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The debate on the decline of democracy is not new. This paper focuses on the current debate on the decline of democracy and downward trends in major democracy assessment indices. Examples from African countries demonstrate that democracy indices based on institutional politics alone do not account for alternative democratic spaces and practices. This paper is the edited version of the keynote speech delivered by the author at the 6th Pécs African Studies Conference in 2021.

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This research aims at identifying the main causes of the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia and its socio-economic consequences, utilizing informal methods of data collection and phone interviews. In addition, observations, assessment, and informal communications with members of the Ethiopian and Tigray defence forces were also included in the data collection. One of the findings is that most of the people are rather spending their time with arguing on who is responsible for the current war instead of focusing on the development of the economy.

JUDIT GODÓ

IN THE SHACKLES OF INSTABILITY:
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Suffering from a multidimensional crisis, the Sahel has morphed into the new center of terror. This paper aims to discuss the challenges and effectiveness of Operation Barkhane, the terminating counter-terrorism operation led by the French, which has started its strategical transformation by merging into the European initiative known as the Takuba Task Force. The importance of the topic speaks for itself because the transformation of the operation and the withdrawal of half of the French troops may have a drastic impact on the future of the Sahel.

AFRICA AND THE DECLINE OF THE DEMOCRACY DEBATE

MOHAMED SALIH

PHD IN ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER, UK

EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT AT THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
OF SOCIAL STUDIES OF ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM IN THE NETHERLANDS

MS01011952@GMAIL.COM

Abstract

The debate on the decline of democracy is not new. It can be traced to the period between the First and Second World Wars, and it resurfaced during the 1970s, followed by the most spectacular democratic resurgence in human history. This lecture focuses on the current debate on the decline of democracy and downward trends in major democracy assessment indices. Africa is among the three least democratic world regions, with 42% of African countries currently designated as not free.

Measuring the decline or rise of democracy only by the performance of institutional politics does not provide a complete picture of the issue. Institutional politics does not account for the resilience and thriving new spaces where democratic vibrancy and civic engagement prevail. Examples from African countries demonstrate that democracy indices based on institutional politics alone do not account for alternative democratic spaces and practices.

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Keywords

democracy, African state, governance, patrimonialism, deliberation

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Introduction

The decline of democracy is also referred to as democratic recession, democracy in retreat, democratic crisis, democratic discontent, democracy under siege, and democracy backsliding. Although all these connotations allude to different qualities of the decline, they all point to what they perceive as something terribly wrong that has happened to the democratic tradition post-Cold War order. A synoptic characterization of what we mean by democracy in decline is a crisis of the legitimacy of the state and its inability to protect fundamental freedoms, including respect of the rule of law, free and fair elections, minority rights, and freedom of the media. Such a depiction of the state of democracy would suggest that state institutions represented by governments have become dysfunctional, defined by cronyism and corrupt politicians supported by the equally corrupt political elite. This imprisonment of state institutions is reinforced by non-responsive elected representatives, who, in many cases, side with those who have overtaken the state rather than the people who elected them. In a sense, the decline of democracy is a symptom of the crisis of state legitimacy.

Therefore, it is not difficult to argue that by claiming that the crisis is a crisis of democracy, the state and the corrupt politicians attempt to shift the blame from the substance to the practice of democracy, which they have jeopardized. However, does the conflation of the decline of democracy and the crisis of state legitimacy mean that politics exists only in the state realm, or does the decline of the democratic values exercised within institutional politics suggest no other space for civic engagement exists? These questions inform the argument of this presentation. But before answering them, let me answer several preliminary questions: Is the debate on the decline of democracy new, and what makes it different this time? Why is democracy declining? How are citizens responding to the double crisis of the state and democracy?

Is the debate on the decline of democracy new?

The decline and even the end of democracy themes are not new. The debate on the end of democracy raged between the First and Second World Wars, appearing in Ralph Adam Cram's 1937 book *The End of Democracy*.¹ He argued that the end of democracy was already taking place (1937: 19). For Cram (Ibid. 1937: 10), the end of democracy began with the emergence of three totalitarian regimes: First, a communist system under Stalin, who in effect created state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat; second, the supreme tyranny of a self-perpetuating oligarchy under the dictatorship of Hitler and Nazism; third, fascism proclaimed "all for the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state" (Sternhel 1976: 356)², leaving no space for civic engagement or democratic practices.

Cram's concerns are understandable as the period between the two World Wars did not give much room for optimism, considering the rise of fascism and nazism in Europe. But democracy did not die and it rebounded after the Second World War, becoming the only game in town despite its ups and downs.

About three decades after Cram pessimistic book, Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki (1975) were entrusted by the U.S. Government to lead the work of the Tri-

lateral Commission on the governability of democracy. The Trilateral Commission was established to respond to a perceived decline of democracy in the USA, Europe, and Asia. The report was prudent enough to ask the question as to whether political democracy as it existed during the mid-1970s was a viable form of government for the industrialized countries of Europe, North America, and Asia. The commission concluded that it wasn't because representative democracy and its institutions required significant reforms to establish a more viable system of government for the 20th century.³

Today, the same question is posed with increasing urgency by intellectuals, the general public, and media outlets. It is being reflected in public opinion polls and democracy indicators. John Kean's (2009)⁴ seminal work *The Life and Death of Democracy* captured these themes, tracing the rise and fall of democracies and empires from the early history of civilizations and empires. He also documented the most recent global expansion of representative democracy from Europe. Kean laments that representative democracy alone is no longer capable of satisfying citizens' craving for new forms of democracy, mainly drawn from the current democratic development worldwide.

Keane's proclamations of the near-death of representative democracy were picked up by democracy assessment indices depicting what is now referred to as the decline of democracy. Two influential journals published special issues on the theme:

Foreign Affairs (2015),⁵ a journal considered the best in the business for unlocking future political trends and informing policies and decision-makers, followed suit with a special issue titled *Democracy in Decline and How Can Washington Reverse the Tide?* Larry Diamond (2015) stated that "Democracy itself seems to have lost its appeal," adding that "many emerging democracies have failed to meet their citizens' hopes for freedom, security, and economic growth, just as the world's established democracies, including the United States, have grown increasingly dysfunctional."⁶ Fukuyama (2015: 11) asked an important question: "Why is democracy performing so poorly?" He questioned whether we are experiencing a momentary setback in a general movement toward greater democracy worldwide or whether this signals a broader shift in world politics and the rise of alternatives to democracy. *The Journal of Democracy* (2016) released a special issue with the theme *Is Democracy in Decline?*, which was edited by Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner. The contributors to this special issue are considered some of the world's leading scholars and policymakers in the field of democracy promotion and assessment, including Francis Fukuyama, Robert Kagan, Marc F. Plattner, Larry Diamond, and Thomas Carothers.⁷

The decline and even the end of democracy themes are not new. The debate on the end of democracy raged between the First and Second World Wars, appearing in Ralph Adam Cram's 1937 book *The End of Democracy*.

It is plausible to argue that debates about the decline of democracy are not new. Democratic decline is associated with the crisis in state legitimacy and democratic institutions becoming dysfunctional. For example, between the two wars when Crampton wrote about the end of democracy, in the 1970s the Trilateral Commission was set up during the Watergate cover-up, the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, the civil rights movement and racial conflicts, and economic decline. It is not surprising that the decline debate begun during the Trump Presidency that epitomized the tarnished image of U.S. democracy during the second decade of the 21st century.⁸

However, there are differences and similarities. First, earlier periods of the decline of democracy were confined to the USA and Europe as most developing countries, including Africa, were still under colonial rule. Democracy was the privilege of the colonial powers, which preserved democratic values for their citizens, while no such privileges were accorded to the colonized. Colonial rule was neither democratic nor respectful of the human rights of citizens in the colonies.

The common denominator of the decline of democracy is global. This time around, the crisis of democracy is affecting the world globally, including Africa. The factors explaining this decline are not only relevant to Africa but also global. Plattner (2015:7) mentioned three of these factors: 1) the growing sense that the advanced democracies are in trouble in terms of their economic and political performance; 2) the new self-confidence and seemingly apparent vitality of some authoritarian countries, and 3) the shifting geopolitical balance between democracies and their rivals.⁹ Likewise, Thomas Carothers noted that democracy's tumbles or backsliding in both the United States and Europe have significantly damaged the standing of democracy in the eyes of many people around the world. For example, the flip side of democracy's dwindling standing has been the growing clout of several leading authoritarian regimes. Key among them is China, whose ability to make enormous economic strides without introducing democratic reforms has cast doubt on the notion that democracy is the only appropriate political system for wealthy countries (Carothers 2015:5).¹⁰

Conventionally, the failure of African democracy was explained against the backdrop of factors such as the politics of the belly¹¹, patrimonialism, lack of social and cultural embeddedness, and religious and ethnic cleavages. However, these factors existed prior to the latest decline of democracy and, therefore, was not expected to intensify over the last decade or so. These factors may point more to the intensity of the crisis of state legitimacy rather than factors inherent in the internal dynamics of African society and culture. Regardless of what factors have induced the worldwide decline of democracy, these factors have nothing to do with African culture and society as sources of current democratic decline.

How Does Africa Fare in The Debate?

During 2010-2019, Africa was rated as the third world region with the highest percentage of countries where democracy had declined (41%), which was far above the world average (28%) for non-democratic countries (Table 1 and Figure 1) (Freedom

in The World 2021: 20-26)¹². The free and partially-free countries in Africa comprise 59%, a decline from about 61% in 2000.¹³ Among the 15 countries with the highest declining democracies, Mali, Tanzania, Burundi, Benin, Mozambique, Comoros, Gabon, and Uganda have seen the highest decline during the last ten year, ranging between -39% in Mali and -11% in Uganda – with the other five countries falling between Mali and Uganda.

Ibrahim Index of African governance (2020) produced similar results (Table 2 and Figure 2), but with far less negative score change for security and the rule of law (-0.7 %) and participation, rights, and inclusion (-1.4 %). When the score change between 2010-2019 for the foundation of economic opportunity (+4.1 %) and human development (+3.0 %) is added, the overall African average was +1.2 %.

Region	Free (%)	Partly Free (%)	Not Free (%)
Americas	60	31	9
Asia Pacific	44	33	23
EURASIA	0.0	33	67
Europe	81	17	2
Middle East and North Africa	11	17	72
Sub-Saharan Africa	16	43	41
World Average	42	30	28

Table 1. World average and regional classification by category and scores (%), 2020.
 Source: Freedom in the World Report, 2021, available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>

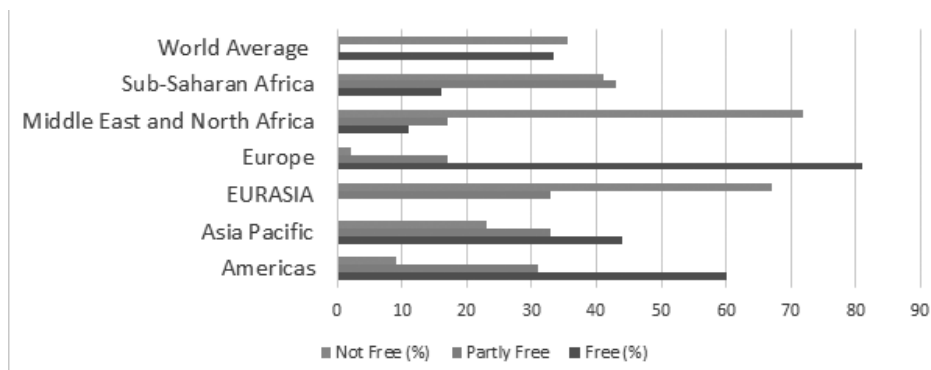


Figure 1: World and regional classification by category (%), 2020.
 Source: Freedom House (2021). Freedom in the World Report, available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>

Trend classification	2019 average score	Score change 2010-2019
Security and Rule of Law	49.5	-0.7
Participation, Rights and Inclusion	46.2	-1.4
Foundations for Economic Opportunity	47.8	+4.1
Human Development	51.9	+3.0
Overall African Governance Average	48.8	+1.2

^ Table 2. African governance trend Classification, 2019 average and 2010-2019 score change. Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2021, available at: <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020-index-report.pdf>

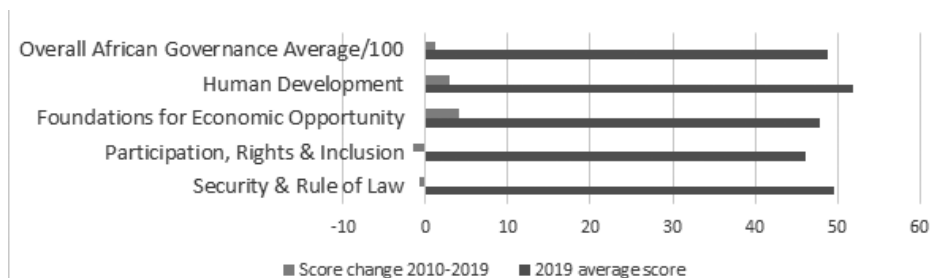
Four conclusions can be made from the findings of Freddon in the World and Ibrahim Index of African Governance:

1. The indices are state-centric, focusing on how citizens' rights are disregarded or not guaranteed, respected or acted upon as codified in the jurisdictions of the legislative state. The indices inform us that the state has failed to discharge its duties of facilitating and reinforcing democratic rules, but has instead flouted the rules.
2. There is a priori assumption that institutional politics and organized civic associations are the only spaces where democracy is practised, thus ignoring the pervasive nature of politics permeating the totality of human activities and existence.
3. Those who claim that democracy has declined assume that institutional democracy and conventional representative democracy are the only spaces for democratic expression.
4. Even if the claim that democracy is declining is true, the introductory remarks have shown that upward and downward trends in democratic performance are not new. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that crises are common to democracy, particularly during periods of state capture¹⁴, extreme economic and political corruption, minority exclusion, dereliction of duty, abuse of office, and economic recession.

With these four conclusions in mind, the final part of this presentation is devoted to Africa's new and expanding spaces and forms of democracy outside institutional politics.

New spaces and forms of democracy are expanding

Four developments characterize the past two decades of democratic resurgence outside institutional politics: local and grassroots democracy, cyber democracy, and the expansion of private, political party and interest groups TV and radio broadcasters, including digital radios.



▲ *Figure 2: Trend Classification, 2019 and 2010-2019 score change (%).*
 Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2020, available at: <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020-index-report.pdf>

First, voter turnout is not linear, and booms and busts are part of the democratic process. Large voter turnout could be attributed to many factors. Some are related to regulations, such as when there is more voters turnout in countries with compulsory voting. There is documented evidence of higher voter turnout in authoritarian regimes where party leaders intimidate citizens into voting against their will. In transition or mature democracies, low voter turnout is not necessarily an indicator of the quality of the democratic process. Even in old democracies, legal trickery was used to exclude a disfranchised population, such as African Americans in the United States. Low voter turn out could be attributed to political exclusion and lack of government response to citizens' fundamental socio-economic concerns, where state capture and patronage are rampant. The assumption that low voter turnout is a sign of apathy should not be understood to mean that citizens cannot relocate their political energy to where politics matter.

Second, there has been an emergence of politically active and expanding local and grassroots deliberative democracies. In 2015, it was estimated that local government political executives were elected in 80% of the African countries where more than 60% of the population lives.¹⁵ Local government authorities and elected legislatures exhibited better transparency, citizen participation, and democratic and legislative practices than central government institutions. This vast space of local democratic practices should be treated as one of the primary outcomes of democratization that began in the early 1990s. However, it is not apparent that democracy indices include deliberative democracies performed at the local level and among this critical section of the African population.

During the 1990s, the near breakdown of public service institutions in some African countries compromised state legitimacy and its role as provider of public amenities (health, education, water and sanitation, etc.). After the resurgence of democratic development, most African states lost control of national public policy due to incapacity or lack of resources to fulfil their responsibilities as functioning states.

It is estimated that over 45 African countries' local governments have embarked on reforms aiming at decentralizing and devolving service delivery functions to the local authorities since 1990. Some of the local government reforms codified laws that recognize chieftainships as part of local governance. Efforts to hold the government accountable have shifted to include the new generation of social accountability practices that emphasize a solid evidence base and direct dialogue and negotiation with government outside the established local governance networks. Adopting such immediate deliberations instead of conventional democracy, including demonstrations, protests, or antagonising government institutions, does not make these democratic practices less democratic.

Democratic spaces for civic engagement have expanded following rural and urban local communities withdrawal from state-created democratic political spaces to community and indigenous forms of direct deliberations. Citizens deliberately forming groups to solve fundamental social and political problems confronting local communities are not new to Africa. For example, endogenous and modern local institutions co-exist in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique, Rwanda, and South Africa. They often develop joint collaboration and they benefit from each other's leverage.

Deliberation at the local level is not only about service delivery. It is also about local politics, local elections, and the aspiring political elite who flock to the countryside during national elections. Local political party representatives, candidates, and agents hold more primaries and debates than those organized at the national capitals. Youth, women, farmers, pastoralists, traders, and nongovernmental and civil society organizations regularly participate in deliberations to resolve local problems, such as

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water, health, education, and forestation. In most cases, such community deliberation includes like-minded transnational NGOs and democracy activists.

Suppose proclamations about the decline of democracy are to be trusted. In that case, they should go beyond the current data craze and engage the emergent new forms of local, community, and grassroots deliberations where the majority of the World population practice democracy locally. This type of grassroots deliberations have been taking place for decades and expanding in Africa and the rest of the developing world. Therefore, the gatekeepers of democracy dismiss local community and grassroots deliberations as non-existent while representing the spaces where authentic people-centred politics occurs.

Third, there is an expanding role of social media and cyberdemocracy. Since the late 1990s, the rapid expansion and convergence of information and communication technologies have created new spaces for political engagement, which has expanded citizens' freedom to exchange information, organize political action and social movements, and rediscover the growth of a new vocabulary of resistance. While democracy's essential values have persisted, the forms and spaces of democratic practices have multiplied. Consider, for example, e-government, e-political parties, e-parliaments, and e-civic networks and associations, all of which have become prominent features for citizens not only for accessing information but also for using information to make governments more responsive.

The emergence of local, national, regional and globally networked interest groups using social media to debate social issues of great significance online has ushered in an era of unprecedented global interaction. These virtual communities engage institutional politics and include grassroots organizations, social movements, opposition parties, women and youth. They are supported by like-minded political party members, traders, innovators, indigenous movements, and religious denominations.

Fourth, there has been an expansion of private TV and radio broadcasting for cyber democracy and political mobilization. In 2000, it was estimated that there were 600 TV broadcasters in Africa.¹⁶ This number rose to about 1500 in 2020. Most of these broadcasters are private, with the government (or public) broadcasting corporations facing stiff competition from the national and international TV broadcasters. In 1990, about 120 radio stations in Africa were public, with a few operating under strict state surveillance. In 2020, the number increased to over 4500 radio stations. The majority are digital, using computer-mediated communication.¹⁷ Most FM radios have parted with the use of foreign languages to broadcasting in national or local languages. The use of new media such as YouTube and Facebook to challenged digital TV and radio broadcasting, reducing the African government's capacity to restrict the flow of information and freedom of expression.

