

CLIMATE CHANGE INDUCED INSTABILITY AND CONFLICTS: MALI, BURKINA FASO AND NIGER

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Abstract

The nexus between climate change, instability and conflicts finds Africa, and specifically the Central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger), a fertile field for its operationalisation. In this sub-region where there is already a very high potential for instability and conflict, climate change will intensify this situation by acting as a threat multiplier. This article tries to explore this link, explaining that climate change is not a grassroots cause of this instability, but will act as an exacerbator, causing an increase in the spread and appeal of radicalism, migratory waves and social and political instability, embodied in coups d'état and a threat to the traditional French and Western presence, which is being overtaken by new international players such as Russia – Wagner Group (Africa Corps) or China.

Keywords

Climate change, Instability, Conflicts, Africa, Central Sahel.

Resumo

O nexo entre alterações climáticas, instabilidade e conflitos encontra em África, e especificamente no Sahel Central (Mali, Burkina Faso e Níger), um campo fértil para a sua operacionalização. Nesta sub-região, onde já existe um potencial muito elevado de instabilidade e conflito, as alterações climáticas irão intensificar esta situação, actuando como um multiplicador de ameaças. Este artigo procura explorar esta relação, explicando que as alterações climáticas não são uma causa de fundo desta instabilidade, mas actuarão como um exacerbador, provocando um aumento da propagação e da atração do radicalismo, das vagas migratórias e da instabilidade social e política, consubstanciada em golpes de Estado e numa ameaça à presença tradicional francesa e ocidental, que está a ser ultrapassada por novos actores internacionais como a Rússia – Wagner Group (Africa Corps) ou a China.

Palavras-chave

Alterações climáticas, Instabilidade, Conflitos, África, Sahel Central.



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Introduction

The idea that climate change can exacerbate instability and conflict is not necessarily new. For decades, there has been research on "water wars", river flows, dam construction, droughts and deforestation caused by climatic phenomena that could be behind an increase in instability and even intra- and inter-State conflict. More recently, however, an objective link has been established between the rising adverse effects of climate change and an increase in regional instability and conflict. The Central Sahel sub-region, in particular Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, is a paradigmatic example of this phenomenon. The aim of this article is precisely to explore this link and to try to determine to what extent it is, or is not, an important factor in the growing conflicts in these countries and in the regime changes that have recently taken place there, calling into question old alliances and agreements with the former colonial power, France, and the European Union itself, and bringing to light the growing influence of extra-African actors such as Russia, through the Wagner Group (Africa Corps) or the People's Republic of China.

1 - Conceptualization on climate change, instability and conflicts: Literature review

Climate change, along with its social and security implications, has given rise to a multidimensional concern for various actors in the International System (IS), including states, International Organizations (IOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and social movements. Consequently, the intersection between climate change and human communities has led to a significant increase in literature studying the relationships between climate change, security, conflict, and instability.

Climate change being the "significant variation in temperature, precipitation, and wind over a period of at least 30 years" (Swain, 2016: p.151), is often rightly seen as a global,



intergenerational, and environmental challenge (Martins-Loução, 2021). The effects of greenhouse gases have global consequences that extend beyond the emitters of the gases. The deterioration of atmospheric conditions can have intergenerational impacts, affecting multiple generations. Human activities, from daily life to economic strength, depend on polluting sources, contributing to 'mortgaging' the future of generations to come (Martins-Loução, 2021: p. 19).

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of the main themes and evidence in this scientific domain.

In 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) addressed several risks associated with climate change in its fourth assessment report. These risks have the potential to cause global instability and insecurity (Scheffran & Battaglini, 2011). These risks include a variety of issues associated with water resources, agriculture, forests, human security, and the economy. It is important to understand the complex interactions between environmental stress factors, their social impacts, and the responses adopted in order to analyze the implications for security.

According to Gilman et al (2007) and the report 'National Security and the Threat of Climate Change' published in 2007 by the CNA Corporation and the Military Advisory Board, climate change is considered a catalyst for various challenges that threaten US security and national interests (CNA, 2007 apud Scheffran & Battaglini, 2011: p.28). The discussion of the potential multiplier effects that climate change can have on regions that are already unstable is justified by the development of awareness of the climate-security nexus, especially among international organizations, governments, and think tanks.

