

# THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE SAHEL: ASSESSING THREATS AND RESPONSES



MARCH 2023

CONTRIBUTORS:

PROFESSOR JIBRIN IBRAHIM  
AMBASSADOR ZANGO ABDU  
PROFESSOR YASMINE HASNAOUI  
AMBASSADOR [RET.] CHARLES RAY

COMMENTATORS:

PROFESSOR RITA COLWELL  
PROFESSOR CHRIS KWAJA

EDITORS:

PROF. YONAH ALEXANDER  
PROF. DON WALLACE, JR.



INTERNATIONAL CENTER  
FOR  
**TERRORISM**  
STUDIES

INTER-UNIVERSITY CENTER  
FOR  
**TERRORISM**  
STUDIES



Educators  
Advisors  
Publishers

## **NOTICES**

Amid multiple continued grave health challenges, Africa is also experiencing an upsurge of other worrisome security threats, such as organized criminal activities, terrorism, and ungovernable societies. International experts at a Zoom Forum held on November 2, 2022, assessed the Sahel's security challenges, and recommended governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental response strategies:

Video of the full conference may be found here: [LINK](#)

### **DISCLAIMER:**

Please note that the editors and contributors cannot be held responsible for any errors and consequences arising from the use of the information contained in this publication. Also, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the academic institutions associated with this report.

## **“THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE SAHEL: ASSESSING THREATS AND RESPONSES”**

© 2023 Yonah Alexander, Director - Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies

All Rights Reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, translated, or adapted in any form or by any means, except as permitted by law, without the written permission from Yonah Alexander.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION AND PERMISSION MAY BE REQUESTED FROM:**

Yonah Alexander

Email: [YAlexander@potomacinstitute.org](mailto:YAlexander@potomacinstitute.org)

**"THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE SAHEL: ASSESSING THREATS AND RESPONSES"**

**EDITORS:** PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER  
PROFESSOR DON WALLACE, JR.

**CONTRIBUTORS:** PROFESSOR JIBRIN IBRAHIM  
AMBASSADOR ZANGO ABDU  
PROFESSOR YASMINE HASNAOUI  
AMBASSADOR [RET.] CHARLES RAY

**COMMENTERS:** PROFESSOR RITA COLWELL  
PR. CHRIS KWAJA

**MARCH 2023**

# "THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE SAHEL: ASSESSING THREATS AND RESPONSES"

<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
I.	PREFACE     Professor Yonah Alexander and Professor Don Wallace, Jr.	1
II.	SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS	3
III.	CONTRIBUTORS' PRESENTATIONS	8
	Professor Jibrin Ibrahim Ambassador Zango Abdu Professor Yasmine Hasnaoui Ambassador (Ret.) Charles Ray	
IV.	COMMENTATORS' REMARKS	14
	Professor Rita Colwell Dr. Chris Kwaja	
V.	PANEL DISCUSSION	17
VI.	ABOUT THE EDITORS	22
VII.	ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS	22
VIII.	ABOUT THE COMMENTATORS	23

## I. PREFACE

PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER AND PROFESSOR DON WALLACE, JR.

### EDITORS

One cannot fully understand the impact of rising terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel without looking back to numerous warning signs that exploded during the post-WWII period. Thus, one tragic historical lesson relates to the December 21, 1988, mid-air explosion of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, perpetrated by a Libyan state-sponsored operation. It resulted in the death of 270 passengers, mostly Americans. Although Muammar Gaddafi's 42 years of dictatorship were replaced by a new Tripoli regime in 2011, Libyan terrorism is alive and well. This brutal reality was graphically illustrated by the killing of four U.S. government personnel, including Ambassador John Christopher Stevens, in Benghazi on September 11, 2012. In fact, several days after this attack, a Libyan preacher during a Friday sermon called on the faithful to “detonate our wrath upon them” and “stab them in their main artery.”<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies (IUCTS), in cooperation with its academic partners such as the George Washington University, the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, the International Law Institute, and other institutions in the U.S., Africa, Asia, and elsewhere have developed interdisciplinary educational programs focusing on security challenges in the Maghreb—Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia—as well as adjacent areas such as Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and their regional and global strategic implications.

More specifically, our latest academic work has included a number of publications. The first on, “Why the Maghreb Matters: Threats, Opportunities & Options for Effective U.S. Engagement in North Africa” was published by the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies and the Conflict Management Program at the John Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies on March 31, 2009. This initial work was guided by a bipartisan panel, including former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, General (Ret.) Wesley Clark, Ambassador (Ret.) Stuart Eizenstat, Professor William Zartman, and other distinguished former officials and academics. The panel recommended more effective engagement in the region to prevent a brewing security crisis from erupting there.

Another following report is, “Terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel in 2015” that was authored by Yonah Alexander and published in March 2016. This work drew similar conclusions, thereby underscoring the pessimistic reality that the region is engaged in a generational socio-cultural conflict that impacts the global community. Indeed, events continue to point to a growing “arc of instability” across the region, with consequences beyond any country's borders.

Additionally, in 2017, another study also authored by Yonah Alexander observed that focusing international attention on the region can help enable the seeds of conflict resolution, political accommodation, economic and social development, and national reconciliation to emerge and counter the forces of instability and chaos. The publication therefore recommended that, to be sustainable and effective, these solutions require an integration of global and local resolve as well as resources. Without an effective menu of responses to the challenges of terrorism and instability, these threats to the world community will only continue to grow.

The current March 2023 publication draws from the recent Zoom Forum titled, “The Security Situation in the Sahel: Assessing Threats and Responses” that was held virtually on November 2, 2022. It included the following distinguished invited speakers Professor Jibrin Ibrahim (Senior Fellow, Centre for Democracy & Development); Ambassador Zango Abdu (Country Manager, USIP Nigeria; Director, Sahel Institute for Strategic Studies); Professor Yasmine Hasnaoui (University Professor of Humanities & Political Science at the American International University, Kuwait); Ambassador (Ret.) Charles Ray (Former United States Ambassador to Cambodia and Zimbabwe); Professor Rita Colwell (Distinguished University Professor at Maryland and Johns Hopkins); and Dr. Chris Kwaja (Associate Professor of International Affairs at the Center for Peace and Security, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria). Deep appreciation is due to their exceptional contributions to the Forum.

It should also be noted that since this particular event was held, a major diplomatic conference was organized by the Biden Administration and took place on December 13-15, 2022, in Washington D.C. This gathering was titled, “The United States-Africa Leaders Summit 2022” and included high-level representatives from 49 African countries.

It is particularly significant that the United States recognized that Africa will be a key geopolitical player and the collaboration with African leaders and civil society is essential in the coming years. The agenda of the summit was based on shared interests and values between the U.S. and Africa, including boosting economic engagement, advancing democracy, and increasing cooperation regarding public health, food security, climate change as well as security issues.<sup>12</sup>

Hopefully, this latest collective effort will inspire the world community to advance multiple goals in the coming decades such as:

- Refocus on Africa and strengthen the strategic relationship between the continent and the United States.
- Promote the awareness of political, military, ethnic, religious and other important security dimension trends that could have an impact on the prospects, course and consequences of conflicts in Africa in order to influence the implementation of sound peace and security policies.
- Address the root causes of conflict and terrorism, including food insecurity and famine and poverty, to bring peace to African nations committed to democracy, free enterprise, transparency and the rule of law.
- Provide strategic insight concerning the U.S.’s strategy for sub-Saharan Africa: peace and security; democracy and governance; economic growth, trade and investment, education and culture (2).
- And contribute to establishing high-level policies, documentation of good practice and the provision of technical support in the priority areas of the Program: Peace and security, Democratic governance, U.S-Africa partnerships and sustainable development through information exchange, research, analysis, documentation and compilation of databases.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

On a personal note, Professor Alexander wishes to express his deep appreciation for the decades-long academic and professional partnerships with the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies and the International Law Institute; Thanks are due particularly to PIPS’s Dr. Jennifer Buss (CEO), General Al Gray (USMC (Ret.), Chairman of the Board), and Gail Clifford (VP for Financial Management & CFO). Likewise, he is most grateful to the ILI’s Professor Don Wallace, Jr. (Chairman), Robert Sargin (Deputy Director), and intern Min Ah Joo (Pomona College).

