

AFRICAN UNION

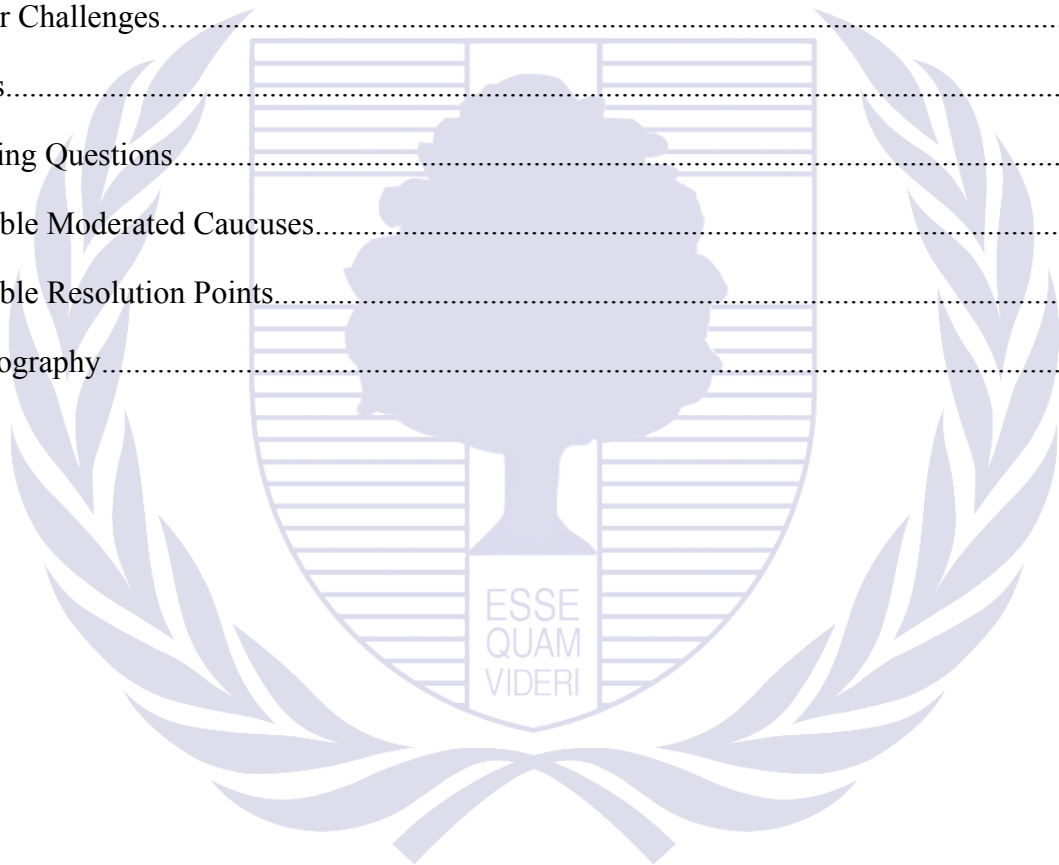
Topic 1: “Combating the Rise of Terrorism and Military Coups in Western Africa and the Sahel Region through the Implementation of a Peace Framework”



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Definitions of Key Concepts

These are some terms that we recommend you understand and research prior to the MUN to have a better understanding of our debate. They may vary depending on your country's ideology.

Terrorism: Criminal acts, including acts against civilians, intentionally committed with the aim of provoking a state of terror in the general public, intimidating a population or compelling a government or international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act.

Military Coup: A sudden and illegal seizure of power from a government by a faction (often military) within the state apparatus, bypassing constitutional procedures and often undermining democratic governance.

Peace Framework: A structured and coordinated set of policies, agreements, and actions, often at the regional or international level, designed to resolve conflict, restore stability, rebuild institutions, and foster reconciliation.

State Fragility: A condition in which a state experiences a combination of exposure to risk and insufficient resilience of its institutions, systems, or communities to manage, absorb, or mitigate those risks.

Violent Extremism: The beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious, or political goals, often targeting civilians and undermining peace and security.