Political parties and public interest groups (environment, religion and women) use private TV and radio media to spread their political, social, and cultural messages. Political parties envisage their broadcasting outlets to subvert the state monopoly

over the media, particularly in the build-up to national and local elections. Radio use as a source of information is still prevalent in rural Africa, where fewer than 10% of the population has access to TVs and computers, with around 6% having internet access.¹⁸

In short, the expansion of private radio broadcasting, digital radios, private print and electronic newspapers, and TV stations have broken the state monopoly over information and its capacity to hinder political competition. Long gone are the days when the state-owned radio and TV stations and print newspapers were the only sources of information about the political programmes of competing political parties. Cyber democracy is one of the foremost enablers of freedom of information, the most cherished pillar of democracy. In Campbell (2018) words, there are three ramifications of cyber-democracy:

1. The networking opportunities and capabilities of interaction and communication increase;
2. The volume of codified knowledge cumulates, and the possibilities to publicly access this knowledge also improve; and
3. Digitalized information and knowledge, and the Worldwide Web, created a network-style and infrastructure of knowledge, allowing a knowledge conversion of the local into the global and vice versa.¹⁹

On the other hand, it has also become a norm that authoritarian and sem-authoritarian regimes block the internet and withdraw private and political party media outlets' licenses. Such exclusionary methods emphasize the significance of the new media's role in creating new spaces for political engagement.

Conclusions

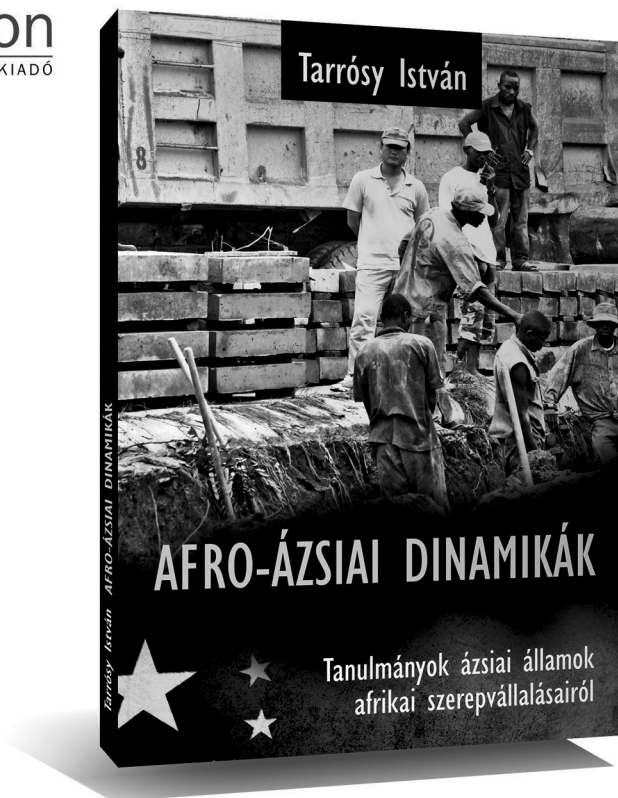
Democracy is expanding into new spaces and taking new forms complementing rather than replacing representative democracy. The modest gains or presumed decline of democracy can be attributed to citizens' relocation of their democratic energies to these new spaces and local deliberative democracies. Rather than retreating, democracy has exhibited considerable resilience.

Crams declared the end of democracy in 1937 between the two World Wars. Huntington and associates declared the crisis of democracy in 1975 during the height of the Watergate scandal. The latest crisis in American democracy was during the Trump presidency. All these periods of democratic decline occurred during times characterized by a crisis of state legitimacy.

Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that the moment the state, the cronies of the state and the self-serving political elite are made to shape their relationship with citizen's, democracy will rebound. If the state is restructured to serve citizens' interests and become responsive to their legitimate demands, we would certainly be rejoicing in the rebirth of democracy. ☀

Notes

- 1 Cram, Ralph Adams 1937. *The End of Democracy*. Boston: Marshall Jones Company. r
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- 5 Diamond Larry (ed.) (2015). "Democracy in Decline: How Washington Can Reverse the Tide", in *Foreign Affairs* 95/4.
- 6 Diamond, Larry. 2015. "Democracy in Decline: How Washington Can Reverse the Tide". Editorial, in *Foreign Affairs*, 95/4. August/September Special Issue.
- 7 For these and other authors refer to *Journal of Democracy* (2015), 26/1.
- 8 Kruse, Kevin M. and Julian E. Zelizer. (2019). *Fault Lines: A History of the United States Since 1974*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.
- 9 Plattner, Marc. F (2015). "Is Democracy in Decline?" *Journal of Democracy* 26/1: 5-10.
- 10 Carothers, Thomas. (2015). "Democracy Aid at 25: Time to choose", *Journal of Democracy* 59-73.
- 11 Refers to patron-client relation, poverty as a factor undermining democracy or that politicians hoare resources for themselves and their social support-base to the detriment of the survival of the rest of the population.
- 12 The determination of free, partly-free and not-free is based on computing the indicators of seven variables: Political pluralism and participation, electoral process, personal autonomy and individual rights, associational and organizational rights, freedom of expression and belief, rule of law and functioning of government (Freedom House 2021).
- 13 A free country scores above 70 scores, partly free sore between 70 and 40 scores, not free countries score less than 40 scores in political rights and civil liberties.
- 14 State capture means the political elite and the business class join hands to capture the state through corrupotion and manipulation of the rules of the political game.
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Tarrósy István
AFRO-ÁZSIAI DINAMIKÁK

A kötet a nemzetközi és geopolitikai stúdiumok számára hiánypótló műként a 21. század globális rendszerét egyre jelentősebben átjáró, azt meghatározó afro-ázsiai kapcsolatokkal, az afro-ázsiai interkontinentális tér szereplői által keltett dinamikákkal foglalkozik. Az egyes fejezetek az alapvető történelmi áttekintések után a mindennapokban tetten érhető geopolitikai valóságokat elemzik, könnyen fogyasztható módon.

A gondolatmenet homlokerében Kína, India, Indonézia és Japán, valamint további ázsiai szereplők globális térben elfoglalt pozícióinak ismertetése és az általuk, egymás között különböző formát öltő „új regionalizmus” paradigmájának bemutatása, valamint az új dinamikák által keltett hatalmi kihívások – főként az USA és az EU számára – felvázolása állnak. Az érvelés során a szerző kitérítetett figyelmet szentel az afrikai kontinensnek, ugyanis meglátása szerint az „új dinamikák” egyik fő terepe a szubszaharai térség.

A kötetben részben a szerző által hazai és külföldi tudományos folyóiratokban közölt elsőszerzős tanulmányok, illetve azok átdolgozott változatai, részben újonnan megírt fejezetek fűződnek koherens irodalommal. A könyv a széles olvasóközönség érdeklődésére tarthat számot, segítséget nyújtva a nemzetközi rendszer változásainak jobb megértéséhez.

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EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN IN MOROCCO AND TUNISIA

SIPOS XÉNIA ZSUZSANNA

PHD CANDIDATE AT THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE (INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY STUDIES SUBPROGRAM),
CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST
XENI-KHALI2008@LIVE.FR

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has globally amplified and brought to the surface the difficulties of vulnerable groups, including women engaged in rural activities. Even before the outbreak of the pandemic, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was strongly affected by a significantly high unemployment rate (42.8%) among young people aged 15 to 24. The fact that 61.8% of the female labour force in Morocco and 70% of it in Tunisia are involved in the agricultural sector serves as an additional obstacle to realizing gender equality. Besides the application of statistical indicators, the article also works with qualitative data collected from interviews that were conducted with four representatives or members of local Tunisian NGOs and four activists of Moroccan women's rights organizations. On one hand, it cannot be denied that international relations themselves are strongly dominated by men. On the other hand, taking into consideration the complex interdependence of the international political order and its effects on decision-makers and sub-state actors alike, the analysis states that despite the political, historical, economic, and cultural characteristics of Morocco and Tunisia, the pandemic can serve as a catalyst for women's rights organizations to act for the improvement of women's conditions.

Keywords

gender inequality, Maghreb, complex interdependence, sub-state actors, COVID-19

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Introduction

Despite the significant efforts of governments to ensure all the necessary measures and protection against the discrimination of women following the Arab Spring protests that swept over the region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) starting from December 2010 the remnants of traditional norms in patriarchal society are still seen as a major obstacle to achieving gender equality. A recent study conducted by the OECD, the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) focusing on women's empowerment in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan revealed that the GDP of the MENA region could be increased by 47% or more if there was equal participation in the labour force between men and women (OECD-ILO-CAWTAR, 2020: 17).

The reason for highlighting Morocco and Tunisia from the other MENA countries is to compare the outstanding indicators and measures taken by these countries to ameliorate the position of women in the political and economic field. Tunisia has emerged in the region as a pioneer of women's rights. Following the country's independence in 1956, the Tunisian political arena was centralized by the first president of the country, Habib Bourguiba, who started a westernized modernization process in politics and economics (Sadiqi, 2008: 449). As a result of the adoption of the Personal Status Code (PSC)¹, in 1956 the modernization process also had a significant impact on women's rights (abolition of polygamy, protection of the rights of women to divorce, child custody reforms, and establishing a minimum age for marriage). Moreover, in 1958 the Tunisian president introduced compulsory education for young women and people living in rural areas (Chabchoub, 2014: 128). Contrary to Tunisia, in Morocco the dominance of traditional norms derived from a patriarchal society and the consolidation of these norms in the family code (*Mudawwana*) adopted in 1957 determined the inferior position of women since the beginning of the country's independence in 1956. Resulting from the absence of a controlled, top-down approach linked to the historical and social characteristics of Morocco, the amelioration of women's rights in the country required a more significant presence and measures from non-governmental organizations, which found themselves in a quite favourable environment following the accession of King Mohamed VI to the throne in 1999 (Ennaji, 2021: 165-166).

By applying the feminist approach of international relations (IR), the article builds primarily on Ann Tickner's gendered perceptions in IR and states that the question of women's rights requires a complex analysis in which all circumstances and key players – including decision-makers as well as sub-state actors of the political arena – are taken into consideration. Regarding the emergence of sub-state actors from the end of the 1970s, the study links Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane's complex interdependence theory to the topic of the presence of gender inequalities. It is important to emphasize that the analysis of the gendered states' behaviours in the international political arena and the multilateral framework of the question of women's rights would exceed the length of the current study. Therefore, the article focuses on bottom-up and top-down relations and their role in shaping the political,

economic, social and cultural position of women in Morocco and Tunisia during the COVID-19 pandemic. By evoking some basic social indicators, the article demonstrates the biggest socioeconomic challenges women faced even before the outbreak of the pandemic. Interviews with four representatives or members of Moroccan and Tunisian NGOs and locals contribute to reinforcing the main argument that is despite the negative impacts of COVID-19, the pandemic can urge local NGOs to cooperate for the benefits of women in the region.

A postmodern feminist approach to the question of gender inequalities in IR: gendered international relations in the world of complex interdependence

When approaching the question of women's participation in political and economic fields and analysing the causes of existing inequalities between men and women in general, regardless of the current pandemic situation, the study deals with the post-modern approach of feminism in international relations. In this regard, Ann Tickner must be mentioned. Based on the marginalization of women in policy-making and the presence of different stereotypes, Tickner described international relations as male-dominated and deeply "gendered". According to Tickner, the elimination of gender hierarchies requires a more equal (c.a. 50%) participation of women in all levels of decision-making, including foreign and military policies (Tickner, 1992: 8–9, 96). As women's role in society is shaped by various social and cultural norms that often serve as constraints limiting gender equality, these inequalities penetrate the internal political arena where measures of decision-makers are taken accordingly. Moreover, these socially created patterns also have a significant impact on the behaviour of states transnationally (Keohane, 1998: 193–194).

R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is indispensable to better understand the origins of the unequal relationship between men and women. In his work *Gender and Power*, Connell stated that the dominance of men over women is a culturally idealized form created by the society that helps to maintain patriarchal social order (Jewkes et al., 2015: 113). Similarly to Connell, Joan Scott also shed light on the fact that gender relations are in fact power relations that derive from the traditional division of roles between the sexes (private versus public sphere), which further reinforce women's inferior status in the political arena (Scott, 1986: 1069). Radical feminist Cynthia Enloe elaborated a different approach when examining the existing inequalities between men and women, and instead of analysing the causes of the weak participation of women in key decision-making processes, she tried to find answers to the absence of women in the fields of politics and security (Ruiz, 2005: 5). Thus, contrary to the previous findings, Enloe stated that in fact women are present in the political and military arena, but institutional processes have always reinforced the dominance of men over women.

As mentioned in the introduction, the transnational framework – i.e. multilateral and regional efforts and cooperation, including previous women conferences such as the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995 and previous conventions and protocols – will not be part of the current analysis because of the study's limited scope.

Therefore, the study focuses on the origins of gender inequalities from the bottom-up perspective and the relationship of sub-state actors with decision-makers. Moreover, it also touches upon the question of *to what extent sub-state actors can collaborate to ameliorate the situation of women in Morocco and Tunisia in light of the global pandemic*. Following a brief review on the feminist IR approach, the study also starts off by discussing the inferior position of women that is the outcome of a male-dominated society. Regarding the level of sub-state actors, the previous findings would mean that the position of women is shaped by the particular cultural and social circumstances in Tunisia and Morocco. Similar to interstate relations, anarchy predominates on the level of sub-state actors, but certain conditions can drive representatives of NGOs to collaborate for the benefits of Moroccan and Tunisian women. As a result, the bottom-up patterns penetrate the level of the states, having a significant impact on decision-makers who face pressure to consider the particular features of society with their policy towards the question of gender equality. In this regard, a reverse process takes place and sub-state actors also shape the behaviours of states.

Regarding non-state actors, it is indispensable to underline that the 1970s and 1980s brought about a new hierarchical order. The emergence of global problems and their solutions required an approach that was totally different from the previous management of these challenges. This is how the phenomenon of complex interdependence emerged as a result of the appearance of new political actors – i.e. sub-state actors with a significant impact on decision-makers. While on the one hand nobody can deny that the traditional political order remains state-centric, on the other hand we cannot contest the fact that through mobilizing and monitoring activists, domestic and regional organizations also exert a significant influence not only on public opinion, but on government policies. According to Joseph Nye and Robert O. Keohane, in certain cases non-governmental actors have a greater impact on international processes than states themselves. Contrary to interstate activities, the main characteristics of transnational interactions is that they involve sub-state actors as well. Nye and Keohane stated that transnationalism has five effects on state behaviour: changes in attitude; the emergence of international pluralism; limitations on states to maneuver as a result of the alteration of the traditional state-centric order; an increased ability to influence other governments; and a more significant role of sub-state actors that sometimes overwrites the priorities of governments (Nye–Keohane, 1971: 331–332, 336–337). Sub-state actors constitute the focus of the article and the transnational framework will not be part of the current study. Therefore, the limited space for states to maneuver and the increased role of sub-state entities require further analysis in addition to the aforementioned changes. In the following section, the article aims to demonstrate the main socioeconomic challenges that the women of Morocco and Tunisia faced before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, it will also provide a brief overview on the different policies of the two countries and the role of women’s rights NGOs to cope with these problems.

The evolution of women's rights in Morocco and Tunisia: major challenges and their solutions

When dealing with the question of women's rights in the Maghreb it is indispensable to mention that the evolution of women's rights cannot be separated from the economic, social, cultural, political and historical characteristics of Morocco and Tunisia. The modernity derived from the heritage of the French colonial past was built on a conservative, patriarchal society, which resulted in the co-existence of two competing paradigms. The existence of a more liberal way of thinking is well demonstrated in the will of carrying out necessary reforms that focused on the modification of the fundamental set of laws that regulate the status of women in everyday life (i.e. the family code). The aforementioned efforts resulted in the extension of women's rights and the assurance of greater access to education and political representation. However, on the other hand the presence of some traditional social practices, particularly in Morocco, is seen as a serious barrier to achieving gender equality (Kimani, 2008: Africa Renewal).

According to Moghadam (2014), the institutional legacy of the past, the role of women's rights organizations before and after the political transition beginning in December, 2010, all had a serious impact on the question of gender equality. The 1960s saw a general improvement in the health and economic conditions of women in the Maghreb. Moreover, the number of women enrolled in education and involved in decision-making also increased (Sadiqi, 2008: 451). While nobody can contest the growing influence of women's rights organizations from the 1960s and 1970s, it is certain that transnational activities and the fear of the emergence of political Islam from the 1980s also exercised pressure on decision-makers in the Maghreb region to act on behalf of women's empowerment. Education and women's economic and political participation also influenced the twelve objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted in 1995 during the Beijing Conference on Women's Rights (UN Women, 2015: 5). Moreover, these indicators are also crucial from the point of the Gender Inequality Index (GII)², a human development index developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Concerning women's access to schooling, it must be mentioned that contrary to Tunisia, in Morocco education only became compulsory in 1963, five years later than in Tunisia. Between 1990 and 1991 school attendance showed significant differences between boys and girls (88% vs. 48% for 7 and 12 year-olds and 69% vs. 4.5% for 13 and 15 year-olds in favour of boys) (Sadiqi, 2008: 462-463). Although women's access to education improved in the 1990s and early 2000s, inequalities are still present. According to the official statistical data of UNESCO³, between 2012 and 2019 the presence of boys was 4% higher in primary education. This tendency also continued in secondary education between 2011-2012 and 2017-2019 with males outnumbering females by 5.87%. However, when it comes to academic enrolment, women outnumbered men by 1% according to the latest data available from 2019. Unfortunately, indicators of illiteracy are far from promising as Morocco has the highest illiteracy rate in the Maghreb (Sadiqi, 2008: 462) that impacts women living

in rural areas the most (60%). According to the latest UNESCO data from 2018, the illiteracy rate reached 35.4% for women and 16.7% for men who were 15 years old or more.

As explained in the theoretical framework for the article, the study addresses gender inequalities and applies the Gender Inequality Index (GII) developed by the UNDP. When analysing inequalities between Moroccan men and women in the field of reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market, between 1995 and 2019 significant measures were taken by the government to reduce inequalities (the GII) from 0.722 to 0.454 (United Nations Development Programme, HDR)². A gradual improvement also took place following the Arab Spring. However, despite the aforementioned developments, in 2019 Morocco occupied the 111th place worldwide among the ranking of countries on the Gender Inequality Index. This ranking means that Morocco did even worse than Libya (56th place) and Algeria (103rd place) in terms of unequal opportunities for women compared to men. The dimensions of the GII clearly demonstrated that in Morocco women's participation in the labour force and decision-making are key areas where improvements were urgently needed even before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerning the women's share of the labour force, official statistical data from the High Commission of Planning (Haut Commissariat au Plan) is only available from 1999, showing a significant rise in the female unemployment rate from 8.8% in 2017 to 14.7% in 2020⁴. According to the GII, in 2019 female participation in the labour force was 21.5% compared to 70.1% for men². In connection with scholars of feminist IR theory who study the absence of women in decision-making, the percentage of women in the national parliament of Morocco only reached 18.4% in 2019 (20.5% in the upper chamber and 11.7% in the lower house) according to the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) ranking. When compared with Tunisia or Algeria, Morocco remains the country with the weakest participation of women in the national parliament, despite the required 30% of representation stipulated in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2003: 14). To achieve this objective the government will have to take additional steps.

