful to turn to a different area that nevertheless shares some similarities with the topic of concern. The effects of stabilization operations on the ‘humanitarian space’ is one such area that has received some attention. The humanitarian space is defined as the ability of governmental and non-governmental aid agencies to “operate safely and effectively on the ground, as well as the wider social, political and geographic space in which civilians are protected.”\textsuperscript{78} Unfortunately, there is “no straightforward positive or negative correlation between stabilisation policies and the protection and maintenance of the humanitarian space,” likely because even this topic has received relatively little scholarly attention.\textsuperscript{79} Even so, Muggah notes that:

There are at least four types of consequences of stabilisation on the humanitarian space: (i) situations where stabilisation impedes humanitarian agency space but generates certain positive humanitarian outcomes (i.e., Colombia); (ii) circumstances where stabilisation positively shapes agency space but does not result in positive humanitarian outcomes (the former Yugoslavia); (iii) settings where both humanitarian agency space and humanitarian outcomes are compromised (Somalia); and (iv) settings where stabilisation operations simultaneously protect agency space and humanitarian outcomes (Haiti).\textsuperscript{80}

This typology of consequences of stabilization on the humanitarian space can be applied to the case of social service provision. Following this logic, the four types of consequences of stabilization on the social service space would be: (i) situations where stabilization impedes

\textsuperscript{77} The Fund for Peace, “Global Data,” Fragile States Index, accessed February 1, 2021, \url{https://fragilestatesindex.org/data/}.


\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 49.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 49.
social service space but generates certain positive social service outcomes; (ii) situations where stabilization positively shapes social service space but does not generate positive social service outcomes; (iii) situations where both social service space and social service outcomes are compromised; and (iv) situations where stabilization operations simultaneously protect social service space and social service outcomes.

Muggah asserts that humanitarians can be divided into two camps with regards to the effects of stabilization on the humanitarian space: the pessimists and the optimists. The pessimists argue that stabilization adversely affects the humanitarian space because this type of operation “erodes the neutrality and impartiality of aid agencies and their ability to maintain an apolitical stance in the face of egregious violence.”81 Meanwhile, the optimists contend that “stabilisation can protect aid workers and widen the humanitarian space.”82 Both the pessimistic and the optimistic perspectives can be applied to the case of social service provision: a pessimistic outlook would contend that stabilization introduces more violent actors into an environment, thereby increasing chaos and fragility and further complicating the delivery of services; an optimistic outlook would contend that stabilization reduces violence and fragility, thereby protecting teachers and medical staff and facilitating the delivery of services.

A consideration of political geography is also helpful in understanding how states might fare in projecting power over their sovereign territory— for instance, by providing services to citizens. In his seminal book *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, Jeffrey Herbst delineates how different geographic features can affect governance in the

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82 Ibid.
context of the African continent. Herbst classifies Mali and Niger as “hinterland countries” because their “areas of high and medium population density (by national standards) are in relatively small areas of the country,” whereas their hinterlands are vast and sparsely populated.\footnote{Jeffrey Herbst, \textit{States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control}, New edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 152.} Hinterland countries distinguish themselves from “countries with problematic population distribution,” however, because in the former “the empty areas are not internal to the country but constitute a vast, largely empty, hinterland.”\footnote{Ibid.} For Mali and Niger, this vast hinterland is comprised of the Sahel.

One problem with hinterland countries is that “those who might be alienated by the regimes have a ready-made hinterland in which to escape.”\footnote{Ibid., 154.} In essence, the vast emptiness of hinterlands makes them difficult for governments to control and provides anti-state actors with abundant refuge. For similar reasons, hinterlands are operationally difficult and financially taxing for interveners to stabilize. Unlike both Mali and Niger, Burkina Faso has favorable geography, meaning its “highest concentration of power is found... around the capital, and then population densities become lower as distance from the capital increases.”\footnote{Mehta 28}
Chapter II: Security & Intervention in the Central Sahel

“If unchecked, the Mali crisis threatens to create an arc of instability extending west into Mauritania and east through Niger, Chad and Sudan to the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden, characterized by extended spaces where state authority is weak and pockets of territorial control are exercised by transnational criminals.”

—then-United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres

This chapter will consider the security environment in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso in addition to the supportive interventions in those countries. A range of regional and extracontinental actors have been deployed to the Central Sahel since 2013 to aid the three national governments in countering violent extremist organizations and (re)establishing control over their territory. The conflict has sparked a dire humanitarian catastrophe and has taken a terrible toll on the education sector in particular. But first, it is important to ask a more basic question: have foreign-led stabilization operations reduced insecurity such that Central Sahel states can provide critical services?

The Roots of Conflict

Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso all face a number of interrelated insecurity, governance, economic, and humanitarian crises. As will be described in subsequent pages, the ongoing violence and insecurity that precipitated intervention largely have their roots in northern Mali. As early as 2018 this insecurity shifted southwards from northern Mali into Liptako-Gourma, a tri-border area where Mali, Niger, and Burkina converge. Confusingly, policymakers and analysts refer to armed conflict in Liptako-Gourma by a number of different purportedly interchangeable place names, followed by the word ‘crisis.’ The Liptako-Gourma crisis, the Sahel crisis, and the Central Sahel crisis have all been used to describe armed conflict and related governance and

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humanitarian crises in Liptako-Gourma. Such labels as ‘the Sahel crisis,’ however, are unhelpful and unspecific given the tremendous size of the Sahel and the fact that there are simultaneous unrelated security crises throughout this vast region. For instance, though still in the Sahel, the unrelated Boko Haram insurgency in southeastern Niger is some 1,700 kilometers east of Liptako-Gourma. The lack of a regionally- or universally-accepted name for the conflict in Liptako-Gourma is highly symbolic of the overwhelming complexity and disorder of this borderless crisis.

Because the precise “geographical definition of Liptako-Gourma varies,” this point necessitates further discussion.88 Etymologically, “Liptako” is derived from the name of an early nineteenth-century Fulani polity located along the present-day Nigerien-Burkinabè border; “Gourma” refers to the Gourmantché people of West Africa. In December 1970, the heads of state of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso created the Autorité de développement intégré de la région du Liptako-Gourma, more commonly known as the Liptako-Gourma Authority (ALG).89 ALG’s founding mission was to advance “harmonious and integrated” economic development and cooperation in the Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso border region, specifically by promoting energy, fishing, agro-pastoralism, and mining.90 In reality, though, livestock herding and agriculture are the primary economic activities. According to a map in an undated ALG publication, the regional authority covers approximately 370,000 square kilometers, including parts of the following administrative regions: Mopti, Tombouctou, Gao, and Ménaka in Mali; Nord, Centre-Nord,

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90 Ibid.
Sahel, Est, and Centre-Est in Burkina Faso; and Tillabéri and Dosso in Niger. Liptako-Gourma is a perfect example of what Herbst describes as a hinterland because it is sparsely populated and its vast land is not internal to a single country. Indeed, the core of the region consists of the northern half of Mali, western Niger, and northern Burkina Faso, which is far removed from the favorable geography of Ouagadougou, the capital. Geographically, the region consists of semi-arid Sahel in addition to more hilly terrain.

The March 2012 military-led coup d’état that toppled Mali’s civilian government is widely considered the cause of the country’s—and indeed its Central Sahel neighbors’—recent struggles. While the 2012 putsch was undoubtedly a critical juncture that enabled the expansion in northern Mali of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), its splinter groups, and other predatory non-state actors, this event was in many ways only the culmination of longstanding tensions between the political elite in the south and the Tuaregs in the north. Indeed, a more complete geographic and historical analysis shows that the roots of Mali’s crisis were decades in the making.

Located in the interior of West Africa, Mali is a large, landlocked country twice the size of France. While ethnically diverse, approximately 90% of the population is Muslim. Much of its territory is also in the Sahel, a semi-arid transition zone nestled between the Sahara Desert to the north and more arable savanna to the south. In geographic terms, the Sahel spans the African continent from Mauritania and Senegal along the Atlantic Ocean to Sudan and Eritrea along the Red Sea. (The Sahel also includes parts of Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon’s Extrême-Nord region). Geopolitically, however, in both African and international contexts the

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Sahel usually refers to the five member-states of the G5 Sahel: Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. Meanwhile, the Central Sahel invariably refers only to Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

Mali’s “long and often permeable borders”— with Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania— facilitate the clandestine movement of people and goods across the Sahel, for both nefarious and legitimate purposes. Migration and trade have long been recurring themes in the region. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, trans-Saharan and trans-Sahelian trade routes enabled the prosperity of the Malian Empire, facilitating the import of salt and the export of gold. Historically, a number semi-nomadic pastoralist peoples, including the Tuaregs, have migrated throughout the region, an anthropological practice that predates the largely artificial borders drawn when African countries gained independence from European powers in the 1960s. In more recent history, Mali’s permeable borders have played an outsized role in the country’s ongoing insecurity and humanitarian crises.

Mali is divided into ten administrative regions in addition to Bamako, the capital district. The country also has three major climate zones. The vast majority of Mali’s 20 million people (approximately 90%) live in the southern half of the country which consists of the southern tropical savannah and the central semiarid Sahelian zone. “Political and economic power is strongly centered on the urban elites in the south of the country,” where the climate is more

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93 Ibid., 10.
The northern five regions—Taoudénit, Tombouctou, Kidal, Gao, and Ménaka—are hinterlands and are found in the country’s third climate zone, the arid Saharan desert. Consequences of climate change, namely drought and desertification, have had acute effects on Mali’s north and continue to exacerbate “the population’s vulnerability and raised levels of food insecurity.”

These geographic realities have compounded persistent historical inequities and grievances, specifically among the Tuareg, an Amazigh (Berber) ethnic group indigenous to the Sahara. Traditionally semi-nomadic pastoralists, the Tuareg inhabit arid regions of Algeria, Libya, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Today, they account for up to 5% of Mali’s population and live in the sparsely-populated northern regions. These regions, fully in the Sahara Desert, are considerably poorer than the southern half of the country where the bulk of the population resides.

Tuareg grievances emerged in the colonial era and have remained a hallmark of Malian politics even after independence from France in 1960. René Caillié, the French colonial explorer, is thought to be “the first European to visit Timbuktu (1827) and return alive.” In his own account of his colonial travels, *Journal d’un voyage à Temboctou et à Jenné dans l’Afrique Centrale* (published in 1830), Caillié describes his encounters with several ethnic groups in the French Sudan (present-day Mali), including the Fulani and the Moors. His harshest criticisms

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97 Ibid., 28.
98 Ibid., 26.
and most vitriolic descriptions, however, are reserved for the Tuareg (“Tooariks”), whom he
describes as “savages” and “marauders”.\textsuperscript{101} This “negative image of the Tuareg was further
reinforced in later encounters with the French military.”\textsuperscript{102} It was in the first half of the
nineteenth-century, then, that French colonizers introduced the notion of Tuareg inferiority
relative to neighboring ethnic groups in northern Mali.