Counter-Terrorism: Measures taken to detect, prevent, and respond to terrorist acts through legal, political, military, and social strategies, including international cooperation and national capacity-building.

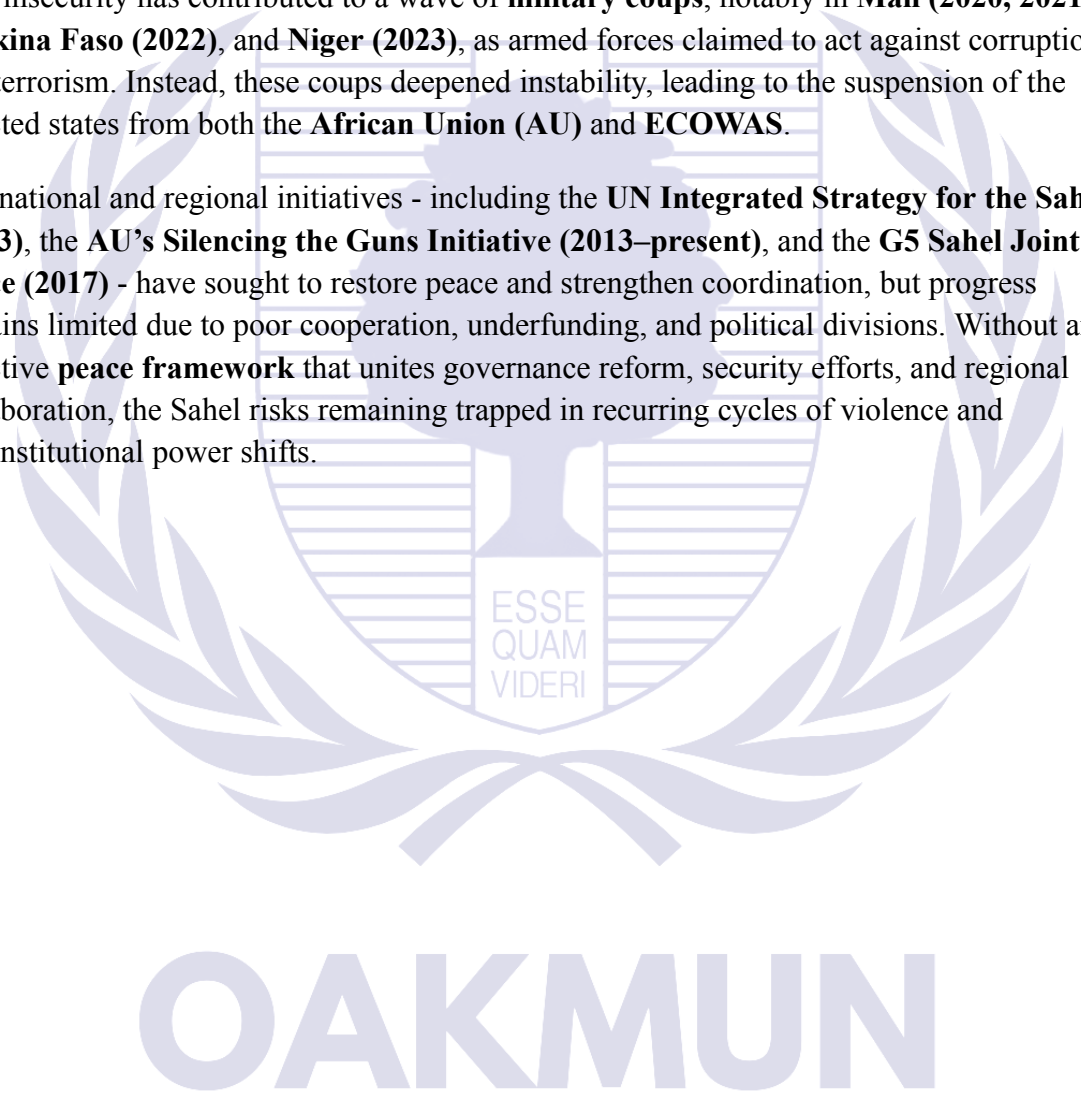
Regional Security Cooperation: Collaborative efforts among neighboring states or regional organisations to address shared security challenges - such as terrorism, organized crime, and political instability - through joint operations, intelligence sharing, and coordinated policy frameworks.

