

Introduction: Sahel: A complex and unstable epicenter

The Sahel refers to a vast area that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, from Mauritania to Eritrea and for more than 5,000 kilometers, and is a key area for the stability of a large part of the planet, although it was largely unknown until a little more than a decade ago. The term *Sahel* derives from an Arabic word meaning *shore*, and this is the reality of this area, which constitutes the broad strip of land, approximately 400 kilometers wide, that serves as a transition space between the Sahara Desert and the steppe, between the inhospitable sandy sea and the plains where the ecosystems are more favorable for life and subsistence. And like the shore of the sea, it serves as a communication platform with the other side of the sea, with the northern shore of the Sahara, with the countries of North Africa, with the southern Mediterranean coast... and, therefore, with Europe. The Sahel is directly linked to Europe.

If in antiquity the presence, action and impact on European soil of empires with Sahelian roots, such as the Almohads, attest to this reality - in an era in which movement and interrelation between spaces and people was much slower and more complicated - today, in addition to licit and illicit flows of goods and resources (Iglesias, 2024), the growing arrivals of migrants clearly highlight this reality. The Sahel constitutes Europe's southern border.

And in this vast frontier, life is hard and difficult, associated with mobility. Nearly three quarters of the population lives from the primary sector, largely from transhumant livestock farming and agriculture that has to make use of - and compete with pastoralists for - water and fertile land, given the Sahel's bioclimatic situation, with low rainfall and highly concentrated in the rainy season. Therefore, the struggle for resources is a constant in the region and the mobility of livestock, the rotation of fields, the search for new areas, etc., for pure survival is a sign of identity. If we add to this the fact that trade along those ancient roads that cross the Sahara to the north, or to the south, to the Gulf of Guinea and its Atlantic cities and ports, has been the most lucrative activity since time immemorial - trade, as we have said, in all kinds of resources, whether licit or not, it is clear that the Sahel is not only a transition zone, a key intra-African space, but that the mobility associated with the vital dynamics of its population shapes the region as an environment of mobility with continental and global impact.

This constant struggle for basic resources generates a situation of permanent insecurity, aggravated by the weakness of states that are among the poorest on the planet (see table of indicators at the end of this chapter) and therefore do not have sufficient capacity to legitimately monopolize violence. If we add to this a worldview and social organization based more on the concept of the tribe than that of the citizen, weak government systems and very little and complex economic development, the result is that these societies find it very difficult to stabilize and progress. And if we add to this climate change - which complicates extraordinarily the natural rhythms that make a certain balance between livestock farmers and farmers possible - and a demographic growth that doubles the population every twenty years, the picture emerges of a large mass of young people, with few alternatives for the future, in an environment that is socially and economically degraded and worsening exponentially. For all these reasons, mention is often made of the Sahelian perfect storm (Sánchez, 2021), as it feeds back on itself and grows in amplitude and intensity.

In this complex and unstable environment, with few alternatives and little hope, organized crime and terrorism thrive - sometimes as the simple and only alternative employment for many young people - terrorism and crime that spread along the same millenary routes along which resources flow and which, as in the past, but with much greater scope and intensity in this interconnected world, have a continental and global projection.

Therefore, the Sahel, that remote and almost unknown area, is articulated - paradoxically or not - as a global epicenter in many respects; suffice it to say that it constitutes an epicenter of drug distribution (Guerrero, 2024) on a global scale and an epicenter of armed jihadism (Masoliver, 2024; Sánchez, 2022) on the planet, with the devastating consequences for the region and for the planet that this entails.

But in the context of the ongoing global geopolitical reconfiguration... could it also be the epicenter of something else?

Background to the conflict. The Sahel and the West: From request for help to rejection?

Although the Sahel constitutes the wide strip of land mentioned in the previous section, it is usually referred to as the Western Sahel, five countries - Mauritania, Mali, Burkina

Faso, Niger and Chad - which present a series of characteristics, from a common colonial past to similar and shared threats and problems, as well as internal and external dynamics with many similarities, which make a more homogenous joint vision possible.