During Mali’s period of gradual decolonization, France briefly considered “creating an
independent pan-Saharan desert state for the Tuareg.”\textsuperscript{103} The creation of a Tuareg homeland, to
be called Azawad, emerged as an idea in the 1950s and would consist of the five northern
hinterland regions of present-day Mali.\textsuperscript{104} Although this plan was never realized, “it left a residue
of tragically heightened Tuareg expectations” and perceived political and economic
marginalization that have persisted well beyond Mali’s independence.\textsuperscript{105} This well-documented
disaffection is less a matter of religious difference but rather “a classic case of conflict between
nomads” in the peripheral north and “central authority” in the south.\textsuperscript{106} Furthermore, throughout
Mali’s postcolonial history “disputes over access to resources and land distribution became
increasingly common within the increasingly sedentary Tuareg community, which faced chronic

\textsuperscript{101} René Caillié, Travels through Central Africa to Timbuctoo: And across the Great Desert, to Morocco,
\textsuperscript{102} Dona J. Stewart, “What Is Next for Mali? The Roots of Conflict and Challenges to Stability” (Strategic
\textsuperscript{103} Robert Pringle, “Democratization in Mali: Putting History to Work” (United States Institute of Peace,
\textsuperscript{104} Dona J. Stewart, “What Is Next for Mali? The Roots of Conflict and Challenges to Stability” (Strategic
\textsuperscript{105} Robert Pringle, “Democratization in Mali: Putting History to Work” (United States Institute of Peace,
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 30.
droughts.”

It seems almost inevitable, then, that there have been four organized Tuareg rebellions after independence: in 1963, 1990, 2006, and 2011.

The so-called fourth Tuareg rebellion deserves special consideration because of its role in sparking Mali’s ongoing crisis that is at the heart of the conflict in the Central Sahel. The rebellion took place against the backdrop of the Arab Spring. This wave of popular pro-democracy movements that swept such countries as Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt beginning in early 2011 “also reenergized the Tuareg’s long-standing quest for greater autonomy” in northern Mali.

Furthermore, the immediate aftermath of the Libyan revolution also precipitated the fourth Tuareg rebellion. Muammar Qaddafi, Libya’s longtime dictator, had filled his army’s ranks with Tuareg mercenaries in 1978 by offering them residency (and sometimes citizenship) and deploying them in local conflicts as well as in Chad, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Lebanon.

When the Qaddafi regime fell in October 2011— the result of a UN-sanctioned NATO intervention supporting anti-Qaddafi rebels— 3,000 Tuareg fighters who had supported the Libyan regime for pay returned to northern Mali with heavy weapons and hundreds of vehicles. These Tuareg fighters together with other Tuareg factions formed the Mouvement national pour la libération d’Azawad (MNLA), a Tuareg separatist group that would quickly be labeled an insurgency by Mali’s central government.

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In January 2012, the MNLA began attempts to forcefully capture key cities in northern Mali with the aim of establishing control over the territory called Azawad by some Tuareg groups. On January 17 MNLA rebels captured the town of Ménaka (in the eponymous region) near the Nigerien border. Meanwhile, disaffection within the ranks of the Malian army had been fomenting since the formation of the MNLA in October 2011, in large part due to the government’s purportedly inadequate support of the military in countering Tuareg separatism. Consequently, on March 22, 2012 a military-led coup d’état orchestrated by army captain Amadou Sanogo ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré (known as ATT), whose election and ascendency “to the presidency marked the first time in Mali’s history that power would be passed from one democratically elected president to another.” Given the military’s motivations for the coup, the removal of ATT from power had the rather ironic effect of further weakening both the central government and the military’s power over the country’s northern hinterland. The MNLA capitalized on the power vacuum in Bamako and by April 1 they had captured Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu, a city of great cultural and historic importance to the Tuareg.

MNLA fighters, however, were not the only armed groups to exploit a weak Malian state in the aftermath of the March 2012 coup. Three jihadist groups with a history of operating in Mali’s Sahara also became embroiled in the struggle over the country’s north: AQIM, the Algeria-based Salafi jihadist terrorist organization founded in 2006; its splinter group,

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Mouvement pour l’unification et le jihad en Afrique de l’ouest (MUJAO); and AQIM ally Ansar al-Dine, a Tuareg separatist and jihadist group founded in November 2011. In the first six months of 2012, the MNLA was supported militarily by certain factions of Ansar al-Dine, with which it shared the goal of greater autonomy or independence for Tuaregs in Mali. By April 2012 both groups (and to an extent AQIM) had gained control over Mali’s northern regions. On April 6 the MNLA declared the independence of Azawad, which the AU swiftly denounced as “null and void.” The MNLA reversed its declaration in July 2012 when it instead demanded the formation of an autonomous region.

The MNLA’s initial success in seizing Azawad (Mali’s northern hinterland) was short-lived. Despite sharing with Ansar al-Dine the objective of greater autonomy for the Tuaregs, the secular MNLA ultimately severed ties with the its Islamist allies in June 2012 when the latter sought to impose Sharia law in Timbuktu and other northern cities. In response, Ansar-al-Dine, AQIM, and MUJOA routed the MNLA from Mali’s north and themselves “established control over MNLA-held territories.” By July 2012 Ansar al-Dine and AQIM began destroying centuries-old cultural artifacts and projecting power southwards towards Mali’s population center and capital.

116 By extension, the MNLA was also supported by AQIM since the latter was associated with Ansar al-Dine, though the former emphatically denied having any ties with AQIM.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.

history, helped plunge the country into a crisis that continues to rage on almost a decade later, despite significant international intervention.

**Supportive Military Intervention**

Although supportive military intervention began in 2013 with operations exclusively in Mali, it has since grown considerably in size and scope and has expanded across that country’s borders in attempt to quell roving jihadist violence. Given the proliferation of foreign interveners on the ground in the years since 2013, some analysts have come to describe the security environment in the Central Sahel as a “traffic jam” of military interventions.\(^\text{122}\) Table 2 attempts to count the size of various foreign military operations in each of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervener</th>
<th>Mali</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Burkina Faso</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MINUSMA</td>
<td>13,045 military 1,746 police</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France (Barkhane)</td>
<td>2,780</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Takuba Task Force</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUTM Mali</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>18,871</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,400</strong></td>
<td><strong>400</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 clearly illustrates the three different scales of supportive intervention across the spectrum of stabilization in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. While the two primary foreign interveners— the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the French military— have an outsized presence in Mali, the foreign military

footprint in Niger is comparatively small. Meanwhile, the 400 French troops in Burkina Faso—though indeed based in Ouagadougou—are not actually involved in regular stabilization operations in that country. A more nuanced examination of each intervening force’s history and mandate is merited, precisely because the raw numbers shown in Table 2 cannot in and of themselves fully characterize the scope and character of intervention.

France was the first foreign actor to intervene military, launching air strikes on January 10, 2013 at the request of Mali’s interim government. The air strikes—launched from a preexisting French base in N’Djamena, the capital of Chad—were intended to prevent jihadists from moving southwards from their strongholds in Mali’s northern hinterland, which they had exploited in the wake of Tuareg separatism and a coup d’état. Hitherto, “French policy was to avoid unilateral intervention and instead work through international organizations [such as the UN and ECOWAS] to assemble a multinational force.” Ultimately, Paris estimated that the diplomacy requisite for the deployment of a multinational force would have been unable to stop “a long-distance raid by columns of Toyota-mounted fighters armed with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs)” from seizing Bamako; such an outcome would have presented a grave threat to governmental stability in Mali, and to human life, though this is less likely to have factored into France’s strategic deliberations. Consideration of Mali’s hinterland

123 400 French special operations soldiers are based in Ouagadougou and conduct irregular counterterrorism operations throughout the Central Sahel; this contingent is not actively involved in stabilizing Burkina Faso in the same way MINUSMA is in Mali. Thus, the supportive intervention in Burkina Faso is in essence nonexistent.


126 Ibid., 8.
political geography would suggest that this logic is not unfounded: “given the concentration of population, occupation of the capital automatically means that the government of the day is in close proximity with a large percentage of the population.”

France officially launched Operation Serval on January 11, 2013, which involved further airstrikes and approximately 4,000 troops deployed throughout Mali. Serval was prematurely declared a success despite the persistence of jihadist violence and in July 2014 France replaced it with Operation Barkhane, an expanded force headquartered in N’Djamena. Operation Barkhane is still ongoing and as of April 2021 included 5,100 French soldiers. The primary goal of the operation is to fight jihadi insurgents in Liptako-Gourma (what in French is often referred to as la zone des trois frontières). In addition to Barkhane’s headquarters in N’Djamena, the French military maintains large bases in Gao (the eponymous capital of the region in Mali’s north) and Niamey, Niger’s capital. As of April 2021, France maintains two forward operating bases (FOBs) in northern Chad, one in northern Niger, and five in northern Mali. The two FOBs closest to Liptako-Gourma are in Gossi and Ménaka. Since 2014, France has kept a contingent of approximately 400 special operations forces (known as Task Force Sabre) in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso’s capital.

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130 Ibid.
Beyond combat operations, Barkhane aims primarily to improve the capacity of G5 Sahel militaries. According to the French Ministry of Armed Forces, 18,000 G5 Sahel soldiers have received French training since 2014.\textsuperscript{133} This represents approximately 20\% of all uniformed personnel of G5 Sahel militaries.\textsuperscript{134} It is unclear whether G5 Sahel units that received French training have in fact been deployed to the Liptako-Gourma region.

Under the auspices of the UN, MINUSMA is the second primary intervening force in the Central Sahel, though it operates only within Mali. On April 25, 2013, nearly four months after France launched Operation Serval, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted Resolution (UNSCR) 2100 to establish MINUSMA effective July 1 of the same year.\textsuperscript{135} Once deployed, MINUSMA absorbed the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), which itself had been launched on January 17, 2013 at the behest of ECOWAS and the AU.\textsuperscript{136} At its peak AFISMA consisted of approximately 6,000 African troops sent primarily from member states of ECOWAS, but also from such countries as South Africa and Uganda.\textsuperscript{137}


\textsuperscript{134} The Central Intelligence Agency’s World Facebook provides estimates for the sizes of active duty armed forces: 18,000 in the Malian Armed Forces; 10,000 in the Nigerien Armed Forces; 12,000 in the Armed Forces of Burkina Faso; 16,000 in the Mauritanian Armed Forces; and 35,000 in the Chadian National Army. Therefore the total size of active duty forces in the G5 Sahel is approximately 91,000.