As mentioned in the introduction, the evolution of women's rights in Tunisia followed a different path since its independence in 1956. The marginalisation of the tribal system and the relatively small size of the population of the country made the top-down approach led by a strong president (Habib Bourguiba) possible. Thus, state feminism enabled significant reforms to be carried out (Sadiqi, 2008: 449–450). However, on the other hand, these reforms were the outcome of a clearly defined westernized modernisation process that required a more educated and skilled labour force. In this regard, compulsory education was provided to girls in 1958, and Tunisian women were given the right to vote in 1959. As a result of the extended rights in the field of education, indicators demonstrated a significant improvement for women, which meant that the average years spent in school rose from 4.9 to 15.1 years between 1971 and 2010 (Mail, 2019: 2–4). Family planning in the 1960s and the legalisation of abortion in 1973 (Jomier, 2011: 6) also conformed to Bourguiba's

modernisation process. While the aforementioned Personal Status Code (PSC) ensured formal equality (abolition of polygamy, women's consent to divorce, etc.), it did not eradicate inequalities between men and women. State feminism proved to be a political tool of the government to get rid of Islamists by practicing control over the religious sphere, as well as to conform to the international objectives of the women's rights framework. On one hand, the ratification of the international bill of women's rights, the CEDAW in 1985, and the increase of the quota in electoral positions to 20% by President Zin el-Abidine Ben Ali in 2004 were all clear indicators of the real intentions of the government concerning the question of women's rights. On the other hand, Tunisia's reservations (CEDAW, 1979: 67-68) made to the CEDAW, including inequality between men and women with respect to their children, inequality in marriage and its dissolution, guardianship, demonstrated the dichotomy of the government's approach to gender inequality (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2003: 95, 98). In this sense, the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolution in December 2010 brought about a new chapter for previously repressed women's rights organizations in which a more open debate on the role of women (e.g., drafting of the new constitution in 2014, law on equal heritage) became possible (Mail, 2019: 2–9, 11, 13, 17–18).

Regarding equal access to the field of education, the net enrolment rate in primary education was equal between the sexes until 2018 when the presence of boys was 1% higher than girls. According to the official statistical data of UNESCO,³ in secondary education the attendance of girls between 2011 and 2016 surpassed that of the boys and nearly doubled between this period (While in 2011 girls' school attendance rate surpassed that of boys by 6.6% this advantage increased to 12.4% in 2016). Concerning women's academic enrolment, it is important to underline that between the period of 2011 and 2019 an absolute dominance of women is seen in higher education. While in 2011 an advantage of 22.6% was demonstrated in favour of women, this ratio increased to 41.7% in 2019. In connection with the level of education, it is important to mention that contrary to Morocco, the illiteracy rate was only significant for the age group of 65 years and above where an 81% illiteracy rate is present versus 48.6% for men according to the latest UNESCO statistical data from 2014.

Taking the Gender Inequality Index (GII) as a reference, with its 0.296 GII in 2019, Tunisia occupied the 65th place worldwide in the ranking of countries by the UNDP² regarding countries with the lowest gender inequality. This ranking also means that five MENA countries (Bahrein, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) did better than Tunisia in terms of ensuring equal opportunities for both sexes in the field of reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market. The biggest gap was identified in the field of participation in the labour market where women aged 15 years and older made up only 23.8% of the labour market contrary to 69.4% for men. According to the Tunisian Bureau of Statistics, in 2014 only 20% of women living in rural areas possessed of a decent job and in some regions the unemployment rate surpassed 40%. In the most marginalized regions, 61% of women worked in

the most vulnerable agricultural sector and only 12% had access to medical and social services (Ministère de la Femme, de la Fertilité et de l'Enfance, 2017: 2). This percentage clearly shows that the low participation of women in the labour market and the conditions of rural women were worrisome even before the outbreak of the pandemic, aggravated by the growing political and social tensions from 2019. Regarding the dimension of empowerment of the GII, it must be mentioned that following the events of 2011 when the participation of women in the parliament only reached 26.27%, in 2014 Tunisia surpassed the 30% requirement set by the CEDAW. Moreover, in 2019 women occupied 78 out of the 217 seats, which meant a 35.9% representation (31st place worldwide and first place among Arab countries). However, following the presidential elections of October 2019, a regression took place and according to the latest data of the IPU⁵, in 2020 only 54 seats were occupied by women out of the 217, meaning a 24.9% representation in decision-making. Though a strategic decision, the nomination of Najla Bouden on 30 September, 2021 as the first female Prime Minister in Tunisia and the Arab world is seen as a unique and promising step for women's empowerment (Mazoue, 2021).

Indicators	Tunisia		Morocco	
	women	men	women	men
Net school enrolment rate – primary education	114.93% (2018) <i>*statistical data from 2019</i>	115.93% (2018) <i>*statistical data from 2019</i>	112.73% (2019) 111.51% (2018)	116.69% (2019) 116.11% (2018)
Net school enrolment rate – secondary education	99.32% (2016) vs. 95.28% (2011)	86.9% (2016) vs. 88.63% (2011)	78.18% (2019) vs. 61.52% (2011) <i>*statistical data from 2016</i>	84.05% (2019) vs. 71.31% (2011) <i>*statistical data from 2016</i>
Net school enrolment rate – higher education	41.7% (2019)	22.6% (2019)	38.1% (2019)	39.1% (2019)
Literacy rate – 15 years and above	72.2%	86.1%	64.6%	83.3%
Literacy rate – 65 years and above	24.4%	55.8%	19%	51.4%
Participation in the labour force	23.8% (2019)	69.4% (2019)	20.5% (2019)	70.1% (2019)
Share of seats in the parliament	35.9% (2019) (24.9% in 2020)	77.4% (2019)	18.4% (2019)	81.6% (2019)
Gender Inequality Index	0.296 (2019)		0.454 (2019)	

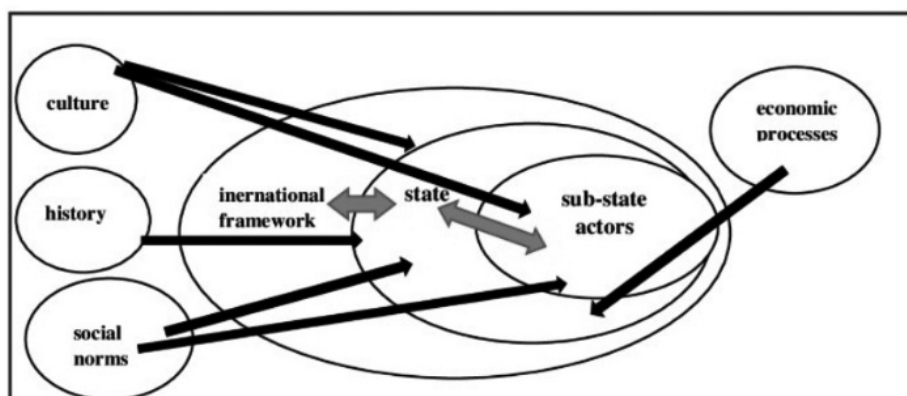
Table 1. Summary chart of Tunisia and Morocco based on the main indicators of gender inequalities
Source: based on the statistical data from the official site of the Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'Éducation, la Science et la Culture. Institut de Statistique de l'UNESCO
Tunisia: <http://uis.unesco.org/fr/country/tn>;
Morocco: <http://uis.unesco.org/fr/country/ma?theme=education-and-literacy>
UNDP Human Development Reports: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/home>
IPU: <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=1&year=2021>

The brief outlook on the evolution of women's rights in Morocco and Tunisia proved that different social, political, historical, and cultural processes contributed to the construction and reconstruction of women's rights in both countries. However, the Arab Spring clearly demonstrated that democracy can only be realized if it takes into consideration the social and economic needs of the most vulnerable groups (Moghadam, 2014: 141). Therefore, the evolution of women's rights is a bidirectional process: women's rights activist can push states towards the acceptance of certain reforms in favour of women, especially in socially or economically fragile periods such as the Arab Spring or the COVID-19 pandemic. This happened in Morocco with the reform of the family law in 2004 (Moghadam, 2014: 140) or in lifting some of its reservations to the CEDAW in 2011 (Dahlerup–Darhour, 2020: 15). Following this overview, the next chapter will identify the main consequences of the pandemic on women's rights.

The social, economic, and political impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's rights in Morocco and Tunisia

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about new political and economic challenges that all governments had to face. This new situation required decision-makers to adapt to new strategies and reconsider the question of gender equality. The new challenges emerging from the pandemic include growing inequalities in education and the labour market, namely the overrepresentation of women in agricultural and domestic work. Moreover, women also tend to suffer from the psychological effects of the pandemic as they are more liable to domestic violence resulting from the accumulated social and economic frustration.

According to the OECD report in 2020 that analyses the effects of the COVID-19 on gender inequalities in the MENA, women's school enrolment constituted one of the main challenges even before the pandemic, but the crisis brought about a higher



^ Figure 1. The evolution of women's rights in the framework of international relations and sub-state actors.

number of women dropping out of the educational system. School dropout was much higher in remote rural areas with limited access to internet and other necessary materials for distance teaching (OCDE, 2020: 4–5). The second most serious effect of the pandemic includes issues related to the labour market and concerns about women involved in agricultural activities, exacerbating the inequalities women experienced before COVID-19. In Morocco, 61.8% of the female labour force works in the agricultural sector compared to only 43.4% of men according to the latest available statistical data from the International Labour Organization (ILO)⁶. While in Tunisia 70% of women are engaged in agricultural activities, when it comes to compensation their salaries are only half of what men earn. Besides inequalities in the labour market, rural women account for 65% of school dropouts and an illiteracy rate of about 30% (Bajec, 2020), which are disturbing trends considering the objectives of the International Bill of Women's Rights (CEDAW) to ameliorate the living conditions of rural women (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2003: 15, 18–19).

The most serious impact of the pandemic on women was the increase in domestic violence. The COVID-19 upheld the traditional role of men as head of the family, which resulted in increased feeling of frustration. In Morocco, according to a study conducted between March and July, 57% of Moroccan women experienced some forms of violence during this research period (Ennaji, 2021: 11). A significant increase in violence was also identified among Tunisian women following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between March and May 2020, the number of registered cases was 9 times higher than average (2,700 cases were violent out of 9,800) and 76% of Tunisian women experienced physical violence. Furthermore, violence also impacted the labour market in the form of deprivation of access to job opportunities as well as control of salaries. Despite the establishment of an emergency line in Tunisia for victims of violence, the restrictions caused by the pandemic resulted in a decrease of complaints registered by the Ministry of Justice (ONU Femmes, 2020: 6).

Addressing the challenges women faced required different approaches from decision-makers and NGOs, resulting in large-scale mobilization. In Tunisia, in addition to the 24/7 emergency line, a reception centre was set up by the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors to assist asylum seekers during quarantine before moving to traditional reception centres. Moreover, in collaboration with different ministries, women rights organizations launched several awareness campaigns for female victims of domestic violence (OCDE, 2020: 20-21). However, the lack of information about the real number of victims remained unknown, and except for urgent cases the activities of courts were suspended. The responses of women's rights NGOs and governments to the challenges women have faced during COVID-19 clearly demonstrate that while the current global crisis can contribute to the reconsideration of gender inequalities through the mobilization of NGOs, the lack of infrastructural facilities poses an obstacle to realizing these objectives. The following chapter will analyse the possibility of a bottom-up evolution of women's rights in light of challenges caused by the pandemic.

A bottom-up approach to women's rights: is gender equality possible?

As highlighted in the introduction, the analysis centred around the question of whether the outbreak of the pandemic triggered more intense collaboration among women's rights activists and NGOs to push decision-makers towards reevaluating problems related to gender inequality. To answer this research question, interviews were conducted with representatives and members of Moroccan and Tunisian women's rights NGOs. Four women's rights activists were selected from each country for online interviews because of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and the limited availability of NGOs. In Morocco the four activists come from different organizations while in Tunisia two activists belong to the same organization which means that in Tunisia only three organizations were involved in the research. Founded in 2000, the Marrakesh-based High Atlas Foundation (HAF) is a Moroccan association and U.S. non-profit organization that is committed to promoting sustainable development for women and youth empowerment and education⁷. The other three women's rights activists came from the Rabat-based *La Voix de la Femme Amazighe*,⁸ the *Without She I Would Never Be a He*,⁹ and the *Coalition ISRAR pour l'Empowerment et l'Égalité (ISRAR Coalition for empowerment and equality)*¹⁰ organizations. The organizations involved in the empirical research demonstrate the conditions of rural women as well as the cultural and ethnical diversities of Morocco. In Tunisia questions were posed to the representative of the regional bureau of UNFT (*Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne*) in Kelibia (a city in northeastern Tunisia, belonging to Nabeul Governorate). The Tunisian UNFT is the biggest and oldest women's rights NGO established during Tunisia's independence. The organization is dedicated to working on the promotion of civil rights, participation in political life and education, and fighting against domestic violence committed against women¹¹. The other three women's rights activists interviewed included the president of the Tunisia-based *l'Association Patrimoine pour l'Economie Solidaire (APES, Heritage Association for Solidarity Economy)*,¹² the secretary general of the *Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche sur le Développement (AFTURD, Association of Tunisian Women for the Research on Development)*,¹³ who is also active member of the Tunisian syndicate, UGTT (*Tunisian General Labour Union*).¹⁴ The fourth activist interviewed is also a member of the AFTURD. The interviews took place between August and November in 2021. For the protection of personal rights, the researchers prefer to keep the interviewees' identities anonymous.

Interviews were conducted with the same list of questions, including the *objectives of the associations, future challenges in light of*

■ **The most serious impact of the pandemic on women was the increase in domestic violence. The COVID-19 upheld the traditional role of men as head of the family, which resulted in increased feeling of frustration.**

the pandemic, intra-state and regional *cooperation with other NGOs*, and *biggest constraints for achieving gender equality*. Researchers posed questions to both representatives and members of the organizations. Both the HAF and the UNFT Kelibia stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had a serious impact on public life, including the conditions of women and the previous plans and objectives of their organizations, mainly due to the cancellation of seminars and workshops. However, according to the HAF, the pandemic also urged the organization to adapt to the changing situation with a work plan and live or pre-recorded trainings involving closer cooperation with U.S. volunteers. The Tunisian AFTURD also emphasized adaptation and highlighted the advantages of teleworking. The second Moroccan NGO, *La Voix de Femme Amazighe*, also raised issues that reinforced the consequences of the pandemic on women *the organization referred to the increase in violence committed against women*). The negative impact of the pandemic on the organization resulted in the cancellation of field work, which constitutes its largest and most important objective. The decrease in the organization's financing and regional cooperation with other NGOs were also negative consequences of the pandemic. Moreover, the interviewee of *La Voix de Femme Amazighe* stated that "the pandemic negatively impacted the conditions of those women who work in small cooperatives and informal sectors like hammams and hairdressers, and this led to the impoverishment of women". The organization also highlighted the impoverishment of women, an opinion also shared by the *Association Patrimoine pour l'Economie Solidaire*. Despite admitting the negative consequences of COVID-19 on the conditions of women, *Without She I Would Never Be a He* emphasized that one of the positive outcomes of the pandemic was manifested in a more effective support to women. The main goal of the organization is to achieve the economic independence of women: "Of course there are negative impacts of the pandemic, like an increase in violence committed against women or impoverishment, but on the other hand we can provide more support to women. Achieving economic independence is the priority for us, it is a key to everything". Women's rights organizations in Tunisia also raised issues related to the same consequences that the Moroccan organizations discussed concerning the impact of COVID-19 on their activities. The *Association Patrimoine pour l'Economie Solidaire* highlighted problems related to financing the organization and the cancelling events. The member of the Moroccan *Coalition ISRAR* saw digitalization as a key element in the post-COVID period: "the gist of digitalization is to support illiterate women, but besides this the empowerment of women and the elimination of violence are also important". Despite the negative impacts of the pandemic on the activities of the NGOs, *Coalition ISRAR* believes that if an association is well organized the current crisis can contribute to the improvement of the conditions of women.

Both the HAF and the UNFT Kelibia claimed that working with other national or international NGOs with the same objectives will contribute to the creation of a comprehensive vision in terms of approaching the question of gender equality. The HAF collaborates with the Empowerment Institute in the US, and the UNFT Kelibia cooperates with the Spanish Assembly of Cooperation for Peace (ACPP).

The latter observed that one advantage of the pandemic was that it brought about a bigger awareness campaign among women to ameliorate their rights. This view is also shared by the HAF referring to the need of complementary activities such as workshops to raise awareness and empower women on how to better enforce their social and economic rights. The co-founder of the *Without She I Would Never Be a He* NGO also reinforced her willingness in this matter by emphasizing the NGO's regional coordination efforts with Tunisian and Mauritanian women's rights organizations. The president of *La Voix de la Femme Amazighe* was the only interviewee who stated that "due to the pandemic the NGO does not continue any cooperation with other regional partners, and dialogue with Tunisian and Libyan NGOs has stopped". In the case of Tunisia the responses of NGOs were the similar to that of Morocco, with the exception of the APES, which clearly underlined that "due to problems related to the question of financing I do not believe the cooperation of women's rights organizations with the same objectives can have any positive outcome". *Coalition ISRAR* stated that the organization aims to create a working group that can boost the previous cooperation of the former regional initiative known as the Collectif Maghreb-Égalité 95. AFTURD evoked the advantages of intra-state and regional cooperation, stating that "only collective actions can bring about change." The initiative of the organization includes collaboration with rural associations as well as other regional or international organizations, including NGOs from Palestine, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Lebanon in the field of violence committed against women. Overall, the interviews proved that despite the efforts to increase regional cooperation, intra-state collaboration of NGOs remains quite strong. According to women's rights organizations, decision-makers must pay attention to such efforts to address questions and problems related to inequalities between men and women.

The most significant question was the identification of social and cultural norms that serve as constraints in realizing gender equality. There was a consensus about social, cultural and traditional norms being obstacles to equality between the sexes. The HAF identified social, cultural, and traditional norms, and the lack of access to education, the labour market, and health and legal services as the major constraints to gender equality. While the UNFT Kelibia stated that following the the Arab Spring some progress was made in the consolidation of previous achievements guaranteed by the PSC, realizing equality in job opportunities and decision-making remain two key areas where further development would be of great importance. The local NGO saw the lack of self-confidence as one of the biggest obstacles to achieving equality between men and women. In this sense, the organization played an important role in supporting several female candidates during the last municipal elections and started working on the creation of a local bureau for female entrepreneurs in Kelibia before the pandemic. The increased participation of women in decision-making was also a significant goal for the *Without She I Would Never Be a He* NGO in Morocco, the UNFT Kelibia, and the *Association Patrimoine pour l'Economie Solidaire*. Organisations in Tunisia outperformed those in Morocco in terms of women's involvement in the process of decision-making. Besides the existing traditional norms, it is also

of crucial importance to highlight the historical perspective and presence of male-dominated norms originating from the heritage of a traditional society and the French colonial past. According to *Coalition ISRAR*, “there is no monitoring and no protection for women”. Additionally, the availability of statistics regarding the conditions of women in Morocco and Tunisia is not sufficient, and in most cases statistics do not cover the reality. The lack of financing and a competent labour force to collaborate with local NGOs were also identified as obstacles to realizing gender equality. AFTURD highlighted the main achievements regarding the elimination of illiteracy but emphasized that the results of these measures are not apparent as inequalities are present in the labour market and in decision-making. AFTURD regarded the realization of equality as a key to women’s empowerment. According to the interviewees, the high unemployment rate of educated women who graduated from school was the most troublesome obstacle to improving the conditions of women.

When it comes to the main research question (i.e. whether women’s rights organizations in Morocco and Tunisia believe in the application of a top-down approach after the Arab Spring uprising and during the COVID-19 crisis), the responses of the NGO interviewees in general were positive. HAF believes that by promoting intensive training programs and establishing local cooperatives, sub-state actors can contribute to reforming rigid social norms that clearly do not help with decreasing gender inequality. Awareness campaigns and reforms to increase the participation of women in national parliaments also play a role in women’s rights NGOs, such as *La Voix de la Femme Amazighe* and *Without She I Would Never Be a He*. The latter NGO along with the *Association Patrimoine pour l’Economie Solidaire* also emphasized the establishment of the economic independence of women by launching different programmes as a key step towards achieving gender equality. Their emphasis on local cooperation in the bottom-up approach is vital for success. In contrast, the *Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche sur le Développement* (AFTURD) believed that the creation of an international framework for women’s rights (top-down approach) could trigger collaboration on state and sub-state levels. The second interviewee from AFTURD saw the bottom-up approach as a long and careful process. According to the *Coalition ISRAR*, decision-makers have a limited scope to ameliorate the conditions of women. On the one hand, there needs to be a willingness to take into consideration the demands of NGOs; on the other hand, the question of gender equality is not a priority in their agenda.