Although the structural situation of these nations has always been complex, as also noted in the previous section, the fall of Gaddafi in Libya in 2011 led to the total destructuring of the country and, clearly demonstrating the direct link between the Sahel and the Maghreb (southern and northern shores of the Sahara), Mali was destabilized by a new Tuareg revolution and jihadist offensive, fueled by weapons and armed elements from the Mediterranean country. And the situation became so serious that Bamako asked the former colonial power, France, for help. France sent a contingent of troops, within the framework of international legality and legitimacy, which prevented - at least at the time - the fall of the Malian government and the spread of instability throughout the region. But it was never the same, as the fragile Sahelian equilibrium was shattered.

Aware of the importance of the region for Europe and the African continent, nations and international organizations, with the blessing of local governments, launched a series of initiatives and aid aimed at strengthening security, governance and economic and social development and stabilizing Sahelian societies.

It was not only military operations, especially from 2013 onwards, such as Serval and French Barkane, MINUSMA of the United Nations, EUTM-Mali of the European Union, among others, to strengthen the security pillar, but also huge economic aid in different areas and sectors, advisors, and even the implementation of Sahelian organizations and initiatives, sponsored by different countries and organizations.

Among them was the creation on 16 February 2014 of the Sahel G5 group, an organization that sought to provide a joint response to the threats -terrorism, organized crime, migratory flows, etc.- shared by the five aforementioned countries, as well as to advance and deepen various issues, not only in security matters, but also in infrastructure, the fight against climate change, etc. Within this framework, a Joint Military Force was created in 2017, to which each country would contribute a battalion of 750 troops, with the capacity to carry out cross-border actions and essentially engaged in the fight against terrorism and organized crime. The European Union contributed to the financing of this force.

The disagreements that arose with Mali, which included sanctions for having suffered two coups d'état in less than a year, led Bamako, when it was not authorized to occupy its rotating presidency, to express in May 2022 (recalling that the invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022) that "*The opposition of certain G5 Sahel states to Mali's presidency lies in the maneuvers of an extra-regional state that seeks to isolate Mali*" (Le Monde, 2022) in a clear allusion to France, which was concerned about the apparent presence of Wagner elements and that the Sahel country was withdrawing from the organization and the joint force, as well as denouncing its instrumentalization.

The succession of coups d'état in the Sahel (Sánchez, 2022b) has led to condemnation by the international community and African organizations - such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) - and even information regarding the possible dispatch of foreign military forces to reverse these coups, in many cases applauded by a population that felt no improvement in security or living standards, along with the rise of the anti-Western narrative, initially very much focused on France - *what are they doing deployed here if there is still terrorism and violence and more and more of it?*- and subsequently spreading to all international (essentially Western) action, which is generating a series of disagreements, which are becoming more and more intense and which, from 2022 onwards, are turning the international presence into something unsustainable. And the fact that in February 2022 Russia invades Ukraine and that Moscow's presence in the Sahel region through Wagner is growing may be seen as a mere coincidence, although in geopolitics coincidences are rare.

The situation is becoming so rarefied that from 2023 onwards, at different times and at different paces, all international missions deployed in the region, and even forces - such as the US forces - deployed under bilateral agreements, are being withdrawn; a vacuum is created which Russia, which promotes it, among other revisionist powers of the current world order, is filling.

And, following these changes, what is the current situation in the region?

Current conflict situation. Sahel: a key area of global reconfiguration!

The situation remains one of full-scale conflict. In addition to structural issues - terrorism, organized crime, poverty, etc. - the global struggle is not only directly reflected in the

Sahel, but is also being waged in the Sahel, which has become not only a battleground, but also an actor in this global reconfiguration. In this context, it is possible to analyze several dynamics, among others.

Sahel: a secondary front in the war in Ukraine?