Finally, are also due to Kevin Harrington (coordinator of the IUCTS internship program since 2021) who provided some research and administrative support for this publication in conjunction with our graduate and undergraduate student interns: Adrik Bagdasarian (James Madison University); William Brooks (George Washington University); Louisa Burch (American University); Matthew Dahan (the American University); Joshua Isaiah Horton (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill); Xiang Ji (Brown University); Grace Johnson (University of Texas at San Antonio); Harrison Kopitsch (American University); Jinhan Li (Johns Hopkins University); Claudia Rodriguez Loys (University of Miami); Royon Meerzadah (Carnegie Mellon University); Evan Rohe (University of Kent); and John Watters (Colby College).

---

<sup>1</sup> Libya Al-Hurra TV, September 14, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> “U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit - United States Department of State,” U.S. Department of State, December 16, 2022.

## II. SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS [DRAWN FROM THE NOVEMBER 2, 2022 FORUM'S PARTICIPANTS]

1. During the UNGA 77 held in September 2022, the United Nations, African Union, and Economic Community of West African States established a high-level panel, under the leadership of the former Nigerian President Mahamadou Issoufou, to address the inability of African states to govern their territory and find solutions for recovery and development.
2. The crisis in the Sahel can be traced back to the 1973 drought and extends south to the Gulf of Guinea and encompasses the Sahara's zones as the population moved massively from the rural hinterland to urban centers. This changed the demography because families became scattered, thus disturbing traditional values and making the religion in the Sahel an open book.
3. The current instability in the Sahel can be tied to an ideology about the legitimacy of the use of arms by the states. This resulted in using the widespread availability of arms as a statement by the grandchildren of those that moved out in 1973. This concerned the current monopoly of arms against civilians and the desire to protect themselves from repression.
4. There is an understanding that the history in the Sahel, with France as a past ruler, is a conspiracy against the people but some people in countries like Mali still sing praises of France as a savior following French intervention.
5. Following the return of democracy in the Sahel in the post-1990 period, there is confusion about the beneficiaries of the return of democracy and the question about if they should resist coup d'états if democracy is not working for the people, as there is little difference in the lives of people between the democratic regime and the previous military, one-party, tyrannical regimes that previously ran the countries.
6. People in the Sahel receive information through social media and messaging apps like "WhatsApp" which redefine France as an enemy because of daily videos of French helicopters supplying arms to terrorists and other atrocities, thus highlighting the difficulty of distinguishing what is true, false, contrived propaganda spread for effect, and what is news.
7. The return of great power rivalry, the war in Ukraine, and Russia's attempts to counter the West present a unique opportunity to extend the struggle to a new level through the Sahel.
8. Democracy fails to be an answer for parts of the Sahel because Africa developed a new framework of values about plurality and inclusiveness to ensure that policies stand in terms of the people.
9. The core of the problem in the Sahel is in the demographic changes, the youth bulge, and the rise of non-state actors in the region.
10. In Nigeria today, an estimated six million arms are circulating in the hands of non-state actors, which changes the situation in Nigeria because the quantity of arms is more concentrated in non-state actors rather than within the Nigerian state and its armed forces.
11. Discussions about Lake Chad losing 80% of its water surface emerged following the rise of Boko Haram rather than following the 1973 drought in the region.
12. In the Sahel, institutions do not generally perform the rules they are supposed to perform and, thus, are not functional because no governance is anticipating the problems that face the region.
13. While there is a sense that many terrorist organizations are influenced by jihadi ideologies, current studies are showing that jihadists in Nigeria are now a minority in terms of non-state actors and that the majority are now simply criminal bands, thus making it harder to combat because there is no manner of deradicalization to mobilize communities to realize the weak ideological justification for those actions within the doctrine of Islam.

14. The criminal, non-state actors within the Sahel have a history of negative relationships with the states and have realized that the possession of Kalashnikov rifles provides them with the ability to enjoy what those who are in control of the state have been enjoying.
15. Many people in Sahel societies live in extreme poverty and, therefore, may have nothing to lose in terms of engaging in activities tied to non-state actors.
16. On November 3, 2022, the African Union mediators signed a ceasefire agreement between Ethiopia and its Tigray rebel region after two years of war which is a good sign following the two years of mass killings and suffering.
17. While African leaders initially decided among themselves that nobody should have more than two ten-year terms in office and have zero tolerance for government changes through unconstitutional means, they started to break that agreement themselves and manipulate elections.
18. When those in charge of running democratic regimes fail, a state has two main options: either give up the ambition to survive through succumbing to anarchy or start to open up negotiations for new social contracts with its citizens to rebuild trust between citizens and the state.
19. The State of Nigeria has survived for the past 40 years thanks to petroleum rights; however the State has not been able to obtain petroleum rights for the past four to five years due to the theft of most of the petrol produced and its diversion to private pockets.
20. The security situation in the Sahel region is much worse than a decade ago. The threats are multi-dimensional and spread across the region.
21. In Nigeria, when terrorism completely takes over, 120-130 million refugees will head for the U.S. and Europe unless the government starts taking steps to fix the issues.
22. A large variety of actors, including terrorists, insurgents, and bandits, as well as al-Qaeda and ISIS groups with different ideologies, contribute to the instability in the region.
23. In Central Africa and Sudan, the proliferation of small arms as a result of instability, combined with discontent among the population, particularly the youth, makes it much easier for rebels to overthrow governments.
24. Failure of democracy leads to the depletion of public goods and services, incentives for military intervention, and causing instability. It also provides opportunities for Russia to step in on African affairs during a time of great power competition, having a negative impact on the security situation in the Sahel.
25. There are international responses to the security situation in the Sahel from different levels, including the African Union, the United States, and the United Nations. However, the responses are less effective due to the contending interests among great powers such as the U.S., Russia, and France.
26. With the U.S. focusing on the war in Ukraine and the U.N. focusing on poverty and infectious disease, more attention needs to be diverted to security in the Sahel region since it can impact greater international security.
27. National governments in the Sahel are unable to hold territory against terrorists, rebel groups, or criminal organizations in remote areas and where its forces cannot reach.
28. The international community cannot ignore the instability in the Sahel region. The Sahel states need actions from sub-regional, regional, and continental levels. Bad governance leads to failed states or corruption, incentivizing underprivileged people to riot against the states. It is a complicated situation that requires both short and long-term solutions.

29. For the last decade, the African continent has been at the stage of permanent structural violence, with 48% of the victims of terrorism in the world being African.
30. In 2021, terrorism in Africa cost the continent around \$171 billion.
31. ISIS continues to exploit conflicts such as governance failure, political turnover, socio-economic inequalities, and grievances to attract followers and resources to incite a terrorist threat.
32. A challenge currently witnessed in Africa is the ongoing hostilities and food insecurities worsened by the Ukraine-Russia war. This, fueled by armed conflict and climate change, forced millions of citizens to flee their homes from various countries within the Sahel and other parts of Africa.
33. The withdrawal of French forces in Mali left an open window which is now being filled by Russian mercenary groups, such as Wagner. Since their arrival, violence against civilians has increased. The Wagner group's intentions to occupy Africa are clear.
34. The withdrawals of French forces posed a change of policy in Mali that increased the risk of instability and provided opportunities for countries outside the scope of Western Values to settle within the nation.
35. Over 70% of the population in the Sahel depend on agriculture and pastoralism as their primary source of income. Climate change has contributed to the driving existent socio-economic and political tensions that further escalated the conflict.
36. The links between climate and security are something very important to take into consideration when making policy decisions for the Sahel.
37. Certain socio-economic conditions are a push factor for radicalization, such as climate risks and unequal access to natural resources. This trend requires an approach where the dual government partners with the whole of society.
38. The international community must remain united in its commitment to combat terrorist organizations.
39. Military and security-led responses alone will not lead to sustainable solutions. They need to be part of a tactical response in the short-term creating the localized ability necessary for trade and economic activities to become established.
40. Africa is the continent of the future. The Sahel is a model for that future, meaning all stakeholders must come together to fight terrorism and invest in the youth.
41. To ensure peace, policy makers have to tackle development programs, only focusing on security is not enough.
42. The effects of terrorism on the youth population in the Sahel region need to be addressed more as well.
43. Solutions should primarily come from African leaders, not just international organizations.
44. Now that France has withdrawn its forces and Russian mercenaries have taken their place, it is only a matter of time that China also sends mercenaries to occupy parts of Africa.
45. The perception of the region must also change. There should be an integrated approach that includes building institutions, promoting jobs for the youth, human rights, etc.
46. Climate change needs to be the responsibility of the international community and resolutions should be passed because this issue causes imminent danger.
47. The large youth population and a lack of economic development contribute to existing criminal groups within the Sahel.