However, it cannot be denied that the promotion of gender equality is often used for political purposes by decision-makers, especially in times of crisis. This transpired during the rule of President Bourguiba and Ben Ali. This fact was also reinforced by an interviewee from the *Association Patrimoine pour l’Economie Solidaire*, who regarded the nomination of women to political posts more like symbolic gestures than a real intention to change: “For me, the nomination of a woman as prime minister is more about communication than a true willingness to change”.

The following summary chart provides a classification of the interview questions and organizational responses;

Aspects	Morocco				Tunisia		
	HAF	La Voix de la Femme Amazigh	Without she I would never be a he	Coalition ISRAR	UNFT Kelibia	APES	AFTURD (2activists)
Impacts of the COVID-19 on women's rights	serious (adaption is possible)	serious (impoverishment of women)	serious (increase of domestic violence)	highlighting the vulnerability of women, digitalization as a key	serious	serious (reinforcement of inequalities, increased domestic violence)	serious (impoverishment of women)
Intra-state and regional cooperation	will of cooperation international cooperation with the US → positive experiences	will of cooperation, but outbreak of the pandemic (belief in domestic cooperation)	will of cooperation (e.g. Tunisian and Mauritanian partners)	will of cooperation (e.g. Algerian, Mauritanian, Libyan and Tunisian NGOs + rural associations) → creation of working groups+ forums	will of cooperation Spanish support → positive experiences	pessimistic scenario → problems of financing, more confidence in a Northern-Southern cooperation	wider regional and international (French and Spanish NGOs) cooperation before the Arab Spring reinforcement of intra-state cooperation after 2011
Outcome of the pandemic	positive impact → need for complementary activities (workshops) → empowerment of women	negative impact → financial cut, termination of field work and regional cooperation	negative impact → possibility to support women's economic independence as a key area	question of adaptation + financing = amelioration of the conditions of women	positive impact → intensive awareness campaign	negative impact → termination of seminars, cut in the financing	negative impact, but positive consequences for rural women → lower impact of the pandemic 2 nd activist: teleworking as a positive impact
Barriers to gender equality	social, cultural and traditional norms; lack of access to education, labour market, health services; lack of legal awareness	presence of laws in favour of men, regional and cultural inequalities, patriarchal society	cultural, political, glass-ceiling effect in the labour market	lack of monitoring, reliability of statistical data, lack of competence	lack of job opportunities, limited access to decision-making, lack of self-confidence	social, economic, juridic, educational, political	need for change in mentality → heritage of the historical past unemployment of female graduates
Bottom-up approach	yes, establishment of local cooperatives, intensive training programs	yes, the key is political participation of women + local cooperation, local projects	depends on the current political context + economic independence+ political will	willingness does exist with decision-makers, but difficult	-	rather pessimistic view depends on the political context	partly + importance of the international framework of women's rights (CEDAW) after 2011 bottom-up approach)

Table 2. Summary chart based on interviews¹⁵ with representatives of the Moroccan and Tunisian NGOs

Conclusion

The article analysed the question of gender equality from a new perspective that included the feminist approach to IR, positioning the study in the framework of complex interdependence theory that emerged at the end of the 1970s and had a significant impact on decision-makers. While the absence of women in the main decision-making and economic processes clearly demonstrates that international relations are strongly gendered, the study dealt with the question of *to what extent sub-state actors can influence the behaviour of states*. In this regard, the article elaborated a model that showcases the relationship between the various NGOs and the states, finding that the evolution of women's rights is strongly dependent on the historical, political, economic, cultural, and social processes in Morocco and Tunisia. In Morocco, the lack of the centralization of power and the presence of a tribal system brought about the consolidation of a patriarchal society, which was reinforced following the adoption of a conservative family law in 1957. Concerning the political characteristics of a certain state, it must be highlighted that states' support for gender equality also serves as a tool to show off to the international community, with leaders often utilizing women's rights as a political card to play against their opponents. In Tunisia this scenario took place after 1956 (*state feminism*), and in contrast to Morocco resulted in a higher HDI index, a lower GII, and more developed educational and healthcare systems. In Morocco, women's rights NGOs needed to fight for an extended period of time to bring about significant development.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has already had a grave effect on global economic development. According to official statistical data, both Morocco and Tunisia faced serious economic and social crises before COVID-19. In Tunisia, the GDP growth was 2.7% and the unemployment rate for women reached 16.7% (PNUD–MDICI, 2020: 10–11, 40). In Morocco, one million people lost their jobs in the first four months following the outbreak of the pandemic and the unemployment rate reached 33.4% for 15–24 year-olds, 18.2% for graduates, and 15.6% for women (Ennaji, 2021:8–9). The article began by discussing the feminist approach, which refers to the inferior position of women in all fields of society. Following the overview of qualitative data from interviews, the study found that despite the presence of anarchy on the level of sub-state actors and states (*micro and mezzo levels*), this anarchy can be modulated through the interaction of sub-state actors and states. The Arab Spring uprising beginning in December 2010 demonstrated that crises can pave the way for different NGOs to mobilize for the benefit of the vulnerable groups, which can contribute to bringing about significant positive social development. In this regard, the question of gender equality can be understood as a bidirectional process in which the presence of some traditional, culturally established norms means an obstacle for women's rights NGOs and states alike. However, both sub-state actors and the international community can exercise pressure on states to act. The study proved that the pandemic could bring about the amelioration of women's rights as states were pushed to rethink how social peace could be preserved.. However, in the long run this conclusion must be considered with caution. The empirical findings

also reinforced the fact that achieving progress is a long process that must include sustained support from sub-state actors and decision-makers, with a clear strategy for equal treatment of women in regards to their social, economic, and political rights. ✨

Notes

¹ The full text of the Personal Status Code or Code du Statut Personnel (PSC) adopted in 1956 by the first president of Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba, can be accessed via the link mentioned in the bibliography.

² Created by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Gender Inequality Index (GII) measures inequalities on three main dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market with different indicators in each dimension. Access to the UNDP indicators can be found in the bibliography.

^{3,4,5,6}The official data of UNESCO, the Moroccan High Commission of Planning (HCP), IPU, ILO can be accessed via the links mentioned in the bibliography.

^{7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15} The official websites of the for Moroccan HAF, La Voix de la Femme Amazighe, Coalition ISRAR, Tunisian UNFT Kelibia and APES can be found in the bibliography. Information on the activities of the women's rights the Moroccan and Tunisian organizations Without She I Would Never Be a He and AFTURD was only available on their official Facebook pages.¹⁵ The questions asked during the interviews can be found in the Appendix.

Appendix

Questions asked from the representatives of HAF and UNFT Kelibia

1. To what extent did the pandemic situation effect the main objective(s) of your organisation? What are/were the main challenges to cope with for the future?
2. Besides the negative impacts of the pandemic on women's empowerment, how can the post-COVID period lead to the amelioration of certain conditions of young women and women in general? Or, do you believe that the pandemic will further reinforce the already existing inequalities?
3. How do you see the cooperation with other NGOs in the field of education? In this regard, how do you see the prospects of collaboration among other associations that represent the same objectives? Do you believe a certain kind of top-down approach can have a great impact on decision-makers?
4. How can regional cooperation among associations with the same objectives be feasible for achieving gender equality?
5. How do you see the process of shaping feminine norms before and after the Arab Spring events of 2011? How has COVID-19 impacted -the question of gender equality?
6. What do you see as the biggest barrier to realizing gender equality?
7. How do you cope with the presence of traditional practices and norms when working on realizing the main objectives of your organisation?
8. How and to what extent can your organisation contribute to ameliorating women's empowerment in your country?
9. Please name some success stories among those women you support or supported. Who achieved high positions in political or economic fields (e.g., politicians, entrepreneurs)?

10. To what extent did your organisation succeeded in eliminating illiteracy during its operation?
11. How could schools and professors provide continuous education during the pandemic (e.g., access to internet, etc.)?
12. Do you believe that by realizing your main objectives you can overwrite the existing traditional norms and practices that create a burden in front of achieving gender equality? Why/why not?
13. What impact can your organisation have on decision-makers? How can it influence decision-makers and the field of policy-making in a world traditionally dominated by men?
14. How can your organisation succeed in rewriting socially and culturally constructed barriers that hinder achieving gender equality?
15. How can women contribute to the process of democratization?
16. How can the gender gap between men and women be reduced?
17. How can society have an impact on decision-makers and NGOs?

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ROOT CAUSES AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE ONGOING WAR BETWEEN THE TPLF AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA (2 NOVEMBER 2020 – 15 OCTOBER 2021)

AHMED ABDULETIF ABDULKADR

PHD, SAMARA UNIVERSITY, COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS, ETHIOPIA

AHMEDABDULETIFABDULKADR@SU.EDU.ET

CYÖRGY IVÁN NESZMÉLYI

PHD, PROFESSOR OF BUDAPEST BUSINESS SCHOOL UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

NESZMELYI.GYORGY@UNI-BCE.HU

Abstract

Abiy Ahmed, the current premier and Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2019, is the third prime minister to lead Ethiopia since the overthrow of Derg. Although he had high approval ratings at the beginning of his administration across the country including Tigray, the premier has lost the trust of the TPLF, and most of its leaders have left the capital Addis to settle in Mekelle. This situation increased tension between TPLF and the federal government, which resulted in the ongoing war. This research aims at identifying the main causes of the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia and its socio-economic consequences, utilizing informal methods of data collection and phone interviews. In addition, observations, assessment, and informal communications with members of the Ethiopian and Tigray defence forces were also included in the data collection. The root cause of this war was a matter of gaining power in the federal government. As a consequence of this conflict, people in the Tigray region and some parts of the Afar and Amhara regions have been suffering for several months. Hundreds of thousands of people displaced from western Tigray to Sudan and central Tigray and war zones in Afar and Amhara are currently searching for safety. The people of Tigray have not had electricity, banking services, and internet access for many months. In the past two months, some parts of the Amhara and Afar regions have also been similarly affected. The economy of the country has been impacted in many sectors including tourism. The military tanks, cars, and aircraft that were destroyed in the war were resources for the country. Most importantly, the country is losing its work force while fighting in the war with many fatalities. The war has also had a psychological impact on community due to rapes and robberies. The other key finding is that most of the people are rather spending their time with arguing on who is responsible for the current war instead of focusing on the development of the economy. In conclusion, this war broke out due to a few politicians seeking power, which negatively impacted the livelihood of Ethiopian citizens and country's economy. As there is nothing more important than peace for the country and its people, it is recommended that politicians should sit down to work out their differences.

Keywords

TPLF, EPRDF, Tigray, Amhara, Afar, war/law enforcement, Ethiopian economy

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Introduction

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world with a known governance structure categorized as imperial, socialist and federal. Despite the presence of a political governance system and known to be unified in times of foreign invasion, the practice of democracy began at the introduction of the federal governance system when the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) led the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991.

The Tigray Regional State is one of the eleven regional states in Ethiopia. The region is located at the northern part of the country with an estimated population of 5.6 million (CSA 2021). Based on the current geographical map, the region's neighbours are Eritrea in the north, Sudan in the west, the Afar National Regional State in the east, and the Amhara National Regional State in the south and southwest. As in other regional states, the majority of the people are smallholder farmers.

The region has been led by the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), which was founded in 1975. Seventeen years of the TPLF-led movement was guided by the need to "respect the rights of nations and nationalities", and the TPLF-led government was established in 1991 by overthrowing the Derg military government, forcing the former president to flee to Zimbabwe. Since this time the TPLF has been the main actor in Ethiopian politics, taking control of leadership positions in the federal government.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power with support of four political parties (EPRDF members) and citizens across the country. Following his inaugural speech, the overwhelming majority of citizens including the people of Tigray were happy to see new leadership with a promising vision for the future. He visited all the regions and some important towns, and he was warmly welcomed in all of these locations. However, people started to recognize some differences and tensions between the TPLF and the federal government, which led to the current war.

It has been over a year since the war (which the federal government refers to as *law enforcement*) broke out, and a lot of changes have been happening in the country. Foreign pressure by different countries including United Nations member states has been observed. Based on the researchers' observation, there are different opinions on the main causes of the war across political parties and ethnic groups in Ethiopia, and the depth of the impact is not well understood by the people who are in other parts of Ethiopia far from the war zone. Therefore, it is important to address the root causes and its socio-economic consequences in the country. Both primary and secondary sources of data will be utilized. The primary data was obtained through informal interviews with people affected by the war, with soldiers from both the federal and the TPLF sides. Informal methods were employed due to the sensitivity of the issue, which could have affected the responses of the participants. Furthermore, phone interviews were also made to confirm the media information. Moreover, the researchers' personal experience is also used since they were in the southern part of Tigray and had a chance to move to other parts of Tigray, Afar and Amhara. Secondary sources of information from official press releases and interviews were used to

meet the research objectives. The data were qualitatively analysed and pictures were used as evidence to assess infrastructural damage.

Root Causes of the Ongoing War

Ethiopia was ruled by an imperial system until 1974, when the military Derg came to power (Lyons 2019). The Derg formed a socialist unitary system where the central government dictated everything that happened in the country with a slogan of “Ethiopia First” that did not recognize ethnic diversity. Failure to recognize and respect the diversified ethnic groups in the country created the foundation for liberation movements. TPLF was one of these movements, and later several additional liberation movements emerged in Oromia, Amhara and other areas of the country to accelerate the overthrow of the socialist regime by the end of May in 1991 (Abbink 2006). The federal government was led by the coalition of four political parties representing southern people and nationalities in Tigray, Oromia, and Amhara. They were called the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). This coalition ignored the involvement of other regions such as Somali, Afar, Benshangul Gumuz, Gambella and Harari.

The political culture of Ethiopia before 1991 can be considered non-democratic. The current federal system is considered to be a system that respects ethnic diversity in the country. It has also brought the concept of good governance and democracy (African Development Bank, 2009; Hashim, 2010; Yonatan, 2012). Several improvements have been made under the leadership of EPRDF in the last two decades. Though the current federal system improved the socio-economic status of the country, there were still many grievances. The situation got worse after the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The main source of these grievances was the government. The grievances started to be visible when the Addis Ababa city expansion master plan was proposed when the Oromo people – especially the young people called “Qerro” – started to protest. The main concern raised by the protesters was the fear that the master plan may leave farmers without any source of income.

Change of leadership might happen due to many reasons such as the end of term, death, and a coup. The leading party may also decide to change its leader following a series of public anti-government demonstrations. There were economic and social injustices, violation of human and democratic rights, lack of good governance, and a high youth unemployment rate (Siraw, 2015; Amnesty International, 2017; Freedom House, 2017). The main challenge was not the presence of grievances, but rather the way leaders responded to these grievances. They advocated for changes through ethnic channels. This way of advocating enabled several ethnic groups to participate in protests because they believed their ethnicity had caused the problems. It was very difficult to deal with such protests democratically. In addition to the protests, the internal political vacuum that was created after the death of the Prime Minister Meles was another reason for the increase in protests. Internally, the sister parties that formed the leading party EPRDF were not identical ideologically, and hard and soft liners came out over time. This situation enabled protesters to get power and

weaken the government, resulting in the change in leadership that can be seen in Ethiopia today.

There was also a request for constitutional revision in some parts of Ethiopia, especially in the Amhara regional state. The elites from Amhara Regional State, especially members of Amhara National Movement, believed that the people of Amhara were not represented in the process of the preparation of the current federal constitution and requested for amendment of some articles in the constitution. The main reason for the grievances mentioned above was lack of good governance. At all levels of administration in the country, the people of Ethiopia complained about lack of good governance. In general, the government has been a source of grievances in the country. Following the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the grievances started to expand across the country.

This situation forced the former Prime minister Hailemariam Dessalegn to resign, opening the door for Abiy Ahmed to be the third prime minister of Ethiopia on April 02, 2018. He was the first prime minister who came from the Oromo people.

According to Ahmed (2019), the premier has made significant improvements in the country in reducing gender disparity in federal leadership positions. He has also constructed recreational centres and huge parking lots in Addis Ababa by mobilizing resources from the community with the slogan “Five million for a dinner in the government palace with the Prime Minister” (Embassy of FDRE in London, 19 August, 2019). This slogan was used when a call was made for all Ethiopians to support the government by contributing five million Ethiopian birr. The premier decided to have a dinner with them in the palace. He also freed political prisoners and called for collaboration. Moreover, he received a Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 for ending the silent war between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

All these decisions brought hope to the people of Ethiopia. Ethiopian people are now expecting to solve the problems that have arisen in the last two decades. The economy is expected to grow fast with economic reforms and job creation to decrease the unemployment rate. There has also been a high rate of corruption in the country and the Ethiopian people are hoping the leadership under Abiy Ahmed will address this problem in the country.

Although the official declaration of the war came immediately after the attack of the TPLF force on the national army base in Mekelle, the main internal cause was the TPLF’s rejection to the premier’s reforms. The following section provides an overview of the specific root causes of the ongoing war.

Forming of Prosperity Party and the Peace Deal with Eritrea

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came with the vision of coming together (“Medemer” in Amharic) so that all political parties leading different regions could be integrated into the federal government. In the past the federal government was led by a front of four parties who formed the EPRDF. The EPRDF system intentionally excluded five regions, namely the Afar National Regional State, the Somali Regional State, the Benshangul Umuz Regional State, the Harari Regional State, and the Gambella

Regional State. They were named as support rather than main actors. These regions were not involved in decision making at the central level despite being sovereign in their own respective regions. According to former leaders of the Afar Regional State, in the interview they stated that there were both direct and indirect interferences by the TPLF leaders. There were delegates from TPLF members in the region who supported politicians in the region. Yet, they were interfering in the decision-making process.

The formation of a unified political party was not a new concept for EPRDF. It was on the agenda for several years even when the TPF's most influential leader, the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, was leading the party. Despite this reality, TPLF opposed the formation of the prosperity party which allows all the regional political parties to engage in decision making at the federal level. The prosperity party was formed with all political parties leading every region except for the TPLF, which represented the Tigray Regional State. TPLF leaders believed that the procedure of formation of a unified political party (prosperity) was wrong since the decision was made at the centre by the council of ministers while they preferred to first discuss the issue of joining prosperity party with their members. Following this, the TPLF became one of the parties opposed to the Prime Minister's new political reform. Finally, the prosperity party was formed with all political parties leading every region except TPLF, which represents the Tigray Regional State. Following this, TPLF became one of the parties opposed to the Prime Minister's new political reform.

Lemma Megersa was very influential and one of the highly respected leaders in Oromia region. He was chairperson of the Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO), which is now the Oromia Prosperity Party. But, he was not member of the federal parliament. By that time, Abiy Ahmed was vice chairperson of OPDO, and member of the federal parliament. According to the Ethiopian legislation, any prime minister needed to be a member of the federal parliament as well. So, Lemma decided to leave the responsibility of chairing the OPDO so that Abiy Ahmed could have the opportunity to become the first prime minister of the country from the Oromia region. Hence, Abiy Ahmed was provided with the chance to be a nominee in the election of the EPRDF chairperson and got elected. After a while, the premier decided to form a unified political party called prosperity party. Such a unified party formation was not acceptable for Lemma who was president of Oromia region. Megersa said that forming the prosperity party was not completed in a timely manner because the country was under reform and the people who participated in the elections in 2015 did not vote for prosperity. He mentioned in his interview with the

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Voice of America (VOA, Oromia) that the idea of the establishment of the prosperity party had to be a point of discussion for everyone to agree on before implementation (Qero Media, 2019).