Map 2: MINUSMA Deployment Map, December 2020

Operative clause 16 of UNSCR 2100 establishes the primary mandate of MINUSMA: the “Stabilization of key population centres and support for the reestablishment of State authority throughout the country.” The resolution repeatedly stresses the importance of assisting Mali’s then-transitional government in reestablishing administrative capacity throughout the country; this directive— itself quite ambiguous— seems to be a proxy for any clear definition of ’stabilization’, which is notably missing from the resolution. That the UNSC “Authorizes MINUSMA to use all necessary means… to carry out its mandate” contributes to the mission’s ambiguity and furthers the narrative that stabilization is a chiefly military endeavor.

Ultimately, the implicit understanding of stabilization conveyed by UNSCR 2100 is more or less consistent with de Oliveira and Verhoven’s description of the term: as a broad set of strategies, many backed by direct military force, that seek to bolster the sovereignty and legitimacy of the host government to the benefit of both the intervener and the intervened.

UNSCR 2531, adopted unanimously in June 2020, extended MINUSMA’s mandate until June 30, 2021. It also notes that a strategic priority of MINUSMA is “to protect civilians, reduce intercommunal violence, and re-establish State authority, State presence and basic social services in Central Mali,” with a notable emphasis on education.

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140 As described in Chapter I, the UN has never formally defined ‘stabilization.’


142 See Chapter I for a more complete discussion of stabilization operations

MINUSMA has the unfortunate distinction of being the deadliest ongoing UN operation (though not the deadliest in UN history), with 231 fatalities as of December 2020. Since as early as 2017, however, there have been charges that military personnel from African troop contributing countries have been ordered to the most dangerous regions to execute the most dangerous missions. As of August 2019, African soldiers assigned to MINUSMA accounted for over 80% of non-civilian UN fatalities despite accounting for under 60% MINUSMA’s troops. From the beginning of MINUSMA’s deployment through June 2015, more Chadian soldiers had been killed in Mali than personnel from any other troop contributing country. As of March 2021, MINUSMA had 13,045 military personnel and 1,746 police personnel deployed in Mali—from 61 contributing countries.

The United States and the European Union have also assumed secondary roles in support of the French and MINUSMA interventions in the Central Sahel. The United States has three drone bases in Niger. The first is operated by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Dirkou, a rural Saharan town in the country’s north-east. This base was first reported by The New York

Times in 2018\textsuperscript{149} and by March 2021 it had undergone a significant expansion;\textsuperscript{150} reporting suggests that its primary function is to facilitate aerial surveillance of southern Libya and northern Chad. United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) "operates MQ-9 Reaper drones from Niamey, Niger’s capital, 800 miles southwest of Dirkou; and from a $110 million drone base in Agadez, Niger, 350 miles west of Dirkou.”\textsuperscript{151} According to the French Ministry of Armed Forces, in 2020 AFRICOM covered 40% of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support for Operation Barkhane— presumably from its bases in Niamey and Agadez.\textsuperscript{152}

U.S. military and intelligence activity in Niger is clouded in secrecy.\textsuperscript{153} Even still, reporting and analysis suggest that approximately 800 military personnel have been deployed there since the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding in 2017.\textsuperscript{154} Though the majority of those troops are thought to support ISR activities and drone operations in non-combat roles, AFRICOM has also maintained an unknown number of special forces operatives in the country.\textsuperscript{155} That U.S. special forces were involved in combat operations in Niger was only


\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{153} See Office of the Secretary of Defense. (2018, June). Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 President’s Budget: Justification for Component Contingency Operations the Oversees Contingency Operations Transfer Fund (OCOTF). AFRICOM activity in Niger falls under the purview of Operation Juniper Shield, of which little has been made public.


acknowledged publicly after four U.S. Army personnel and five Nigerien soldiers were killed in an ambush in Tongo Tongo, a rural Nigerien village in the Liptako-Gourma region near the Malian border.156

For its part, the European Union (EU) maintains two military operations in the Central Sahel. The European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) was launched in January 2013 with a mandate of assisting the Malian Armed Forces “in restoring their military capacity with a view to enabling [sic] them to conduct military operations aiming at restoring Malian territorial integrity and reducing the threat posed by terrorist groups.”157 Approximately 700 military personnel are assigned to EUTM Mali; the mission operates primarily in Mali but also throughout the G5 Sahel.158 Meanwhile, Task Force Takuba is a contingent of approximately 600 soldiers from eight European states and is under the command of France’s Operation Barkhane.159 Launched on July 15, 2020, Takuba is composed primarily of French and Estonian special forces and is mandated to “advise, assist and accompany Malian Armed Forces, in coordination with” the G5 Sahel and MINUSMA.160 The task force has two bases in Mali: in Gao and Ménaka.161

Given that stabilization is seen as mutually beneficial both to weak states and foreign powers, it is unsurprising that France, the UN, the United States, and the EU have invested heavily in such operations. Perhaps in part due to domestic political concerns about migration and refugees, European officials in particular repeatedly contend that security in Europe is closely linked to security in the Sahel.162 One especially noteworthy outcome of this notion is that the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (known as Frontex) has labeled Niger a “pre-frontier area,” where civilian officials have been deployed “to monitor migrant flows headed towards Europe.”163

The preceding qualitative description of each foreign intervening force is necessary to contextualize the scales of intervention shown in Table 2. Mali clearly has the largest supportive intervention. Niger’s is considerably smaller, while in Burkina Faso intervention is essentially nonexistent. These qualitative characterizations of each intervention sought to highlight that each stabilization operation is a chiefly military endeavor predominately focused on security. It is in this context that the following section’s attempt to quantitatively measure the effect of intervention on security should be read.

Measuring Insecurity Across the Spectrum of Stabilization

Placing Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso on a spectrum of the scale of supportive intervention enables a comparative study of insecurity and its effects on education across each country. While Mali has many supportive interveners, Niger has considerably fewer. Burkina Faso has virtually none. This paper’s hypothesis expects that where there are more interveners

162 Ambassador Ángel Losada Fernandez, the EU Special Representative for the Sahel, maintains that fragility in the central Sahel poses a significant threat to European security.

there is less violence; conversely, where there are fewer interveners there should be more violence. This paper further hypothesizes that less insecurity would, in theory, be more conducive to education provision.

The aftermath of Mali’s 2013 political and insecurity crises helped catalyze the conflict and humanitarian catastrophe in the Central Sahel. Nearly a decade after the 2012 military-led coup d’état that ousted Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré (and indeed after a second coup in August 2020), the instability and violence championed by jihadist groups in Mali have long since spread across the country’s porous borders with Niger and Burkina Faso.

Two jihadi militant groups are the primary culprits responsible for violence in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso: the AQIM-affiliated Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Although “Armed violence in the name of jihad is… new” in the Central Sahel, “it often follows old patterns and familiar tactics, such as seizing people’s cattle under pain of death and calling that a tax.”164

Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)165 shed light on the sheer complexity of insecurity in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.166 Figure 1 shows the total number of fatalities from armed conflict in each of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Figure 2 shows the total number of instances of armed conflict per year in each of the three countries. These fatalities and events, recorded by ACLED, are associated with four categories of armed conflict: battles; strategic developments; explosions/remote violence; and violence against

166 ACLED data can be viewed and downloaded online at https://acleddata.com/#/dashboard.
Figure 1: Fatalities in the Central Sahel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mali</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Burkina Faso</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>110</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1727</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>2209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>2826</td>
<td>1107</td>
<td>2295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACLED, 2021

Figure 2: Instances of Conflict in the Central Sahel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mali</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Burkina Faso</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>775</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACLED, 2021
civilians. Unless otherwise indicated, fatalities from and incidents involving protests and riots are henceforth omitted.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 both confirm the historical narrative of the evolution of conflict in the Central Sahel. From 2012 through 2014, only in Mali did fatalities from armed conflict occur in significant numbers: indeed, during these early years, Niger and Burkina Faso had yet to be affected by the violence stemming from Mali’s fourth Tuareg rebellion and the related coup d’état in 2012, which had the combined effect of crippling that country’s government and its ability to control its territory. In 2013, fatalities in Mali increased 74% compared to the previous year, despite initial supportive intervention by the French military in January of that year. (MINUSMA was not deployed until July 2013). In 2014, fatalities in Mali decreased by 58% compared to 2013. This may be because the combined efforts of the French and MINUSMA operations initially succeeded in reducing violence.

In 2015, while fatalities in Mali increased by a marginal 12% compared to the previous year, fatalities in Niger increased by an exponential 2484%, from 38 to 982. This spike corresponds with a series of attacks by Boko Haram, a jihadist terror organization, in Niger’s southeast. Of the 59 incidents of armed conflict in Niger in 2015, 55 were directly related to Boko Haram and occurred in the Diffa region (in the Lake Chad basin, near the border with northeastern Nigeria and western Chad); only one occurred in Niger’s western Tillabéri region in Liptako-Gourma, and just five of the 982 fatalities occurred outside the Diffa region. Niger’s striking 2015 spike in fatalities is thus unrelated to the conflict in Liptako-Gourma that is of interest to this paper. The “jihadist threats in [Niger’s] far western and eastern regions… are as
different as one would expect for places more than 1,000 kilometers apart and adjoining different countries.”

Per the prevailing historical narrative, Mali’s fourth Tuareg rebellion and the 2012 coup initially gave rise to the conflict in that country’s northern regions, which later moved southwards into Liptako-Gourma as jihadist groups replaced the MNLA as challengers of state authority. Figure 3 confirms the veracity of this historical narrative.

Figure 3 shows the number of fatalities per year in Liptako-Gourma, shared border area of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. For the purposes of this paper, Liptako-Gourma consists of the following administrative regions: Mopti, Tombouctou, Gao, and Ménaka in Mali; Tillabéri in Niger; and Sahel, Nord, Centre-Nord, and Est in Burkina Faso. Figure 3 shows that conflict in Liptako-Gourma has been persistent on the Malian side, though it worsened only in 2017. As measured by fatalities, through the end of 2016 conflict on the Nigerien and Burkinabè sides of Liptako-Gourma was practically nonexistent before worsening in 2017 and 2018. Overall, fatalities in each of the three countries’ constitutive Liptako-Gourma regions increased year-over-year from 2015 through 2020. In Mali and Niger, this yearly increase in fatalities is steady. Burkina Faso’s security situation— as measured by regional fatalities— began to deteriorate in 2016 and more than doubled in the two proceeding years. In 2019, however, fatalities in Burkinabè Liptako-Gourma increased by an exponential 746% compared to the previous year, from 174 to 1,472. These data are corroborated by reports in the same year suggesting Burkina Faso had “become the epicenter of the Sahel’s security crisis” without international support like

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Importantly, Figure 3 shows that 2020 was the deadliest year in the Central Sahel, a trend that seems likely to worsen into 2021 and beyond.