48. The Sahel region's unique geographic layout between the Sahara and Savannah, and the continued climate change crisis further breeds the farmer-herder conflict over land use.
49. Violence and criminal networks operate in areas with weak or no governance. This decreases levels of trust among civilians toward their government and facilitates conditions for military coups.
50. Government and international response efforts are primarily directed at solving security issues, but not enough attention is focused on combating the Sahel's overpopulation, food, and safety insecurities.
51. Without effective governance over public services, removing ISIS would replace one terrorist / extremist / criminal group with another.
52. The Sahelian problem requires a holistic approach to a solution. Regional groupings in Africa and the international community must listen to what the people in the Sahel need most rather than informing them of what they are bringing.
53. Satellite sensing is being used to determine the location and time of potential cholera outbreaks in Yemen and Ethiopia. This technology will eventually be used in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
54. Overpopulation, lack of resources, and lack of safe water are among the reasons why cholera is such a prevalent problem in the Sahel and surrounding countries.
55. Computational modeling and satellite sensing give researchers the information to provide a six-to-eight-week prediction of a cholera outbreak. Many aid organizations, such as UNICEF, can bring supplies to certain areas in preparation for these outbreaks.
56. In 2017, Yemen had one of the worst cholera outbreaks in its history due to disagreement over solutions.
57. Satellite sensing and computational modeling analysis have been added to the various tools of the United Nations, becoming increasingly important for their humanitarian efforts.
58. Many non-profits, such as the Safe Water Network, have recognized the importance of providing safe water to countries such as Ghana and making it extrapolatable; this may be the solution to fixing water crises in Africa.
59. The long-term solution to water crises in Africa lies within these local communities to maintain safe water themselves. Locals must be hired, trained, and given technology rather than simply providing safe water for them to consume.
60. Safe water, under these locally controlled, freestanding water systems, would be a few cents for twenty liters, making water abundant but keeping its tradability. (Making safe water entirely free should be avoided).
61. There are several hundred freestanding safe water units in Ghana. These safe water systems provide water for up to three million people.
62. The government in Pradesh, India has contracted with the Safe Water Network to create freestanding safe water units in that area.
63. Many issues, like water crises, are threatening democracy and the world. Utilizing practices, like the Safe Water Network's water recyclability, will help alleviate this overarching issue.
64. Philanthropy has been unsuccessful in solving these water crisis issues in Africa. Finding voices within local communities and creating local control and responsibility will be a start to fixing these problems.
65. An emphasis and implementation of governance at the local level will help solve the issues in Ghana and Africa as a whole.

66. At the local level, if people are given the ability to be in charge, operations run and run much more smoothly; external sources usually lead to the vast number of issues in both Ghana and Africa.
67. The recent UNGA77 drew attention to the very important role of non-state actors that are becoming increasingly present in the Sahel with their implications for security and governance within the Gulf of Guinea area.
68. One major manifestation of the increase and the dominant role of the non-state actors is the mercenary incursion into the Sahel. It is important to monitor such activities across the world and undertake visits to countries with issues of this concern to the United Nations.
69. The role that the Wagner group is playing in Mali today is beyond a mercenary outfit. Russia is also using the presence of the Wagner group in Mali as a means of expanding its security interest in Africa.
70. The absence of supervision over mercenary groups can create problems such as human rights violations and unconstitutional changes of government, especially in fragile states.
71. There has not been any concrete discussion about the death of Idris Derby of Chad and the emergence of his son as the leader of Chad as one example of unconstitutional changes in government. The same applies to Guinea and Burkina Faso.
72. Countries such as Nigeria have been pushing for the recharging of Lake Chad, home to millions of people as a source of livelihood, while not much has been done to push that agenda forward.
73. The population displacement in Mali, Burkina Faso, and other countries within the Sahel area due to activities of rebels and other groups such as Boko Haram has huge implications for migration, transnational crimes, and instability.
74. Border controls within the ECOWAS region are weak partly because of the existing Group Protocol on the free movement of persons and goods, which in a way aids the movement of criminal groups.
75. It is crucial to focus on monitoring the movement of people within the continent, for they become causes and sources of insecurity. The fall of Gaddafi in Libya is one example of the movement of people and arms that aided pre-existing conflicts in other countries.
76. Leadership is very central to security conversations because leadership is not given or organized when individuals and groups don't trust power.
77. The Sahel will only experience a cyclical movement or change of leadership while the ordinary Sahel people continue to suffer if leaders are not concerned about development.
78. Amid the crisis of governance and security, policymakers should appreciate the disconnect between the states and citizens because citizens no longer have confidence in the state and its institutions.
79. Policymakers must think of ways to get the states to be active in their primary responsibility of protection and provision. Such advocacy will help the Sahel and the African continent in general.

### III. CONTRIBUTORS' PRESENTATIONS

*This section of the Report consists of presentations made by the contributors at the Special Forum: "The Security Situation in the Sahel: Assessing Threats and Responses" that was held on November 2, 2022, via Zoom conferencing. Some updates and revisions were made by the invited participants.*

#### PROFESSOR JIBRIN IBRAHIM

*SENIOR FELLOW, CENTRE FOR DEMOCRACY & DEVELOPMENT (CDD)*

Thank you very much for the invitation to be part of this discussion on the security crisis in the Sahel. Just about a month ago, the United Nations, together with the African Union and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), established a high-level panel to review the crisis in the Sahel and map out a pathway for recovery and development. This panel started its work under the leadership of the former Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou. I am one of the experts working with the panel to try to understand where we are on the Sahel. I just returned from a week of initial discussions and, maybe, if there is one lesson I learned from the initial discussions, it is that when we talk about the crisis in the Sahel, it is, in reality, a crisis of the African states that are unable to govern their territory. This inability to govern the territory has set in motion social, political, and economic responses and consequences that we have witnessed for some time.

The key issue about where we are today is that there is a real existential threat to these states in the Sahel. The possibility of state collapse has never been as strong as it is today. The fact of the matter is that the crisis in the Sahel also means a crisis in the Gulf of Guinea countries and in the Sahara zone in North Africa. As a result, this is a much larger crisis than the Sahel. However, what is specific about the Sahel, which is the crux of the matter for me, is that we have had 50 years of a very deep crisis to which nobody has responded in an adequate manner. This crisis is traced to the 1973 drought, which was a massive shock for the Sahel. This created repercussions, the results of which we are reaping today.

The first is the question of the precariousness of life. Life has always been precarious in that zone, but what the drought did in 1973 was make it clear that the population of the Sahel could no longer survive just in the Sahel. The question of mobility became a survival issue, and the population of the Sahel started moving massively out in 1973. There are two directions of movement. One direction is south towards the Gulf of Guinea, the countries to the south of the Sahel. The other direction is from the rural hinterland to urban centers. This led to a massive change in demography, as a significant percentage of the population left their rural habitats and moved out to cities and moved to the south.

This movement massively dislocated family, culture, religious practices, and socialization processes which opened that population to all sorts of ideas. In being open to ideas, what is particularly important, in my view, is the way it impacts two institutions: family and religion. The family became scattered, and traditional values got disturbed. At the same time, religion became an open book because people were then open to new religious ideas as the structure of religious education that had existed for centuries collapsed under the weight of mobility and a new environment while marginalization and the traditional poverty in the zone remained.

Today, what we see in terms of the insecurity in the zone, in particular with the widespread availability of arms and the use of those arms by young people against communities in which they live, against state institutions, and for themselves, is a statement coming from the grandchildren of those who moved out in 1973. They are saying that they finally get it, that the state is about the monopoly of arms for self-service. These arms have been used for too long against them to repress them. They are saying that they no longer accept the ideology that the use of these arms by the state against them is legitimate. They conclude that it is not legitimate, that they, as victims of the kids of marginalization, deserve to consider that they are the ones who need these arms to protect themselves and to advance on the socio-economic ladder. They need these arms to ensure they access what all the others have accessed over the years – material benefits.

There is a sense that the nature of the conflicts in the Sahel and how arms are used is very much tied to this reconsideration of the nature of the states and the legitimate or illegitimate use of forms of violence. I think what is particularly interesting about the current state of the crisis is the way in which there is a real contest over the history of the post-colony in this zone of the world. Since independence, the talk has been about development,

democracy, and inclusiveness. That talk does not reflect the reality of the lives of the people. The reality is one of crass primitive accumulation by ruling classes, marginalization of people from opportunities, and exclusion.