At the end of July 2024, a fighting action took place in which Tuareg rebel groups and jihadist terrorists attacked a government-sent force in northern Mali, resulting - although figures are impossible to verify - in the deaths of some 87 Russian contractors (Wagner) and 47 Malian soldiers (Diop, 2024). A hard blow for Russia and a hard blow for Mali, despite which Moscow signaled (Eldiario.es, 2024) that it would continue to offer the necessary assistance to Bamako.

Although there were already more or less confirmed reports of the presence of Ukrainian space forces in Africa - Sudan is one of the places where such a presence is reported (Iddon, 2024) - the forcefulness of the action in Mali is surprising. But it is also surprising because of the statements, later denied or qualified, made by high-ranking Ukrainian officials and institutions: the Ukrainian secret service claims that Kiev was involved in the attack: "*The rebels received the necessary information and not only information, which allowed them to carry out a successful military operation against Russian war criminals*" (Burdyga, 2024), or that "*the ambush at Mali was not the first attack against Russian forces in Africa in which Ukraine was involved*" (Watson, 2024).

Indeed, Kyrylo Budanov, the head of Ukrainian military intelligence, said quite bluntly in 2023: "*We have been killing Russians, and we will continue to kill Russians everywhere in the world*" (McGregor, 2024), although he later qualified (The New Voice of Ukraine, 2023) these words by noting that he was referring only to war criminals.

The response to the July 2024 action is withering: Mali and Niger break relations with Kiev, Ukraine and Poland are accused (Agenzia Nova, 2024) by the Alliance of Sahel States - Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso - of training terrorist groups in the use of kamikaze drones and that these were sent with the support of a Ukrainian embassy in a neighboring country; and the Ukrainian embassy in Senegal received a formal warning following the publication of a propaganda video of the Ukrainian army and comments regarding the Tuareg attack on Wagner and Mali's forces.

And that these diatribes and severing of relations took place during the fourth tour of the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dymtro Kuleba to Africa, in search of support for Ukraine's cause in the so-called Global South and, although the communiqué of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine stated: "*among the main points will be the participation of African states in global efforts to restore a just peace for Ukraine and the world*" (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024*), the facts do not exactly contribute to gaining support for Kiev in a Global South that is on the whole rather indifferent to the cause or directly supportive of Russia.

Ukraine may have deployed advisors on the ground, or special operations teams, as part of an indirect strategy - acting on secondary fronts to weaken and exhaust the adversary - to reduce Russian pressure on its territory, although it is necessary to consider that Ukraine, despite the enormous effort it is making, depends on Western support and assistance to continue its fight against Russia. It could also be that the Ukrainian forces, real or supposed, are nothing more than a sort of "*proxy forces*" of other nations with global interests, or a simple disinformation campaign in the framework of Russia's growing action in Africa. In any case, Ukraine, which is trying to open new contacts and relations on Africa, may be damaged by these actions, which quickly turn into narratives of neo-colonialism and support for terrorist and insurgent groups.

An example of this Ukrainian interest is that Kiev has opened seven new embassies in Africa, in addition to the 10 it already had on the continent, in an effort to achieve a growing number of supporters for its cause; but also, Ukraine's desire to internationalize its cause has led it to emphasize universal justice and human rights. And at an event a few months ago, Olena Zelenska, the country's first lady, said: "*When we understand that the international system does not work, we must talk not only about ourselves, but about all the other war crimes, humanitarian crises and people's tragedies around the world*" (Gumenyuk, 2024)... thus, and given Ukraine's support for Israel - with the brutal war in Gaza ongoing - the Ukrainian narrative loses ground in the Sahel. And, it is further noted (Hairsine, 2024) that, given that since Ukraine's independence there has never been a visit by any Ukrainian president or foreign minister to Africa... now has there?

Consequently, and within the framework of this reconfiguration, of this geopolitical struggle that is underway, it is stated in some quarters and without ambiguity that the

"New line of conflict passes from the Ukrainian Donbass to the Malian Sahel" (Kassouin and Sovon, 2024).

But if the fight against Russia opens a new front in the Sahel, that implies that Moscow was already there - and was there for a reason?