Several contributions have been made to understanding the relationship between security, climate and conflict, like for instance, among others, the work of Homer-Dixon (1999, 2007), Swain, (1996, 2004, 2016), Grover (2007), Tertrais (2011), Gleditsch (2012), Meierding (2013), Baysal and Karakaş (2017), Freeman (2017), and Koubi (2018, 2019).

The environment was identified as a source of security risk in the late 1980s, as the Cold War came to an end.¹ The first studies on environmental security were based on a broad range of threats related to environmental degradation. However, this security agenda soon shifted its focus to the relationship between environment and conflict (Baysal & Karakaş, 2017; Meierding, 2013). Against this background, two major research projects

¹ Environmental concerns really began to appear on the international agenda in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. This is not to say that there were no previous concerns, because there were. In fact, the period between the beginning of the 20th century and the 1960s largely represents the discovery phase and a prehistoric phase for international environmental law. In addition, the concerns regarding the environment that arose during this period were more focused on its preservation from the point of view of economic profitability than from the point of view of protection for the pure and mere protection of the environment (Gomes, 2018; Gomes et al., 2021; Gomes & Leong, 2023). For this reason, we believe that it was from the mid-1960s and early 1970s that the environment began to be integrated into international concerns. In reality, there are several factors that help us understand why this process occurred. Firstly, there are changes at a political, social and economic level, such as the development of greater awareness of the importance of the environment and its state of global degradation, the proliferation of environmentally-oriented organizations and social movements, the dissemination of the scientific work of personalities such as David Attenborough, Jane Goodall, Jacques Cousteau, David Suzuki and Rachel Carson, the impacts of the oil shocks, and the proliferation of international conventions, summits and reports on the state of the environment (Gomes, 2018; Simões, 2024; Soromenho-Marques, 2018).



stand out: Thomas Homer-Dixon's project on population, environment and security, known as the Toronto Group, and the Swiss Environmental Conflict Project, also known as ENCOP (Baechler, 1998; Homer-Dixon, 1999; Meierding, 2013). Both projects examined different cases in which the degradation of renewable natural resources could lead to internal conflicts, adopting a position based on a deprivation and Malthusian logic, arguing that the poor distribution and decline in the quantity and quality of resources are crucial factors in increasing the likelihood of internal conflict (Baechler, 1998; Homer-Dixon, 1999; Meierding, 2013). These models are the first to contribute to the idea that climate change has a "threat multiplier" effect², as it contributes to accentuating pre-existing factors in a given region, leading to a scenario of instability (Meierding, 2013; Muggah, 2021; Swain, 2016)³.

The phase of a fast environmental degradation and scarcity of renewable natural resources was followed by a focus on conflicts over the abundance of non-renewable natural resources, such as oil and diamonds. The relationship between the extraction of these resources and the tendency to increase internal conflicts, such as the civil war in Sierra Leone, was then studied (Meierding, 2013; Ross, 2004). Following this timeline, it is only in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century that we find a third phase in which the focus shifts from the environment per se to environmental stress (Baysal & Karakaş, 2017; Homer-Dixon, 2007; Meierding, 2013).

In short, in the face of growing anxieties, climate change is increasingly being analysed from a security perspective. It is precisely in this sense that Brown and Crawford (2008) and Brown and McLeman (2009) argue that we are now beginning to realise that the speed and scale of climate change - from the way it threatens to affect where we can live, where we can grow food and where we can find water, to the way it threatens humanity's current sustainability - could undermine the economic and political stability of large parts of the world in the coming years, plunging vast regions into intense conflict. In doing so, climate change could become a threat multiplier, making existing problems such as water scarcity and food insecurity more complex and intractable.

We believe that environmental stress is a key driver of insecurity and instability⁴. There are various ways in which this insecurity and instability can manifest itself, including degenerating into conflict. Examples of these manifestations include: resource scarcity

² It was also in the 1990s that, to a large extent through the work of Homer-Dixon, the demystification of wars over natural resources became operational, and a view was adopted based more on the perspective that these are just another factor in a more complex situation of regional, national or local instability.

³ More recently, we have seen a transition in the discourse towards an orientation more focused on recovering the narrative of environmental wars. This type of discourse clashes with the one that has prevailed since the 1990s and which is based on the idea of the threat multiplier effect.