The other intriguing contributing factor of the current war was a lack of transparency following mutual visits and signing agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The two countries were in a cold war for almost twenty years after a war in 1998-1999 due to the border-issue. Prime Minister Abiy in his inaugural speech stated that the conflict between the two countries must come to an end and visited Eritrea to initiate the peace deal. TPLF leaders did not join the delegation to Eritrea even though Eritrea and Tigray share a long border with each other. In addition, there were no officially released statements to the people of Ethiopia on the points of discussion. By such step the premier fuelled distrust between the TPLF and the federal government.

Over time, the premier has reduced the power of the TPLF members in the federal government and they have moved from the country's capital where the federal government is located to Tigray's capital Mekelle. After their arrival in Mekelle, they asked for forgiveness from the Tigray people for not serving them well. The people of Tigray did not have an alternative for a strong political party in the region, so despite their disappointment with TPLF's efforts they agreed to support them. On the other hand, TPLF became a critic of the federal government and tried to use their platform to manipulate both the people of Tigray and other regions of Ethiopia through its state-owned media.

Ideology Change

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed not only aimed to form a unified political party, but he proposed an economic reform to replace state-led development strategy of EPRDF with a liberal economic system. Such shift became another significant factor dividing the TPLF and the federal government. The TPLF is against the liberal economic doctrine. They believe that the economic growth of the country will slow down, unless the big companies are owned by the state. So, they prefer that the country should improve the number of local investors who can compete with their international counterparts. If foreign investors dominate the economy of the country and decide to leave for some reasons, the economy would contract.

Handling Corruptors and Territory-related Problems

In the first place, the popular protest was mainly driven by violations of democratic rights, massive corruption, and a false historical narrative. While implementing the economic reform, the primer focus was put on state-owned corporations that manage large amounts of national capital, including Ethiopian Metal and Engineering Corporation (METEC) and Sugar Cane Corporation. Unfortunately, the leaders of these sectors were from Tigray and they were removed from their position. After some time, the director for METEC, General Kinfu Dagnew, was under the radar of the federal government. He was captured in the western Tigray and taken to the

capital of Ethiopia for further investigation. After his arrest a documentary film was released on official state-owned media about the corrupt director. Another documentary was also released on Medias on the human rights crimes committed in the EPRDF period not long before the documentary on General Kinfe.

While analyzing these documentaries, they suggested that human rights violations were committed by TPLF, specifically mentioning “Tigrigna language speakers” despite the fact that all EPRDF members were responsible for the violations (Fana, 2018; EBC, 2018). This action was considered an anti-Tigray movement by TPLF, and this was also a point of concerns for the upcoming inclusive democracy that the Premier specified in his inaugural speech.

The current regional classification was made before the approval of the current constitution. Some of the areas included as parts of Tigray were previously administered under the current Amhara region. There are people in some parts of Tigray who prefer to belong to the Amharic region. For example, the issue of Wolkait in the west and the issue of Raya in the southern part of Tigray are among the main factors for the territory-based tensions between Amhara and Tigray Regional States.

Postponing Federal Elections and Holding Regional Elections

Ethiopia’s past five elections in the period of EPRDF were criticized for electoral vote theft and lacking transparency, and the country has frequently experienced postelection protests. The new premier, in his inaugural speech, promised that the 6th national election would be transparent and democratic. To ensure this goal, he has freed political prisoners to widen the voting electorate. Furthermore, he assigned Birtikuan Mideksa as a head of electoral board. She was one of the leaders of the opposition party imprisoned by the EPRDF under the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, though now she is not a member of any political party.

Although the election was planned to be held in August 2020, which was the last year of the EPRDF term, the government decided to postpone it due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A couple of options were raised by the government prior to the decision of the office responsible for making such decisions. The options were either to dissolve the parliament, call for a state of emergency, or extend the term of the current government and approve postponing the election. The House of Federation¹ passed the decision to postpone the election after consulting lawyers and other professionals for judicial review of the constitution. The decision was not welcomed by TPLF and their supporters, who argued that the COVID-19 pandemic was not a justifiable reason to postpone the election. They decided to reject the legitimacy of the federal government as well as its laws and proclamations after last day of the government administration on September 30, 2020. Once the decision was passed on postponing the election, the Tigray regional government decided to hold its own election without the approval of the Ethiopian election board, which is the only organization responsible for managing elections. The TPLF-ruling Tigray government established its own election board and conducted the election with five opposition parties participating. TPLF was declared to be the winning with 99% of the seats and the party formed its

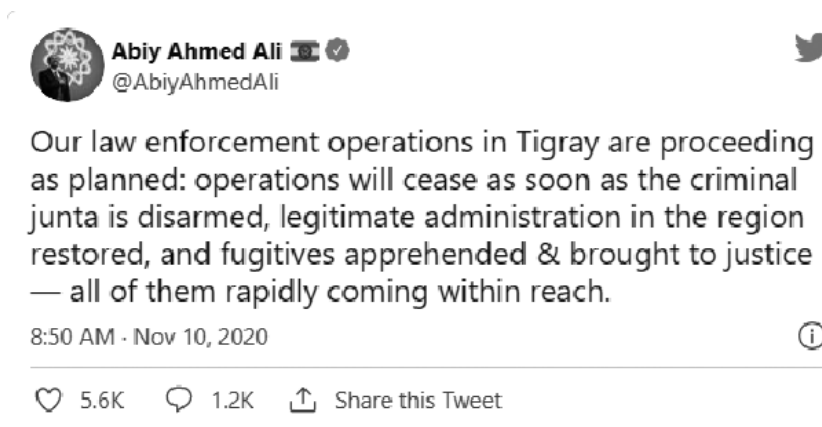
government. This decision of TPLF was totally against the constitution of the federal government. The Ethiopian constitution clearly states that the election board is the only responsible body to manage the elections both for regional and federal seats. However, the federal government did not take any measures to prevent this from occurring. In his interview on the issue of Tigray conducting election, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said that it did not matter as long as the TPLF came to power. He said that problems would result if another party won the election that was not legally a part of the federal government.

Attacking the Ethiopian Defence Forces in Tigray

There have been several efforts by religious leaders and elderly Ethiopians across the country to settle differences through dialogue. This is one of the traditional methods for conflict resolution in Ethiopia. A peace and reconciliation committee was also established at the federal level to explore ways of finding compromise. Despite the efforts made, the situation worsened because the history of governmental corruption before Abiy Ahmed was linked to the TPLF. Tensions peaked when TPLF forces brutally attacked the Ethiopian Defence Forces based in Mekelle.

Following this attack on 2 November, 2020, the federal government announced a law enforcement order for the Ethiopian Defence Forces to enforce. The Amhara Special Forces and Eritrean Defence Forces were involved in the war alongside Ethiopian Defence Forces. The federal government gave nine days in three rounds (three days in each round) for the TPLF leaders to surrender, though they never accepted this offer.

After a week had passed, the premier informed the public through his twitter page that the law enforcement was going as planned and would end when the TPLF was disarmed.



▲ Figure 1. Prime Minister's Twitter post. Source: Office of the Prime Minister of Ethiopia

Following this post, the war only took two more weeks and the federal government seized control over nearly the entire territory of Tigray and the capital city of Mekele where the regional government operated. In the three-week war between the TPLF and other allied forces (the Amhara Special Force, Eritrean Defence Force, and Ethiopian Defence Force), some of the founding members of the TPLF were killed including Siyoum Mesfin (foreign minister during the EPRDF period and Ambassador of Ethiopia to China), Abay Tsehaye (minister of federal affairs and leader of Sugar Factory Corporation), Asmelash Woldeselassie (former Ethiopian parliament chief whip), Sekoture Getachew (the TPLF spokesperson), Daniel Assefa (former head of the Tigray finance bureau), and Zeray Asgedom (former head of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority).

After controlling Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, the federal government established an interim government at both regional and lower administrative units in Tigray. At the regional level, oppositional political parties based in Tigray formed a coalition to share the power and tried to convince the local community members to vote for them. In the meantime, the Ethiopian Defence Force continued searching for the remaining TPLF leaders such as the president of Tigray, TPLF chairperson Debretsion Gebremichael, spokesperson Getachew Reda, and other senior staff. One of them included Sibhat Nega (called him Aboy Sibhat), who was the founding and most senior member of the front. Despite the continued search, they could not capture the majority of them including the president and other former Ethiopian Defence Forces generals who were leading the war for the TPLF.

Finally, on 28 June 2021, after eight months of being in Tigray, the federal government left most areas of Tigray except in the south and west where the Amhara Regional State claimed and passed a unilateral ceasefire to give the TPLF time to re-think and rural farmer a chance to return to their normal agricultural activities to reduce vulnerability to food insecurity in the region. The measure taken by the federal government on unilateral ceasefire was appreciated by the United Nations (UN), which requested the TPLF forces to respect this decision (UN, July 2021).

Despite the decision made by the federal government to cease fire, the TPLF continued to not only control the southern region but advanced to the Amhara and Afar territory. Although the government declared victory over the TPLF and claimed they would continue hunting members down, during the eighth month of the interim period the TPLF started a guerrilla war and grew stronger when the defence forces left the region.

Consequences of the Ongoing War

The conflict between TPLF and the federal government has affected the country and the regions involved in the war. The following section discusses the main consequences of the war.

Socio-economic Consequences

Civilians were killed by the crossfire and people were displaced from their homes, becoming dependent on aid. According to the UN in July 2021, more than 2 million people were displaced because of the war. In the first few months after the war, Tigray experienced a complete blackout. There was no electricity in Tigray because the electric powerlines were damaged. There was no telecommunication access or banking services. Lack of access to drinking water and transportation were additional problems resulting from the guerrilla war. Businesses shut down and trade with other regions stopped. Banking access was blocked for those accounts opened in Tigray regardless of where people lived and their ethnicity. This situation forced all citizens including wealthy individuals to become dependent on aid, which was limited due to the number of displaced people in the three regions and road blockage to Tigray by the TPLF.

According to a UN meeting in July 2021, the ceasefire was not followed by the TPLF and they continued the war. As a result, basic support to humanitarian services was halted, and there was widespread destruction and looting of communication centres by the Ethiopian Defence Forces while withdrawing (UN, 2 July 2021),

Massacres were committed, which killed more than 1,000 people in Mai-Kadra and Axum. More than 200 sexual and gender-based violence reports were submitted to the UN (UN, August 26, 2021), which were reportedly perpetrated by soldiers involved in the war. According to the informal interview with the TPLF soldiers and the rural community in southern Tigray and the phone interviews conducted with residents from Axum, Shire, and Mekelle, most members of the Ethiopian Defence Forces had high ethical standards, though some were involved in rape and theft. According to the interviewees, members of the Eritrean Defence Forces were responsible for killing and raping family members and burning down houses.

Most rural residents depend on agriculture to get the food they consume and cash they need to survive. Agriculture in Ethiopia accounts for almost half of the gross domestic product (41% of GDP), 80% of the employment, and the majority of foreign exchange earnings (Zenebe et al., 2011). Many research findings (Zewudu and Bamlaku, 2014; Bezabih et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2013; Wagesho et al., 2013) revealed the importance of agriculture for economic growth and reducing poverty. Due to the war, hundreds of thousands of young Ethiopians have joined the Ethiopian Defence Forces instead of working in the labour market. Moreover, farmers from Amhara and Tigray regional states are involved in the war. These farmers should be ploughing and harvesting their lands so that they can feed themselves and other Ethiopians. This situation affected farming and reducing production, which in turn has led to food insecurity.

The destroyed tanks, cars, mortars, and other military equipment have resulted in a loss of millions of dollars. For a country suffering with hard currency, it is too costly to recover these resources, especially because the federal government is being forced to buy additional military equipment while the war continues. Due to the war,

the IMF Projection for 2022-2026 has excluded Ethiopia from its global economic projection citing the unusual high degree of uncertainty (IMF, 2021).

Diplomatic Issues

Diplomatically, Ethiopia is far from where the country used to be. The European Union, the United States, the United Nations Security Council and other countries are calling for a ceasefire. Several meetings have been held to discuss the crisis in Ethiopian. Individual sanctions were imposed by the USA on some of the leaders at the federal level. For example, leaders of the Amhara region and the TPLF are on the lists who are denied to get USA visa.

Moreover, recently the U.S. government gave information on the upcoming sanctions to be imposed unless there is a ceasefire. Authorities said that the United States will remove Ethiopia from the AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act) agreement that allows Ethiopia to import from the USA free of tax. Following this decision, the special economics advisor of the prime minister requested the USA not to take such a measure as it would affect more than one million Ethiopians who are not directly involved in the war (DireTube, October 15, 2021).

Infrastructural Damage

Infrastructure is one of the main enablers for economic growth of African countries. It has a significant contribution to poverty reduction, assuring food security and sustainable development. The role of infrastructure in enhancing the economic growth is mentioned as it is a prerequisite for any development. It is also very difficult to assure sustainable development without proper infrastructures. As it can be seen in the pictures above, schools, health facilities, tourist destinations, and transportation



^ Figure 2. U.S. Announcement. Source: United States Embassy in Addis Ababa

facilities such as airport and roads were damaged as a consequence of the conflict. Education is key to human capital development. A country's healthcare, labor force, and transportation facilities are key to facilitate economic activity by transporting goods and providing services.

Based on several studies, Fan and Rao (2003) indicated that public spending in rural infrastructure is one of the most powerful instruments that governments can use to promote economic growth and poverty reduction. Teklebirhan (2015) has strengthened the importance of investing in public infrastructure to boost output and growth. The government of Ethiopia invested a huge amount of money on several infrastructural developments in the country.

The important role of international development co-operation can be seen in the preceding overview of infrastructural development. China has built much-needed transport infrastructure that can increase Africa's connectivity with the rest of the world (Tarrósy and Vörös, 2018; Erdeiné Késmárki-Gally, 2015; Vörös, 2010), but the role of India has also been increasing in this area. Moreover, India is now more interested in training African personnel than bringing in its own professionals (Tarrósy, 2011).

Due to the ongoing war, infrastructure has been damaged. Examples are highlighted in the pictures below: the Axum airport located at the city of Axum, known for being a UNESCO registered world heritage site; the Al Nejashi Mosque, the first mosque in Ethiopia; tourist sites, bridges, and health and educational facilities. Furthermore, educational infrastructures have been damaged and will take time to recover from the effect of the war. Additionally, health centres and other social services have been damaged by the war. These are resources that the country has invested in to ensure sustainable economic development and improve the livelihood of communities.

Interruptions to Education

Recently, education has not only become a human rights issue, but also a key factor in reducing poverty and improving living standards (Debebe, 2014; Kadzamira and Rose, 2003). Education is key for improving the quality of life, and it is difficult to survive in the current knowledge-based competitive world without education. It is a way to build bridges between communities from different nations to foster political understanding and socio-economic progress, which in turn enhances local and regional economic development (Petros, 2015).

Education has been interrupted in the Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regional states. Most soldiers in TPLF are young children who should be attending school. Furthermore, university students who were studying in graduate and post graduate programs in Tigray universities located were forced to stop their educational careers.

Interruption of schooling means not only stopping for the duration of the war, but it also raises challenges when children go back to school. Moreover, for those who are displaced, it is difficult to settle and engaged in education due to cultural differences in new locations.



^ Figure 3. Photographs of structural damage resulting from the war. Source: Social Media and Google

It is crucial to improve the health of the population in order to achieve development goals (Panda and Thakur, 2016; Obrist et al., 2007). According to Ram (2012), health is not only a determining factor to development, but it is also a human right.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The root cause of this war was a matter of gaining power in the federal government. Specifically, the main reasons included the formation of the prosperity party during the EPRDF period, ideological economic development changes made by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed from a developmental state economy to a liberal system, and lack of transparency on details of agreements signed between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Additionally, postponing the federal election was not welcomed by TPLF leaders. The other root cause for the current war between TPLF and the federal government

was the attack on the Ethiopian Defence Forces following the illegal regional election they held. According to the informal interviews and discussions with different residents in Tigray, this kind of attack on the Ethiopian Defence Forces from within is intolerable for all Ethiopians including the Tigray people.

The impact of war is multi-dimensional. The economy of the country in general and the war zone area in particular are affected. Lack of social services is an issue that is key to survival. Displaced people including mothers with children in Tigray, Amhara, and Afar Regional State are suffering from hunger and they are dying. They are dependent on aid, though the transportation system for the assistance has been affected by the ongoing war as well. Young boys who should be at school and young adults who should be working in the labour market are instead fighting in the war, which will affect the future of country.

In general, the economy of the country is suffering. Military equipment has been destroyed, infrastructure has been damaged, the young citizens who should be part of the labour force are dying in the war. This situation is decreasing economic transactions and having negative impact on Ethiopia's economy. Moreover, this war is reducing tourism and foreign investment in the country.

Most importantly, many people are involved in discussing the current crisis in Ethiopia, with most debating which side is right and which side is wrong. This means that more energy could be spent on discussing economic development, entrepreneurship, and other social developments issues related to the war. Therefore, these arguments over the war are often a huge waste of time and resources.

Governmental systems are expected to play a pivotal role in maintaining food security and sustainable development of the region. As long as there is good governance (i.e. a system that is participatory, accountable, transparent, equitable, inclusiveness, responsive, well-structured, and law-abiding), there will be a better social development.

The only possible way to make improvements is to sit down and talk about potential solutions. Dialogue is the foundation for peace. Of course, peace is a broader concept, but first we must stop the senseless deaths of young children and military personnel in our nation. In its meetings on the crisis in Ethiopia, the United Nation has been calling for a ceasefire without any preconditions set by TPLF. Furthermore, the crimes committed should be investigated by an independent and neutral body. Peace has to come first and there should not be any preconditions for peace. Peace deals can be made before, during, and after war. Despite the delay in reaching an agreement, it is better to agree to end war face-to-face while sitting around a table. The longer the conflict, the more famine and suffering people will have to endure. The recommendation we make is to save the people and the country by being responsible. Both sides should sit down and start making a ceasefire agreement so they can agree on a solution. Additionally, a dialogue forum on national issues should be urgently organized for all active political parties in the country. ✨

Note

- 1 The House of Federation is the upper house of the bicameral Federal Parliamentary Assembly, the parliament of Ethiopia.

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IN THE SHACKLES OF INSTABILITY: CHALLENGES OF OPERATION BARKHANE IN THE G5 SAHEL COUNTRIES

JUDIT GODÓ

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS EXPERT (MA), CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

DESK OFFICER FOR TRADE POLICY, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE OF HUNGARY

JUDIT.GODO8@GMAIL.COM

Abstract

Suffering from a multidimensional crisis, the Sahel has morphed into the new center of terror. In the past few years, it has become one of the most hazardous places in the world, which has negatively transformed the fragile states of the Western-African region. Emerging as a novel security policy challenge, the G5 Sahel countries – namely Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger – have found themselves stuck in a quagmire of different deep-rooted human security issues, which have placed their populations in a vicious circle of closely intertwined problems. Various influences threaten not just the security of residents and foreign actors but also the security of neighboring states. Different regional and international actors are trying to solve this complex crisis with varying levels of success. In this environment, in the shackles of instability, the presence of jihadist terrorist organizations and the operations of different rebel armed forces independent from governments pose a growing threat by making Sahelian life a living hell. This paper aims to discuss the challenges and effectiveness of Operation Barkhane, the terminating counter-terrorism operation led by the French, which has started its strategic transformation by merging into the European initiative known as the Takuba Task Force. Under President Emmanuel Macron, France remains the most important actor in the international community. In close alliance and cooperation with the African leaders and military forces of the five countries involved, they have been fighting terrorism within the confines of Operation Barkhane since 2014. Until recently 5,100 French soldiers have been deployed. They risk their lives every day in an incredibly hostile and constantly changing field where either they or the jihadists are under fire. Even though this operation has become an essential part of providing security in these countries, French participation remains controversial: despite their willingness to help, heavily armed French soldiers are not the most popular throughout the region. The importance of the topic speaks for itself because the transformation of the operation and the withdrawal of half of the French troops may have a drastic impact on the future of the Sahel.