The understanding today in much of the Sahel is that the specific history of that zone, with the rule of France as the master working with the local rulers of the Sahelian states, has been some sort of a conspiracy against the people. However, that conspiracy has absolutely no legitimacy because it is not about development. When they talk about democracy, it is not *really* about democracy. I think the fact that the return of democracy in the post-1990 period created a fundamental change of mentality in terms of what is good for the people.

The people of the Sahel appear to have concluded that, yes, democracy has come back, and yes, there are multiparty elections, but who are the beneficiaries of this return of democracy? A lot of them are saying that when you compare recent history in terms of the reality of the lives of people, there is very little difference between a democratic regime and the previous military or one-party regimes that ran the tyrannical systems. This is what our whole literature has been about over the past few decades.

That is the context in which, I think, two major trends emerged. If this democracy is not producing results for the people, then what is the point of resisting or opposing coup d'états in principle? Because, in any case, that democracy is not working. And, if it is working, it is not working for the people. The other element has to do with the role of France. I was in Mali in 2012 when the French intervention happened to stop the march on Bamako by the jihadists. What struck me, as a Nigerian, going to Bamako was this deep and great love for France that emerged spontaneously at that time. The people carrying French flags were singing praises of France as a savior. At the same time, they were castigating the failure of ECOWAS and Nigeria to save them at their time of need. Where was the Nigeria that acted so decisively in its interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, they asked?

A decade later, France failed to address the problem of violent extremism in the Sahel successfully. This failure needed an explanation. France was a superpower, and if it did not resolve the problem, then it must be that they decided not to. Stories started emerging about the love of France for Tuaregs. The reality that superpowers, including the United States, have been unable to win wars asymmetrical wars against insurgents never emerged in unfolding narratives. On the contrary, thanks to WhatsApp, conspiracy theories about active collaboration between France and terrorists became the central narrative. The hero of 2012 had become the villain of 2022. The messaging on WhatsApp became extremely impactful. What was seen in the Sahel on a daily basis was videos of French helicopters supplying arms to terrorists so that they could kill innocent civilians. Someone clearly won the disinformation war, and France was redefined very clearly as being on the enemy's side and, in fact, being the worst of the enemies.

In that context, the timing of the return of great power rivalry - with the war in Ukraine, the battle by Russia to counter the West is an important part of the dynamics in the Sahel today. The zone has become a significant opportunity for Russia to extend its struggle against the Western powers to a new level. They are helped by the fact that one of the great difficulties of messaging and social media today is distinguishing what is true, false, or contrived propaganda spread for effect. Organized forces are producing the videos and messages that are circulating and having such a significant impact. Given the context and the choices people have made and given failures in the past, it does not matter whether these narratives have been fabricated falsely because it tells the story they want to tell today. For the past 150 years, France has been the enemy. It is irrelevant even if you can prove a particular video is false. The reality today is that 150 years of French repression and collaboration with local ruling classes have found a narrative that is pleasing to the people. There is no doubt that the great power rivalry currently unfolding is bound to intensify and deepen this crisis in the Sahel moving forward. This will have an impact on the flow of arms and how arms are used in that region.

My final point in this opening salvo is to assert that, for me, democracy has always been the answer rather than the problem. The people are saying the practice of democracy that they have seen in their countries over the past two decades does not reflect the values of the post-1990 normative framework about multiparty democracy, level playing ground for elections, inclusiveness, and ensuring that policies made actually produce dividends for the people. They have seen the abuse of powers of incumbency, manipulation of the electoral process, corruption and money politics. If Sahelians come out to support a coup d'état, they are not saying they are against democracy but that what existed was not real democracy. The challenge in the Sahel today is for us to make sense of these understandings and misunderstandings of current dynamics underpinning the deepening of the crisis in the Sahel.

## **AMBASSADOR ZANGO ABDU**

*COUNTRY MANAGER, USIP NIGERIA; DIRECTOR, SAHEL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES; FORMER DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION, NIGERIA EMBASSY, WASHINGTON DC*

First, let me thank Professor Alexander for this wonderful initiative. In 2012, we had a similar discussion on the Sahel and today, Professor Jibrin has set the context very well. I will just touch on some issues to see what has changed since our last discussion so that we have room for more discourse on some of the new issues raised. In 2012, we looked at the Sahel as a bastion of instability. That has not changed dramatically, if at all, and like Professor Jibrin highlighted, there is a further deterioration of the existential threats in the Sahel.

Second, the crisis is much larger than we thought, and it is very interesting how Professor Jibrin highlighted it. When you look at the Sahel, and the existential threats, you may think that the crisis is something spreading across the desert, but it is spreading both Northwards and Southwards, so it is much larger. It is multi-dimensional and has become a force multiplier leading to instability even in the Gulf of Guinea, and bringing in more actors. Over the years, the focus has largely been on the variety of groups, from terrorists, insurgents, and bandits to sub-national groups and others, with all sorts of ideologies converging to create instability.

Third, today we are seeing more actors in the Sahel with the metamorphosis of different terrorist groups. Between 2012 and 2015, al-Qaeda has dominated the scene, but now we are seeing the emergence of ISIS in different forms (ISWAP, ISIGS) and other ISIS fringe groups from the Middle East. All these present major security challenges which Professor Jibrin highlighted. The proliferation of many actors and other developments such as the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya, the instability in the Central African Republic, and Sudan have added a major dimension to the crisis in the Sahel. Furthermore, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the rising youth population without commensurate means of livelihood has made them more attracted to instruments of violence, thereby making them take up arms against the state.

Fourth, the key aspects of democracy and development have largely disappeared in the region. Over the years, the Sahel region has witnessed a system of dysfunctional democracy. This has become a major incentive for military intervention. The failure of democracy to provide dividends such as social services rapid expansion of goods and services has led to widespread dissatisfaction among the local population providing clear justification for military intervention in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea Conakry. Indeed, the global community is finding it difficult to make a case for democracy in Africa due to the wide reception accorded to military adventurers in some countries of the Sahel region.

Finally, I would like to also focus on the response to the crisis in the Sahel as highlighted by some of the presenters. Between 2013 and to date, there have been moves at the regional level, the African Union, the United Nations, the United States, and development partners to address the challenges in the Sahel. However, these interventions have not yielded many results due to contending vested interests especially among major powers such as France, the United States, China, and Russia who are now key actors in the region. Recent efforts by countries in the region to find a lasting solution to the crisis in the Sahel as highlighted by Professor Jibrin is commendable. However, with the global community and the United States concentrating their efforts on the Russia/Ukraine crisis, there is very little room for optimism in the resolution of the crisis in the Sahel which requires concerted effort in addressing poverty, illiteracy, governance, and climate change.

## PROFESSOR YASMINE HASNAOUI

*UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR OF HUMANITIES & POLITICAL SCIENCE AT THE AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, KUWAIT*

Thank you, Professor Alexander, for inviting me to be a part of this timely conversation along with these distinguished seasoned experts. I would like to contextualize the moment we are living in, as Professor Jibrin and Ambassador Abdu rightly put it, the security landscape has taken a new turn in Africa and specifically in the Sahel region. The African continent with approximately 30 million km<sup>2</sup> spread across 54 countries has been the stage for the last decade of permanent structural violence, with 48% of the victims of terrorism in the world being African. Terrorism in Africa has cost the continent around \$171 billion in the past year, but the region's crisis has drifted further from the international community's spotlight with considerable media attention prioritizing the war in Ukraine. Across the continent, ISIS continues to exploit the conflict, governance failure, political turmoil, socioeconomic inequalities, and grievances to attract followers and resources, as well as to incite and organize terrorist attacks. These are the main security threats that we face today in Africa. No region is spared from these security challenges that we are going to talk about today. The Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, Somalia, Eastern DRC, and Mozambique are affected by terrible terrorist acts, and even beyond other regions in North Africa where we witness terrorist groups in connivance with some militias. The Polisario, for instance, keep targeting Sahrawis who become a breeding ground for ISIS recruiters and traffickers of all kinds.