⁴ It should also be noted that the way we view the potential for insecurity, instability and conflict associated with the use of natural resources is closely linked to the theoretical paradigm we apply. For example, perspectives based on realist assumptions tend to consider that relations between states are eminently competitive, so there can hardly be cooperation in the management and use of natural resources. On the other hand, perspectives based on liberal assumptions assume that not only is cooperation possible, but that states tend to promote the institutionalization of regimes on the management of the natural resources they share, for example by creating international river basin organizations, commissions or committees, agreements and conventions. In all reality, this is rarely a situation in which there is either competition or cooperation, so inter-state relations regarding the management of international natural resources are also rarely zero-sum relationships (Simões, 2025). In fact, the most common scenario is one in which conflict, or if you prefer, competition, coexists with cooperation.



and competition; forced human migration and displacement; state fragility; crises; and many others. Barnett (2010) identifies six main approaches to environmental security - ecological security, common security, environmental security, national security, greening defence and human security - of which we are interested in highlighting the relevance of the environmental security perspective, the approach that studies environmental violence in terms of the correlation between climate change and violent conflict.

For example, Barnett (2010) argues that the scarcity of available resources is directly related to the propensity for violent conflict, especially when it comes to satisfying individual needs. We therefore understand that resources are strategic assets and that unequal access to resources can lead to tensions with the potential to degenerate into violent conflict. Barnett (2010) also points to factors such as complex interdependence and trade as mitigating factors in disputes over natural resources. For their part, Baysal and Karakaş (2017) analyse the securitisation of the environment in a tripartite logic: (i) climate change is (should be) a security issue; (ii) climate change is not (should not be) a security issue; (iii) climatisation of security. We are particularly interested in analysing the first perspective. As far as the first perspective is concerned, matters are divided between those who defend climate change as a statocentric and therefore traditional security issue and those who argue that climate change should be seen in the light of human security (Baysal & Karakaş, 2017; Simões, 2024). This is a bifurcation between those who prioritise the analysis of climate change as a threat multiplier, and those who prioritise aspects related to human suffering.

In the context of climate change as a traditional security issue, we adopt the perspective of analysing the securitisation of the environment through the discourse of climate conflict, following Detraz and Betsill (2009). It should be noted that despite the impact of climate change in the traditional security domain, with the exacerbation of pre-existing tensions, climate change does not fail to generate impacts in the human security domain, so we believe that a symbiotic relationship is forming between traditional security, environmental security and human security (Baysal and Karakaş, 2017).

2 - Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger: Drivers and sources of instability

All three countries are former French colonies and they became independent in 1960. They are all in the Central Sahel region and they are landlocked countries. The dominant religion is Sunni Islam. The population is ethnically very diverse. In the case of Mali and Niger, there is a significant Tuareg population in the North of both countries and a more Arabised Bantu population in the South. Burkina Faso is made up of a majority ethnic Hausa population, but with a very significant mosaic of other minority ethnic groups (Lugan, 2023). There has been much political instability in all three countries, with eleven successful coups in Burkina Faso and five in Mali and Niger since independence (Lugan, 2023; *Frequency of Coup Events From 1945 to 2022, by Country* | Cline Center, n.d.). They are all among the poorest countries in the world. In the following table (Table 1) we can see some indicators of fragility, poverty and vulnerability:

**Table 1** - Indicators of fragility, poverty and vulnerability to climate change

Countries	Population (2021)	Area Km2	GDP PPP Per capita (2022)	Fragile States Index (2023)	Recent Coups	Vulnerability to impact of climate change (Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative)
Mali	21,9 million	1240190 Km2	2639 USD	13th out of 179 States	March, 2012; August 2020 and May 2021	175th out of 185 States
Burkina Faso	22,1 million	274220 Km2	2683 USD	21st out of 179 States	January 2022 and September 2022	157th out of 185 States
Niger	25,25 million	1267000 Km2	1579 USD	24th out of 179 States	July 2023	183rd out of 185 States

Source: Author's own elaboration (2024)

Hence, Pavia (2021: p. 4), when analysing the specific case of the African continent, has established a correlation between the situation of fragility and the tendency towards greater conflict in the various States and the fulfilment of certain conditions, namely: (i) the lack of overlap between the State and the nation; (ii) a non-democratic regime; and (iii) the dominant presence of the State in civil society and the economy. A State is much more likely to be in a situation of fragility, and therefore more prone to greater conflict, if all three of the above conditions are met. This situation is unfortunately the most common in Africa, and particularly in the three States mentioned.

