



Security Council

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Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#) of 8 December 2017, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General, in close coordination with the members of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger – and the African Union, to report on the activities of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and the support provided by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in this regard. The Council adopted resolution [2640 \(2022\)](#) on 29 June 2022, extending the mandate of MINUSMA, including enhanced support from MINUSMA to the Joint Force, as authorized by the Council in resolutions [2391 \(2017\)](#) and [2531 \(2020\)](#). The present report covers the period from 9 November 2022 to 8 May 2023.

2. Since the withdrawal of Mali from the G5 Sahel and its institutions on 15 May 2022, the other States members have continued to advocate for Mali to rejoin the Group. The Joint Force is being restructured to focus on both operational coordination and the conduct of joint operations. Meanwhile, Mali has strengthened its military cooperation with Burkina Faso and the Niger at the strategic and operational levels.

3. The security situation in the Sahel continued to be marked by terrorism and violent extremist groups frequently targeting border areas, in particular the Liptako-Gourma region in the tri-border area of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. Since the beginning of 2023, the situation has deteriorated further with an upsurge in clashes between the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin as they vie to extend their respective areas of influence and control major supply routes. In Burkina Faso, the number of civilian deaths reported in February reached its highest level in recent years as a result of offensives by Islamist militant groups. The number of civilians killed in February was nearly double the average monthly death toll for 2022. In addition, attacks by Sahel-based violent extremist groups in the northern parts of West African coastal States continue to be a growing concern.



II. Operationalization of the Joint Force

A. Deployment update on the military

4. Efforts to operationalize the Joint Force continued, despite the withdrawal of Mali from the G5 Sahel. On 10 January 2023, in a meeting in N'Djamena, the G5 Sahel Ministers of Defence and Chiefs of Army Staff agreed to restructure the Joint Force and revise its strategic concept of operations. As a result, the Joint Force headquarters will be replaced by a coordinating body named *État-major de Coordination de la Force Conjointe du G5 Sahel*, which will be redeployed from N'Djamena to Niamey. Under the strategic concept of operations, the number of battalions will increase from 6 to 14. Chad and Mauritania will contribute two battalions each, while Burkina Faso and the Niger will contribute five each. In accordance with the revised concept of operations, the operational command centres in the western (Mauritania-Mali border), central (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger) and eastern (Chad and the Niger) areas of operations will be replaced by a flexible joint staff coordination headquarters in Niamey to monitor bilateral and multilateral Joint Force operations.

5. Following the structural reform of the Joint Force in January 2023, its three sectors, were dismantled. Meanwhile, the six battalions operating in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and the Niger continued to conduct reconnaissance patrols in their areas of deployment.

6. On 18 January, the G5 Sahel Ministers for Foreign Affairs met in N'Djamena and called on Mali to rejoin the G5 Sahel. They also agreed to enhance cooperation among their countries, intensify coordination with international partners and establish bilateral and multilateral mechanisms for cooperation with the Malian Armed Forces in the fight against terrorism. In early March, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Niger visited Mali, where he met with the President of the transitional Government of Mali. The discussions centred on cooperation between the two countries in the fight against terrorism.

B. Deployment update on the police component

7. There are no updates for the period from 9 November 2022 to 8 May 2023.

C. Executive Secretariat of the G5 Sahel and institutional framework

8. The Executive Secretariat of the G5 Sahel continued to actively support diplomatic efforts to revitalize the organization. From 14 to 19 November, the Executive Secretary of the Group, Eric Tiaré, conducted political consultations in N'Djamena ahead of a meeting between the Heads of State of Chad, Mauritania and the Niger on the margins of the African Union Summit on industrialization and economic diversification held in Niamey from 20 to 25 November.

9. Mauritania assumed the Group's rotating presidency at the sixth extraordinary summit of the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel, held in N'Djamena on 20 February. The Heads of State of the Group reiterated their calls for dialogue with Mali and mandated Mauritania to pursue discussions with Mali, with a view to persuading Mali to rejoin the Group. In addition, they decided to revitalize other key components of the Group's security architecture, namely, the G5 Sahel Defence College and the G5 Sahel Security Cooperation Platform, both of which are based in Nouakchott, the Intelligence Analysis and Fusion Centre in Niamey, and the Sahelian Threat Analysis and Early Warning Centre in Ouagadougou.