An analysis of the proportion of fatalities in each of the three countries’ constitutive Liptako-Gourma regions clearly confirms that the violence that began in Mali’s northern hinterland (Azawad) in 2012 shifted southwards. In 2012, fatalities from armed conflict in Malian Liptako-Gourma represented just 34% of total fatalities across the country. From 2014 through 2019, the proportion of fatalities in Malian Liptako-Gourma increased consistently, from 43% in 2014 to 92% in 2019. By 2020 this figure accounted for 89% of total fatalities in Mali.

Source: ACLED, 2021

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The conflict in Tillabéri, Niger’s sole constitutive region of Liptako-Gourma, began in 2017 with 62 fatalities compared to 15 the previous year. From 2017 through 2020, the proportion of fatalities in Tillabéri increased every year. In 2017, fatalities in the region represented 26% of total fatalities across the country; this figure increased to 61% in 2020.

The conflict in Burkinabè Liptako-Gourma began in 2016 with 33 fatalities, representing 45% of total fatalities across the country. This figure increased year-on-year: 69% in 2017, 83% in 2018, and 93% in 2019. By 2020, fatalities in Burkinabè Liptako-Gourma accounted for 92% of total fatalities across the country.

Map 3, made by The Economist using ACLED data, visualizes the shift in violence from northern Mali to Liptako-Gourma, the contemporary epicenter. Map 3 shows fatalities involving JNIM and ISGS, the primary belligerents, from January 2020 through February 2021. The concentration of jihadist violence in northern Burkina Faso— which at once lacks interveners and is distant from the more populous center— is striking.

Since 2017, then, Mali’s southeastern regions, Niger’s southwestern region, and Burkina Faso’s northern regions have increasingly been destabilized by jihadist attacks in the border triangle. In Mali, attacks in the northern five regions (Azawad) are now outnumbered by those in Mopti, the southeastern region bordering Niger and Burkina Faso. Presumably, Mali’s northern regions formerly overrun by AQIM fighters are now more secure and thus more conducive to the provision of services. These data confirm reporting and analysis that identify Liptako-Gourma as the epicenter of conflict in the Central Sahel.
Map 3: Jihadist violence in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

**Jihadist violence in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**

Jan 2020-Feb 2021, by group involved

- **Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM)**
  - Fatalities: 50

- **Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)**
  - Fatalities: 100

Sources: ACLED; French Ministry of Defence

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Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 show the share of civilian versus non-civilian fatalities. Non-civilians include national and international military and police personnel and members of jihadist groups and militias. Figure 4 shows the sharp increase in fatalities across all three countries beginning in 2016, when violence shifted southwards into Liptako-Gourma. Figure 5 shows the sharp increase in fatalities in Mali beginning in 2017, after violence appeared stagnant since 2014; this suggests that French and MINUSMA intervention has not succeeded in quelling violence after it shifted southwards into Liptako-Gourma beginning in 2017. Figure 6 shows an alarming spike in fatalities in Niger in 2015: as described in preceding pages, these fatalities are related to conflict with Boko Haram in the country’s southeast. In 2018, fatalities again increase year-over-year as Liptako-Gourma became the epicenter of the violence in the Central Sahel. Figure 7 shows the dramatic deterioration of Burkina Faso’s security environment in 2019, with a high proportion of civilian fatalities at the hands of jihadist groups (particularly ISGS, as seen in Map 2). Further exacerbating the humanitarian situation across the Central Sahel are the well-documented attacks on civilians instigated by state security forces.\textsuperscript{170} These attacks are invariably extrajudicial killings of ethnic minorities or semi-nomadic pastoralists in rural areas of Liptako-Gourma that are already plagued by jihadist violence.

Although a number of foreign actors have intervened military in support of the three Central Sahel countries, only France and MINUSMA have been involved in sustained combat operations or patrols.

Figure 4: Civilian vs. Non-Civilian Fatalities (Central Sahel)

Source: ACLED, 2021

Figure 5: Civilian vs. Non-Civilian Fatalities (Mali)

Source: ACLED, 2021
Figure 6: Civilian vs. Non-Civilian Fatalities (Niger)

Source: ACLED, 2021

Figure 7: Civilian vs. Non-Civilian Fatalities (Burkina Faso)

Source: ACLED, 2021
Figure 8 shows the number of armed conflict events instigated by foreign interveners, including France and MINUSMA, in each of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. In total there were 343 such events recorded between January 1, 2013 and December 31, 2020. These events fall under three categories: battles; strategic developments, and explosions/remote violence. In the same time period, ACLED data record 13 instances of violence against civilians perpetrated by these interveners, all of which are omitted from Figure 8. It is critically important to note that military operations by interveners that do not technically involve instances of armed conflict are not represented in ACLED data. Although ACLED data includes such strategic developments as diffusing improvised explosive devices (IEDs) planted by jihadist militants, these data do not include routine patrols by French or MINUSMA forces that strive, for example, to protect rural villages and deter jihadist attacks. Between July 1, 2013 and February 28, 2019, MINUSMA forces conducted 183,769 military patrols and 72,755 police patrols in Mali. These events are not counted by ACLED and therefore undercount the actual operations of France and especially MINUSMA.

Figure 8: Attacks Launched by Foreign Interveners

Source: ACLED, 2021

Figure 9: Fatalities Caused by Foreign Interveners

Source: ACLED, 2021
In Mali, events instigated by both France and MINUSMA are shown. In Niger and Burkina Faso, all events were instigated by French forces since MINUSMA is limited to operating only within Mali. Of the 39 total events in Burkina Faso, all occurred in the constitutive regions of Liptako-Gourma. 24 of these events (62%) were French drone strikes that did not involve ground combat operations. According to ACLED data, the U.S. military was only involved in three instances of armed conflict, all in indirect roles in support of France and MINUSMA. This confirms news reporting and press releases describing American involvement in the Sahel as indirect.172

Figure 9 shows the number of fatalities caused by France and MINUSMA in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Figure 9 is strikingly similar to Figure 8, which suggests that overall armed conflict events by foreign interveners have resulted in similar numbers of fatalities. Of the total 1,845 fatalities in all three countries between 2013 and 2020, 5 (0.3%) were recorded as being civilians accidentally killed in the blast radius of airstrikes targeting insurgents. The remainder of these fatalities constitute either jihadist militants or Tuareg insurgents. It is also interesting to note that MINUSMA forces are only responsible for 5 of these fatalities (0.3%), which points to the fact that they are engaged primarily in patrols and protection as opposed to offensive operations like French forces.

By and large, the ACLED data scrutinized in this chapter corroborate the historical narrative that conflict in the Central Sahel has both shifted southwards into Liptako-Gourma and increased in severity, as measured by instances of conflict and by fatalities. However, that “a steady growth in jihadi activity seems to thrive in the presence of foreign military operations” is

a great contradiction to conventional wisdom. While this paper’s hypothesis anticipated violence to decrease on the high end of the spectrum of stabilization, the case of Mali disproves this: despite the presence of nearly 19,000 foreign military personnel in a supportive role, insecurity in Mali has remained higher than in either of Niger or Burkina Faso.

On the other hand, the case of Burkina Faso lends credence to the hypothesis that there is more insecurity where there are fewer interveners. Therefore, while the presence of large-scale intervention does not ensure a lower level of insecurity, the absence of supportive interveners seems to correspond to a higher one. The empirical realities of the spectrum of stabilization are thus complicated, and fighting insecurity with security does not appear to be a comprehensive strategy for success in restoring peace and stability.

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Chapter III: Assessing Education Provision in the Central Sahel

“I hope for peace, so that all children can go back to school again. Going to school is good, because then you can become an adult and help others. I want to be a doctor and cure other people, poor people. As a doctor I could help many. I miss my village, my school. We had good teachers. I don’t know where they are today.”

— Burkinabé boy, age 14 [name withheld]174

This chapter will explore how participation in and access to education in the Central Sahel has changed over time as the security crisis and subsequent intervention have evolved since 2013. Before looking closely at the state of education in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, it is helpful to conduct a brief qualitative review of the level of government services in African countries.

Although a full description of government services across 54 remarkably diverse African countries is well beyond the scope of this paper, it is nonetheless possible to make certain general observations. One unfortunate reality is that in sub-Saharan Africa many countries “are still working to pave roads; provide electricity, water, and sanitation services; and build schools and health centers that reach rural populations or slum-dwellers in urban zones.”175 Indeed, the myth of low levels of service provision in Africa—despite its obscene oversimplification and generalization of complex states and systems of governance—has entered the collective conscience both within the continent and further afield.

Education in Context: Historical Considerations

In this context of low service provision, whether or not bona fide, the relative importance of education as a government-provided service increases considerably. According to Jaimie

Bleck, “In weak or low infrastructure states in sub-Saharan Africa, public education spreads a sense of national unity for learners, but education provision also gives the government credibility” precisely because it is allegiance-building.\textsuperscript{176} In other words, education provision creates loyalty not to a particular party or political figure but rather to a set of democratic principles, which ultimately “bonds citizens to formal channels of political expression.”\textsuperscript{177} Particularly in rural areas where governments experience more difficulty in providing services, the provision of education and of healthcare in particular are “likely to be very visible to citizens.”\textsuperscript{178}

That education builds and spreads a sense of national unity is well-documented by scholars and is not an idea limited to the African continent. According to Eric Hobsbawm, it is quite logical that “states would use the increasingly powerful machinery for communicating with their inhabitants, above all the primary schools, to spread the image and heritage of ‘nation’ and to inculcate attachment to it.”\textsuperscript{179} In Africa, however, states were not the only actors that stood to gain from increasing the provision of and access to education.

Throughout the 1990s during the periods of democratization of African states, African constituencies lobbied their new governments to improve education for their children. Newly-elected leaders sought to eliminate fees and erect more schools and, as a result, this period saw marked improvements of the education sector. Increasing access to schools, “particularly at the primary level, is arguably the most powerful domestic policy change in the majority of African

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 19.
countries since the transitions to democracy began.” While Africa’s citizens and democratic leaders ought to be credited for improving access to education, scholars also note the importance of supranational campaigns such as the Millennium Development Goals in helping double international aid for education across the continent between 2000 and 2004. All told, with more funding and political will, the majority of sub-Saharan states liberalized education sectors and increased their education spending by 6% year-on-year between 2000 and 2010. Between 2000 and 2008, gross primary school enrollment increased by 48% while non-primary (including pre-primary, secondary, and tertiary) enrollment increased by over 60%. Evidently, then, the democratization of sub-Saharan Africa brought about extraordinary improvements to education provision.

To contextualize more current data from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, an examination of the Sahelian education sector is in order. Education in Mali has been the subject of more scholarly study than in either Niger or Burkina Faso. Despite inevitable divergences and differences across the three countries’ respective education sectors, a detailed consideration of education in Mali is quite helpful in understanding the Nigerien and Burkinabé contexts, too.