Since the very start of the Libyan civil war and the subsequent total destabilisation of that country, the flow of arms and the return of the Tuareg who trained and fought there have had a spillover effect throughout the Sahel. These effects have been particularly significant in Mali, even leading to an attempt at secession in the North of the country in 2012, with the short-lived creation of the State of Azawad. In both Mali and Niger, as noted above, there is a significant divide between the North and South of the two countries. There is also a latent conflict between pastoral nomads and more sedentary farmers. The traditional transhumance of nomadic herders is often hampered by farmers and by the borders between the three countries. Ethnic and linguistic divisions also exacerbate the conflict. Existing corruption and glaring inequalities in access to scarce resources also fuel conflict. The growing distance between the political and military elites, who are mainly concentrated in their countries' capitals and other urban areas, and the rest of the population (who live mainly in the informal sector), who feel abandoned by the formal authorities, is also widening the gap between the two sectors of society (Martinez, 2023).

This is why these marginalised populations, even those harassed by traditional powers, often find a way-out from their situation in organisations such as AQMI

(Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and its affiliates or the Islamic State, as an escape from their situation. These radical organisations end up replacing the formal power of the State and take on this role in vast regions, as is the case with Hezbollah in Lebanon or



Hamas in the Gaza Strip (Martinez, 2023). The central structures of the State are seen as predatory, supported by international missions (French or Western), seen as a perpetuation of neo-colonial rule, which only want to seize the country's natural resources. The military coups that have recently taken place in these countries, and the support they have had from significant parts of the population, are a reflection of this situation (Rubicon, 2023). The acrimony against Western missions and presence is embodied in the calls for intervention by Russia and the Wagner Group (Africa Corps), seen as an alternative to the "exploitation" to which these countries are subjected. Of course, this perhaps naïve view couldn't be further from reality, given the role that the Wagner Group (Africa Corps) has played in the exploitation of natural resources in the African countries where it operates (Rubicon, 2023).

There are, of course, specificities in each of these three countries. The case of Mali, which has been the most affected, is explained by the spill-over effects of the civil war in Libya, the return of Tuareg combatants in that conflict, the arms trafficking linked to that area, the "abandonment" to which the populations in the vast North of Mali have been subjected, the short-lived attempt to create the State of Azawad and the international interventions that followed (Franco, 2021). Added to all this are the historical ethnic rivalries between North and South, combined with climate change, which has a multiplier effect on all this instability (Davidova, 2023).

Burkina Faso has been significantly affected by the instability in Mali, with a "domino effect" that has created conditions of great instability and conflict. Ethnic and religious divisions between the South and North, plus the significant presence of radical groups taking advantage of clashes between communities over cattle theft and deteriorating subsistence conditions (also due to climate change), plus the military coups of 2022, have created the "perfect storm" that has made this country one of the world's most needy in terms of international humanitarian aid. However, Burkina Faso also has very specific endogenous causes that favour instability and conflict, exacerbated by adverse climatic changes. Lugan (2023) refers specifically to the creation of protected wildlife areas, which have created restrictions on transhumance activities, leading to conflicts between the authorities and nomadic pastoralists; he also refers to the installation of rice plantations - some owned by Chinese companies - which have driven out and prevented traditional sedentary farmers from maintaining their ancestral way of subsistence; finally, some laws on rural land ownership have expropriated some owners in favour of others, from other ethnic groups, creating acrimony and conflicts. All these situations favour an appeal to extremism as a last resort.

Niger, which was the last to be affected by this "domino effect", also has its own specificities. Unlike the other two, there was a formal democracy and President Mohamed Bazoum was elected in 2021. However, on 26 July 2023, a military coup overthrew Bazoum and installed a military junta in power, as had happened in the neighbouring States of Burkina Faso and Mali. Niger was home to significant contingents of French and American troops. This country was considered the headquarters of the fight against Islamic radicalism in the region. In Niger, in addition to Islamic State and AQIM and their affiliates, Boko Haram is also active. As in neighbouring States, relations with the former colonial power, France, have deteriorated significantly, with the military junta demanding



the withdrawal of the French military contingent from the country. The same has not happened, at least so far, with the US presence. Another specificity of Niger is that it is one of France's main suppliers of uranium. France's dependence on this raw material to feed its nuclear industry is well known (Glaser, 2017). A large part of Niger's uranium exploration was handed over to French companies, with accusations of neo-colonial exploitation. There are fears that this business could be handed over to companies linked to the Wagner Group (Africa Corps)⁵ or to other countries such as China.

