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TOPICS: Terrorism by Non-State Actors, Illicit Small Arms Trade

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Terrorism by Non-State Actors Recent Updates

The Sahel region in Northern Africa is one that continues to deteriorate today, with non-state actors constantly perpetrating acts of indiscriminate violence in a region already plagued by humanitarian and political crises. The conflict, exacerbated by non-state actors like Boko Haram and al-Qaeda, has increased the number of displaced people to beyond 2.6 million.¹ In the last few years, al-Qaeda has expanded its influence in West Africa, an area particularly vulnerable to extremism. These nations already have weak governance institutions, limited state capacity, corruption, poverty, and ethnic tensions.² The situation in the Sahel region, as well as other cases of terrorism, needs international cooperation to form multi-stakeholder agreements focused on humanitarian law and multilateral cooperation. The International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) is addressing the influence that terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and also Boko Haram have on the region. In the first half of 2017, there was a notable decline in Boko Haram attacks, but since September 2017, it increased steadily to a peak of 143 civilian casualties in November. Boko Haram's means of attacks are unorthodox, especially with the use of child suicide bombers. In 2017, their use of children as suicide bombers increased by 5 times. Today, during the first six months of 2022, the security landscape has taken a new turn across the Sahel.³ Jihadist insurgencies have become abundant and the epicenter of this crisis affects most

¹UNHCR - Sahel Emergency. <https://www.unhcr.org/sahel-emergency.html>.

²"The Schism of Jihadism in the Sahel: How Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State Are Battling for Legitimacy in the Sahelian Context." *Middle East Institute*, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/schism-jihadism-sahel-how-al-qaeda-and-islamic-state-are-battling-legitimacy-sahelian>.

³D'Amato, Silvia, and Edoardo Baldaro. "Counter-Terrorism in the Sahel: Increased Instability and Political Tensions." *ICCT*, 7 July 2022, <https://icct.nl/publication/the-politics-of-counter-terrorism-in-the-sahel-how-political-tensions-are-impacting-the-fight-against-terrorism/>.

of the West-African countries, including Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, Benin, and Ivory Coast. With multiple groups fighting for power within the Sahel region, increased competition between the groups makes the crisis even more dangerous. The ICCT is focused on undertaking means to bring about peace and stability in the region.⁴ It is focused on enhancing intelligence and security cooperation between the associated member states. With Mali's recent leave from G5 Sahel, an anti-jihadi coalition between African nations, we could see dynamic shifts within Africa.

⁴“West Africa & Sahel.” *ICCT*, 18 Apr. 2019, <https://icct.nl/region/west-africa-sahel/>.

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Illicit Small Arms Trade Recent Updates

The pervasive presence of illicit small arms is a daily threat to the health, safety, security, and development of citizens. In 2001, countries adopted the Program of Action to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).⁵ Africa has been at the forefront of the illicit small arms and light weapons trade even though they are mainly produced outside of the continent and transferred to illegally armed groups in Africa. The illicit small arms trade is especially prevalent in Kenya, where almost 680,000 households own small arms and 2.7% of households own guns.⁶ Considering Kenya's porous borders with Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda, which all constantly experience conflict, they contribute to the increase of small arms and other forms of organized crime. With the crisis brought to the attention of representatives of Africa in the United Nations, the General Assembly sought to respond by passing Resolution A/77/77 in May 2022, providing assistance to states to curb the illicit traffic in small arms. This resolution also addressed the growing role that states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have played in the global arms trade. An increase of arms diversions, referring to the appropriation or rerouting of conventional military materials contrary to national or international law including towards illicit markets in the MENA regions.⁷

⁵“We Must Tackle Illicit Weapons, Ammunition in Parts of Africa, Globally | Africa Renewal.” *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/september-2021/we-must-tackle-illicit-weapons-ammunition-parts-africa-globally>.

⁶“Global Study on Firearms 2020.” *United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime*, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/firearms-study.html>.

⁷“Arms Transfer and SALW Controls in the Middle East and North Africa: Challenges and State of Play.” *SIPRI*, <https://sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2022/arms-transfer-and-salw-controls-middle-east-and-north-africa-challenges-and-state-play>.

Multiple UN embargoes have been in place since 2015, yet continuous violations have been reported by states and non-state actors. The UN Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons has provisions that cover all aspects of the manufacturing, storage, transfer, and disposal of SALW in all regions. However, conformity with the UNPOA has been lackluster causing there to be a lack of transparency in the MENA.

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