10. On 20 March, the G5 Sahel Council of Ministers held its eleventh ordinary session in Nouakchott. The Ministers approved the budget for 2023, which takes into account a series of cost reduction measures. In addition, the Executive Secretariat of the G5 Sahel will pursue its development-related activities under the Priority Investment Programme with the support of partners, including the United Nations.

11. From 27 to 29 March, the Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, in her capacity as Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, undertook a mission to Mauritania, the country that held the presidency of the Group. In Nouakchott, she had conversations with national authorities regarding their perspectives and vision for the region.

12. The Independent High-level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, chaired by the former President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, held its third consultative meeting in Niamey from 15 to 17 March, at which it discussed the preliminary findings from the technical missions that it had conducted between January and February in 12 countries of the broader region. At a briefing on the margins of the February 2023 summit of the African Union, the Independent High-level Panel presented a progress update to the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the Secretary-General and the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

III. Implementation of the technical agreement

13. MINUSMA continued to fulfil its support mandate and provide life support consumables to the six battalions of the Joint Force outside Mali, namely, Dori in Burkina Faso, Wour and the Eighth battalion in Chad, Nbeiket el Ahouach in Mauritania, and Téra II and Madama in the Niger.

14. On 25 January, the European Commission informed MINUSMA that the funding from the European Union for the logistical and operational support provided by the Mission to the Joint Force would end. On 7 February, the European Commission decided to extend the funding, from 28 February to 23 June, at no cost in order to meet final operational and grant reporting requirements.

Life support consumables

15. Delivery of life support consumables to the Joint Force is tentatively scheduled to be completed on 19 May 2023. From 22 October 2022 to 20 April 2023, the Joint Force headquarters and battalions received, in their area of operations or the nearest location, a total of 993,710 litres of diesel and 69,583 litres of oil and lubricants. A total of 174,440 individual ration packs were delivered directly to the six battalions during the same period. The types and quantities of life support consumables delivered by MINUSMA are summarized in the table below.

Table
**Life support consumables delivered by the Mission to the Joint Force from
 9 November 2022 to 8 May 2023**

<i>Location</i>	<i>Combat ration packs (packs)</i>	<i>Fuel (l)</i>	<i>Water (l)</i>	<i>Oil 50 (l)</i>	<i>Grease (kg)</i>	<i>Coolant (l)</i>
Burkina Faso (Dori battalion)	26 222	225 771	–	2 180	240	240
Chad (Eighth battalion)	37 290	167 199	–	2 120	240	240
Chad (Wour battalion)	31 850	166 859	–	2 120	240	240
Mauritania (Mbeiket battalion)	21 010	167 992	–	2 120	240	240
Niger (Madama battalion)	31 658	127 965	–	2 120	240	240
Niger (Tera battalion)	26 410	83 856	–	1 085	120	120
Command posts and headquarters	–	54 068	–	1 000	50	60
Total	174 440	993 710	–	12 745	1 370	1 380

16. In line with European Union recommendations, life support consumables intended for the Malian battalions of Goma Coura and Boulekessi are currently being rerouted based on the operational needs of the Joint Force.

17. Deliveries were implemented in accordance with the support requests received from Joint Force headquarters and in compliance with the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces. The Mission continued to mobilize one national and two international vendors to ensure the delivery of life support consumables across G5 Sahel member States.

Engineering support

18. MINUSMA did not provide engineering support during the reporting period, as it was not requested.

Casualty evacuation and transport

19. MINUSMA did not provide casualty evacuation or transportation support because neither were requested. The provision of casualty evacuation and transportation support was limited to Mali.

IV. Challenges

20. The implementation of the support package to the Joint Force continued to encounter technical and operational challenges. Lack of storage capacity at some battalion locations or areas of operation persisted, with insufficient maintenance of storage equipment, in particular for combat rations. In addition, insecurity along supply routes often delayed and, in some cases, prevented deliveries. The shipment of combat rations was delayed by a 24-day strike at the seaport in Durban, requiring MINUSMA to implement interim solutions, including segmented deliveries.

V. Implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework and the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces

21. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), while adapting to the context of the overall G5 Sahel Joint Force reconfiguration, continued to support the Joint Force with regard to human rights law and humanitarian law, compliance, capacity-building, combating impunity and implementation of the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces. The G5 Sahel confirmed its commitment to keeping the compliance framework at the heart of the operationalization of its new structure. In that connection, OHCHR conducted after action reviews with Joint Force personnel in the three Sectors prior to the dismantling of those Sectors and at Force headquarters in N'Djamena. The aim of these after-action reviews was to assess the status of implementation of the compliance framework and identify best practices that will guide OHCHR support to the restructured Joint Force. From 27 February to 1 March, OHCHR supported a workshop in the Niger on adapting the compliance framework at the national level.

22. In addition, the Office continued to support the capacity-building efforts of the Joint Force for its staff with regard to international human rights and humanitarian law. From 21 to 25 November, in Bakara, Chad, OHCHR organized a training of trainers seminar on human rights and humanitarian law for 20 participants (2 of whom were women), including 10 members of the Chadian army, 2 members of the Chadian gendarmerie, 2 members of the Chadian police force and 6 members of the Joint Force. The aim of the seminar was to sustain the achievements made in capacity-building by also strengthening the training capacities of the Chadian National Army in relation to human rights and humanitarian law.

23. On 9 and 30 November, OHCHR conducted two awareness-raising and training sessions on international human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law for 40 commissioned and non-commissioned officers (including 3 women) of the Sector East command post in Chad. The second session was facilitated by, inter alia, a member of the Joint Force who had benefited from the training of trainers seminar that had been held from 21 to 25 November in Bakara, Chad. On 19 December, in Téra, the Niger, OHCHR organized a sensitization session for 60 soldiers (including 1 woman) from the Nigerien battalion of the Joint Force based in Téra. The session focused on the compliance framework, as well as issues pertaining to conflict-related sexual violence, protection of children in armed conflicts and the responsibility of commanders and other superiors. The Office also organized a training session on 19 and 20 December in Téra for 30 participants, including 15 officers and 5 provosts of the Nigerien battalion of the Joint Force, in preparation for the implementation of the compliance framework at the national level. The training session covered the conduct of hostilities, detention and the prohibition of torture.

24. OHCHR reinforced the capacities of the Joint Force's early warning mechanism, which was created in 2021 in Téra with the support of OHCHR, to monitor the human rights situation and liaise with the Joint Force and local authorities regarding the protection of civilians. This mechanism comprises departmental authorities, representatives of customary authorities, the Joint Force commanders and civil society, with technical support provided by OHCHR. On 19 and 20 December, OHCHR organized a training workshop in Téra on the monitoring and reporting of human rights and humanitarian standards for 30 members (including 6 women) of the early warning mechanism.

25. On 18 and 19 November, OHCHR organized an after-action review in Bakara, Chad, on operations Nadhif 1 and Nadhif 2, which were conducted by the Joint Force in Sector East in May and September 2022, respectively. This after-action review, the first to be conducted with Sector East personnel, was attended by 12 representatives from the Wour Battalion and the Sector East command post, who assessed the impact of these operations on the civilian population and the level of compliance demonstrated by the Joint Force with international human rights and humanitarian law. In addition, in the context of the restructuring of the Joint Force and the dismantling of its command posts and headquarters, OHCHR organized two after-action review workshops, one with command post personnel in Sector East (from 23 to 25 January in Bakara, Chad) and one in Sector West (from 1 to 2 February in Hodh ech Chargui, Mauritania), and another with the command posts and headquarters (on 24 and 25 February in N'Djamena). These after-action reviews provided an opportunity to review successes and challenges, and participants made recommendations for improving the implementation of the compliance framework to better protect civilians in the context of future Joint Force operations.

26. From 18 to 21 December 2022, in Téra, OHCHR met with local authorities and internally displaced persons from Pételkolé to assess the human rights situation in the areas of operation of the Joint Force. No violations by the Joint Forces or security forces were reported. From 20 to 27 January 2023, OHCHR conducted a mission in Burkina Faso to investigate allegations of serious human rights violations, including reported extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in the communes of Sitenga, Dori and Gorom-Gorom. OHCHR also conducted interviews with victims, witnesses and civil society sources. No incidents involving members of the Joint Force were reported.