As measured by conventional metrics, the state of education in Mali at independence in 1960 was dire, a reality that would foreshadow the difficulties of expanding access to and improving the quality of a service so fundamentally vital to a country and its citizens. Strikingly, in 1960 “only 7% of the Malian population was literate in the former colonial language as

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181 Jaimie Bleck notes that between this time period said aid rose from US$1.8 billion to US$3.4 billion.
compared to an African average of 39%.”\textsuperscript{183} In light of France’s notorious \textit{mission civilisatrice} employed in its African colonies, this alarmingly low literacy rate seems especially ironic.

Mobido Keita, Mali’s first president, made it a priority to expand access to education and during his tenure primary school enrollment increased to 24% in 1964.\textsuperscript{184} This effort, however, was not without controversy. Keita’s staunchly secular Marxist government inherited colonial hostility towards madrassas and Islamic education while still handing state subsidies to Catholic schools — this despite the vast majority of Mali’s population being Muslim. This slight to Islamic education (in a country with a rich pre-colonial history of Islamic scholarship, no less) would continue to fester well into the 21st century.

After Moussa Traoré toppled Keita’s government in a 1968 coup d’état, the former upended many of his predecessor’s gains in the education sector until a second coup put an end to his own dictatorship in 1991. Throughout Traoré’s 22 year-long dictatorship, gross primary school enrollment was stagnant and in 1991 was estimated at an abysmally low 26%, a mere two points higher than in 1964.\textsuperscript{185} Traoré also cut teacher salaries and censured civic education from public school curricula, moves that helped push approximately 1,000 (12.5%) of teachers to leave the education sector. Embracing structural adjustment programs imposed by international financial institutions, Traoré dramatically reduced health and education expenditure and ended a scheme that guaranteed state employment for secondary school graduates.\textsuperscript{186}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{183} Jaimie Bleck, \textit{Education and Empowered Citizenship in Mali} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 77.  \\
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 78.  \\
\end{flushright}
Mali’s immediate post-democratization educational expansion is at once emblematic of and more exceptional than the continental trend described above. Astoundingly, in the two decades since Mali’s first democratic election in 1991, primary school gross enrollment increased from 26% to 82%. Jaimie Bleck attributes this improvement in enrollment to three factors: (i) the liberalization of the education sector; (ii) increased government spending on education; and (iii) increased international aid. Liberalization greatly expanded access to primary education in particular. With the emergence of community schools, for-profit schools, secular Francophone schools, and religious schools, the public school monopoly ended. In fact, non-public primary schools became so ubiquitous that by 2007 they instructed nearly 40% of pupils. As increased education expenditure subsidized fees and increased access to schooling, international donor aid was essential in establishing community schools and madrassas in rural areas.

In Niger and Burkina Faso, democratization in the 1990s (albeit limited in the latter country while it was ruled by Blaise Compaoré) also resulted in the liberalization of the education sector. As a diversity of non-public school options emerged in Niger and Burkina Faso, both governments experienced difficulty in regulating and even counting the small schools that seemed to open constantly in urban and rural areas alike. Oftentimes these small schools operated as informal community businesses, increasing the difficulty with which cash-strapped

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188 Ibid.
regional and national governments could regulate them. This was especially the case in non-
urban hinterland zones where it had already been difficult to expand access to education.\textsuperscript{190}

Despite the pivotal role of liberalization in expanding access to education to more pupils, the opening-up of the sector nonetheless had certain negative effects in Mali. The emergence of non-public schools and the dramatic school choice afforded to parents increasingly caused Malians to identify public education as qualitatively inferior to non-public education.\textsuperscript{191} Indeed, since the 1990s states across the Sahel have prioritized erecting more schools to expand access to education over improving pedagogy and curricula.\textsuperscript{192} The emphasis on liberalization (in tandem with Traoré’s reforms) drew attention away from the civic curriculum and as a result, the state “failed to capture the unifying or nation-building benefits of education.”\textsuperscript{193}

These same processes (liberalization and the failure to reform civics curricula) together hindered the Malian government’s ability to nurture pupils with the goal of producing empowered democratic agents. Bleck defines empowered democratic agents as “citizens who are knowledgable about the political system, the range of potential political choices, and the avenues for expression in democratic institutions.”\textsuperscript{194} Thus, the lack of success in producing empowered democratic agents is an example of the Malian government “forfeiting the allegiance building that can be reaped from public goods provision.”\textsuperscript{195} Not only does this represent a failure on the part of the national government to seize an opportunity to amass credibility and longterm civic

\textsuperscript{190} \textsuperscript{190}Étienne Gérard, “Logiques sociales et enjeux de scolarisation en Afrique: Réflexions sur des cas d’écoles maliens et burkinabè,” \textit{Politique africaine} 76, no. 4 (1999): 158, \url{https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.076.0153}.

\textsuperscript{191} \textsuperscript{191}Jaimie Bleck, \textit{Education and Empowered Citizenship in Mali} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 73.

\textsuperscript{192} \textsuperscript{192}Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{193} \textsuperscript{193}Ibid., 87.

\textsuperscript{194} \textsuperscript{194}Ibid. 6.

\textsuperscript{195} \textsuperscript{195}Ibid., 20.
engagement; it also risks increasing state illegitimacy as a key social service becomes less visibly tied to the state. Ultimately, the negative impacts associated with the liberalization of the education sector must be measured against the importance of bringing more children into the education system.

As described in Chapter II, the failure on the part of Central Sahel governments to protect and provide services to citizens has engendered varying degrees of state illegitimacy, which in turn encourage disenfranchised citizens to join violent extremist organizations. In Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the failure to ensure the safe and stable conditions requisite for education provision is emblematic of weak governing institutions. Jaimie Bleck argues that “weak governments are allowed to underperform precisely because of the lack of pressure from citizens and civil society on these institutions.” Following this logic, empowered democratic agents should be better able to exert pressure on their governments to improve governance and service provision— precisely because such people are more knowledgable of political realities and avenues for political expression. This would have great potential to improve security, too. Moreover, given the allegiance building nature of education, improved service provision would have the potential to bolster governments’ actual sovereignty and improve security.

Throughout their histories as independent states, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have seen periods of improvement and deterioration of their education provision as a result of a number of different factors— including government priorities, expenditures, and foreign aid. Overall, however, all three countries can be said to have had weak education provision well before the security crisis in Liptako-Gourma. Figure 10 shows that literacy rates among youth essentially

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doubled between the beginning of democratization in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. Literacy rates in 2017—the most recent year in which data are available for this demographic in all three countries—show that in spite of considerable progress, access to education is still low: in Niger for example, nearly 60% of youth were not literate.

Recent public opinion data is helpful in gaining a baseline understanding citizens’ perception of social services. Afrobarometer is a non-partisan pan-African research organization that conducts public opinion surveys. In their 2020 survey in Mali,197 14.6% of respondents identified education as the single most important issue the government ought to address, only

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197 Afrobarometer surveyed Malians between March and April of 2020, before the military-led coup d’état that ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita but after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
behind crime and insecurity, which 23.8% of respondents identified as the most important issue.\textsuperscript{198} Fully 87.3% of respondents disapproved of the government’s overall handling of education; no other issue area received a disapproval rating higher than 80%. In Afrobarometer’s 2019 survey in Burkina Faso, only 2.4% of respondents identified education as the single most important issue the government ought to focus on, while 8.5% of respondents identified education as the second most important issue.\textsuperscript{199} Afrobarometer’s most recent survey in Niger was conducted in 2015 but did not probe public opinion on education.\textsuperscript{200}

Figures 11 through 15 provide a quantitative synopsis of a number of key education sector metrics in each of the three Central Sahel countries. These figures use the most recent data available from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics.\textsuperscript{201}

Figures 11 and 12 show the number of children out of primary and secondary school respectively, across all three countries. These data show that even before 2012, when insecurity worsened first in Mali, all three countries had poor education provision. Indeed, in 2011 each of the three countries had well over 1 million children out of school (primary and secondary school combined); in Niger this statistic neared 2.5 million. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) notes that the consequences of the first wave of violence after 2012 were first limited to Mali’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{198} “Résumé Des Résultats: Enquête Afrobaromètre Round 8 Au Mali, 2020” (Afrobarometer, 2020), \url{https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/resume_des_resultats-mali-afrobarometer_round_8-21oct20_0.pdf}.
\item \textsuperscript{199} “Résumé Des Résultats: Enquête Afrobaromètre Round 8 Au Burkina Faso, 2019” (Afrobarometer, 2019), \url{https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/resume_des_resultats-afrobarometer_round_8-au_burkina_faso-v2-17dec2020_0.pdf}.
\end{itemize}
Figure 11: Pupils Out of Primary School

Source: UNESCO, 2021

Figure 12: Pupils Out of Secondary School

Source: UNESCO, 2021
north, especially in terms of the “the interruption and/or disruption of learning activities.”\textsuperscript{202} As described in Chapter II, however, in the years after 2012 conflict both worsened and shifted southwards towards Mali’s population centers and into Niger and Burkina Faso. Based solely off the data presented in Figures 11 and 12, the number of pupils out of primary and secondary school do not seem to increase as significantly as might be expected, given the deteriorating security situation. Even still, in Figure 11, there are observable increases in the number of Malian and Nigerien pupils out of primary school after 2017, the same year that violence began shifting southwards. Meanwhile, in Burkina Faso the number of pupils out of primary school decreased between 2017 and 2018. Evidently further data analysis and historical contextualization are necessary to paint a clearer picture of education provision in the Central Sahel.

Figure 13 shows net primary school enrollment as a percentage of the primary school-age population. Because these data reflect proportions of the primary school-age population as opposed to raw numbers (like those shown in Figure 11), observations about enrollment can be made more responsibly. Most striking is Burkina Faso’s steady increase in primary school enrollment from 2011 through 2018, with a 5% increase in 2016 compared to the previous year. In 2019, primary school enrollment in Burkina Faso decreased slightly, the same year conflict worsened in that country, as described in Chapter II. In Niger, which has the lowest literacy right

Figure 13: Net Primary School Enrollment (%)

Source: UNESCO, 2021

Figure 14: Net Secondary School Enrollment (%)

Source: UNESCO, 2021
and the most children out of school (per Figures 10, 11, and 12), primary school enrollment increased steadily between 2011 and 2017. In 2019, however, enrollment fell 7% compared to 2017 numbers\textsuperscript{203} to the lowest level since 2011. In 2019, primary school enrollment in Niger was fully 19% lower than in Burkina Faso. Worsening insecurity may be at least partially responsible for the drop in Nigerien primary school enrollment in 2019. Meanwhile, primary school enrollment in Mali fell by nearly 10% from 2011 to 2015. 2013, the year with the sharpest drop, also marked the beginning of French and MINUSMA intervention as a result of rising violence.