As we have just seen, there are many common factors and some distinctive aspects. It is clear, however, that in all cases climate change acts as an exacerbator and multiplier of instability and conflicts, which in some cases have existed for a long time (in the case of ethnic and religious divisions and also the asymmetries between North and South) and in others are more recent, such as the rise of radicalism, the deterioration of economic and subsistence conditions and acrimony towards the international presence, particularly of the West. We should also add the total ineffectiveness of the regional organisation, ECOWAS, in maintaining institutional normality and the growing influence of disinformation and fake news campaigns, allegedly carried out by Russian or Chinese interests, which encourage this destabilisation and anti-Western sentiment.

3 - External actors

International actors do of course play a role of varying intensity in the unfolding of events in these three countries. The terrorist networks operating in the region exploit the porosity of borders, the impact of the civil war in Libya, the dissatisfaction of large sections of the population towards traditional authorities, the absence of the State and security forces in large parts of these territories, religious affinities and support from other forms of trafficking, such as drugs, arms and illegal migration networks. Groups such as AQMI (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and its affiliates, the Islamic State or Boko Haram, which is also active in Niger, are part of this Islamic radicalism that threatens the security of the entire region (Martinez, 2023).

ECOWAS/CEDEAO (the Economic Community of West African States) is the regional grouping established by the Treaty of Lagos, signed in 1975. This treaty was revised in 1993 with the aim of deepening the economic and political integration of its members. It also includes a responsibility to prevent and resolve conflicts in the region, with sanctions for any non-constitutional political changes. As a result, following coups in Mali in 2020 and 2021, Burkina Faso in 2022 and Niger in 2023, these countries were suspended from the organisation and placed under severe economic and political sanctions. However, the organisation's track record in maintaining constitutional normality in its members is not positive, given the increasing number of coups or attempted coups that have taken place in this sub-region of Africa in recent years. The corollary of this situation was the

⁵ From January 2024, the group formerly known as the Wagner Group (Africa Corps), began to call itself Africa Corps. This also reflected an attempt to dispel reminiscences of the controversial death of its former leader in August 2023. See Lechner and Eledinov (2024).



withdrawal of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso from ECOWAS in January 2025, with these countries forming the “Alliance of Sahel States” in the meantime.⁶

Through its various programmes, projects and missions, the European Union's main objective is to promote development, combat extremism and control illegal immigration aid networks, thus helping to prevent huge flows of people from reaching the shores of the Mediterranean in the hope of reaching Europe. Its influence is exerted primarily through the various development aid programmes and also by sending missions under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Following the coups d'état in Mali and Niger, these missions were forced to withdraw by the new military juntas in power and, in the case of Mali, were replaced by mercenaries from the Afrika Korps (Binnie, 2022). The European Union's concerns are also focused on combating the growing Chinese influence in Africa. To this end, an ambitious program was presented, the Global Gateway Investment Package,⁷ with a total value of 150 billion euros, which aims to be a possible European alternative to the Chinese BRI (Belt and Road Initiative).

Russia's presence on the African continent had fallen sharply following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is important to note that the former Soviet Union had been one of the main supporters of liberation movements in Africa as part of the ideological agenda pursued during the Cold War. Even today, many of Africa's current leaders, who in some cases lived and studied in the former Soviet Union, have close ties - even family ties - with Russian citizens or citizens of other former republics, such as Belarus, Ukraine, Azerbaijan or Georgia (Pavia, 2023).

In this sense, following Russia's isolation since 2014 and, above all, since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia's interest in the African continent is explained by economic reasons (access to the rare natural resources that African countries possess, including mineral and energy resources) and expanding Russia's export capacities in military equipment. The other dimension has to do with geopolitical issues; for example, using the influence of African States in the United Nations General Assembly to prove Russia's ability to overcome its isolation on the world stage (Davidova, 2023).

In recent years, several connections have been made between Russia and the so-called Wagner Group (Africa Corps). Classified as a semi-State group, private security company and/or para-military, the Wagner Group (Africa Corps) has been the subject of study by various researchers and specialists (Russia's military, mercenary and criminal engagement in Africa, 2023), especially since 2014, after the annexation of Crimea, when the group began operating, and later with the expansion of its presence to other war scenarios, namely in Syria and Libya (Davidova, 2023). Its operations are geared towards strategic and operational interests defined in coordination with Moscow, constituting a fundamental element of its irregular warfare strategy and an extension of its foreign policy at State level (Davidova, 2023).