27. In accordance with the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces, MINUSMA carried out 14 risk assessments on requests for support to Joint Force headquarters and the Joint Force battalions operating in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and the Niger. Seven requests were submitted for the final quarter of 2022 and seven for the first quarter of 2023. The requests concerned the provision of fuel and rations for the Joint Force. Tailored mitigation measures were recommended to address the risks identified in the process. These measures included follow-up on previously documented violations, increased sensitization on international human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law, and evaluation of the support provided by MINUSMA. As in previous reporting periods, limited progress was made in relation to the implementation of the mitigation measures, with the redeployment of the Joint Force headquarters out of Mali making it more difficult for the Mission to follow up in that regard.

VI. Observations

28. The security situation in the Sahel is of strategic importance not only for the subregion but for the African continent and beyond. Violent extremism is spreading at an alarming rate and expanding in West Africa. The withdrawal of international forces from the territory of Mali and the cessation of joint operations by the Joint Force have left a security void that violent extremist groups have exploited, in particular in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area. I remain deeply concerned at the impact of the crisis on civilians. These events have shown the need for a multidimensional response based on increased cooperation among Sahelian countries with the support of their regional and international partners to address the common challenge of violent extremism. The transnational nature of the challenges and of the actors fuelling insecurity in the Sahel perforce call for regional cooperation.

29. The Joint Force remains an important regionally led initiative that complements the multifaceted engagements by the United Nations and other international partners in the region and merits the international community's support. In the long term, regionally led solutions devised by key stakeholders are the most effective ways to create lasting peace and stability, and fully tap into the potential of the region. I reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations, in coordination with our partners, to continue supporting the countries of the Sahel in their efforts towards long-term stability, including through strengthening security and improving cooperation. On several occasions, including in my 13 February 2023 briefing to the General Assembly on Our Common Agenda, I have reiterated the need for a new generation of peace enforcement missions and counter-terrorist operations, led by regional forces, with guaranteed, predictable funding. Our collective objective should be to ensure that regional actors have the ability to plan, deploy, manage, sustain and finance their peace support operations.

30. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the European Union, the main partner of the United Nations in providing support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force, for its excellent cooperation in the framework of the tripartite agreement between the United Nations, the European Union and the Executive Secretariat of the G5 Sahel, through which MINUSMA has received funding for the delivery of life support consumables to the Joint Force. Since the start of the programme on 23 February 2018, the operational and logistical support provided by MINUSMA to the Joint Force, in addition to the support provided by other partners, has enabled the Joint Force to make progress in its operationalization. However, it is important to note that the logistical and operational support provided by MINUSMA to the Joint Force, as well as that this aspect of the Mission's mandate, will end if the tripartite agreement expires, as planned, in June 2023.

31. Respecting human rights and international humanitarian law obligations during military operations is critical to the efficacy of the Joint Force and the sustainability of its operations. The engagement of OHCHR with the Joint Force and the Executive Secretariat of the G5 Sahel has made it possible for the Joint Force to put international humanitarian law and international human rights law at the centre of its military operations. Despite challenges in operationalizing the Joint Force, the close collaboration of the Joint Force with OHCHR sets an important precedent for United Nations engagement with regional forces, and demonstrates that security forces themselves can be best placed to protect, uphold and advocate for international humanitarian and human rights standards in operations. Beyond the context of training and capacity-building, the Joint Force has taken ownership of these concepts and its restructuring presents an opportunity to further mainstream them.

32. Several initiatives have been taken to enhance the fight against terrorism and organized crime, including by the Joint Military Staff Committee of the Sahel Region, which is made up of Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger. Recently, the Accra Initiative, which brings together Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, the Niger and Togo, decided to establish its own multinational task force. The Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS have also decided to operationalize the region's standby force to fight terrorism and unconstitutional changes of government. I welcome the momentum generated by these initiatives to address the security challenges in the region. I reiterate my call for increased cooperation to ensure coherent and comprehensive responses at the local, national and regional levels. Furthermore, it is crucial that security initiatives are deployed as part of a coherent political strategy. In the Sahel and beyond, the counter-terrorism toolkit should be complemented by comprehensive dialogue and mediation mechanisms using a whole-of-society approach.

33. The United Nations will continue to support the countries of the Sahel to forge collective and multidimensional approaches oriented towards the promotion of sustainable development in order to address the root causes of the threats in the region. In this regard, I look forward to the recommendations of the Independent High-level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, under the leadership of the former President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, on ways to improve joint and coordinated regional and international responses.