Figure 14 shows net secondary school enrollment as a percentage of the secondary school-age population. Though these data are incomplete, several trends can nonetheless be observed. Niger again has the lowest enrollment and in 2017 its rates were nearly 10% lower than in both Mali and Burkina Faso. Even so, by 2017 secondary school enrollment was 8.5 points higher than in 2011, suggesting a steady improvement. In Burkina Faso, net enrollment increased by nearly 12% from 2011 to 2018, with steady gains each year. Secondary school enrollment in Mali fluctuated in the same period but net rates only dropped by 2% from 2011 to 2019.

Figures 15 shows government expenditure on education as a percentage of total expenditure. Interestingly, in 2011 education expenditure in all three countries represented between 18.3% and 20.1% of total expenditure. In the following years, education expenditure fluctuated in all three countries, with marginal net changes between 2011 and 2018. In the context of proportions of total government expenditure, however, a change of even 1 percentage point represents significant amounts of monies.

\textsuperscript{203} Nigerien primary school enrollment data for 2018 are not available.
Though official statistics from UNESCO, the data presented in Figures 10 through 15 in and of themselves cannot represent the actualities of education provision in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. In the case of enrollment rates, for instance, that children may have been recorded as enrolled for official statistical purposes says nothing of the empirical realities of violence that may prevent attendance and participation in education. The following section will consider reporting and analysis largely informed by local sources in order to contextualize these data and more accurately measure education provision and how it is affected by stabilization.
Assessing Education Provision Amid Insecurity and Stabilization

Since independence, the education sector in Central Sahel countries—and hundreds of thousands of children along with it—has been at the mercy of political leadership and appropriated expenditure, among other things. More recently, persistent insecurity since 2013 has wreaked its own havoc on education in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso: inter-communal and jihadist violence have forced school closures; schools and education professionals have been the target of horrific attacks; and children displaced by violence have faced added barriers to education. This section will assess how education has been affected by insecurity and whether stabilization has improved education provision.

Unfortunately, Central Sahel governments and ministries of education do not readily release data on school closures as a result of insecurity, nor do foreign interveners seem to track how their stabilization operations might affect education provision. To address these key points and this paper’s hypothesis, it is necessary to rely on contemporary reporting and analysis from non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, and news media.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the Covid-19 pandemic and the substantial complexity it has added to any contemporary consideration of the education sector. Per The Economist’s crunching of UNESCO data, “schools in sub-Saharan Africa shut for an average of 23 weeks.” Meanwhile, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) maintains that the reporting of attacks against education in the Central Sahel “declined between

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March and May 2020 when schools were closed” due to the pandemic. Generally speaking, education-related data collected after March 2020 are skewed as a result of school closures, travel restrictions, and other public health measures that have prevented comprehensive monitoring by NGOs, UN agencies, and regional and national governments.

In a January 2020 report, UNICEF (formerly known as the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund) ominously warned that “Across the Central Sahel, attacks and threats on schools and against teachers and students are becoming more and more common, which further worsens the situation of children.” This disturbing assertion is corroborated by reports from such groups as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and GCPEA, and from a host of international and local news organizations. It is critical to understand the violent nature of attacks against education before examining the relevant quantitative data.

Across Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, attacks are launched by “armed groups who oppose state-administered, French-language education” in public primary and secondary schools. JNIM, ISGS, and their affiliates are the primary assailants behind attacks on schools; even when these groups do not claim responsibility their involvement is verifiable independently, oftentimes by photographic evidence and video footage shared on social media.

Although the precise circumstances of attacks against schools inevitably vary, certain trends have become typical of jihadist assaults on schools throughout the Central Sahel. By and
large, assailants target public schools “by burning and looting educational facilities and threatening, abducting, or killing teachers.”\textsuperscript{209} A May 2020 report by HRW based on interviews\textsuperscript{210} with 177 current or former students, teachers, school administrators, and parents in Burkina Faso (all of whom were either survivors or witnesses) provides chilling details of attacks on schools. Attacks would begin with the arrival of men on motorcycles, oftentimes riding two or three per vehicle. The men were “typically armed with Kalashnikov military assault weapons” and wore “turbans with their faces covered.”\textsuperscript{211} The men often “gave speeches before, during, and after their attacks,” in which they described themselves as jihadists and announced their opposition to “‘French education.’”\textsuperscript{212} Attacks could generally be categorized as either raids or rampages. Raids occurred when “armed Islamist groups ordered schools’ closure, often firing in the air to intimidate teachers and students.”\textsuperscript{213} In rampages, jihadists would set fire to desks, school supplies, and entire buildings; shoot teachers and administrators; and loot cafeterias and computer labs. Interview subjects described limited cases of kidnappings of students and teachers, almost always by motorcycle.\textsuperscript{214} Teachers and principals (\textit{directeurs} of primary schools and \textit{proviseurs} of secondary schools) have been subjected to verbal and physical abuse, and to

\textsuperscript{209} “Supporting Safe Education in the Central Sahel” (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, September 2020), \url{https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/Central-Sahel-Paper-English.pdf}.

\textsuperscript{210} HRW conducted interviews in Burkina Faso in January and February of 2020. Interview subjects included current or former residents of all four Burkinabè regions in this paper’s definition of Liptako-Gourma (as described in Chapter II): Nord, Centre-Nord, Sahel, and Est.

\textsuperscript{211} “‘Their War against Education’: Armed Group Attacks on Teachers, Students, and Schools in Burkina Faso” (Human Rights Watch, 2020), 27, \url{https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/05/26/their-war-against-education/armed-group-attacks-teachers-students-and-schools}.

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 25. School-related kidnappings in the Central Sahel have generally not mirrored the appalling scale of Boko Haram kidnappings of schoolgirls in Nigeria and northern Cameroon.
targeted killings in schools and in their homes.215 There are also accounts of beheadings and summary executions in classrooms and schoolyards. Fortunately, although “attacks often occurred when students were in class… students were not typically the targets.”216 While these details were obtained in interviews with survivors and witnesses in Burkina Faso, other reporting and analysis indicates that attacks on schools in Mali and Niger are not dissimilar.217

The preceding summary of the horrific nature of attacks on schools is essential in contextualizing comparatively emotionless quantitive data. Data from the ACLED dataset scrutinized in Chapter II also shed light on attacks on education. Figure 16 shows the number of attacks against schools in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso from 2012 through 2020.218 Beyond their inherent consideration of innumerable human stories in the aggregate, these data are imperfect for at least two reasons: first, ACLED tracks instances of armed conflict generally and not exclusively those against education; and second, the 2020 numbers are likely underrepresented due to the ramifications of Covid-19 described in preceding paragraphs. In its own tally, GCPEA disclosed “430 reported incidents of attacks on education in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger” between 2015 and 2019”219 versus the 179 shown in Figure 16. Despite the imperfect nature of these ACLED data, Figure 16 nonetheless provides an illuminating snapshot of education amid insecurity in the Central Sahel.

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215 Ibid., 29.
217 Ibid.
218 These data represent instances of armed conflict that contain the term ‘school’ in the notes column of the ACLED dataset. A thorough manual review was conducted of each such instance of armed conflict to verify that a school was indeed the target of an attack.
Of the 179 attacks on schools shown in Figure 16, 178 (99%) are attributable to either JNIM, ISGS, their affiliates, or unidentified armed groups presumed to correspond with one of the aforementioned three categories of assailants. This corroborates reporting from HRW, UNICEF, and GCPEA that identify JNIM and ISGS as the assailants behind attacks on schools. Figure 18 also makes abundantly clear that frequent attacks on schools only began in 2017, the same year that—as described in the analysis of ACLED data in Chapter II—saw marked increases of incidents of conflict in the Central Sahel. Also striking is the number of attacks on schools in Burkina Faso, which in 2020 experienced fully four times as many such attacks as either Mali or Niger. The high incidence of attacks on schools in Burkina Faso, where there is no supportive intervention, suggests that the lack of foreign interveners helps create a security environment more conducive to attacks on schools. Per this logic, it should follow that Mali
(where there is the largest-scale intervention) would have considerably fewer attacks on schools than Niger. As seen in Figure 16, however, this is not the case: in 2020 Mali experienced more attacks on schools than Niger and 2019 numbers were similar.

Remarkably, of the 179 attacks on schools shown in Figure 16, only 14 (7.8%) resulted in documented fatalities. Furthermore, those 14 deadly attacks on schools resulted in a total of 44 fatalities. Though it is possible that fatalities from attacks on schools are undercounted in ACLED data, this is unlikely: instances of armed conflict associated with the same perpetrators (JNIM, ISGS, affiliates, and unidentified groups presumed to be affiliated with the first two) but not involving schools more frequently caused deaths. Furthermore, the accounts of attacks on schools discussed in preceding paragraphs noted that adult teachers and administrators, not students, were the primary targets of jihadists. Because there tend to be fewer adults in schools than children, and given that the jihadists mostly avoided killing children, it seems plausible that ACLED data indicate that relatively few deaths are associated with attacks on schools.

Table 3 shows the percentage of the attacks on schools from Figure 16 that occurred in each Central Sahel country’s constitutive regions of Liptako-Gourma, where conflict has been concentrated since as early as 2017. Every year from 2017 through 2020, at least 60% of attacks on schools in each country occurred in the regions in question. In Mali, the high share of attacks on schools in the constitutive Liptako-Gourma regions is especially troubling given the presence of MINUSMA, French, and EU troops in each of Gao, Mopti, Ménaka, and Tombouctou. Therefore, the high incidence of attacks on schools in regions with large-scale intervention suggests that the presence of interveners does not deter jihadist attacks on schools. According to

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220 As described in Chapter II, these include: Gao, Mopti, Ménaka, and Tombouctou in Mali; Tillabéri in Niger; and Sahel, Nord, Centre-Nord, and Est in Burkina Faso.

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GCPEA, in Niger between 2018 and 2019, “reports of attacks on education… shifted geographically from the eastern Lake Chad basin to western Tillabéri and Tahoua regions at the borders of Mali and Burkina Faso.” As shown in Table 3, this reporting is corroborated by the increase in the share of attacks on schools in Tillabéri (Niger’s sole constitutive Liptako-Gourma region) from 60% in 2018 to 92% in 2019. In Burkina Faso, the high proportion of attacks on schools in Liptako-Gourma regions is unsurprising given the high incidence of total attacks and the lack of supportive intervention.

Ultimately, attacks on schools, “the terror they generated, and worsening insecurity have resulted in a cascade of school closures” across the Central Sahel, “undermining students’ right to education.” According to UNICEF’s January 2020 report, in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso “the number of schools closed or non-operational increased from 512 in April 2017 to 3,315 schools in December 2019,” a six-fold increase. These numbers represent “school closures due

Table 3: Percentage of Attacks on Schools that Occurred in Liptako-Gourma Regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mali</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Burkina Faso</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(no attacks on schools)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


to violence.” By January 2020, over 8 million Malian, Nigerien, and Burkinabè children between the ages of six and fourteen were out of school—nearly “55 per cent of children in this age group.”