Background Information

The Sahel region, stretching from Senegal to Sudan, has long faced instability rooted in weak governance, poverty, and fragile state institutions. Since the early 2010s - following the fall of Libya's regime and the spread of weapons across the region - terrorist groups such as **Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM)** and the **Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)** have expanded throughout **Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger**, exploiting porous borders and government fragility. These insurgencies have caused thousands of deaths, massive displacement, and severe economic disruption.

This insecurity has contributed to a wave of **military coups**, notably in **Mali (2020, 2021)**, **Burkina Faso (2022)**, and **Niger (2023)**, as armed forces claimed to act against corruption and terrorism. Instead, these coups deepened instability, leading to the suspension of the affected states from both the **African Union (AU)** and **ECOWAS**.

International and regional initiatives - including the **UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (2013)**, the **AU's Silencing the Guns Initiative (2013–present)**, and the **G5 Sahel Joint Force (2017)** - have sought to restore peace and strengthen coordination, but progress remains limited due to poor cooperation, underfunding, and political divisions. Without an effective **peace framework** that unites governance reform, security efforts, and regional collaboration, the Sahel risks remaining trapped in recurring cycles of violence and unconstitutional power shifts.



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Case Study

Coup in Mali ([LINK](#)):

The 2020 coup in Mali was initiated by the country's armed forces, led by Assimi Goïta, following long standing complaints about corruption, lack of security, and state fragility.

The coup, and subsequent ones in the region, highlight deep underlying issues in the Sahel and offer important lessons that you can learn from. Understanding the foundation of the problem will greatly aid you in leading the debate in the right direction.

Key details:

The coup began on **18 August 2020** when elements of the Malian armed forces mutinied, detained President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, and forced his resignation. Main underlying causes: escalating terrorist violence, weak governance and state capacity, socio-economic frustration, and a perception of predatory rule by elites.

The key dynamics were that the coup disrupted regional cooperation, including through ECOWAS and the African Union, and it coincided with a worsening of the jihadist insurgency in Mali and its neighbours. The coup also led the African Union to suspend Mali's membership by invoking Article 30 of the AU Constitutive Act, which prohibits governments from coming to power through unconstitutional means.

Key Takeaways

1. State fragility is the root cause of coups.

The 2020 Malian coup highlights how weak governance, corruption, and public mistrust in institutions create conditions where the military gains public support to seize power. When governments fail to provide basic security and services, coups become a symptom of a deeper institutional crisis rather than an isolated event.

2. Terrorism and insecurity fuel political instability.

Mali's military justified the coup as a response to the government's inability to contain jihadist violence. Persistent attacks from groups like JNIM and ISGS undermined civilian confidence and gave legitimacy to military intervention. This shows how terrorism directly weakens democratic resilience in fragile states.