Sahel: Russia's counter-encirclement strategy?

The Sahel is rich in raw materials and resources (Nievas and Mesa, 2019) - Mali is the third largest producer of gold in Africa, Niger is one of the world's main producers of uranium, the existence of hydrocarbons, strategic minerals, etc. - although, paradoxically - or not, as has been previously commented when describing *the Sahelian perfect storm* - despite this wealth, the region is "*in the grip of extreme poverty*" (Isilow and Basaran, 2023). The interest in gaining access to these resources and the wealth that can be obtained from them on the part of a Russia subject to Western sanctions, as well as a China whose eagerness to gain a monopoly on certain resources - such as strategic minerals - is paradigmatic, and the interest of many other middle powers, which is why this once forgotten region has become a space of geopolitical confrontation. This is why Russia, already at open war with the West, finds in the Sahel a vital area for its economic interests. But this is not the only reason for Moscow's presence.

The Sahel not only forms the key space for intra-African mobility and materializes Europe's external border, but it also constitutes, or could constitute, a bulwark from which it is possible, to a certain extent, to reduce and/or even create a breach in the encirclement that Russia feels the West has been subjecting it to for centuries: be it the so-called Great Game with Britain as its opponent in the 19th century, or the Cold War strategy of containment, or today with the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union and the growing penetration of the former post-Soviet space in the Caucasus and Central Asia, Moscow sees the United States as engaged in a new struggle for Rimland (Sánchez, 2021b), a struggle for that great ring of land that, in Mackinder's words, surrounds the heartland, essentially Russia, and whose control keeps it isolated, separated from warm seas and unable to expand.

Therefore, for Russia, in an Africa and Sahel in the midst of a power struggle for dominance (Sánchez, 2023), setting a firm foot on the continent and in the region can

contribute not only to gaining political support - so important in a global process of reconfiguration and economic benefits no less important in the context of the war in Ukraine - but also to obtaining an armed presence, even if only through the Wagner group in the first instance, and creating a network of military support points outside this encirclement or even establishing an arc, an outer ring, a sort of counter-circle, to obtain an armed presence, albeit through the Wagner group in the first instance, and to create a network of military support points outside this encirclement or even to establish an arc, an outer ring, a sort of counter-circle... which would be an extremely valuable asset. which would be an extraordinarily valuable asset for Moscow.

So much so that the United States, deeply concerned by this growing Russian presence and by reports (Reuters, 2024) that Iran is seeking uranium in Niger, is regretfully watching as it too is invited to leave the region, a redeployment that ends on 15 September 2024 (United States Africa Command, 2024). In what it calls recalibration and in the framework of a new strategy, it is trying by all means to be able to deploy troops at least in the vicinity of the Sahel. Washington states that this will be done "*in like-minded countries with shared democratic values, shared objectives and shared challenges on the West African coast. We are in discussions with Côte d'Ivoire and also with Ghana and Benin*" (US Department of State, 2024), just as an agreement had apparently been reached to deploy small special operations units (Babb, 2024) in Chad itself - US statements that were immediately contradicted (Swiss Info, 2024) by a statement from the government of the Sahelian country. It seems that the US is trying by all means and with urgency to avoid a potential counter-collapse by Moscow... or to formalize another external encirclement of the Sahel.

In any case, tensions are growing between the, until recently, allies, but could this new Sahelian stance be a reflection of something deeper that is brewing?

Sahel: resurgence of pan-African theses?

The anti-colonial narrative and accusations of attempted neo-colonialism have become a constant in Sahelian daily life: disinformation encouraged especially by Russia and China¹, the slogans against the former colonial power in particular and the West in

¹ See: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mapping-a-surge-of-disinformation-in-africa/>

general are gaining ground among a large part of the population that continues to face enormous levels of insecurity and poverty and finds it difficult to answer the questions - albeit twisted and manipulative questions - what has the West done for you? Don't you see that the West only wants to continue plundering your wealth in order to remain rich and you poor? Do you really believe that the institutions and organizations it has created are really there to facilitate your development?