Keywords

G5Sahel, instability, France, Barkhane, Takuba Task Force, counterterrorism, jihadist terrorism, security policy

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to evaluate the French military presence in the G5 Sahel countries focusing on the counter-terrorism operations within the confines of Operation Barkhane. As a framework, the first four sections provide key background information that one should be familiar with before discussing Operation Barkhane. After the introduction, the second section discusses the hostile field in which the operations work including the different human security issues. The third section presents the active jihadist groups in the region while the fourth section discusses the legitimacy of the French military presence. The fifth section focuses on Operation Barkhane and the last section concludes with the findings and a prognosis on the future of the Sahel region.

In terms of spatial and temporal delimitation, I assess the French military presence in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger – the countries that are participating in the G5 Sahel cooperation – from May 2017 to September 2021. In my research methodology, I look at complex interpretations of the security regime by processing primary and secondary sources. My research questions include the following: To what extent does the French military presence contribute to ensuring security in the G5 Sahel countries? Could Operation Barkhane be the “cure” for the crisis in these nations? The argument of this paper is that although the French military presence contributes significantly to ensuring security in the G5 Sahel countries, as the study of Operation Barkhane illustrates, they cannot ensure it alone due to the instability of the region. Operation Barkhane cannot constitute the solution because a military response by itself is not enough to solve the ongoing crisis.

The area where the operation is taking place is in the territory of the G5 Sahel (G5S) countries - Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Despite all good intentions, the African regional organizations such as the African Union and the ECOWAS have failed to solve these complex security issues on their own. Because they lack the requisite will, financial sources, and operational support to intervene, it became necessary to establish a regional cooperation instrument (Çonkar, 2020; Erforth, 2020a). Founded in 2014, the G5S came into being with the commitments of the five Sahel states. It would not have become reality without the support of the then French administration of President Hollande. According to the diverse and ambitious mandate of the group, its aim is not only to eliminate organized crime networks and jihadist terrorist groups but also to create a more secure and livable Sahel with the help of development programs in the fields of infrastructure, education, and food security. Today, the G5 Sahel cooperation aspires to become a well-functioning regional mechanism for enhancing the security of its member countries. Its challenge, however, is that in the sea of pressing security threats, the capacity for cooperation is not aligned with the objectives (Çonkar, 2020: 8-9; Bak, 2020; G5 Sahel, 2020). Nevertheless, in the coming decades and under pressure from Paris, this cooperation will stand. In the meantime, the G5S countries will continue to count on financial support from various donor countries to cope with their weak statehood coupled with economic and military shortcomings. Without development

aid from external donors and foreign military assistance, their cooperation is worthless (Bak, 2020; Çonkar, 2020).

2. The Different Dimensions of the Sahel Crisis

Understanding the challenges of the region remains crucial because, without this information, one cannot fully evaluate the hazards and causes related to Barkhane. To put an end to these issues, a solution must be found at the local and regional levels. Operation Barkhane has been providing extensive assistance in achieving this objective. Failure to address these challenges could result in global security implications (Varga, 2016; Douce, 2021a; Çonkar, 2020; United Nations, 2020). Thus, in this section nine human security challenges are discussed briefly: demographic and food security crises, weak statehood and corruption, ethnic conflicts, ongoing migration crisis, organized crime networks including child trafficking, human rights abuses, and last but not least, mental health issues.

According to the World Bank's population estimates of 2019, there are 15 million residents in Chad, 23 million in Niger, 4.5 million in Mauritania, 10 million in Mali, and 20 million in Burkina Faso (World Bank, 2019). In a region where more than half the population lives under the poverty line, these numbers may double by 2050 if the demographic trend does not change soon, which will probably further aggravate the current food security crisis. Surveys conducted by the World Food Program show that more than five million people are starving daily in the Liptako-Gourma region – known as the “tri-border” or “three-borders” zone – which has become one of the most critically affected areas of the Sahel crisis. In the shadow of the pandemic, the health care systems of the conflict-torn region are among the most severely under-



^ Figure 1. French President Emmanuel Macron and the leaders of the G5S in a meeting at Château de la Celle Saint-Cloud in 2017 (Source: Cold-Ravnkilde, S.M., 2018:3)

developed. The majority of these institutions lack essential supplies such as clean water or soap, which would be integral tools to prevent epidemics like malaria or coronavirus. Poor governance has exacerbated those fundamental structural reforms that constitute key elements to tackle these alarming challenges. Furthermore, the long-term effects of the current pandemic may deepen not only the economic but the social problems these countries face (OCHA, 2020; Çonkar, 2020:1-15; Varga, 2016:72; World Health Organization, n.d.; World Bank, 2019).

Upon examination, the latest Fragile States Index shows that Chad ranks as the 7th, Mali as the 16th, Niger as the 19th, Mauritania as the 33rd, and Burkina Faso as the 37th most vulnerable states to collapse out of 178 countries. By comparison, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria are in the top four, and unfortunately, in terms of fragility, the G5 Sahel countries are not very far from these states with extremely weak public frameworks. In many cases, local tribal leaders, international aid organizations, and NGOs play the role of governments, so it is often difficult to distinguish between local and foreign political actors (World Bank, 2019; Çonkar, 2020:1-5; Varga, 2016:72; Fragile States Index, 2020).

Another significant root cause of instability in these weak states is widespread corruption. According to Transparency International's latest Corruption Perceptions Index, the G5 Sahel countries are among the most corrupt states in the world. Out of the 180 surveyed countries, Chad is the most corrupt and Burkina Faso is the least corrupt. Chad has 160 points on this scale while Burkina Faso has 86 points on the scale where the first country is the least corrupt.¹ In light of this statistic, it is no wonder that public confidence in state institutions has been shaken and the legitimacy of states is quite questionable (Transparency International, 2020; Çonkar, 2020:1-5).

All these factors play a substantial role in disputes and conflicts generated between the local communities and the different ethnic or tribal groups, especially because the Sahel serves as a sort of dividing line between the Christian and Muslim religious groups and between the North-African and Sub-Saharan tribes. After decolonization, when most of the colonies became independent, social groups structured essentially on a tribal basis found themselves within a kind of state framework that completely ignored territorial and national unity, designated by the great powers and their former colonial leaders. The newly drawn borders cared nothing for the traditional tribal areas, nor for the nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life of those who lived there. Dozens of conflicts and crises have been unfolding ever since during frequent changes of power, military coups, and dictatorial regimes (Varga, 2016; Palkovics, 2020; Michailof, 2016).

Nowadays the region is experiencing an era of one of the most dynamically deteriorating internal refugee crises. In the G5 Sahel countries, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has risen to almost 2.5 million. The majority seek safety in the refugee camps in the Liptako-Gourma region where national resources are overburdened, and international assistance is more committed to security assistance. Those members of society are most at risk who seek refuge in overcrowded refugee camps where neither the hygienic conditions nor practicing social distancing can

be fulfilled; moreover, different armed conflicts affect the security of IDP families grievously. In this fragile region, the turmoil and mistrust of local communities are intensifying, which increases the success of extremist armed groups' efforts to radicalize and recruit personnel (Çonkar, 2020; R4Sahel, n.d.; UNHCR, 2020:1-15; World Bank, 2019). At this point, it must be highlighted that the majority of African refugees are intracontinental. In most cases, they flee to a more secure corner of their country or move to a neighboring one. In case of danger, they choose to move to the closest safe havens. It is worth emphasizing that for a significant part of nomadic or semi-nomadic ethnic groups, due to their way of life, continuous migration is a naturally inherited characteristic. In that respect, a scenario of an influx of African refugees flooding Europe may occur to some extent, but one must be aware that from such poor areas like Mali, Burkina Faso, or Niger, it remains unlikely that millions would flee to Europe in search of a better life since these people do not have the necessary financial resources (Tarrósy, 2019:148-152; UNHCR, 2020). Currently, as a consequence of climate change, local families striving to ensure their livelihoods need to migrate because most of them work in the agricultural sector. More and more conflicts sprung up due to the scarcity of arable lands, which are depleted natural resources or part of the illegal arms trade (Varga, 2016; Palkovics, 2020; Michailof, 2016).

The Sahel has become the “gold mine” of organized crime including human, arms, and drug trafficking. Since most families live under the poverty line it is not a coincidence that more and more people work in the informal sector, not to mention that the current pandemic has aggravated the matter of mass unemployment as well. In many cases, illegal work is the only chance for families to survive: for local communities, these jobs serve as sources of income and the key to their livelihood. On the other hand, it is alarming that these illegal enterprises are usually supported by influential state actors, which is why it has become rather difficult to identify the perpetrators. Furthermore, different rebel and jihadist groups usually turn out to be members or even masterminds behind these cruel and illegal activities that increase instability in the region. Using illegally acquired weapons, the formation of local self-defense militias is now increasingly common among the traumatized populations, which only exacerbates ethnic divisions. In the most terror-affected countries of the G5S including Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, eliminating these illegal activities is not a top priority because the capacities and border control units concentrate on holding up and eliminating jihadist groups. It is important to understand that a link exists between these two phenomena (Çonkar, 2020:1-6; Mangan and Nowak, 2019:20-21).

The issues of child trafficking and child soldiers are also serious problems requiring a resolution. In this region, children live in extreme danger. Many become victims of human trafficking, sexual abuse, or slavery. Mali suffers the most from this situation, especially near refugee camps where children are easy targets for kidnapping. In Mali and Niger, the institution of child militia still exists, constituting another challenge to security policies in the region. These innocent children are forced to

wield weapons either by their starving families or jihadist groups. These children are usually used as tools to achieve the goals of jihadists: they are easy to replace, so they are not just used to spy or to give birth to new generations of warriors, but they are used for suicide attacks as well. Jihadist groups prefer to put young children into combat because they are easy to manipulate and they possess a less developed sense of responsibility and fear. During the different missions of Barkhane, the French soldiers usually encounter these young militias. They always attempt to spare their lives, but due to the complexity of the Sahel crisis, it is not always possible (Palkovics, 2020; France24 English, 2013; UN News, 2020).

Members of local communities became victims of human rights abuses like extrajudicial executions or arbitrary arrests on a regular basis. These abuses have been aggravating and “widening the abyss between Sahelian states and their citizens” (Çonkar, 2020:7). These abuses are usually counted as war crimes; furthermore, besides extremist groups, local security forces (for instance the Malian militia) are also perpetrators. In 2020 almost 200 cases were reported in the Liptako-Gourma region. As long as the affected population suffers from these nightmarish traumas, citizens will never trust the armed forces and it will not matter if the soldiers have a patch of the Malian, Nigerien, or French flag on their uniforms (Amnesty International, 2020; International Criminal Court, 2019; Çonkar, 2020:3-6).

The Sahelian people witness brutality or experience violence every day. Next to the physical wounds they endure, there are invisible ones as well. It is important to note that Africans suffering from mental illnesses usually end up marginalized, since African belief systems often interpret these cases as curses. In this chaos, these countries lack the adequate capacities to treat these patients; therefore, NGOs like Doctors Without Borders are trying to fill this gap with varying degrees of success (Douce, 2021b).

3. In the Shadow of Terror: Jihadist Groups in the G5 Sahel Region

Since the rise of extremist terrorist networks plays a huge role in exacerbating the instability of the region, until recently, Operation Barkhane has been functioning primarily as a counter-terrorism mission (László, 2021; Varga, 2016). Momentarily, it is challenging to identify the different jihadist groups because one day they are fighting each other, then the next day, they become allies. Since the increase in the French military presence, they have been keen to carry out attacks in less visible, rural, and more isolated areas, targeting local communities, foreign legions, and rebel armed groups. Here I present two groups who are responsible for most of the lethal attacks in the “tri-border” zone, thus they have become the top targets of Operation Barkhane. One of the most active actors, which has been operating in the region since 2015, is the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara² (ISGS), which is the African cell of the Islamic State. The other group is Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which is a member of the Group to Support Islam and Muslims umbrella organization (GSIM)³ (Çonkar, 2020; Marsai and Treszkai, 2019; Bencherif, Campana and Stockemer, 2020:15-16).

In the Liptako-Gourma region, France’s biggest enemy is the ISGS. This group is famous for its ruthlessness, and it does not spare the civilian population either. They were responsible for more than 2,100 deaths in 2020. While al-Qaeda’s local cells are very popular, the Islamic State’s African troops are less appealing among the civilian population, with much lower support for understandable reasons. The group focuses mainly on controlling lucrative activities in the “tri-border” region, whether in gold mining communities or communities living near illegal smuggling routes. Expanding revenue from these activities is essential to their success. They make good use of the region’s harsh natural conditions, often seeking refuge from counter-terrorism forces in national parks (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2020).

The delta of the Niger River has become the citadel of the GSIM in recent years. The group was created in 2017 by the alliance of four terrorist groups and has become the most dangerous group that swore allegiance to Al-Qaeda. Their cooperation serves as a great example: foreign allied military action is not enough to win this war. Islamist groups have intimate knowledge of the terrain and, in several cases, the support of a part of the local community. In 2019, thanks to American and Mali aid, members of the French Foreign Legion eliminated the leader of the group (Châtelot, 2021; Çonkar, 2020; Marsai and Treszkai, 2019; Varga, 2016).

As an Islamist militant organization, the AQIM has already named France as its nemesis. They are not only responsible for launching attacks against skilled soldiers



The Economist

Figure 2. Spheres of influence of the GSIM and the ISGS in the Liptako-Gourma region (Source: The Economist, 2021b)

but for many attacks where innocent civilians have lost their lives. The current emir is Abu Obaida al-Annabi, who replaced the previous leader Abdelmalek Droukdel after he was killed during a mission of Operation Barkhane. AQIM's strategy differs in cities and rural areas: in the larger cities and central locations, they target various government buildings or military bases by blowing up or kidnapping people; on the periphery in rural areas, they try to infiltrate society. The latter can be achieved mainly through two methods: members of terrorist organizations prefer to marry into local communities or offer well-paid jobs within terrorist networks (Varga, 2016; France24, 2020).

As highlighted previously, the inhabitants of the region feel disillusioned with governments and democratic state institutions and that is why they become perfect subjects for terrorist organizations. These groups recruit new members by taking advantage of the frustrations and poor living conditions of these people (Varga, 2016; Marsai and Treszkai, 2019): "The gap between the broad needs of ever more fragile Sahelian societies and states incapable of offering hope for the future has opened a door for violent extremists to entrench themselves into the fabric of Sahelian societies" (Çonkar, 2020:7).

At this point one must see that in many cases these hopeless masses do not join a radical terrorist organization because of their beliefs; they see this option as a means of making a living. It is important to stress that this crisis knows no territorial borders: terrorist organizations operating in the G5S countries are responsible for what has happened in Cameroon, Nigeria, and Libya. What jihadist militants in the region have in common is their geographical proximity, ideology, operational strategies, and illegal finance methods. To make the complex situation more complicated, the G5 Sahel countries are swarmed with regular and irregular armed actors: national armies, international forces, UN peacekeepers, insurgent groups, community-based local armed groups, smugglers, and members of criminal organizations. In light of this, one might understand why it is extremely problematic to differentiate between the different armed actors (UNHCR, 2020; Varga, 2016; Marsai and Treszkai, 2019).

As Viktor Marsai emphasized in an interview, the Sahel crisis has its roots in the 1970s when demographic expansion, problems caused by climate change, and weak states aggravated the fragility of the area (László, 2021). As a consequence, the rise of jihadist ideologies has dramatically increased over the past 10 years, with 15 African countries becoming terror-infected (László, 2021). In the G5 Sahel countries during the past few years, the attacks of the jihadist groups demanded 600% more victims than before: "Even though there are five thousand French troops there, for five million square kilometers, that is a pittance. The weak statehood makes the local forces worthless. The Burkina Faso army, for example, has never been involved in an armed conflict, and it is they who should be fighting the embattled jihadists. (...) These [terrorist] organizations grow out of local society; they can operate very effectively at a very low cost. To give you an example: if they can take a sick child of a tribal leader to a hospital, they have already won a group. All it takes is a ride, a can of gasoline, a few hundred dollars"⁴ (László, 2021).

Concerning extreme Islamism and Jihadism in the Sahel, it is very important to highlight that terrorism never exists by itself. It is always a consequence of local political, economic, social crises; acting against these problems first can be a solution. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the dimensions of the Sahel crisis described in the third section: if these challenges do not improve or disappear soon, the Sahel will remain a hotbed of extremism and jihadist terrorism for many years to come (Külügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet, 2020).

4. Legitimacy of the French Military Presence: History, Interests, and Foreign Policy Strategies

The dynamics of Franco-African relations are deeply rooted in their common history. Today, the French military presence is understood in the context of the global fight against terrorism. Alongside the US, France has become the most important actor in counter-terrorism and security in Sub-Saharan Africa: between 2000 and 2020, nine military operations were conducted. Based on the 2013 White Paper, the Sahel region constitutes a top priority of the French defense strategy because of the common language, history, economic links, and the presence of French citizens. This strategy is becoming increasingly important under President Macron since France has a long history with the G5 Sahel countries that became independent from the mainland in 1960, known as the “Year of Africa”. These five countries and most Francophone African countries became bonded to the former colonial power, which has produced various military, economic, and political agreements. Critics argue that these moves gave France a sort of legitimacy to continue their operation in the territories of their former colonies (Charbonneau, 2017:322-326; Gazdag, 2019; Csizmadia, 2007; Ministère des Armées, 2013; Erforth, 2020a; Erforth, 2020b).

All the presidents in power in France’s history have been aware of the importance of the African continent in international relations. In 21st century rhetoric, France acts no longer as a gendarme, but rather as a comrade and a partner, especially in Francophone Africa. During the Cold War years, the West acknowledged France as a guarantor of security and stability in Africa, which is why the French presence became the result of a series of “invisible” agreements signed by other Western countries. African elites have always sought to remain on good terms with France. Apart from patronizing policies, personal ties have also strengthened their relationship. The tip of the iceberg, as Erforth puts it, was the notorious *Françafrique* network, whereby the French did have a separate foreign policy in Africa for a long time (Charbonneau, 2017:322-326; Chafer, Cumming and van der Velde, 2020:20-22; Gazdag, 2019; Csizmadia, 2007; Ministère des Armées, 2013; Erforth, 2020a; Erforth, 2020b).

Except for the notion of being a great power and the ideal of the French *grandeur*, Emmanuel Macron “received a rather mixed legacy” from the presidents of the Fifth Republic (Gazdag, 2019:9). Macron sees the presidency of Valéry Giscard d’Estaing in the 1970s-80s as a model: he wants to turn the country back into a great power. French policymakers who embrace the concept of *grandeur* believe in the

integrity of their nation and in the extraordinary role that France must play, not only in Europe but in the world – a belief that Macron holds sacred. To this end, the aim is to gain economic, cultural, and political influence across the borders of France, which is why France is fighting for human rights and democracy on the international stage today. As a means to achieve this goal, as part of providing global security, since the 1990s, France has mainly turned to the EU and various African regional organizations to solve the continent's problems in a multilateral framework. Despite this strategy, they failed to reduce or eliminate their military presence in Africa. Although they conducted numerous negotiations on African-French military agreements, ultimately, French troops had to be deployed again during the 2011 crisis in Libya and the 2013 crisis in the Central African Republic and Mali (Erforth, 2020a; Erforth, 2020b:5; Charbonneau, 2017:330-331; Gazdag, 2019:9-14).