3. Regional spillover effects threaten collective stability.

The Malian coup set a precedent that inspired or emboldened similar takeovers in

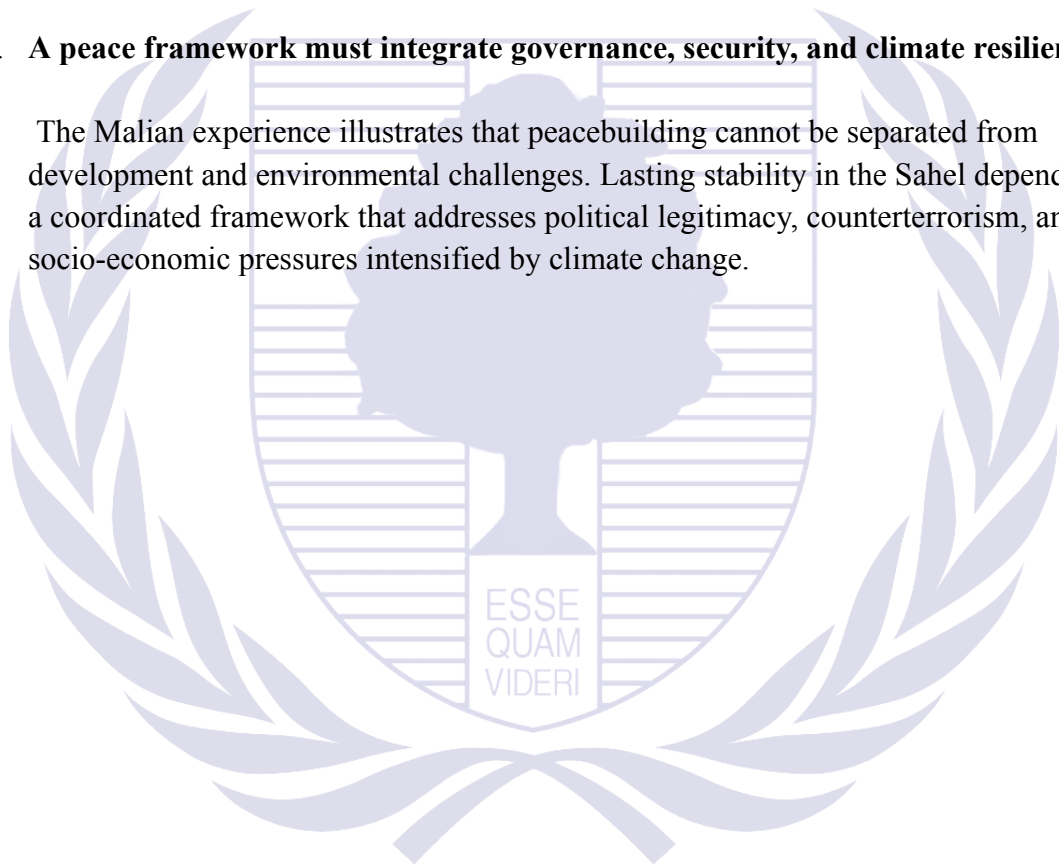
Burkina Faso (2022) and Niger (2023). It disrupted cooperation within ECOWAS and the African Union, weakening joint counterterrorism operations and regional diplomacy across the Sahel.

4. **External interventions alone cannot ensure stability.**

International actors, including France and the United Nations, provided military and financial support to Mali, yet failed to address governance and development issues. The case demonstrates that sustainable peace requires local ownership, inclusive governance, and reforms beyond foreign military assistance.

5. **A peace framework must integrate governance, security, and climate resilience.**

The Malian experience illustrates that peacebuilding cannot be separated from development and environmental challenges. Lasting stability in the Sahel depends on a coordinated framework that addresses political legitimacy, counterterrorism, and the socio-economic pressures intensified by climate change.



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Key Actors & Stakeholders

1. Mali:

A core member of the Sahel region and one of the countries most affected by terrorism and political instability. Mali has experienced two coups (2020, 2021) and continues to face attacks from groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). The Malian government, currently military-led, prioritizes restoring security and sovereignty but remains suspended from the AU following its unconstitutional changes of government.

2. Burkina Faso:

Burkina Faso faces one of the fastest-growing insurgencies in the world. After two coups in 2022, the transitional military authorities claim to focus on counterterrorism but struggle to maintain control over rural areas. The AU and ECOWAS have both called for a clear roadmap back to civilian rule and stronger regional coordination against extremist threats.

3. Niger:

Niger's 2023 coup disrupted what had been one of the AU's key regional security partners. The country's strategic position between Libya, Chad, and Nigeria makes it critical to Sahel stability. Niger remains under AU suspension, with ongoing diplomatic efforts urging a return to constitutional governance and cooperation against terrorism.

4. Chad:

Although not part of the 2020–2023 coup wave, Chad plays a pivotal role in counterterrorism across the Sahel. Its armed forces are among the region's strongest, actively participating in AU and G5 Sahel missions. However, its own transitional process following President Idriss Déby's death in 2021 has raised concerns over democratic governance.