On the other hand, the breakdown of the global order and the desire to end the supremacy of the United States generates, at least in principle and apparently, opportunities for the development of a multipolar model - strongly defended by Russia - with different centers of power and also with new and different governance structures and institutions (Muñoz Castiñeira, 2024), allowing for an increase in regional options as opposed to global and globalizing ones.

And in this reconfiguration and in the face of these apparent opportunities, Africa emerges - and the narratives of the revisionist powers support this idea, although the ultimate purpose is opaque - as a continent of opportunities, with a young and dynamic population, a land full of natural resources and which is called to play a key role in the new global order (Tenembaum , 2024)... if it frees itself from secular shackles. And those shackles, taken together, as previously discussed, are called the West.

In the Sahel, in one of the poorest regions of the African continent, a revolution is underway, a breaking of ties with nations and organizations - even African ones - considered to be tools of the West, and the creation of new ones. Thus, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger founded the Alliance of Sahel States on 16 September 2023, initially as a mutual defense pact - in the face of news of potential foreign intervention to overthrow governments born of coups d'état - and which has gradually extended the level of cooperation to multiple areas - economic, political, diplomatic, cultural, etc. - including the announcement in mid-September 2024 of the design of a common biometric passport (Lisa News, 2024). The will and intentions of a new kind of partnership between equals, free of ties and debts, occupy the declarations and actions within the framework of these nations' capacities on a constant basis.

And this desire for *a new way of doing things* is so powerful that everything, or almost everything, is questioned; Thus, even an African regional organization - ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) - one of the most active on the continent,

is called into question by the new Alliance, although it is true that it imposed sanctions on it, which it later withdrew, It is so questioned that they have decreed its withdrawal from the Alliance, as they did previously from the G5 Sahel group, condemning it to disappear on 28 January 2024 (Agenzia Fides, 2024), even though this will not be effective, according to the statutes of the Organization, until one year later. But the step has already been taken.

Although there was pressure, both from outside Africa and from within the organisation itself, to reverse the separation, the leaders of the three Sahel Alliance countries, after the first summit in Niamey (Niger, July 2024), decided not to return to ECOWAS (Asadu and Mamaneap, 2024), which, from certain points of view, only further weakens the bloc and hinders efforts to combat the violence that is spreading throughout the region and to reverse the sequence of coups d'état that are taking place in the region. ECOWAS, with almost half a century behind it, has even been described as a "*threat to our states*" by the leader of Niger, who also added the intention to create a "*People's Alliance for the Sahel, instead of an ECOWAS whose guidelines and instructions are dictated to it by powers outside Africa*" (Asadu and Mamaneap, 2024).

And the purpose of this new Confederation - for such is the organizational model chosen - includes being a reference and its expansion throughout the region, which is said (Mintoiba, 2024) to be facing a new era, and even throughout the continent, in a sign of the possibility of alternative organizations to the existing ones; organizations also presented as new models, as a new way of doing things free from interference.

Indeed, the power of the narrative employed is so strong that after the Chadian president's visit to Moscow in January 2024, when asked whether he would abandon previous alliances and move closer to Russia, the answer was devastating: "*Chad is an independent, free and sovereign country (...) We are not on the principle of a slave who wants to change masters. We intend to work with all countries in the world that respect us and want to work with us under mutual respect*" (Europa Press, 2024).

Certainly, in this reconfiguration, Africa and the Sahel are also reordered under apparently different and particular parameters... but in the context of a global struggle between great powers, it is necessary to consider whether, beyond the narratives employed, these powers do not continue to support the secular *divide and rule*.

In any case, this area, which was practically unknown a little more than a decade ago, has come to the forefront, but does it really matter to other players?

The role of external actors. Sahel: no longer indifferent to anyone!

As has become increasingly clear, a key space in a reconfiguring planet cannot remain alien to any power with certain aspirations.