I will add another challenge that I believe we witness in Africa: the ongoing hostilities and food insecurities that got even worse with the Ukraine and Russia war. This is also fueled by both armed conflict and climate change that have forced millions of citizens to flee their homes from various countries within the Sahel and other parts of Africa. I have been following deeply what is happening in the Sahel. For instance, in Burkina Faso, a country which finds itself in a very devastating state due to armed conflicts. The military coup conducted in 2022 was a culmination of the population's growing discontent with the state's incapacity to find suitable solutions to terrorist attacks as well as the ongoing political unrest.

The country has indeed been confronted with the presence of several terrorist organizations affiliated to Al-Qaeda which forced thousands of civilians to flee their homes.

We also have seen even worse in Mali following the withdrawal of some foreign forces which left an open window that is now being covered by Russian mercenary groups, which further threatens the security situation in the region. Violence against civilians increased in number and severity since the Wagner arrival in December 2021. The interests of the Wagner group are clear, and the settlements in Africa are just the beginning. Thus, these withdrawals from foreign forces, whether they were right or wrong, not only poses a change of policy in Mali, but a risk in stability and security in the region.

Currently, the main ongoing international mission in Mali is the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, MINUSMA. The European Union counts on two executive missions that fall under the common security and defense policy, and there are also other forces that are present in the region.

I would also like to highlight another point that I see worth mentioning. The Sahel not only has a threat of terrorism, but it is also at the core of the harsh reality of climate change. Over 70% of the population in the Sahel depends on agriculture and pastoralism as their primary source of income. Climate change has indeed contributed to the driving existent socio-economic and political tensions that further escalated the conflict.

Last year, for instance, Niger worked with Ireland to co-author a draft on the thematic resolution on climate change and security and brought it to vote at the security council at the end of 2021. Unfortunately, this draft resolution failed to adopt because of Russia and India, who casted a negative vote. The links between climate and security are something very important to take into consideration. We know that certain socio-economic conditions are a push factor for radicalization, such as climate risks and unequal access to natural resources.

I think that despite efforts from international agencies that have been fully engaged in combating terrorism in the Sahel, we see that there are still many challenges and pitfalls. The G5 Sahel Joint Forces face many challenges; financial issues and limited military capacities remain as the main obstacles. There is also a shortage of resources as around 5,200 strong counterterrorism joint force, who still lack military capacity which limits

what they can actually accomplish. Mali's departure from the regional Sahel organization is another challenge to combating terrorism.

Another crucial challenge is the deficit in intergovernmental and interagency collaboration in fighting this phenomenon. The nature and dynamics of this trend call for a dual government and whole of society approach. The international community must remain united in its commitment, something that we don't see anymore to actually stamp out terrorist organizations. Military and security-led responses alone will not lead to sustainable solutions, but they can be part of a tactical response in the short-term solution. Professor Ibrahim stated about the importance of youth and how they took to this ideology. The youth population in the Sahel, which accounts for 65% and is under the age of 25, makes the region extraordinarily vibrant and youthful, with unlimited potential for progress and sustainable development. I think that Africa is indeed the continent of the future, and all stakeholders must come together, not only to talk about fighting terrorism, but also to invest in youth. They must come together to unlock the opportunities that the region has to offer by increasing economic development, education, and employment opportunities which will empower the youth. They finally need to bring the mantra of African solutions to African problems into reality.

## **AMBASSADOR (RET.) CHARLES RAY**

*FORMER UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO CAMBODIA AND ZIMBABWE*

Thank you for allowing me to join this distinguished panel. I have been listening very intently to what has been said and do not have very much that I can add other than to say that I would like to talk about the security situation in the Sahel from an outsider's point of view; as someone who has had extensive experience in security; both from a military and from a diplomatic standpoint. As I looked at the Sahel and listened to the previous speakers, I heard a lot of what I have observed through my research and my experience in Africa. The Sahel experiences the same problems that the rest of Africa experiences—many other places in the world, in fact—only more so because of its uniqueness. This strip of territory that lies between the Sahara and the Savannah is a textbook case of how complex security problems can be.

We can start with the fact there are many countries in the Sahel that need to coordinate with each other in order to address these very complex problems that have not been able to address them within their own borders. For example, the border issues. People living in border areas where there is little or no government presence have little or no allegiance to the government.

The extraordinarily high number of young people is also a problem. Sixty percent of the people in the Sahel are under 25 years old, which makes it younger than the rest of Africa, which is younger than the rest of the world. The Sahel is the poorest part of Africa and the fastest growing. The rate of population growth is far greater than the rest of the continent and it is also the part that is most severely impacted by climate change. All of these demographic factors, combined with the impact of climate change create a recipe for violence as does the competition for land between herders and farmers.

Violence extremist groups and criminal networks operating in these areas where governments exercise no control pose challenges and exacerbate the feeling that democracy does not work for the region and facilitate conditions for military coups. But, if you look at the history of the Sahel, the military takeovers have not addressed any of these issues that have caused the instability. In one recent case, for example, a military junta was overthrown by another group of soldiers who accused them of not solving these complex problems that caused the initial coup. As Professor Hasnaoui mentioned earlier, though, these are complex problems that require a whole of society, government, and people because there is no single reason or answer to the complex problems of the Sahel.

As I said at the outset, it is essential to address the problem of food security, economic well-being, and government presence in a comprehensive manner if the Sahel's security issues are to be mitigated. Whether it is a military government, civilian dictatorship, or whether it is a democracy, people in a border area do not see the government until there is a problem resulting in a few soldiers swooping in and burning a few houses and departing, leaving the region with a bigger problem than it originally had in most cases. The countries, the societies, the regional groupings in Africa and the international community need to look at the situation in the Sahel holistically, and not simply deal with violent extremism and terrorism. They must address all these other issues, such as overpopulation, lack of food security, lack of a sense of security. If you do not see the government until there's a problem, you will not have any reason really to trust the government, and it does not matter whether the government is wearing a pinstripe suit or a uniform. In fact, my experience in dealing with these issues is that the military governments tend to get greater blowback for these problems than the civilian governments, because in the civilian cases it is neglect, and in the military cases it is actions taken that directly impact and hurt people in these border areas.

We must focus on doing the right things in the international community and regional groupings in Africa, ECOWAS, AU, and others. We need, as I previously said, to sit down and start looking at the problem holistically. It is not enough to remove ISIS from the board. We must address problems of government services to people, governments must start providing security, food security, and economic well-being. Removing ISIS just ends up replacing one terrorist extremist group or one criminal group with another.

As previously mentioned, I am speaking as an outsider, and as a panelist previously said there must be an African solution to these problems. I could not agree more. Essentially, a critical concern the international community must grapple with is when we go into these countries, we need to be in a listening mode, and find out what the people there need rather than swoop in and tell them what we are bringing them.

#### IV. COMMENTATORS' REMARKS

*This section of the Report consists of remarks made by the commentators at the Special Forum: "The Security Situation in the Sahel: Assessing Threats and Responses" that was held on November 2, 2022, via Zoom conferencing. Some updates and revisions were made by the invited participants.*

##### PROFESSOR RITA COLWELL

*DISTINGUISHED UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR AT MARYLAND AND JOHNS HOPKINS; SENIOR FELLOW AT THE POTOMAC INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES*

First, I would like to comment on technological assistance, with examples for Yemen, Ethiopia, and expansion to Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo, providing prediction of cholera risk, employing satellite monitoring data and a computational model to predict cholera risk.

Cholera is a major disease afflicting countries of Africa. Epidemics of cholera are driven by many environmental and socio-demographic factors, including overcrowding and lack of sanitation and access to safe water. Computational modeling that includes environmental data gathered by satellite sensing has been developed and successfully employed to provide a six-to-eight-week risk prediction for cholera. These studies were carried out in countries in Africa, notably in 2017, during the severe outbreak of cholera in Yemen. Civic upheaval in Yemen contributed to the cholera epidemic becoming the worst recorded in recent times. A retrospective analysis of the 2017 cholera epidemic in Yemen, employing computational modeling and satellite sensing, allowed highly accurate prediction of cholera risk. In 2018, in collaboration with the British aid agency, UNICEF, and NASA, it was possible to provide a four to six-week early warning of the geographical location and timing of where the highest risk of cholera could be expected. This allowed the British aid agency and the United Nations agencies to locate precisely where medical supplies, personnel, and safe water would be most effective. Cholera was reduced significantly in 2018 and cholera risk prediction was expanded to include Ethiopia. Interestingly, signals of high risk of cholera in Sudan were obtained at the time of the Yemen cholera pandemic. Several weeks later, cholera cases had, indeed, occurred in Sudan. In conclusion, cholera risk prediction for countries of Africa provided critical technical assistance for the region.