Considering school closure data in conjunction with the particular scale of intervention enables a test of this paper’s hypothesis: that different scales of intervention in the Central Sahel have differing effects on education provision. Mali and Burkina Faso—two countries for which school closure data are available—are at opposite points on the spectrum of stabilization, with the largest- and the smallest-scale interventions respectively. This paper’s hypothesis would expect (i) Mali to have fewer school closures linked to insecurity because the large-scale intervention should both improve the security environment and deter jihadist attacks; and (ii) Burkina Faso to have more school closures linked to insecurity because the lack of intervention would not improve the security environment or deter jihadist attacks.

An April 2019 UNICEF statement attributable to its spokesperson in Geneva, Christophe Boulierac, includes school closure data in Mopti, one of Mali’s four constitutive Liptako-Gourma regions. Per the statement, “At the end of March 2019, 525 schools were closed in the region of Mopti (out of 866 schools closed in the country).” These 525 school closures represent “Nearly a third of all schools in the Mopti region” and “are linked to the overall deterioration of the security situation.” These school closures are surprising given the large-scale intervention

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225 Ibid.
227 Ibid.
in Mali and the presence of interveners in Mopti specifically. Although France’s Operation Barkhane does not maintain a base in Mopti, MINUSMA has two outposts in the region: one in the eponymous regional capital and the other in Douentza. Evidently, the MINUSMA presence in Mopti has been insufficient both in improving the security environment such that schools could remain open, and in deterring the jihadist threat. Thus, the case of school closures in Mali seems to disprove this paper’s hypothesis because the large-scale of intervention was unsuccessful either in improving the security environment or deterring jihadist attacks.

A May 2020 HRW report includes pre-pandemic school closure data from Burkina Faso’s Ministry of National Education. Per the report, “As of March 10, 2020, the education ministry reported that 2,512 schools were closed due to insecurity.” These closures represent “a surge of more than 1,000 [school closures] since the end of the previous academic year” in 2019 and affect “349,909 students and 11,219 teachers.” This greater than two-fold increase in school closures from the end of the 2019 academic year to March 2020 suggests that the number of attacks in Burkina Faso also increased considerably in the same time period. However, as seen in Figure 2 (Instances of Conflict in the Central Sahel), the number of attacks in Burkina Faso only increased from 728 in 2019 to 775 in 2020. It is likely that the Covid-19 pandemic reduced the reporting of attacks in the second half of 2020.

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230 “‘Their War against Education’: Armed Group Attacks on Teachers, Students, and Schools in Burkina Faso” (Human Rights Watch, 2020), 23, https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/05/26/their-war-against-education/armed-group-attacks-teachers-students-and-schools. According to HRW, the 2,512 school closures as of March 10, 2020 represented 13% of Burkinabé schools (including preschools and primary and secondary schools), which “closed due to attacks or insecurity prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, which [itself] resulted in the closure of all schools from mid-March.”

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Given the lack of intervention in Burkina Faso, these school closure data and the surge in closures seen in 2020 are in line with this paper’s hypothesis. The lack of supportive intervention seems to have enabled a deterioration of the security environment, and jihadist attacks and threats were not deterred. Burkina Faso has long faced “major challenges to ensuring education for all children, due to factors such as poverty, poor school infrastructure, poor access, low completion rates, and insufficient numbers of trained teachers, particularly in rural areas.”

Recent insecurity and the lack of thoughtful intervention have undeniably compounded those preexisting challenges and created new ones, to the peril of hundreds of thousands of children.

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Chapter IV: Conclusion

This paper was inspired by a fundamental desire to understand how supportive military intervention affects the citizens of the countries interveners seek to stabilize. Chapter I introduced the spectrum of stabilization, with three different scales of intervention across Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. It also included a literature review of key theories and paradigms of foreign military intervention and stabilization on the African continent; the epistemological shift in which intervention become understood to bolster sovereignty rather than infringe it; and service provision in areas characterized by fragility and difficult political geography.

Chapter II traced the roots of armed conflict in the central Sahel, outlined key belligerents, and detailed the size and scope of the primary foreign interveners in order to substantiate the spectrum of stabilization. Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) were used to examine the evolution of insecurity and to determine to what extent the three scales of intervention improved the security environment from 2013 through 2020. Chapter III included a history of education provision in the Central Sahel and described the horrifying attacks on schools that have increased in frequency since 2017.

Prior to reviewing this paper’s findings, it is imperative to acknowledge the imperfections and omissions of the data that were subject to analysis and discussion. Though replete with invaluable information, the ACLED dataset on instances of armed conflict in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso from 2012 through 2020 is not exhaustive. In a normal year, it is hardly possible to track the precise circumstances of every instance of armed conflict across three vast, diverse countries. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 likely resulted in skewed data, specifically an undercount of instances of conflict and related fatalities. That 2020 was already
the deadliest year in the central Sahel (as measured by fatalities caused by armed conflict) only serves to make this recognition more stark.

In addition to the gaps in the quantitative data examined, it is essential to be aware of their omissions. Each instance of armed conflict visualized in a graph, each fatality listed, each school closure reported—they are all associated with innumerable stories and experiences of individual people, the majority of which go untold. Especially when political science seeks to address inordinately complex international issues, the consideration of quantitative data—despite their necessity in policy considerations—cannot lead to abstraction or divorce from the individual human lives at stake. For brevity’s sake this paper may have also inadvertently portrayed belligerents, interveners, and other actors as more monolithic than actually true.

Finally, because this paper sought to evaluate the effects of stabilization in the Central Sahel on education in Central Sahel countries, it was overwhelming focused on particulars in the three countries in question. In practice, however, political and security realities in an increasingly interconnected world are not only affected by policies and events that originate within the borders of the countries in question. The death of Chad’s president, Idriss Déby, at the hands of rebels on April 20, 2021, is a case in point:232 although Mali’s Mopti region is some 2,000 kilometers away from N’Djamena, the future of Chadian soldiers assigned to G5 Sahel Joint Force patrols in Mopti may be in limbo, potentially jeopardizing the security environment there.233 As evidenced by Déby’s death but also by the August 2020 coup d’état in Mali and the


March 2021 attempted coup in Niger, the political, governance, and security environments in the Central Sahel are as dynamic as they are combustible.

**Summary of Findings**

This paper hypothesized that stabilization operations in the Central Sahel would ultimately improve education provision amid insecurity by reducing attacks on schools and school closures. This hypothesis was tested by comparing the realities of insecurity and education against a spectrum of stabilization, with three distinct scales of intervention across each of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Ultimately, this paper’s findings are nuanced and varied.

In Mali, large-scale intervention has not been successful in reducing insecurity, as measured by instances of armed conflict and fatalities. In Burkina Faso, however, the absence of intervention does seem to correspond with high levels of insecurity. Therefore, while the presence of large-scale intervention does not ensure a lower level of insecurity, the absence of supportive interveners does seem to correspond to a higher one.

The general effects of intervention on insecurity summarized above also translate into the realm of education. With no intervention and a high level of insecurity, Burkina Faso suffered more attacks on schools than either of Niger or Mali, and in 2020 it suffered fully four times as many such attacks as Mali. The poor security environment enabled by the lack of intervention in Burkina Faso also meant that the country suffered a high incidence of school closures. Though in 2019 and 2020 Mali suffered 75% fewer attacks on schools than Burkina Faso (perhaps in part because of large-scale intervention), it still experienced significant school closures in the Mopti region. Meanwhile, Niger suffered a similar number of attacks on schools as Mali even though
the scale of intervention in the former is less than one tenth of the scale of intervention in the latter.234

Overall, given the data on school attacks and closures in Mali, large-scale intervention does not seem to guarantee better outcomes for education provision amid instability. Yet the case of Burkina Faso illustrates that the absence of intervention amid instability is in fact correlated with poorer education provision. In the end, applying the logic of the spectrum of stabilization to the case of education provision in the Central Sahel has led to mixed findings. To improve the potential of stabilization to bolster education provision, the situation of children out of school deserves more attention.

*When Schools Close: The Wide-Ranging Effects of Insecurity on Children*

According to UNICEF, the protracted and interrelated nature of the crises in the Central Sahel affects “all aspects of children’s lives – jeopardizing children’s right to safety, protection, wellbeing, health and education.”235 As described in Chapters II and III, insecurity has prevented hundreds of thousands of Malian, Nigerien, and Burkinabè children from attending school. But even when schools reopen and in other regions relatively unaffected by violence, “Attacks have caused extensive fear-induced withdrawals from schools, as well as longterm psychosocial consequences” for those students who themselves witness horrific violence and survive attacks.236 Indeed, the consequences of school closures and poor access to education are innumerable and do not end in the classroom.

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234 See Table 2: Foreign Military Forces in the Central Sahel.
According to HRW, when schools close in the Central Sahel children often begin work, “Whether for survival, to support their families, or to afford enrollment in new schools.”\textsuperscript{237} It is not uncommon for children whose schools closed to work “as street vendors, domestic workers, brick-makers, or in gold mines.”\textsuperscript{238} In any sociopolitical or geographic context, "Rates of child marriage, economic exploitation or unsafe migration can increase during high levels of insecurity as…survival strategies.”\textsuperscript{239} School closures introduce unknown dangers into children’s lives while simultaneously depriving them of the opportunities presented by education.

Unfortunately, “girls are at even higher risk for sexual violence, exploitation, and early pregnancies” when out of school.\textsuperscript{240} Child marriage is a particularly poignant issue in the Central Sahel. A December 2020 report from UNICEF states that Niger is home to 4.9 million child brides, as compared to 2.1 million in Mali and 0.8 million in Burkina Faso.\textsuperscript{241} Despite accounting for only 16% of the Sahel’s population,\textsuperscript{242} Niger is home to 23% of child brides in the Sahel. According to GCPEA, attacks on schools and their secondary and tertiary consequences “have differentiated impacts on women and girls, including forced marriage, forced pregnancy due to

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., 83.
\textsuperscript{238} “’Their War against Education’: Armed Group Attacks on Teachers, Students, and Schools in Burkina Faso” (Human Rights Watch, 2020), 83, https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/05/26/their-war-against-education/armed-group-attacks-teachers-students-and-schools.
\textsuperscript{240} “’Their War against Education’: Armed Group Attacks on Teachers, Students, and Schools in Burkina Faso” (Human Rights Watch, 2020), 85, https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/05/26/their-war-against-education/armed-group-attacks-teachers-students-and-schools.
\textsuperscript{242} In this report, UNICEF includes Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Sudan, Chad, Senegal, Eritrea, and Mauritania in its definition of the Sahel.
rape and premature pregnancy, and stigma which reduce the likelihood of girls returning to school after an attack.”