Thus, with interests and presence in the region (Sánchez, 2019), in addition to the United States and Russia - already mentioned - and China, an aspiring global power, it is possible to find Turkey within the framework of neo-Ottoman geopolitics and competing with Saudi Arabia, also present in the Sahel region, for the leadership of Islam. Likewise, Israel, seeking to gain support to lessen the impact on the Arab and Muslim world of the Hebrew nation's actions, although with the ongoing war in Gaza, the options have become somewhat more complicated... more and more nations are showing interest in the region.

With the war in Ukraine ongoing and Russia's growing presence in the Sahel, the US is increasingly active, after a certain neglect. Thus, in its struggle with Russia, the narratives that "*pro-Russian military juntas in the Sahel are disintegrating the region with their Alliance*" (Gerlotti, 2024) or that after Burkina Faso and Niger broke off relations with Ukraine, Russia "*sows chaos and instability*" (Europa Press, 2024b), place them in opposition to the approach of diplomacy, democracy and freedom that Washington champions, or claims to champion... although these arguments do not seem to be progressively having much success (Sánchez, 2024) either in Africa or in a large part of the planet. And the US feels it is losing a foothold in the region and in much of Africa.

This is why NATO, which until very recently was essentially turned towards Eastern Europe vis-à-vis Russia, noted in May 2024 in a report (NATO, 2024) that "*Security in the Sahel has deteriorated drastically in recent years, with serious consequences for the populations of the region and for the interests of NATO allies and partners*" and at the summit that took place from 9 to 11 July 2024, in addition to commemorating the organization's 75th anniversary, several issues were addressed, one of them being the action plan for the south (La Moncloa, 2024). This action plan expressly states that "*the Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel, the African continent in general, are of great strategic*

importance for peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic region and, of course, the Alliance can do much in turn to strengthen security and stability in southern Europe" (González, 2024). This is an ode to not neglecting this key area of the planet.

And while what happens in the Sahel is very important for Europe, for Spain, the only European country with a physical presence, with national territory in Africa and constituting the natural crossing point between the two continents, it is absolutely obvious and crucial. The importance of the Sahel and its potential for destabilization has always been a powerful reality for Spain; in fact, not only has it participated in all the European Union missions deployed in the area, but it has always been very active in trying to redirect part of the energies, resources, attention and efforts of the organizations to which it belongs - NATO, the EU, etc. - towards the south. And while this was gradually being achieved and raising awareness among partners and allies of the importance of the Sahel, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine Europe's southern border had almost completely faded into the background... Until now, especially after the departure of most Western troops from the Sahel (Domínguez Cebrián, 2024), troops that were deployed to support and reinforce the capacities of these fragile nations, the feeling of a *security black hole* is great.

Let us hope that we will be able to contribute to stabilizing the region.

Conclusions and outlook. Sahel: more storms and epicenters or...?

There is no such thing as a geopolitical vacuum, and in an era of global reconfiguration, even less so.

And this global reconfiguration brings with it, naturally or linked in a self-interested way, a questioning of norms, rules, customs and systems that have been in place in many cases since the end of the Second World War, in that sort of world order which, far from perfect, did provide a frame of reference.

This interconnected world means that no area is remote or distant and, even if it is not part of the common heritage, there are a number of key spaces that, despite their apparent lack of interest and capacity for influence and action, can make a significant contribution to changing the course of the planet's dynamics. They can be real epicenters.

The Sahel is one such area. And, as everywhere else, there are embers of grievances, real or supposed, internal and external... which, if blown in the right way, can be activated and go on to unleash a terrifying fire... which always serves the interests of a power, of a big, powerful external actor. It is always like that, only the actor changes.

Perhaps it would be necessary to consider the importance of certain spaces - as the Sahel undoubtedly is - and perhaps it would be necessary to consider the importance, rightly or wrongly, of these embers, in order to be able, if you will, to contribute to reducing those which, again, rightly or wrongly, are attributable to oneself. And perhaps it would be necessary, finally, to be absolutely clear that it is not possible to make a literal transposition of the same reality when life in different parts of the planet is so asymmetrical, so different - although human beings are moved by almost the same stimuli and needs - and that a powerful exercise in understanding and pragmatism is therefore necessary.