Another technical assistance currently in the process is the provision of safe water, notably for Ghana and India. At a recent conference in Accra, representatives from NASA, the Safe Water Network headquartered in New York City and operating in Ghana, met with the Minister of Health of Ghana. The provision of safe drinking water is critical for Ghana and other countries in Africa. Safe Water Network operates in the country, establishing local control of the technology. Units providing the safe water were installed and are locally managed. Source water drawn from wells, ponds, or rivers, is treated and distributed. The distributed water cost is a few cents (US) per 20 liters and free for those without resources to pay. The units are operated and maintained locally. This technological approach has proven highly successful in providing safe water for Ghana communities. Safe Water Network has several hundred units operating successfully in Ghana, providing safe water for more than a million people and building local capacity.

The discussion held by this panel is highly informative and makes clear that too many global events are proving dangerous for democracy. Technical assistance in the form of actions, such as providing safe water, addressing climate change, and improving public health, can make a significant difference, in particular philanthropy that aims to institute local control, operation, and responsibility.

## **DR. CHRIS KWAJA**

*ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE CENTER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY, MODIBBO ADAMA UNIVERSITY, YOLA, ADAMAWA STATE, NIGERIA*

Thank you very much, Professor Yonah Alexander. Good evening to all the participants. I know it is afternoon in the U.S. I think Professor Jibrin Ibrahim laid a very important foundation and provided some very specific context to what we are dealing with when it comes to the situation in the Sahel. What I would do quickly is draw attention to some of the trends that we are not capturing in the conversation.

I think the recent high-level meeting that took place in New York, with the Secretary General of the United Nations, drew attention to the very important point about the role of non-state actors that are increasingly present in the Sahel and how that has huge implications for security and governance within the Gulf of Guinea area. And when you stretch that to Africa as well as the Lake Chad area, you begin to appreciate the context within which the entire African continent is situated when it comes to a conversation of this nature, about the kind of response mechanism that should be put in place for dealing with the governance of security issues within the Sahel.

I think one major manifestation of that increase and the dominant role of the non-state actors is the mercenary incursion into the Sahel. I currently represent Africa on the UN working group on mercenaries. Our mandate is simply to monitor the activities of mercenaries across the world and undertake country visits to many of the countries where issues of this nature become of concern to the United Nations. Mali is one of the countries we are looking at, and the role that the Wagner group is playing in Mali today is beyond just being a mercenary outfit in a way. Russia is also using the presence of the Wagner group in Mali as part of its way of expanding its security interest in Africa.

We all know from the days of the defunct executive outcome in the past that mercenary groups, the extent to which many of these actors can also be used by countries to advance their security interests. And this is one area of concern that we need to look at in the context of the absence of a legally binding instrument that guides the activities of mercenaries across the world. When mercenaries are operating in an opaque manner in countries that are fragile, where national-level rules are not even present to regulate their activities, what becomes of them when it comes to the issue of human rights violations, and when it comes to the issue of unconstitutional change of government?

We also witness the death of Idris Derby of Chad. To date, there has not been any concrete discussion about how it happened. What is the role of foreign actors in that context? The emergence of his son as the leader of Chad is one example of what the world witnessed regarding the unconstitutional change in government. The same applies to Guinea and Burkina Faso.

Countries such as Nigeria have been pushing for the recharging of Lake Chad for quite some time, but not much has been done to push that agenda forward. Lake Chad is home to millions of people who rely on it as a source of livelihood. Not much has been done. The population displacement, as a result of Boko Haram, activities of Wagner groups, and activities of rebels in Mali, Burkina Faso, and other countries within the Sahel area also have huge implications for migration and the context of how transnational crimes and instability begin to siege. When you look at border controls within the ECOWAS region, they are very weak partly because of the existing Group Protocol on the free movement of persons and goods, which aids the movement of criminal groups, because they take advantage of these permissions that they get in terms of free movement to undertake or engage in some criminal activities within the region.

This is one area that is of interest. And beyond the issue of migration within Europe and North America, the Sahel and the entire Africa should be an area of focus in terms of how we are able to monitor the movement of people within the continent, all in the name of insecurity. But as they move from one country due to insecurity, they become causes and sources of insecurity in other countries where they move. Libya presents an important example of that. With the fall of Gaddafi in Libya, we saw the movement of people, and we saw the movement of arms. Many of them have aided and continue to sustain pre-existing conflicts in other countries such as Nigeria, Chad, Mali, and Burkina Faso. I think that is one key area of focus.

My last point is the agenda that we should look out for, and I think Professor Jibrin Ibrahim raised that point when he talked about the pathway to recovery and development. He presented one of the key pathways through which the Sahel can be salvaged, but you need governance for security to make sense. Leadership is very central to whatever conversation will be had on security, because even if you develop the security plan or the agenda for recovery, leadership is not given or organized in the context of the kind of individuals and groups that are trusted with power.

We will only experience a cyclical movement or change of these individuals who continue to move from one point to another while the ordinary Sahel people continue to suffer with individuals that are not concerned about development in the office. Unfortunately, while they are here ruling, their kids are out there in Europe and in America going to school, but the schools, the health system, and the public ability here that they are supposed to enjoy are fragile. Their own families are living over there with the resources that are supposed to be used to develop the region.

## V. PANEL DISCUSSION

*Selected comments by the contributors to this report during the discussion following the presentations. Some of the invited attendees from the United States and internationally participated during this segment.*

### PROFESSOR JIBRIN IBRAHIM

We have had a very good spread about the various dimensions that characterize the crisis in the Sahel. I agree, in particular, with the emphasis that has been placed on demographic changes, the youth bulge, and the rise of non-state actors as key players because that is the core of the problem.

Professor Kwaja has raised the issue of the circulation of small arms and light weapons. In Nigeria today, we are talking about 6 million arms in the hands of non-state actors. This changes the situation completely because the Nigerian State and its armed forces do not have that quantity of arms under their own control. That is why it becomes a battle both about the states' survival and the country's political re-composition. What is emerging, and what political alignments are being broken or forged? The key factor is that public trust has been broken, and the challenge is creating a new social contract.

The big story has been the decline of governance in the Sahel. I have started my presentation with the specific rule of climate change as a factor in precipitating the crisis in the Sahel with the 1973 drought. In 2009, when the Boko Haram insurgency arose around the Lake Chad Basin and in the four countries around it, that was the time the governments in the sub-region started talking about Lake Chad losing 80% of its water surface. When did Lake Chad lose 80% of its water surface? That occurred in the 1970s, almost fifty years ago. The governments in the zone only saw it as a problem in the past decade when the insurgency became intractable. If the governments were governing, they would have anticipated in good time that the climate emergency would lead to violent conflicts and anticipated the problem while searching for solutions.

This is my key point: there is a governance challenge in the Sahel. Institutions are not playing the roles attributed to them. Institutions are not just structures; some organizations are supposed to perform specific functions. When you have those structures that exist as formal entities but are unable to perform their functions, outcomes worsen because emerging problems are not being addressed until they get out of hand.

There is a sense in which the real challenge before the Sahel is that of governance. I am glad we have focused less on Libya. The easy path has been to place all blame on the crisis in the Sahel to the breakup of Libya, often forgetting the problems that predated the Libyan crisis. We should not forget that part of the history of the Sahel has been the existence of criminal groups and trafficking in persons, guns, cigarettes, and drugs since the colonial period. Throughout the past 100+ years, these circuits have existed, prospered, and found ways of sustaining themselves. Suppose today that you have six million guns in the hands of non-state actors in Nigeria, it is because these circuits are sufficiently developed, advanced, and capable of providing such a vast arsenal. Precisely because of this reality, these forces have become capable of confronting states and posing the challenge of a takeover of state power.

One of the points I want to make is that we have focused too much, I think, on the religious dimension of the crisis. The narrative is that many terrorist groups are influenced heavily by jihadist ideologies and have placed that jihadi ideology as the central motivating factor for their action. However, the studies that we are currently doing on the rise of terrorism and its impact on Nigeria are showing that the jihadists are now a minority in terms of non-state actors and that the majority are now simply criminal bands. These bands have had a history of very negative relationships with the state or suffered from abuse by state actors. Many of them were pastoralists and have lost a significant part of their herd and now are simply acting as people who have come to the realization that possession of the Kalashnikov is a huge change in their situation. They can use it against their neighbors. They can use it against the communities they belong to. They can use it against the state and its actors. Above all, if those who have historically been in control of the state have used that control to acquire wealth for themselves and their personal aggrandizement, they too can acquire that wealth, start building their fortunes, and enjoy what those who had hitherto been in control of the state have been enjoying.