Global challenges of our time require a stable international system, in which France is a key player. Given the significant commitment of the French military at the national level and on the international stage, the French Armed Forces are facing more complex military challenges than ever before. In terms of its military capabilities, it is doing very well internationally while ranking third in NATO with 209,000 troops. In terms of defense spending, France is in 7th place worldwide with an annual budget of 59 billion USD. In response to external and internal threats to the country, the French Defense Council has increased the budget by 34 billion USD. The French Armed Forces serve as a directly deployed instrument of French foreign policy. As an EU member state, it plays a dominant role in European foreign and security policy. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), it is committed to various peacekeeping operations, therefore, French soldiers are often deployed in various EU, OSCE, and NATO operations, notably in the Middle East and on the African continent (Gazdag, 2019:16; Szűcs, 2019; Fregán, 2019:87; Ministère des Armées, 2013). Although this paper does not focus on the French development aids, it is worth mentioning that France as a donor has been playing an active role in this field as well. For instance, in 2017 France proposed in the UNSC that the G5S Joint Force should receive a permanent financial contribution under a Security Council resolution, but this proposal was voted down. Since then, in many cases, funds from foreign donors have not arrived on time, and if they do, they often end up in the wrong place. Due to the late arrival of the equipment needed to maintain security training is also delayed⁵ (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2018).

When it comes to military engagement abroad, it is important to note that the French president is the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces; therefore, he has the last word in the event of a foreign intervention without having to ask permission from any constitutional body. This kind of dominance in matters of (national) defense is a de Gaullean legacy. The idea of the *domaine réservé*, or “territory reserved for the President of the Republic”, is based on customary law: it is not found in the French constitution and has no legal basis, yet, as a source of pride, it has become a key, almost inseparable element of French leadership, which distinguishes the French from most European states (Erforth, 2021:35-38; Fejérdy, 2019).

Today, French security and defense policy is defined by two main strategic documents. The first document is the *Livre Blanc*, a White Paper on Defense and National Security, which was renewed and published under the François Hollande's presidency, setting out strategic guidelines up to 2025. The second document to be followed is the military planning law currently in force (*La Loi de programmation militaire 2019-2025*), which sets out the budgetary framework for the forces and means necessary for its implementation (Ministère des Armées, 2013; Ministère des Armées, 2021d; Fregán, 2019:87). As these documents declare, France's future and prosperity depend on its activities on the international stage, and it can do so by being present across all oceans and most continents with overseas territories and a large francophone community. In terms of strategic preferences, it is important

to stress that the protection of French national territory and French citizens abroad is an absolute priority, in case France or French citizens are threatened.⁶ The stabilization of the immediate European environment and the fight against jihadist terrorism remains a priority, including operations in the Sahel, especially as France is personally involved in the fight on its mainland (Ministère des Armées, 2017; Ministère des Armées, 2013; Fregán, 2019:85).

In terms of capacities of foreign operational participation, the French military has more than 30,000 personnel, about half of the total of 61,372 conscripts. French soldiers in EU operations total 140, but with the transformation of Barkhane this number is expected to increase. Under the aegis of the UN, 720 French soldiers are currently deployed in more than five countries, including Mali. Furthermore, the French army has one of the most capable and effective mobile forces globally. Thanks to continuous improvements and NATO principles, their military presence is legitimate around the world (Ministère des Armées, 2020:6-30; Fregán, 2019).

Under the Macron Presidency, French decision-makers want to guarantee the security of the African continent as a collective European effort. Both the "global war on terror" narrative and the 2015 migration crisis are beginning to make the EU Member States think about getting involved in what the French forces started doing: for example, Angela Merkel, during her tenure as Chancellor, made more visits to African countries. According to European discourse, France is seen as a mediator and a guarantor of peace in Africa, driven mainly by the fear that if stability in the region did not restore, the various jihadist groups would take power. As

Global challenges of our time require a stable international system, in which France is a key player. Given the significant commitment of the French military at the national level and on the international stage, the French Armed Forces are facing more complex military challenges than ever before.

a consequence, jihadist terrorism could strike Europe not just as a minor downpour but as a devastating storm, as we have seen in recent decades (Erforth, 2020b:14-17). In Macron's vision, France is also seeking strategic independence as a founding member of NATO and the EU. A stronger, more cooperative Europe is still a long way off. Already, the *Strategic Review of Defence and National Security*, published in 2017, highlighted that MINUSMA and EU alliances are more important than ever, alongside Operation Barkhane. At several points, the White Paper also points out that Africa's security should be a greater priority for European partners in the future, and that is what one sees today by reforming and strengthening the Takuba Task Force (Ministère des Armées, 2017; Ministère des Armées, 2021a).

The threat of jihadist terrorism is a common theme between France and the G5 Sahel countries, which may explain and legitimate French participation in counter-terrorism missions. Although no attack in France has yet been officially linked to armed conflicts in the Sahel, this may not necessarily remain the case. After the tragic terror attacks of the autumn of 2020, Emmanuel Macron stressed in an official letter published on the Élysée website that his administration was fighting Islamic separatism or radical Islam, never Islam. This is an important distinction. According to the president, the French state is never against religion, but against fanaticism and violent extremism. He confirmed that the French authorities are doing their utmost to ensure that churches, mosques, and synagogues are protected to the highest possible degree. At this point, he quotes Averroes: "Ignorance leads to fear, fear leads to hatred, and hatred leads to violence" (Macron, 2020). Macron also emphasized that the laws of the French Republic cannot be challenged by hostile and extremist ideologies. The religious neutrality of the state against its citizens remains inviolable. However, it will be a major challenge to conduct counter-terrorism operations in a way that does not deepen the divisions between locals and immigrants, and between Christians and Muslims (Martens Centre, 2020).

5. The Forever War of France? Operation Barkhane

The maze of coalitions and alliances

As highlighted before, the "cure" for the Sahel crisis must be found locally, but without foreign aid it is unimaginable. Therefore, a "regional recipe" must be developed where "international ingredients" are essential parts. The complexity of the challenges facing the region would be impossible to address without multinational cooperation. Because of the sea of complex and often confusing initiatives, I named this phenomenon the "Sahel Confusion", thus this section aims to navigate through the maze of coalitions and alliances that provide a framework for the different missions and initiatives. Understanding the role of these foreign assistance programs is crucial before one analyzes Operation Barkhane (Faleg and Palleschi, 2020:8; Bak, 2020).

The Pau summit of 2020 is a significant landmark in French-African relations because the idea of the Sahel Coalition (*Coalition pour la Sahel*) originated here. French President Emmanuel Macron, who has long been trying to draw the atten-

tion of the international community to share the burden of the Sahel crisis, played a key role in its creation. The summit was attended by the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel countries and also by key representatives of the UN, the EU, and the African Union. The coalition was created to find a more collective solution to the Sahel crisis through international cooperation. The aim is to enable the various international actors to work together more effectively and transparently under the Sahel Coalition (Varga, 2014).

As the infographic presents, different missions are based on four complementary strategic pillars in which France plays an active role. The first pillar is fighting terrorism jointly, led by France and the G5 Sahel countries including the missions of Operation Barkhane, Takuba Task Force, and the G5 Sahel Joint Force. This very first pillar will be in the spotlight and elaborated on later. Constituting the second pillar, the capacity-building of armed forces includes the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel coalition, which looks good on paper but lacks a concrete structure, strategies, and a secretary-general. Its other element is the EUTM Mali, a military training program that aims to give up-to-date and professional training to the Mali army with its 5th mandate. The goal of the third pillar is to re-establish or

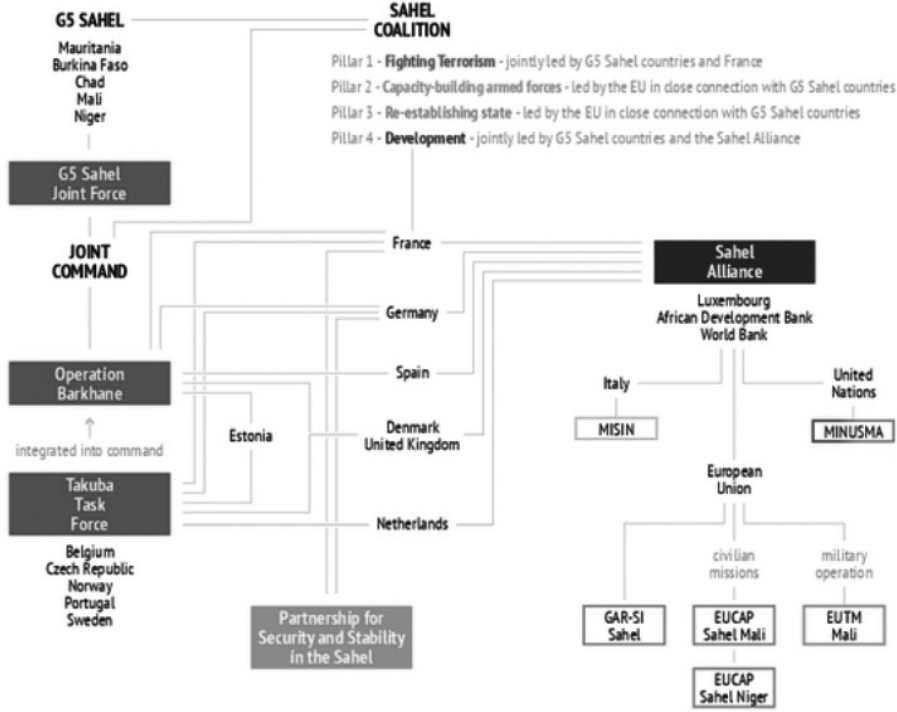


Figure 3. "The architecture of foreign assistance in the G5 Sahel and the role of European States" (Source: Faleg and Palleschi, 2020:8.)

restore the necessary state relations in the G5S countries with EU assistance. This includes the peacekeeping mission of the UN, the MINUSMA, and the two ongoing civilian capacity-building missions initiated by the EU: EUCAP Sahel Mali, and EUCAP Sahel Niger. To stabilize the region, the last pillar is based on crucial development programs. They are coordinated by a donor coordination team known as the Sahel Alliance masterminded by Macron. Without financial aid and foreign donors, neither the military nor the civilian missions can work. Sahel Alliance was established in Mauritania in 2017 by France, Germany, and the G5 Sahel countries. The planned projects seem promising but so far, the Coalition suffers from organizational and communication defects (Lebovich, 2020:12,23-24; Faleg and Palleschi, 2020:8; Bak,2020; Varga, 2014: 349; Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, 2020; EUTM Mali, 2021).

Operation Serval – A model to follow?

Operation Serval served as a forerunner of Operation Barkhane and the French military presence in the Sahel. Emmanuel Macron inherited Barkhane from the former French administration at the beginning of his presidency. The events that took place in Mali in 2012 raised eyebrows around the world: “Two decades after the Rwandan genocide, French soldiers were once again entrenched in a civil war where frontlines were blurred and the distinction between perpetrators and victims not always clear” (Erforth, 2020a:2). The Tuareg population in the north of the country launched an uprising attempting to create an independent state. Seeing the inadequate response from the Malian government, the military took over the rebellion, and Amadou Haya Sanogo seized power from President Amadou Toumani Touré in a coup d'état. In January 2013, at the request of Touré and due to the AQIM threatening Paris, two Gazelle helicopters landed in Burkina Faso, and four Mirage fighters and additional special forces arrived in N'Djamena. France launched its war in the Sahel with the life-saving Operation Serval, which ended the French non-interventionist policy in Africa. Thanks to François Hollande's military campaign (to save Mali and preserve its sovereignty), a few weeks later the French administration deployed 4,500 French troops in war-torn Mali, the largest deployment since the Algerian war. According to the French perspective, without their intervention, Mali would have ended up in the arms of terrorists (Erforth, 2020a:54-60; Vecsey, 2014:206; Erforth, 2021b:8-14). In the eyes of the local population, Serval had a strong pragmatic legitimacy, as they intervened in a critical situation in a timely and effective manner. However, as France was a former colonial country, there was little ideological legitimacy⁷ (Sabrow, 2016:19-20).

Most experts considered Serval as a model to follow in the history of French military policy since it was a strategically successful operation, and it did not cost astronomical sums of money. French participation in the fight against terrorism has once again become legitimate in West African countries. The UNSC also hailed Serval as a success, nevertheless, in response to the ongoing crisis, MINUSMA's blue helmets invaded Mali. Despite the failures in Côte d'Ivoire and Rwanda, the

French under Hollande embarked on a new pro-interventionist policy across Africa, centered on crisis-ridden Mali. In the fall of 2014, during the third phase of Serval, the French began to play an expanding counter-terrorism role, increasingly working with MINUSMA, local Malian forces, and EUTM Mali. By July, Operation Epervier and Serval merged. The last mission of this joint operation was to “search for Algerian flight AH5017, which crashed on 24 July 2014, bringing to an end a year and a half of operations in Mali and giving way to the next”⁸ (Vecsey, 2014:210). Although the French saw the operation as mission accomplished, it was only partially completed and reorganized in the summer of 2014, running under the name Barkhane (Vecsey, 2014:210; Charbonneau, 2017:323-324,338).

Operation Barkhane - The Sahel’s “life insurance”

Barkhane began on 1 August 2014 with the mission to strengthen the coordination of international military units, to launch a pre-emptive strike against jihadist forces before they establish new sanctuaries, and to assist the armed forces of the G5 Sahel countries. It was designed to operate on a wider territorial scale, with the justification that regional actors should be able to participate in their security, as best illustrated by the creation of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. The headquarters were deployed in N’Djamena, Chad and in Gao, Mali, supplemented by temporary forward bases which the commander could use to assemble occasional combat formations when needed. In 2017, Emmanuel Macron said that Operation Barkhane was subordinate to and complementary to the UN’s MINUSMA. The French President, hand-in-hand with a broad section of French society, believes that Mali’s sovereignty can guarantee Europe’s security (Erforth, 2020b:11-12; Vecsey, 2014: 211; Ministère des Armées, 2021c). Until recently 5,100 French troops have been fighting and have been working together closely with the participants of the Takuba Task Force. Momentarily, Barkhane has started its strategic transformation by merging into the Takuba Task Force. Up until fall 2021, the G5S Joint Force worked under a joint command (Ministère des Armées, 2021a; Ministère des Armées, 2021c:8-10; Armée française - Opérations militaires, 2020a; Buzna, 2020).

In the G5S countries, Operation Barkhane has been ensuring the security of the region. Since the Pau summit, multilateral cooperation is based on coordination, concentration, and continuous effort. A major criticism of the French presence is that they support authoritarian regimes in the region, which is one of the main causes of the rampant instability. Despite the historic French-African relations dating back many years, Barkhane, through its military operation, will simply not be able to create the state frameworks and regional governance structures that are urgently needed. The main task of the operation is counter-terrorism, so Barkhane’s troops cannot be expected to address all the challenges of the region, including the deeply rooted political problems of weak statehood that undermine not only Barkhane’s operations but also its covert participation and civilian missions (Ministère des Armées, 2021c:8-10; Charbonneau, 2017:337-340).

The limits of the G5S Joint Force

To date, both the missions of the G5S Joint Force (G5SJF) and the operations of the Takuba Task Force were integrated into Barkhane, operating under a Joint Command Mechanism since the Pau summit. Operating since 2017 and supported with French assistance, a 5,000-strong contingent of the G5S Joint Force is made up of soldiers from the G5S countries with the main aim of enforcing peace. Compared to the size of the territory and the French forces, its strength is limited. The G5SJF has not yet made the expected progress, but it is an excellent complement to the other integrated missions because the local African soldiers have better knowledge of the place and culture than legionnaires ever could have. Furthermore, according to experts' projections, this corps will be able to take over the role of the Barkhane in ten years in the best-case scenario (Boserup and Martinez, 2018:44; *The Economist*, 2021a; Bak, 2020:42-57;62; Çonkar, 2020; Ministère des Armées, 2020).

Alarmingly, there is concern that in recent years there have been several allegations of human rights abuses committed by G5SJF soldiers. In 2019, there were more than 600 cases of unlawful security incidents committed by African security forces in the region. To determine how many of these soldiers have been involved in unlawful arrests and killings, further investigations are needed, which these weak states cannot provide. Since the G5S Joint Force is virtually integrated into Operation Barkhane, this means that the French military presence is heavily influenced by these worrying factors. Assessments show that both Barkhane and MINUSMA serve as deterrents to prevent these human rights violations from happening. If they do occur, these operations also help to bring such cases to the surface, and the families of the victims receive answers and, in some cases, compensation (Human Rights Watch, 2021; *The Economist*, 2021b).

Compared to its limited capacities, the mandate of the G5SJF is over-ambitious. In sync with the five countries' cooperation objectives, the aim is not only to stop organized crime, human trafficking, and jihadist terrorism but also to help with humanitarian and development projects and the return of internally displaced persons. Under pressure from Western countries, particularly the USA and France, involvement in development projects was relegated to the background and the emphasis was placed on security cooperation. This has created a sort of deadlock: without development programs, military responses alone cannot solve the region's problems, and at the same time, armed operations are less likely to perform effectively without adequate resources and assets (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2018). Today the distrust of local communities remains an obstacle as well. As emphasized in the previous sections, violence and arbitrary arrests result in disillusioned crowds who can fall straight into the web of jihadist terrorist networks. In the long run, to prevent these violations and to properly control the local army corps of soldiers, a sustained political and financial commitment will be needed from both the G5S countries and international partners supporting the joint force (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2018).

European beacon of hope: The Takuba Task Force

Engaging in the Liptako-Gourma region, Takuba Task Force is the new ray of hope for France, especially because after consulting with Malian authorities, the French President has once again played a major role in setting it up. Launched in 2020, an operational team of around 600 special forces troops reinforces the first pillar of the Sahel Coalition. The corps consists of troops from EU member states including Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Germany, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, and Estonia. Besides, Norway and the UK have joined this initiative as well. In the future, Hungarian participation can be expected as the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade earlier declared engagement. The participants of Barkhane are committed to working with the European Takuba Task Force of a few hundred people. The EU Task Force has been operating under Barkhane's command since the summer of 2020, but from September 2021, Barkhane started merging into the Takuba Task Force. Until the Malian soldiers can secure their area on their own, the Task Force will assist them in the field and provide technical advice. This EU operation is a milestone in the Sahel crisis, the importance of which Emmanuel Macron has long stressed (Ministère des Armées, 2021a; Ministère des Armées, 2021c:23; France24, 2021; Faleg and Palleschi, 2020: 37; Campbell, 2020; László and Dócza, 2021).

The capacities and the strategic lines of effort

As for the key strategic guidelines, Operation Barkhane's main goal is to ensure that the troops in the Sahel can one day provide their security through a coordinated, effective, and collective strategy. The first strategic pillar focuses on defeating jihadist terrorist groups and eliminating other armed groups, which includes the threat of firefights as well as the search and destruction of communication assets, weapons, and vehicles (i.e., Kalashnikovs, motorbikes, or improvised explosive devices). The second strategic pillar is support for Sahelian troops, which involves training programs and armed assistance in the field. Serving as the third pillar, it is also a goal to encourage local communities to turn with confidence to their fellow Africans if they notice anything out of the ordinary or if they require assistance. These components make up Barkhane's area-based crisis management strategy, which is currently focused on the "tri-border" zone, but it can also respond in other parts of the region if necessary (Ministère des Armées, 2021b:8-10; Armée française - Opérations militaires, 2020a; Buzna, 2020).