If not, we have before our eyes what is happening. And the outlook and prospects, in the context of a global reconfiguration where weapons already speak unabashedly and where everything can be used as a weapon, are absolutely terrifying.

For everyone, without a doubt. Or does one side hope that what happens on the other side will not affect it too much?

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ANNEX

Chronology of the conflict

Ch. 6	THE SAHEL: ALSO THE EPICENTRE OF GLOBAL RECONFIGURATION?
Date	Events
1960	Mauritania, Mali (initially as the Federation of Mali, later Senegal secedes and is renamed Mali), Burkina (since 1984 called Burkina Faso), Niger and Chad are born as independent states.
2011	An international intervention in Libya contributes to ending the Gaddafi regime.
2012	Tuareg revolt and Tuareg domination of northern Mali Ansar Dine establishes Sharia law in northern Mali and takes control of the area. Northern Mali is populated by jihadist terrorist groups, which are expanding their area of action.
1 April 2013	Spain deploys EUTM-Mali forces.
2013	The Serval mission (led by France) is established. The UN mission MINUSMA is established.
21 November 2023	The so-called Euromaidan breaks out in Kiev.
16 February 2014	Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad create the Sahel G5 organization.
March 2024	Russian annexation of Crimea.
2017	The G5 Sahel Joint Force is born.
2021	Death of the President of Chad. Coup d'état in Mali (third in ten years).

	Macron announces the reduction of French troops in the Sahel. Information on the deployment of the Russian private security company Wagner in Mali.
24 February 2022	Invasion of Ukraine by Russia.
14 May 2022	Mali announces its withdrawal from the Sahel G5 organization.
2022	Coups d'état in Burkina Faso.
6 December 2023	Burkina Faso and Niger announce withdrawal from the Sahel G5 organization.
2023-2024	The presence of international troops is terminated.
16 September 2023	The Alliance of Sahel States (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger) is born.
28 January 2024	The countries of the Alliance of Sahel States request to withdraw from ECOWAS.
27 July 2024	Dozens of Russian Wagner contractors and Malian soldiers are killed in an ambush in northern Mali, allegedly supported by Ukraine.
August 2024	Protests by Sahelian countries over Ukraine's interference and severing of relations.
15 September 2024	The US withdraws its last troops from Niger.

In the tables below, data for 2024 unless otherwise stated. *Source: CIA, The World Factbook*

Indicator tables

		Mauritania	Mali	Burkina Faso	Niger	Chad
Area (km ²)		1 030 700	1 240 192	274 200	1 267 000	1 284 000
GDP in billions of dollars		10,453 (2023 est.)	20,905 (2023 est.)	20,325 (2023 est.)	16,819 (2023 est.)	13,149 (2023 est.)
GDP structure	Agriculture	27,8 %	41,8 %	31 %	41,6 %	52,3 %
	Industry	29,3 %	18,1 %	23,9 %	19,5 %	14,7 %
	Services	42,9 % (2017 est.)	40,5 % (2017 est.)	44,9 % (2017 est.)	38,7 % (2017 est.)	33,1 % (2017 est.)
GDP per capita (USD)		6300 (2023 est.)	2500 (2023 est.)	2500 (2023 est.)	1600 (2023 est.)	1800 (2023 est.)
GDP growth rate		3,38 % (2023 est.)	5,24 % (2023 est.)	2,96 % (2023 est.)	2,5 % (2023 est.)	4,12 % (2023 est.)
Exports: in billions of dollars		4,132 (2022 est.)	5,855 (2022 est.)	5,814 (2022 est.)	1,376 (2022 est.)	6,503 (2022 est.)
Imports: in billions of dollars		5,77 (2022 est.)	7,942 (2022 est.)	6,761 (2022 est.)	4,194 (2022 est.)	5,028 (2022 est.)
Population		4 328 040	21 990 607	23 042 199	26 342 784 (2024 est.)	19 093 595 (2024 est.)
Age structure	0-14	35,7 %	46,8 %	41,6 %	49,5 %	45,8 %
	15-64	59,9 %	50,01 %	55,1 %	47,8 %	51,7 %
	More than 65	4,4 % (2024 est.)	3,1 % (2024 est.)	3,2 % (2024 est.)	2,7 % (2024 est.)	2,5 % (2024 est.)
Population growth rate		1,92 % (2024 est.)	2,9 % (2024 est.)	2,4 % (2024 est.)	3,66 % (2024 est.)	3,01 % (2024 est.)