5. Mauritania:

A relatively stable Sahelian state, Mauritania has successfully limited extremist activity within its borders through strong military action and local peacebuilding initiatives. It remains an essential AU partner in coordinating regional counterterrorism efforts and advocating for political dialogue among affected states.

Current State as of 2025

As of 2025, the Sahel region remains caught in a worsening cycle of insecurity driven by terrorism, political instability, and weak governance. Extremist groups such as **Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM)** and the **Islamic State in the Greater Sahel (ISGS)** continue to expand their operations across **Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger**, exploiting porous borders and limited state presence. Civilian casualties have continued to rise, with thousands killed annually in attacks targeting villages, security forces, and local officials. Both the AU's Silencing the Guns initiative and the UN's Integrated Strategy for the Sahel are being revised to adapt to the post-coup context and strengthen regional cooperation.

The coups in **Mali (2020, 2021)**, **Burkina Faso (2022)**, and **Niger (2023)** have not improved the security situation; rather, they have fragmented regional cooperation and weakened international partnerships. The three junta-led governments, all suspended from the **African Union (AU)** and **ECOWAS**, have increasingly coordinated through the **Alliance of Sahel States (AES)**, distancing themselves from regional and international mediation frameworks.

Meanwhile, the withdrawal of **MINUSMA** from Mali and the end of **France's Operation Barkhane** have created a significant security vacuum, which local militaries and private security actors have struggled to fill. The OECD notes that the persistence of jihadist violence, combined with weak governance and strained regional cooperation, "has deepened insecurity and limited prospects for democratic transition in the Central Sahel".

Overall, the region faces a complex challenge where terrorism fuels coups, and coups in turn undermine coordinated counter-terrorism efforts. Without a unified AU-led peace framework that balances national sovereignty with collective security, the Sahel risks remaining trapped in cycles of violence and instability. Efforts by the AU and ECOWAS to negotiate timelines for democratic transitions have yielded limited results, with juntas repeatedly extending transition deadlines and rejecting external pressure.

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Major Challenges

1. Weak Governance and Institutional Fragility

Most Sahelian states suffer from limited government capacity, corruption, and weak public institutions. Military juntas have further eroded trust in governance by postponing elections and restricting civil freedoms. According to the OECD (2024), this institutional fragility has “significantly reduced the ability of central authorities to deliver basic services or coordinate regional security responses.” Without legitimate civilian governance, long-term peace frameworks remain unsustainable.

2. Expanding Terrorist Activity and Regional Insecurity

Extremist groups such as **JNIM** and **ISGS** continue to expand their control across the border regions of **Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger**, where state presence is minimal. In 2024 alone, the Sahel accounted for **43% of global terrorism-related deaths**, making it the most violent region in the world (Global Terrorism Index, 2024). These groups exploit poverty and ethnic tensions, undermining regional stability and deterring foreign investment or humanitarian operations.

3. Breakdown of Regional Cooperation

The suspension of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the **African Union (AU)** and **ECOWAS** has severely weakened coordinated counter-terrorism efforts. The formation of the **Alliance of Sahel States (AES)** in 2023 has created political division within the region, with AES members rejecting ECOWAS mediation and external involvement. This fragmentation prevents the creation of a unified peace framework and limits the sharing of intelligence and resources across borders.

4. Insufficient Funding and International Withdrawal

The withdrawal of the **UN’s MINUSMA mission** and the end of **France’s Operation Barkhane** have left significant security and logistical gaps. At the same time, the AU’s **Peace Fund** and regional operations remain chronically underfunded, covering less than **25% of assessed needs** for Sahel peace operations (AU Peace and Security Council, 2024). The lack of sustained international and regional funding continues to limit the AU’s ability to coordinate long-term stabilization efforts.

Blocs

Pro-Democracy and Institutional Governance:

This bloc emphasizes the importance of **constitutional order, civilian governance, and regional cooperation** through AU mechanisms. Member states in this group strongly **condemn military coups** and advocate for **swift transitions to civilian rule**, viewing democratic legitimacy as essential for long-term peace and stability. They support **AU and UN led peace frameworks**, sanctions on coup governments, and collaboration with traditional partners such as the **European Union** and the **United States** to strengthen counterterrorism and governance capacity.