This makes it a very difficult issue to address because, in terms of jihadi actors, there are things you can do in terms of deradicalization, mobilizing communities to realize the weak ideological justification for those actions within the doctrine of Islam itself, etc. However, when you have more and more actors who are not bound by any ideological guidance but are acting as free actors who have realized that the pathway to wealth is the Kalashnikov. They have acquired the means to success as they see it, so it becomes much more difficult to handle them.

The sociology of Sahelian societies is very important as it is defined by the precariousness of life. A significant percentage of the population is living in extreme poverty and has nothing to lose in terms of the activities it engages in. Suddenly, they are realizing that their normal docility is the explanatory factor for the terrible lives of misery and deprivation they have grown up in. They have now changed from the attitude of docility of their parents and grandparents. They have realized their agency by deciding that their life of misery must change. They have decided to start enjoying what the elite have been enjoying for a very long time because they had control of the security forces. In other words, they have decided to start calling the shots, literally.

### **AMBASSADOR ZANGO ABDU**

I would like to thank Professor Jibrin Ibrahim and Professor Yasmine Hasnaoui for their wonderful intervention. However, the intervention by Professor Hasnaoui leaves me with so much pessimism about the future of the Sahel due to the cocktail of challenges she enumerated. Professor Jibrin and Professor Hasnaoui made the key point that at the core of the challenges in the Sahel is the issue of governance.

And when you look at the concept of ungovernable space, there is nowhere in the world that typifies that concept, not even Afghanistan, better than the Sahel. A considerable number of states in the Sahel such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad are losing control over their territories due activities of bandits, Islamic Jihadists, terrorists/insurgents and criminals. There is an urgent need to address these challenges and as Professor Hasnaoui highlighted it involves a cocktail of actions at both state, regional and continental levels. The more the global community ignores the challenges in the Sahel, the more they find themselves in a more precarious situation.

Governance is collapsing and nobody seems to be doing anything about it while the states are gradually becoming completely incapable of holding the center. State failure has manifested in several ways such that the states are now taken over by criminals. So, it is very important, I think, to emphasize, as Professor Jibrin has highlighted, the need to urgently address the situation, especially the rising youth population and their expectations. There is also a need to adopt a short, medium, and long-term strategy/interventions as enunciated by Professor Hasnaoui. Overall, addressing the crisis in the Sahel depends on the resolve of the international community and this needs to be given utmost and urgent priority for peace, security, and sustainable development.

### **PROFESSOR YASMINE HASNAOUI**

Thank you so much Professor Yonah. By listening to the distinguished speakers, we all agree on important things. We agree that despite government efforts, whether interregional or international, the security situation is getting worse. It is deteriorating. I am sorry to give this bleak image, but it is the truth. I think that we all agree that not only security matters, these interventions matter, but also that to ensure peace we have to tackle the development program. We have to say that purely a security approach is not enough. There should be broad development programs that will be needed to transform economies, increase the living standard, and give young people hope. I think this is very important and I was very moved by the first talk by Professor Jibrin about youth. He was saying that these youth take up arms because they see terrorists take arms. That is really something that needs to be addressed and that these solutions should not only come from international organizations. As Africans we should not wait for international intervention. The solutions must also be African and should come from locals, nationals, and regional stakeholders assisted by external partners as needed. The situation is worsening with these mercenaries being in Africa. We may blame France for the things that it did, but now things are worsening with these mercenaries from Russia, we will see other mercenaries from China, etc. The perception of the region must also change and there should be an integrated approach that includes, among

other things, building institutions, promoting the creation of jobs for the youth, and human rights only through targeted collective efforts so that the desired results can be achieved. This is something that the community needs to talk about. More development and not only focus on ensuring security because I believe that the youth, women, and elderly are the future in Africa. We have to put our hands together to bring something to the African continent because it is a very hard thing to see people dying on a daily basis, people crossing borders as if Europe or the U.S. will give them something whereas in Africa it is the African future. It is Africa that can give them something. Also, I sometimes blame resolutions that don't pass, like the resolution that was co-authored by Niger and Ireland on climate change, on countries that casted a negative vote. I feel sorry to hear about these issues because there should be a responsibility of the international community that they have to be aware that climate change is a real issue that must be taken into consideration.

#### **AMBASSADOR (RET.) CHARLES RAY**

My grandmother taught me “what has already been said well, do not try to resay it.” I think that the speakers before me have really covered the points that need to be addressed to deal with the security situation in the Sahel quite effectively. It has been amazing to hear them speak and with that I will say, keep doing what you are doing and thank you for including me.

#### **PROFESSOR RITA COLWELL**

The panel discussion reinforces the conviction that it is important to develop governance within the community. As in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, when the local communities, the people themselves, are in charge, greater and more powerful success is achieved. When external forces move in, without local participation and ownership, a fracturing and rupturing of society too frequently occurs. We need to find ways to empower local communities, youth, and women and, only then will Africa prosper.

#### **DR. CHRIS KWAJA**

Thank you very much. I think it is a wonderful session with this area of professionalism, bringing valid perspectives to the conversation. One point I want to add quickly is that amid this crisis of governance and security, we are talking about the old question of resilience. How are people and communities responding to existential issues around their everyday survival? I think it is in this context that we also appreciate the disconnect between the states and citizens because citizens no longer have confidence in the state and its institutions, and in response, they are living their lives with this notion that we are not expecting anything from the state.

What is the limit to which resilience can also be implemented by these communities? That is why we have to go back to the question of how we get the states to be alive to their own primary responsibility of protection and provision. And this is what meetings of this nature and consistent advocacy will do to help the Sahel and the African Continent in general.

#### **PROFESSOR DON WALLACE JR.**

Charlie Ray is right. We should not repeat what others have said. This has been an excellent panel, as always. I returned from South Africa a few weeks ago, and I spent a lot of time in East Africa as well as one or two West Africa countries. If you look at Africa's 54 countries, there is a lot to be encouraged by. I think the Sahel and the countries that have been described today, maybe they, quite frankly, what I've heard is very discouraging. Professor Ibrahim, in his various remarks, has put his finger on several cores and others have picked that up. There has been a real breakdown in many Sahel countries for many reasons. The families have broken down, endless displacement, and traditions are destroyed. People point out the State doesn't exist. I agree with Rita that things are on a local level. But if there is no framework or no state, then it is not going to be sufficient.

We hear of all the consequences of the breakdown, the private groups, the arms, the people who exploit, etc. But that happens everywhere. But I think it's particularly bad, quite frankly, in the Sahel countries, as described.

What is the answer? What is to be done? Who is to do it? I'm not very clear. We know what the usual answers are, of course, you want to involve people who are not involved (youth, women, etc.). I don't think that is going to be sufficient. I don't think the international community externally can do much. They certainly can do something. I honestly don't know. It strikes me that the situation is, sort of, unexceptionally desperate in many of the Sahel countries, which is not the case in all of Africa, quite frankly. So, I think that we should not generalize about the whole continent, but I do think we have to work at it. I was very interested in the point made, I think made by Professor Ibrahim, that is no longer the Jihadist push which creates the security problem. There's so much detail within the general breakdown, in which all sorts of pathologies exist. I suppose what we have to do is collect the best sorts of brains we have heard today. But where do you begin? My guess is, and I don't read these countries well, you can't take all countries at once. Maybe you take a few that has a bit more hope and begin to organize around them.

It has certainly been a most enlightening discussion, but I have seen it somewhat discouraging, and Yonah knows, I'm a great optimist. Thank you.

### **PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER**

There are those who believe that the worst is yet to come and whether civilization in Africa and elsewhere will survive. I wonder whether the speakers and panelists ever glimpse into the future in terms of what might happen or if we are going to repeat history.