Although this paper has demonstrated that large-scale supportive intervention in the Central Sahel does not necessarily lead to improved education provision amid insecurity, the specific actions and policies of intervention are, evidently, quite important. The GCPEA notes that “while attacks on education have subsided during summer holidays in several parts of the region, armed groups re-escalated campaigns against education at the beginning of the new school year.” Attacks following la rentrée scolaire may aim to send a more powerful message to students, teachers, and families, but the “restocked food stores and provisions” in school cafeterias may also “render them vulnerable to attacks.” It would follow that increased patrols near schools upon the resumption of classes should deter attacks. Such operations could conceivably be coordinated fairly easily by France and MINUSMA.

Destabilizing Conceptions of Stabilization

What is stabilization? In the contexts of international relations and international security, neither scholars nor practitioners have agreed on a single definition. Stabilization is similar to peacekeeping— and indeed it may be conducted by UN peacekeepers, as in the case of MINUSMA— but they are not one and the same, and scholars seem to struggle to distinguish the two. Ultimately, stabilization is perhaps more easily defined by its objectives than by its features or composition.

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244 Ibid.
245 Ibid.
In Chapter I, this paper identifies two primary objectives of stabilization: (i) to reduce the causes of underdevelopment or ‘fragility’ and (ii) to bolster state legitimacy, capacity, and de facto sovereignty, oftentimes by (re)establishing territorial control. Stabilization is thought at least in theory to be mutually beneficial to both weak states (the intervened) and foreign powers and multilateral institutions (the interveners): weak states receive aid in restoring order and projecting power while foreign powers attempt to contain fragility before it further spreads and destabilizes their own interests.

Though conceptually helpful, this preliminary theoretical framework is oftentimes complicated by on-the-ground realities of stabilization operations. In practice, the status quo of stabilization is comfortable in ambiguity; perhaps this is one reason why such operations become heavily militarized when administered by defense officials in-country and overseen by distant policymakers with few criteria or benchmarks with which to judge outcomes. The UN, for instance, has never defined stabilization despite being the foremost forum for international cooperation and despite being itself a practitioner of such operations.

A good starting place would be to write an internationally-recognized definition of stabilization and to establish norms to eschew mandates so all-encompassing that stabilization operations are doomed never to achieve all of their burdensome objectives.

Stabilization operations have also been replete with inconsistencies as a result of overzealous mandates, imprecise definitions, or other ambiguities. With MINUSMA’s mandate, for example, the “force-driven conception of stabilisation appears somewhat at odds with the more development-focused articulation” and “fails to account for the UN missions that are not
called stabilisation missions but which nonetheless use robust force.”

Although MINUSMA’s authorizing resolution does charge it with certain developmental and governance tasks such as helping the Malian government deliver services, the “all necessary means” clause discussed in Chapter II at once furthers the considerable ambiguity of the mission and contributes to the implicit understanding that stabilization is a chiefly military endeavor.

That said, stabilization has also been understood “as a positive transition from active peacekeeping towards state reconstruction and development,” which seek to reduce fragility and are less singularly-focused on security. With regards to UN stabilization operations, member states have differing standpoints on the degree to which missions should be militarized: “While no member state seems to think that the UN should directly engage in counterterrorism (CT) operations, some have nonetheless suggested that the context [of MINUSMA] calls for a more robust stabilization posture.”

In the central Sahel and in Africa more broadly, conceptions and realities of stabilization have been manifestly security-centric. Key international actors regularly pay lip service to ‘cooler’, non-security forms of stabilization but promptly fail to act on these supposed priority areas. The March 2021 “Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali” noted that Malian women’s groups in particular have stressed the “urgent need to address the issue of education as a prerequisite for lasting peace.” For its part, the French Ministry for Europe and 

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247 Ibid.


Foreign Affairs acknowledges that the “terrorist threat is intrinsically linked to the economic, educational, health and institutional challenges facing [the Central Sahel].” Yet the principal organizations carrying out stabilization on behalf of the UN and the French government are MINUSMA and Operation Barkhane respectively, both military-dominated entities.

France’s role in the Sahel must also be scrutinized. That it is so actively involved in the security of Central Sahel countries is not only a function of self-interest in preventing the spread of fragility; it is also a vestige of decades of colonial rule. According to Crawford Young, “The political, cultural, economic, and military connection Paris has maintained with the erstwhile bloc africain de l’empire has been frequently tutelary, often intrusive, and sometimes overtly interventionist.”

Ironically, despite being at once tutelary, intrusive, and overtly interventionist, Operation Barkhane (and MINUSMA in its own right) is entirely consensual—and purportedly essential to helping the Malian government (re)establish territorial control of hinterland regions.

As Chapter II’s analysis of ACLED data made clear, responding to insecurity in the Central Sahel with more security (in the form of military intervention) did not ameliorate the insecurity crisis. On the contrary, as measured by instances of armed conflict and the number of fatalities, violence actually increased year-over-year from 2012 through 2020.

Thus, to address insecurity in actuality, stabilization should invest more heavily in ‘cooler’, non-security programs. Such programs would invariably require longterm policies and investments that might not pay dividends in the near future. As such, political leaders of


countries with a history of stabilization—for instance France and the United States—may be loth to focus on softer issue areas like education and healthcare that would not directly benefit their own citizens, but rather those of a faraway country.

When ‘softer’ or ‘cooler’ stabilization is pursued, however, discussion is often centered on governance, one of several constitutive crises in the Central Sahel’s “polygon of crises.” Alex Thurston asserts that “Sahelian governments, Western governments, think tanks, NGOs and citizens’ movements, journalists, and academics are all quick to identify ‘good governance’ as the ultimate solution to the [Sahel’s] multi-layered conflicts.” Yet “discourse about governance remains hollow” primarily due to financing and neoliberal economic policies. Citing data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Thurston writes that “whereas there are 89 civil servants per 1,000 inhabitants in France, in Burkina Faso the number of civil servants per 1,000 inhabitants is just 8, in Mali it is 6, and in Niger, 3.” Moreover, “enduring neoliberal economic frameworks create a paradox where Sahelian states are meant to be… bureaucratically lean and budgetarily efficient, but are simultaneously meant to be (by the logic of counterinsurgency thinking and ‘governance talk’) hyper-present in everyday life.”

Given its de facto emphasis on security and its meager results in the Central Sahel, the existing framework of stabilization might benefit from a realignment of strategic and empirical priorities. By challenging conventional wisdom and destabilizing conceptions of stabilization,

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253 Ibid.
254 Ibid.
255 Ibid.
perhaps a new framework for international support—one that veritably improves services—could lead to more peace, prosperity, and opportunity in the central Sahel.

**Great Power Competition and Prospects for ‘Cooler’ Stabilization**

The world’s demographics are changing. The World Bank estimates that “1 in 4 people will be Sub-Saharan African in 2050, whereas the ratio was 1 in 13 in 1960.” As a result, countries outside Africa are becoming more and more invested in the continent in anticipation of its increased prominence. According to Judd Devermont, ‘Western’ countries in particular believe that Africa is increasingly important to a wide range of economic, security, and political goals. And it is not just China; foreign governments have opened more than 150 new embassies in Africa since 2010, and at least 65 countries have increased their trade with the region between 2010 and 2017. Many of Africa’s partners have opened military bases in the Sahel, Horn of Africa, and on the Indian Ocean.

The question of China in Africa has been a concern for U.S. policymakers especially, a trend that seems likely to increase as tensions rise on such issues as human rights, currency manipulation, the South China Sea, and Taiwan. Indeed, China’s involvement on the continent has grown considerably in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The AU’s $200 million headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—construction for which began in 2009—was funded entirely by China. The country’s military footprint on the continent has expanded, too. In December 2008, the People’s Liberation Army Navy began participating in anti-piracy

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operations in Somali waters. China’s first overseas military base opened in 2015 in Djibouti, a strategic location straddling the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden and near the Suez Canal.

Regarding supportive intervention, “Beijing contributes more personnel to UN peacekeeping missions” than any of the other four permanent members of the UNSC. China is a troop contributing country of MINUSMA; as of December 2020 its soldiers were stationed in Gao.

Russia’s military presence in Africa is through proxies, specifically private military companies (PMCs). The Wagner Group, one such PMC, has close ties to the Kremlin and has operated in a number of countries, including the Central African Republic, Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, and Rwanda. Russian PMCs do not seem to have operated in the central Sahel.

The continuation of these Chinese and Russian trends— albeit to a lesser degree in the case of the latter— risk being met by more security- and military-centric U.S. policies in Africa. In an April 2021 U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, General Stephen Townsend, commander of AFRICOM, identified his “number one global power competition concern” as the prospect of China “[gaining] a militarily useful naval facility on the Atlantic coast of Africa.”

Should the United States adopt more militarized policies in Africa to curtail or match those of its

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geopolitical adversaries, the risk of creating a security dilemma could increase. Such an outcome could conceivably draw funding and energy away from longterm projects and investments in areas like education, thereby cementing the precedence of security-centric policy and imperiling prospects for ‘cooler’ stabilization. Scholars and practitioners have long made the case for a “holistic” set of strategies in Africa “that addresses the root causes of terrorism and lays the political, economic, and developmental groundwork for future stability and prosperity.” It is time to make good on those words.

An Uncertain Future in the Central Sahel

Interrelated crises related to insecurity, governance, climate, migration, and extremism have compounded the humanitarian situation in the Central Sahel even beyond the education sector. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of June 2020 there were 1.3 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Central Sahel. Of these displaced people, a disproportionate 45% are in Burkina Faso, “representing a sixteen-fold increase in the number of IDPs in the country since January 2019.” The majority of this displacement was “driven by intense and largely indiscriminate violence perpetrated by a range of armed actors against civilian populations.” In each of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the bulk of the IDP population is in or near Liptako-Gourma, further compounding the region’s challenges.


267 Ibid.

268 Ibid.
Indeed, the inability of stabilization to reduce insecurity has led to more displacement, and more displaced children whose access to education is hindered. As violence and supportive military intervention continue years after they began in northern Mali, there are growing concerns that conflict may spread “south from the Sahel into areas previously untouched by extremist violence, including the Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo and Ghana”\textsuperscript{269}

Much like the future of the Central Sahel, the future of stabilization is uncertain. Interveners should not operate militarily without an exit strategy, yet neither France nor MINUSMA has one. Stabilization may bolster incumbent’s sovereignty in the short-term, but if interveners overstay their welcome surely the citizens of the intervened country will grow tired of their government’s incapacity and reliance on external aid for such fundamental matters as maintaining security, (re)establishing territorial control, and providing basic services.

Stabilization lacks definition and is so all-encompassing in part because intervening actors understand that insecurity respects neither borders nor functional policy areas. In actuality, however, a consequence of stabilization’s overwhelming focus on security is that less attention is paid to such lofty goals as nurturing empowered democratic agents.

References


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