Example countries: Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone.

Sovereignty and Security-First:

Members of this bloc argue that **national sovereignty and security** must take precedence over external political pressure. They view military interventions as **necessary measures** to restore order when civilian governments fail to contain terrorism or corruption. These states reject AU and ECOWAS sanctions, calling them **counterproductive** and **neo-colonial** in nature. Instead, they favor **African-led security cooperation** and partnerships with **non-Western allies** such as Russia and China.

Example countries: Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad.

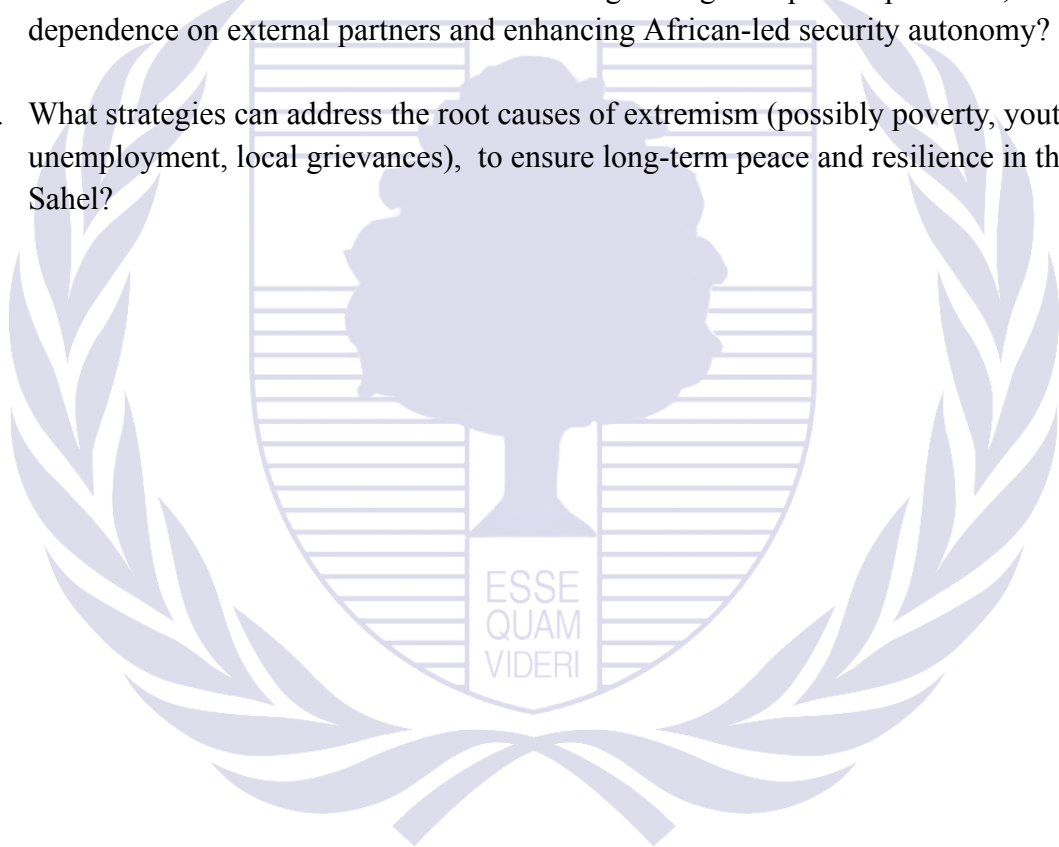
Neutral and Mediation-Oriented:

This bloc seeks to **bridge divisions** within the Union by promoting **dialogue and gradual transitions** toward democracy. Its members prioritize **conflict mediation, development, and humanitarian aid** as tools for stability rather than punitive measures. They support the AU's principle of "African solutions to African problems", emphasizing that long-term peace depends on addressing the root causes of terrorism—poverty, marginalization, and weak institutions.