### **PROFESSOR JIBRIN IBRAHIM**

Maybe the point I want to make is that thirty minutes before we started this conversation, the African Union mediators were able to sign an agreement between Ethiopia and its rebel region of Tigray to sign a ceasefire after two years of war. I believe that is encouraging because, knowing the history of wars in Ethiopia, you continue fighting until you completely annihilate the enemy. But, if Ethiopia today is finding itself in a situation where, after two years of mass killing and suffering, maybe they have to think of a negotiated settlement as a preferable outcome for all parties, it is a good sign. In other words, deterioration and decay is not the only direction of movement that is available. It is possible for belligerents to see a better alternative and follow it.

When we met last week in Niamey, Niger Republic, to discuss the work of the high-level panel on the Sahel, maybe the key issue that arose was the breakdown of governance we are talking about in the Sahel is because those with responsibility for governance failed. It was African leaders that decided among themselves that nobody should have more than two terms in office. They started breaking that agreement. They had an agreement about zero tolerance for change of government through unconstitutional means. They started breaking that. They had an agreement on genuine support for multiparty democracy, and they started manipulating elections.

So, when people say democracy failed, it is actually those in charge of running democratic regimes that failed. There is a sense in which, for me, what is important is trying to reorient the mentality towards enlightened self-interest.

I live in Abuja, and over the past four to five days, when the United States and the United Kingdom issued an advisory that there are likely to be major attacks by terrorists in Abuja and asked their citizens to start withdrawing from this city, I saw members of Nigeria's ruling class with real fear in their eyes. Now, these people who are out there in the villages, out there in the country, killing people and taking their property while causing havoc, and there was no fear within ruling classes because they felt personally safe. Now, no one is safe, and already they are taking the battle against violent extremism more seriously. The threat of survival for everybody is now on the table, and that could lead to more serious attitudes in seeking solutions.

In that context, the state either gives up the ambition to survive or it starts opening up to really negotiate a new social contract with its citizens. We are confronting the total loss of public trust in the state and the breakdown of the social contract between citizens and the state. If that issue is not addressed, then, I think, the whole world is in for a big problem.

I think my final word on Nigeria is just something to reflect on; for 40 years, the Nigerian state has survived on the basis of petroleum rent. In the last four to five years, it is no longer able to get that petroleum rent for the simple reason that most of the petrol produced in Nigeria today is stolen and goes to private pockets. The state that was so dependent on that petroleum right is now unable to function because it has basically no source of revenue.

So, when the crisis reaches that point, you either move towards complete anarchy or start taking measures to rebuild trust and the social contract between citizens and the state. I sense what the Sahel is telling its inhabitants today is that we have reached that point. When terrorism takes over completely, in which case for a country like Nigeria, we are going to produce maybe 120 million-130 million refugees that will head for the United States of America and Europe, or we start fixing things. Then we can continue to stay here.

**PROFESSOR DON WALLACE JR.**

Thank you to everyone and thank you to Yonah. Hopefully, we can have some more of these sessions about the Sahel.

## VI. ABOUT THE EDITORS

**PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER** is the Director of the International Center for Terrorism Studies (at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies) and the Inter-University Center for Legal Studies (at the International Law Institute). He is a former Professor and Director of Terrorism Studies at the State University of New York and George Washington University. Professor Alexander also held academic appointments elsewhere such as American, Catholic, Chicago, Columbia, and Georgetown's Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). He has published over one hundred books and founded five international journals. His personal collections are housed at the Hoover Institution Library and Archives at Stanford University.

**PROFESSOR DON WALLACE, JR.** Yale University BA, Harvard University, LLB, is a Professor of Law at Georgetown University as well as Chairman of the International Law Institute. He is a U.S. delegate to UNCITRAL, Vice President of the UNIDROIT Foundation, a member of the American Law Institute, and the former chairman of the International Law Section at the American Bar Association. He is also the author and co-author of several books and articles.

## VII. ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**PROFESSOR JIBRIN IBRAHIM, Ph.D.**, is a political scientist and development expert with over thirty years of active engagement with civil society. He has conducted research across Anglophone and Francophone West Africa. Dr. Ibrahim was a member of the Electoral Reform Committee established by President Umaru Yar Adua in 2007. He was also the chair of the Global Call for Action against Poverty (GCAP) and chair of the West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOF) Executive Committee. Previously, he was the director of the Centre for Democracy & Development, a regional research, advocacy, and non-governmental training organization for West Africa. Dr. Ibrahim has also served as the Nigeria Country Director of Global Rights and the director of research at the Centre for Research and Documentation, Kano, Nigeria. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Bordeaux, France. He was previously an Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. He has published many books, monographs, and articles in refereed journals and has consulted extensively for the UNDP, DFID, and FOSTER, amongst many other agencies. He writes a weekly column, "Deepening Democracy," in the Daily Trust and Premium Times, two Nigerian daily newspapers, and has sat on many editorial boards of learned journals.

**AMBASSADOR ZANGO ABDU** Currently with USIP leading its programs in Abuja. New role as Country Manager, USIP Nigeria office, Abuja. Former Deputy Chief of Mission, Nigeria Embassy, Washington DC.

**PROFESSOR YASMINE HASNAOUI, Ph.D.**, is a specialist in North Africa Affairs and Conflict Resolution. She is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the American International University in Kuwait. Prior to this, she taught Culture in the MENA region and foreign languages at the Osgood Center for International Studies, Washington DC, Amherst College Massachusetts, Austin College Texas. Professor Hasnaoui is a recipient of the Fulbright FLTA scholarship. She holds a PhD in Human Sciences with research on "Algeria Foreign Policy Role in the Western Sahara Conflict" from Mohamed V University and an M.A. in Communication Studies and Media. Professor Hasnaoui was a former Chair of Council for International Members at Global Ties, a well-established NGO in the U.S.

**U.S. AMBASSADOR [RET.] CHARLES RAY** served 30 years in the Foreign Service (from 1982 to 2012), after completing a 20-year career in the U.S. Army. His Foreign Service assignments were Guangzhou and Shenyang, China; Chiang Mai, Thailand; PM bureau/ DCM in Freetown, Sierra Leone; Consul General in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; ambassador, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Diplomat in residence, University of Houston; deputy assistant secretary of defense for POW/Missing Personnel; and ambassador, Zimbabwe. He has a B.S. from Benedictine College, Atchison, KS; an M.S. from the University of Southern California; and an M.S. the National War College. He's also a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, the Army War College's Land Forces Commander Course, and the Defense Intelligence School's Postgraduate Intelligence Course.

## VIII. ABOUT THE COMMENTATORS

**PROFESSOR RITA COLWELL, Ph.D.**, is a pioneering microbiologist and the first woman to lead the National Science Foundation. She is a Distinguished University Professor at both the University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health. She has received awards from the Emperor of Japan, the King of Sweden, the Prime Minister of Singapore, and the President of the United States. Her interests are focused on global infectious diseases, water issues, including safe drinking water for both the developed and developing world. She is a nationally recognized scientist and educator and has authored or co-authored 16 books and more than 700 scientific publications. She produced the award-winning film, *Invisible Seas*, and has served on editorial boards of numerous scientific journals. She is the author of the highly acclaimed book *A Lab of One's Own* (Simon & Schuster).

**DR. CHRIS KWAJA** is a Senior Lecturer and Researcher at the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria. He is also a Visiting Research Fellow with the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Abuja, Nigeria. He holds a Doctorate Degree in International Relations and Strategic Studies. He was an exchange fellow of Dispute Resolution at the University of Massachusetts, U.S.A and is an alumnus of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Switzerland. Kwaja has been the recipient of several research awards such as the CODESRIA Governance Institute on Private Military and Security Companies, 2009; United Nations Mandated University for Peace Doctoral Research Award, 2009; as well as the Peace Fellow Award of the West Africa Research Centre, 2010. From 2011 to 2015, he served as the Director General for Research and Planning as well as Honourable Commissioner for Local Governments and Chieftancy Affairs in the Governor's Office of Plateau State, Nigeria. Kwaja has over 50 scholarly publications to his credit in journals, books, monographs series, technical reports, policy, and security briefs among others. His research focuses on the politics of identity in Africa, the privatization of security, democratization, conflict and peace studies, as well as security sector reform in transition societies. In 2014, Kwaja was part of the Humanitarian Assessment Mission of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to Plateau State, which was the first comprehensive humanitarian mission conducted by the NHRC in Nigeria. Most recently, in 2016 he was commissioned as the Zonal Coordinator for the North East region (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe States), to conduct the National Survey on Small Arms, Experiences of Arms Violence and Perception on Security in Nigeria, by the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) / Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PRESCOM).