In the last few years, the neutralization of cadres of terrorist groups has become a priority. Barkhane has achieved success in

Engaging in the Liptako-Gourma region, Takuba Task Force is the new ray of hope for France, especially because after consulting with Malian authorities, the French President has once again played a major role in setting it up.

this area: in the fall of 2019, the number two religious leader of the GSIM, Abou Abderahman al Maghrebi, was killed near Timbuktu. Subsequently, in the spring and summer of 2020, Barkhane soldiers, with the help of their partners, also neutralized the AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel and a key ISGS figure, Mohamed el Mrabat. In the fall of 2020, they also managed to neutralize a key GSIM military leader, Bah ag Moussa, in the Menaka region, and last summer they successfully took out the emir of the ISGS (Ministère des Armées, 2021a, Ministère des Armées, 2021b:8-10; Tull, 2021:1).

In line with the second strategic principle and in addition to providing the necessary equipment, since the beginning of Barkhane more than 18,000 local soldiers have been trained from the G5 Sahel countries. In 2020, 5,100 soldiers participated in professional training programs from Niger, Chad, and Mali. Intending to deepen their professional skills, these theoretical and practical training sessions included international human rights lectures, joint patrols, joint operations, training, and shooting exercises. The French troops have provided training for 3,700 personnel in the Malian army, including 127 joint operations and 71 pre-deployment training sessions. The French Ministry of Defense is providing its dedicated support to carry on these training sessions to make the Sahelian armies as operational and deployable as possible (Ministère des Armées, 2021b:12-13,30-31).

A crucial element is that, under Barkhane, French soldiers increasingly involve their Malian counterparts in counter-terrorism operations. For example, they have recently developed an updated attack strategy to track down jihadist groups. This new strategy is based on mobilizing local soldiers to move around in desert terrain as quickly as possible. That is why they use the same equipment as terrorist groups, including motorcycles and smaller trucks that are easier to handle than armored fighting vehicles. The usage of these more common vehicles can also be advantageous because spare parts can be easily found almost anywhere in the region. Dozens of motorcycles, pick-up trucks, machine guns, signaling equipment, and radio equipment have been added to the Sahelian stockpile, in line with the creation of new and modern rapid reaction and intelligence units (Ministère des Armées, 2021b:14-15; Armée française- Opérations militaires, 2020a).

Serving as a counter-insurgency operation and in line with the third strategic pillar, protecting civilians and building trust with locals is a significant part of the mission. Within their capacity, they provide free medical care to local communities if they are injured during an operation, which is a common scenario. It is important to see that French soldiers also serve in civilian missions, whether it is to provide water supplies or to conduct educational and infrastructure projects. Barkhane may be primarily engaged in armed missions targeting jihadist terrorist networks, but French soldiers also regularly work with local regional bodies, international organizations, NGOs, and aid workers of civilian missions assisting with development projects (Ministère des Armées, 2021c:15-18).

Currently there are 280 armored vehicles, 400 reconnaissance and logistics vehicles, and 220 light armored combat vehicles at their disposal (Ministère des

Armées, 2021b:24-30). Air assets play a key role in counter-terrorism operations, as they can cover long distances in a short time in the event of an alert or attack, which is particularly useful in desert areas. Most of the assets are located at air bases in Chad including 20 helicopters, seven Mirage 200s, eight strategic transport aircraft, and three Reaper unmanned fighter aircraft. These unmanned aerial vehicles are used frequently during Barkhane, some of which have been equipped with bombs that enabled them to be used not only for intelligence but also during combat. Moreover, modern military technology has resulted in 40% of their airstrikes being carried out by three drones available (Tull, 2021; Ministère des Armées, 2021b:24-30). Today, the French forces are much more skilled and have more combat experience than local African troops. It appears that the armed rebel groups, criminal groups, and jihadist groups fear the Barkhane's troops more than the G5S Joint Force. However, the local military units in Burkina Faso and Mali still face fundamental structural problems. It is precisely for this reason that Emmanuel Macron decided to increase the number of Barkhane troops by another 600 after the 2020 summit. However, with the ongoing reorganization process the size of the French troops and the number of assets may be reduced soon (Goya, 2021; Bak, 2020:58).

Such a huge area demands an extremely precise, professional logistics team. The climate in the Sahel is often challenging and the desert areas are not always easy to navigate by land vehicles. Yet, given the situation, Barkhane's forces are rapidly deployable, very flexible, and able to operate for quite some time in areas far from central bases, thanks to the 14 different bases on which logistical support is built across Africa. In terms of logistics and aerial equipment, it is important to note that Spain, the United States of America, Germany, and Canada provide the greatest support (Ministère des Armées, 2021b:28-29).

French soldiers and their fellow missionaries have been daily subjected to deadly attacks in this highly complex terrain. Under Barkhane, until September 2021, 51 French citizens have lost their lives. Worryingly, almost 30 of these casualties occurred in the last two years (Tull, 2021:3; Ministère des Armées, 2021b:32-33). Footage and photos published by the online press and on the official online platforms of the French army provide insight into the difficulties French and African soldiers face in the field, and an understanding of the complexity of the situation. One may see that there are human beings beneath the military uniforms, bulletproof vests, and helmets. Being on a military mission in the Sahel is a man-trying task, which involves sacrifice and courage. Serving in the French Foreign Legion requires a great deal of discipline and ability: "Every legionnaire is your brother-in-arms, whatever his nationality, (...) or religion," one soldier sums up (France 24 English, 2018, 2:10. min.; Armée française - Opérations militaires, 2020b).

Evaluation and the road to transformation

Until the fall of 2021, the French Defense Ministry evaluated the operation as a huge success. According to French Defense Minister Florence Parly and her predecessor Jean-Yves Le Drian, serving as the current Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs,

Operation Barkhane was working excellently. To support this conclusion, between 2014 and 2017 French forces neutralized more than 400 terrorists and destroyed 22 tonnes of weapons (Ministère des Armées, 2021c; Boserup and Martinez, 2018:40). However, at the moment the success and effectiveness of the operation are being re-evaluated by Paris. In mid-September, the most up-to-date press kit of Barkhane was published, with amendments in-sync with Macron's summer announcement on terminating the operation. Starting from the observation that the format of Operation Barkhane was no longer adapted to the reality and situation in the Sahel, Macron announced the transformation of the military system for the benefit of their Sahelian partners. According to the plans supported by the leaders of the G5 Sahel countries, the French troops will be halved. Barkhane will undergo a reorganization process and will contribute to the missions of the Takuba Task Force. The new structure has two main axes: fight against terrorism and promote the powerful rise of partner armies. It is in this spirit that the French military system began a transformation in the Sahel starting in September 2021, which will continue throughout 2022 (Ministère des Armées, 2021b:4; Ministère des Armées, 2021a; Campbell, 2021). In addition, in August, the interim leadership of Chad announced that as "an act of strategic redeployment" they would reduce and redeploy its troops from the G5S Joint Force in the "three-borders" zone (Africa News, 2021).

In August 2021, Adnan Abou Walid al Sahraoui, leader of the ISGS, was neutralized. The terrorist died of injuries from an air strike by the Barkhane forces. He was neutralized as part of a large-scale operation targeting ten additional terrorists. In mid-September during an official press conference, the Minister of the Armed Forces, Florence Parly, and the chief executive of the DGSE⁹ made a declaration. They confirmed that the neutralization of the leader of the jihadist group was a huge success and a decisive blow to the organization. In the future, the priority is that French troops will continue the fight against terrorism, but the counter-terrorism operations will change significantly, especially with the European special forces. The main goal has not changed: they still want to prevent the local wings of ISIS and Al-Qaeda from using the region as their rear. Parly highlighted that this success illustrates efficient cooperation with the intelligence services, the French soldiers, and the hard work of the Sahelian troops. "This is teamwork", she said (Ministère des Armées, 2021a; Amiel, 2021), adding the following: "We, Europeans, have a collective responsibility to secure the southern flank of Europe. It is essential not to allow the Sahel and more broadly Africa to become a shelter and expansion area for these terrorist groups" (Amiel, 2021). Unfortunately, "recent attacks in Burkina Faso and Niger have sparked concern that France's reduced presence will create a vacuum that will benefit jihadist groups" (Amiel, 2021).

Caroline Roussy, a researcher at the Institute of International and Strategic Relations, told Euronews that "despite the upcoming end of Barkhane, French forces in Mali 'oddly' seemed to be currently 'very active' with the French Army issuing daily communications on its operations. (...) Is it the last big push before the end?" she wondered, noting that the French government probably wants to showcase results in

Mali ahead of the 2022 presidential election” (Amiel, 2021). According to Roussy, the steps the French have taken could be “a message to other world powers tempted to expand their influence in the Sahel as Paris scales down its troops” (Amiel, 2021). One thing is certain: Macron’s administration is striving to convince more European partners to be committed to the G5 Sahel countries.

When it comes to criticism, the operation led by Macron’s France has wittingly or unwittingly become entangled in the internal politics of Mali and it is still too focused on the fight against terrorism, even though this is not the only cause of instability in the region (Tull, 2021:3-4). At the G5S summit in February 2021, Macron admitted that radical Islamist groups had not yet been neutralized, but he credits Paris with having curbed their expansion in the “tri-border” area. Macron has stressed that there can be no talk of victory until the states of the Liptoko-Gourma region regain their sovereignty, a difficult task according to French discourse because historically there has never been full sovereignty in these territories (Châtelot, 2021; Présidence de la République, 2021; Roussy, 2021). During the winter summit of 2021, the French President also drew attention to the limits of French intervention because there are often unspoken expectations from the French that they have not accepted. According to Barkhane’s new strategy, the current aim is not to fight all the armed forces in the region, as that would be a never-ending war. Yet this is often the very reason why the French presence is criticized (Le Monde, 2021; Présidence de la République, 2021).

In this “chaotic mess”, it is no wonder that some of the missions are failing. In the G5 Sahel countries, the enemy is different for each party. Determining whether an individual is a jihadist terrorist, an insurgent gunman or an ordinary civilian is very difficult based on external characteristics. In any case, the Sahelian terrain is a high-risk factor, but without risk, these countries may forever remain in the shackles of instability. As with all international interventions, the French military presence has had its side effects. France and the G5 Sahel countries have developed a kind of security partnership that creates a sense of security for African countries (Cold-Ravnkilde and Jacobsen, 2020:872-874). Over the past few months, Macron and his top advisers have begun to see that it is not necessarily the case that Paris should continue to prevent the Sahelian political leadership from negotiating with jihadist groups if it avoids putting an end to the ongoing attacks. The Macron administration has previously stated that they would never deal with terrorist troops. For France, negotiating with members of extremist networks would be a total political and strategic failure. On the contrary, hoping to reduce casualties, Burkina Faso and Mali have already achieved small success from negotiations with the enemy. Macron’s policy on Africa continues to emphasize the sovereignty of the G5 Sahel states, so it is not sure that the Sahelian elites will heed French advice (Tull, 2021:2).

6. Conclusion and Prognosis

In light of the discussion above, the argument in this study has support: although the French military presence contributes significantly to ensure security in the G5 Sahel countries, they cannot ensure it alone due to the instability of the region. Operation

Barkhane alone cannot constitute the “cure” for the ongoing crisis because a military response alone will not suffice. As Campbell posits, “In hindsight, the French military presence has been too small in a vast region to be transformative” (2021).

One must understand the limits of the French forces who cannot be expected to be stationed in the Sahel forever. Despite Barkhane’s tactical successes and its major contribution to the stabilization of the region, no major progress has been made. The G5 Sahel countries continue to be incapable of enforcing either the law or providing security, which makes it easy for jihadists to manipulate segments of the population. Hardly a day goes by without armed attacks and atrocities against civilians. Total withdrawal is not an option since that would mean the jihadists have won the battle and Barkhane has given up the fight. If the new transformation and reorganization plans of the operation are not implemented efficiently, there is a fear that the troubling situation in the region could escalate further (Le Monde, 2021; Tull, 2021:3-4).

Today, the French public opposes the French military presence in the Sahel, and Macron must listen to these voices since elections are coming up in the spring of 2022. For the future, what Macron and the French Ministry of Defense envisage for French foreign engagements could be crucial since Barkhane has been placing huge financial burdens on France. As for the expenses of Barkhane, it cost €695 million in 2019 and nearly €1 billion in 2020, representing 76% of foreign defense spending. The president will have to consider the extent of the French participation if he wants to keep his title as the president of France (Tull, 2021:3; Le Monde, 2021).



^ Figure 4. *Unity in strength: Training of partner armed forces in Mali* (Source: *Armée française - Opérations militaires*, 2021)

At this point, the question arises: can Jihadism be defeated at all if the French reduce their military capacity? Experience illustrates the opposite: “The French strategy has been to hold off the jihadists to allow the states in the region to develop the capacity to see to their defense. The longer they stayed, the French sought to ‘internationalize’ their involvement, seeking the participation of other EU states—the motivation behind Takuba—to complement Barkhane and MINUSMA, (...) and emphasizing that the lead should be taken by the African governments under threat” (Campbell, 2021). In the Sahel, there is no doubt that the French surge has been successful in neutralizing key figures from AQIM and ISGS and winning clashes, but the operation failed to make a major difference. No matter how much money is invested in Operation Barkhane, the military response will not be sufficient to eradicate Jihadism in the Sahel because local communities have been unable to rely on local governments for decades; these weak states have been undermining the operations of Barkhane all along. Although Paris is involved in several development programs, clear successes are yet to be seen. France’s ray of hope is the Takuba Task Force, still in its infancy, which would lead the counter-terrorism operations in the future, while the local G5S Joint Force is not ready to fight all the security challenges in the region (Boserup and Martinez, 2018:43-44; The Economist, 2021a; The Economist, 2021b; Aimel, 2021).

Overall, the French military presence with Barkhane in all its dimensions has been serving as life insurance for the G5 Sahel countries. Until the ongoing human security challenges improve and the other three pillars of the Sahel Coalition are emphasized, the French counter-terrorism operations cannot succeed completely. Experts say that, ultimately, this conflict must be resolved by the governments of the region. The training of African soldiers to take up the fight against the various armed groups in the region is becoming more and more important, but it should be remembered that making local forces more effective and rapidly mobilizable does not mean that the poor governance and dubious security institutions of weak states will reform themselves overnight and will rise from their ashes like phoenixes. One of the most critical tasks now is to restore local governments, which frequently fail to reach out to the periphery, to positively influence the distrustful and disillusioned classes that often opt for the violent alternative offered by jihadist groups instead. Macron’s France cannot carry this burden alone forever. Ultimately, the G5 Sahel countries cannot become France’s “Afghanistan”. In support of my argument, I believe that the multilateral framework with an effective and larger-scale global coalition can work in the future. Operation Barkhane could not and will not be able to implement this dangerous and challenging task alone. However, as long as the G5 Sahel countries face such diverse challenges, military solutions alone will not be sufficient (Matissek, 2020:110; Powell 2016; The Economist, 2021a; Tull, 2021; Erforth, 2020; Cold-Ravnkilde and Jacobsen, 2020:872-874). ☀

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Notes

- ¹ Mauritania has 134, Mali has 129, and Niger has 123 points.
- ² État islamique dans le Grand Sahara (EIGS) in French
- ³ Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in Arabic
- ⁴ Author's translation. Original Hungarian quote by Viktor Marsai: "Hiába van ott ötezer francia katoná, ötmillió négyzetkilométerre ez édeskevés. A gyenge államiság miatt a helyi erők mit sem érnek. A Burkina Fasó-i hadsereg például még sosem vett részt fegyveres konfliktusban, nekik kellene a harcedzett dzsihadistákkal felvenniük a harcot. (...) ezek [a terrorista] a szervezetek a helyi társadalomból nőnek ki, nagyon alacsony költségekkel tudnak nagyon hatékonyan működni. Mondok egy példát: ha valamelyik törzsi vezető beteg gyereket el tudják vinni egy kórházba, máris megnyertek maguknak egy csoportot. Elég hozzá egy fuvar, egy kanna benzin, néhány száz dollár" (László, 2021).
- ⁵ At present, Operation MINUSMA provides logistical assistance to the G5S Joint Force, but does not provide them with human resources, even though Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad together provide almost 4,000 troops to the UN peacekeeping mission.
- ⁶ Since the French Revolution defense consciousness is an important element of the French national identity.
- ⁷ Despite its short lifetime AFISMA received more positive support from local communities, which was replaced by MINUSMA in 2013 July.
- ⁸ Author's translation. Original Hungarian quote: "Az Operation Serval utolsó műveleteként a 2014. július 24-én lezuhant algériai AH5017-es járat felkutatását aposztrofálták, amellyel egy másfél éve tartó korszak zárult le Maliban és adta át a helyét egy következőnek" (Vecsey, 2014:210).
- ⁹ Directorate-General for External Security, France' foreign intelligence agency.

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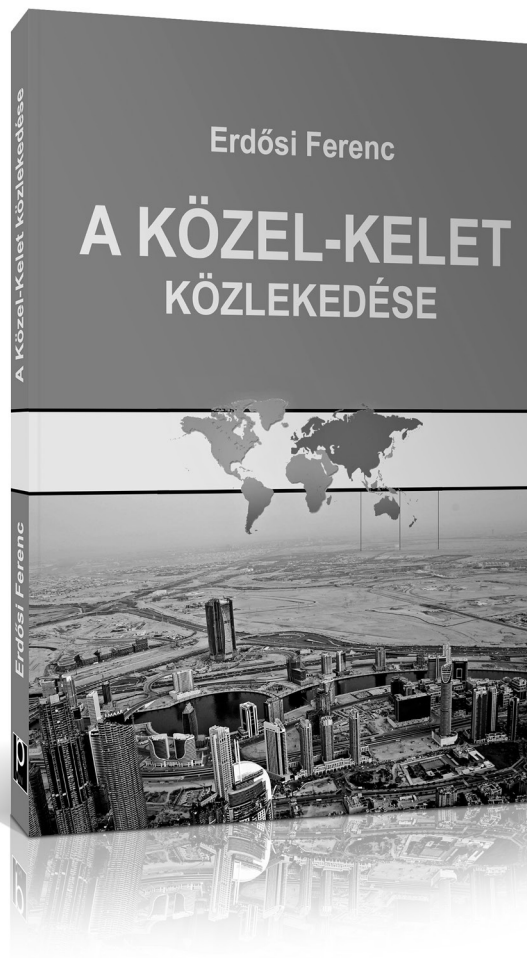
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Erdősi Ferenc

A Közel-Kelet közlekedése

Miközben a sajtóban a Közel-Kelet politikai konfliktusairól szóló hírek vannak többségben, a térség minden vonatkozásban létfontosságú közlekedéséről vajmi keveset tudunk. Ezt az adósságot törleszti az első magyar nyelvű könyv, mely részletes ismereteket ad a közlekedéshálózat geopolitikai/geoökonómiai tényezők által erősen befolyásolt kialakulásáról, az egyes közlekedési alágazatok mai infrastrukturális és forgalmi jellemzőiről, az országok közötti fejlettségbeli különbségéről.

Sok szempontú elemzésre alapozva mutatja be a szerző a távolsági olajszállításban bekövetkezett technológiaváltás okait, továbbá a „Dubaj-szindrómát”, az olajországok bámulatos légitársaság-fejlesztését és a kontinensek közötti forgalmi „fordítókorong” megvalósításából származó hasznot.

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