Example countries: South Africa, Algeria, Mauritania, Ethiopia, Kenya.

Guiding Questions

1. How can the African Union develop a unified Peace and Security Framework that effectively addresses both terrorism and unconstitutional changes of government, while respecting national sovereignty?
2. What innovative mechanisms can ensure that counterterrorism operations in the Sahel remain accountable to civilian oversight and human rights standards without weakening military effectiveness?
3. How can the AU mobilize sustainable funding for regional peace operations, reducing dependence on external partners and enhancing African-led security autonomy?
4. What strategies can address the root causes of extremism (possibly poverty, youth unemployment, local grievances), to ensure long-term peace and resilience in the Sahel?



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Possible Moderated Caucuses

During moderated caucuses, your aim should be to propose topics that your delegation believes are important to discuss. These caucuses could be focused on the entire topic, which would make the debate more general, or they could be focused on a specific topic instead.

Remember that during the moderated caucus, as well as in consultations of the whole, delegations are guiding the debate and choosing what should be discussed, so your aim as a delegation should be to propose topics relevant to your country, as well as participate in any debate in order to express your country's position.

Furthermore, remember that if you have planned any topic for a moderated caucus or a consultation of the whole, you should also think about the speaker's time, as well as the duration of the motion.

Some examples of topics that could be discussed are the following (the following topics can be used):

Governance Legitimacy and Civilian Oversight

- Should peace frameworks establish clear timelines for civilian-led transitions after coups?
- Should local governance (mayors, councils, customary authorities) have the power to deliver services in high-risk areas, even if central governments resist decentralization?
- How can peace frameworks rebuild trust when populations view elites, elections, or constitutions as the enemy?

Security Sector Reform and Professionalization

- Should military promotions, postings, and budgets be placed under stronger civilian oversight to reduce coup incentives?
- Should peace frameworks prioritize “pay, welfare, and discipline” reforms to prevent mutinies and defections to armed groups?
- Should police and gendarmerie be strengthened over army-led internal security operations, or does that create new risks of abuse?
- How can DDR (disarmament, demobilization, reintegration) be designed so it doesn't reward violence or undermine professional forces?

Counterterrorism and Human Rights Protections

- Should counterterrorism operations be paused or redesigned if credible abuse allegations persist, even if armed groups gain short-term advantage?
- Should independent monitoring (national human rights bodies, UN, civil society) be mandatory in any peace framework tied to security support?
- Should victims' compensation and community restitution be integrated into stabilization plans to reduce recruitment into extremist groups?

- How can frameworks reduce “collective punishment” narratives that fuel radicalization?

Negotiating With Armed Groups and Amnesty

- Should governments negotiate with certain armed groups as a pathway to de-escalation, or does it legitimize terrorism?
- Should amnesties be limited to low-level fighters, with exclusions for mass atrocities?
- Should community-based reintegration (through local leaders and restorative justice) be prioritized over detention-heavy strategies?



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Possible Resolution Points

When writing resolutions, your aim should be to reflect the position of your bloc. Through the clauses written, for the preambular clauses, your aim should be to describe the position of your bloc on the subject. If your bloc's stance is in favor of preserving freedoms, then the preambular clauses should reflect that. However, the Operative Clauses have to be focused on the specific measures your bloc believes should be implemented.

Below, you will find some examples of operative clauses for your resolutions. Although you cannot copy and paste the clauses used as examples, it is encouraged to try to use similar language:

Governance Legitimacy and Civilian Oversight

1. Recommends that peace frameworks set clear, time-bound pathways for civilian-led transitions following coups.
2. Calls upon Member States to empower local authorities to deliver essential services in high-risk areas, including through transparent decentralization funding.
3. Urges governments to rebuild public trust through inclusive dialogue, strengthened constitutional safeguards, and credible electoral and accountability reforms.