Ethnic groups	Haratin 40 % Beydan 30 % Other 30 %	Bambara 33.3%, Fulani (Peul) 13,3 %, Soninke 9,8 %, Senufo 9,6 %, Malink 8,8 %, Doggo 8,7 %, Sonra 5,9 %, Bobo 2,1%, Tuareg 1,7 %, Other 6,7 % (2018 est.)	Moss 53,7 %, Fulan 6.8%, Gurunsi 5.9%, Biss 5,4 %, Gurm 5,2 %, Bobo 3,4 %, Senufo 2,2 %, Lob 1,5 %, Tuareg 0,1 %, Other 12,8 % (2021 est.)	Hausa 53.1%, Songai 21.2%, Tuareg 11%, Fulani 6.5%, Kanuri 5.9%, Gurma 0.8%, Arabs 0.4%, Tub 0,4 %, Other 0,6 % (2006 est.)	Sara 30,5 %, Kanembu 9,8 %, Arab 9,7 %, 7 %, Gorane 5.8%, Mass 4,9 %, Bulala 3,7 %, Marba 3,5 %, Mundang 2,7 %, Bidiyo 2,5 %, Dadjo 2,4 %, Tupur 2 % Gabr 2 % Fulani 1,8 % Kar 1.3%, Baguirmi 1.2%, Zaghawa 1.1%, Tama 1,1 %, Mesmedje 0,8 %, Other 4,6 %,

					unspecified 1,7 (2014-15 est.)
Religions	Muslim (official) 100	Muslims 93.9%, Christians 2.8%, Animists 0.7%, none 2,5 % (2019 est.)	Muslims 63.8%, Catholics 20%, Animists 9 %, Protestants 6.2 %, other 0,2 %, none 0,7 % (2019 est.)	Muslim 95.5%, Ethnic religions 4.1 %, Christians 0.3 %, Agnostics and others 0,1 % (2020 est.)	Muslims 52.1%, Protestants 23.9%, Catholics 20%, Animists 0.3%, Other Christians 0,2 %, none 2,8 %, unspecified 0,7 % 0,7 (2014-15 est.)
Languages	Arabic (official), Pular, Soninke, Wolof, French. Note: the Arabic spoken in Mauritania differs greatly from modern Arabic ; the Mauritanian dialect, which incorporates many Tamazigh terms, is known as Hassania.	Bambara (official), French 17.2%, Peu 9.4 %, Dogo 7,2 %, Soninke 6,4 %, Miniank 4,3 %, Tamacheq 3,5 %, Senouf 2,6 %, Bobo	French (official) native languages of the Sudanese family spoken by 90% of the population.	Hausa, Zarma, French, other Note: Niger has 10 national languages.	French (official), Arabic (official), Sara (in the south), more than 120 languages and dialects

		2,1 %, other 6,3 %, unspecified 0,7 (2009 est.)			
Population literacy rate	67 % (2021)	35,5 % (2018)	46 % (2021)	37,3 % (2018)	26.8 % (2021)
Population below the poverty line	31,8 % (2019 est.)	44,6 % (2021 est.)	43,2 % (2021 est.)	40,8 % (2018 est.)	42,3 % (2018 est.)
Military expenditure as % of GDP.	2.5 % (2023 est.)	4 % (2023 est.)	4 % (2023 est.)	2 % (2023 est.)	2,9 % (2023 est.)

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