Security Sector Reform and Professionalization

1. Calls for strengthened civilian oversight of military promotions, postings, and defense budgets to reduce coup incentives.
2. Recommends prioritizing reforms to pay, welfare, and discipline within security forces to prevent mutinies and defections.
3. Encourages strengthening police and gendarmerie capacity for internal security, with strict human rights standards and oversight.
4. Urges DDR programs to be conflict-sensitive and community-informed, ensuring reintegration support does not reward violence and protects affected communities.

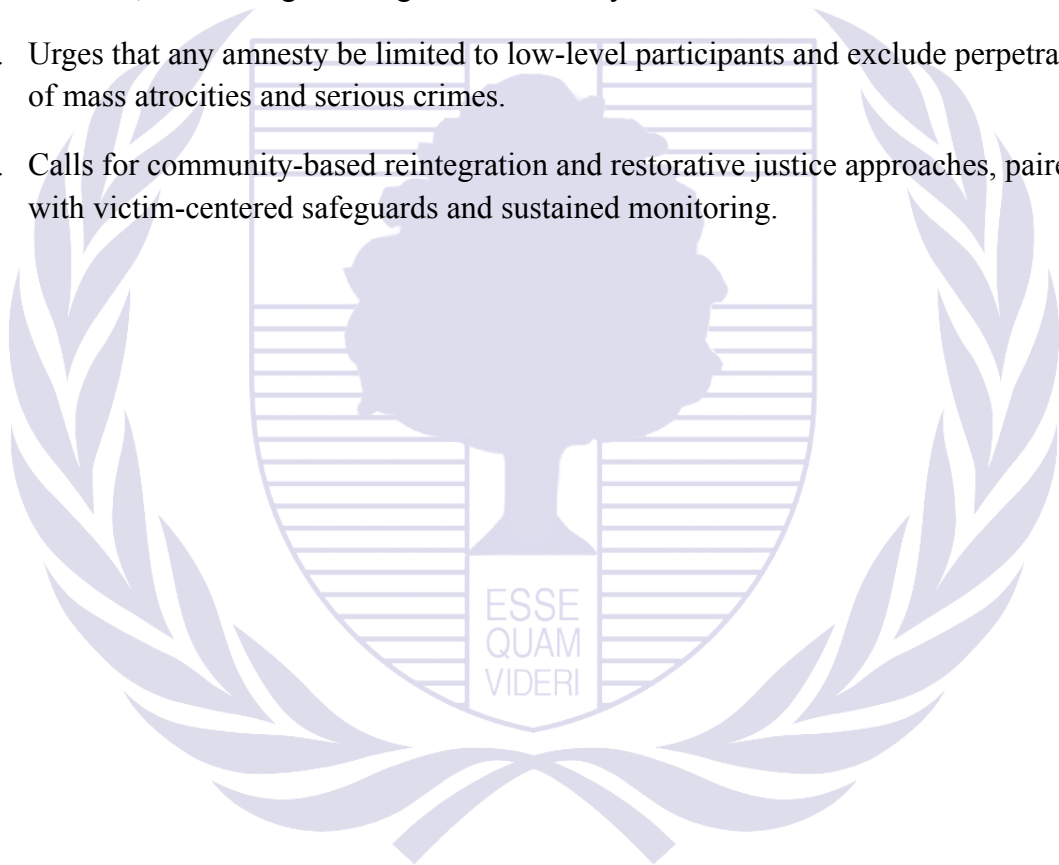
Counterterrorism and Human Rights Protections

1. Calls for the redesign of counterterrorism operations where credible abuse allegations persist, including enforceable civilian-protection measures.
2. Requests independent monitoring and reporting by national human rights bodies, the UN, and vetted civil society as a condition of security assistance.

3. Recommends integrating victim compensation and community restoration into stabilization efforts.
4. Condemns collective punishment and urges community engagement strategies to counter radicalization and extremist narratives.

Negotiating With Armed Groups and Amnesty

1. Supports structured, conditional engagement with eligible armed actors to de-escalate violence, without legitimizing terrorist activity.
2. Urges that any amnesty be limited to low-level participants and exclude perpetrators of mass atrocities and serious crimes.
3. Calls for community-based reintegration and restorative justice approaches, paired with victim-centered safeguards and sustained monitoring.



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