Thus, the Wagner Group (Africa Corps) has been Moscow's armed arm: concluding agreements that will allow Russia to establish itself in a given country in order to access the natural resources present there, in exchange for providing military support. At the

⁶ See Le Monde (2025).

⁷ See European Commission (2023).



same time, it manages to create difficulties for the former colonial powers (specifically France) and the West in general, which are being replaced in their historical and traditional role (Pavia, 2023). This situation is exactly what is going on in Mali, Burkina Faso and more recently in Niger.

According to Pavia (Pavia, 2023), China's presence in Africa is growing in importance compared to its Western presence, as it seeks to consolidate its role on the continent with a view to pursuing certain objectives, for which economic and political-diplomatic factors contribute. China's economic interest in the African continent stems essentially from the supply of essential raw materials, such as oil, which sustain the country's economic growth and the industries that leverage it. Furthermore, Pavia suggests that "the very weakness of the social, administrative and economic structures of most African countries facilitates commercial and financial exchange without legal, environmental, social or other constraints that could hinder Beijing's efforts" (Pavia, 2023).

The political-diplomatic dimension, based above all on the prevalence of diplomatic relations with China, to the detriment of Taiwan, and the voting position within the United Nations; the consolidation of the "Beijing consensus" in Africa is also becoming increasingly important, in other words, the promotion of an "uncomplicated and uncompromising policy" that promotes the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, which is strongly defended by African countries (Pavia, 2023).

This trend thus demonstrates the entrenchment of Chinese soft power in Africa (Davidova, 2023), which could extend to mirroring China's authoritarian political model implemented on the African continent, in contrast to the liberal democratic Western model (Pavia, 2023). For Beijing, Africa represents a source of political support and, increasingly, an expanding economic market (Davidova, 2023). From the African point of view, China's presence represents an alternative partnership that offers important opportunities for economic development (Pavia, 2023).

France, as a former colonial power, is one of the most influential external actors in these three countries. This is, in fact, one of its assets and also one of its vulnerabilities. France's post-colonial relationship with its former colonies, especially in Africa, has acquired very complex characteristics, which have led to it being labelled *France-Afrique*. *France-Afrique* is a controversial neo-colonial relationship in which the former coloniser continues to dominate - now indirectly - economic, financial, military and even political issues in its former colonies (Glaser, 2017). The new African *nomemklaturas*, as long as they are subservient to the dictates of Paris, thus find protection, even if their regimes are clearly dictatorial and kleptocratic, as has happened several times, one of the most paradigmatic examples being the Bokassa regime in the Central African Republic. Successive French leaders have tried to justify this situation - while distancing themselves from the most controversial aspects of this peculiar relationship - with an alleged special purpose of France in Africa, with some going so far as to say that: "La France sans l'Afrique, c'est un petit pays dans le monde" (CNEWS, 2023).

In this context, France has often taken on the role of "Gendarme d'Afrique", setting up military bases in some of these countries, sponsoring military education and training projects and carrying out large-scale security operations, the last of which took place



precisely in these three Central Sahel countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger), among others in the sub-region. These operations were discontinued following military coups that installed new actors in power who were unfavourable to the continuation of these operations. In turn, the United Nations and European Union missions also ended up suffering the consequences of this new political shift, ceasing their operations in these countries. It should be noted that a significant number of these operations and missions have not had the desired success in their fight against the radical movements operating in this region, and in some cases have even been embroiled in controversy, affecting citizens who may have had nothing to do with terrorism. A common factor in the rhetoric of these new military juntas is their anti-French and, in some cases, anti-Western inspiration, calling for new extra-African actors to take their place. In particular, there are calls for Russia and the Wagner Group (Africa Corps), which are already operating in some of these countries.

This whole situation has "shocked" the French leadership, which is observing a growing anti-French rhetoric in Africa and, more importantly, a real decline in Quai d'Orsay's traditional presence and influence on that part of the continent.

4 - Climate change exacerbation of instability and conflicts

Social scientists describe climate change as a "threat multiplier" because it does exacerbate the risk factors that already give rise to instability (Muggah, 2021).

Therefore, empirical results support the assumption that climate change acts as a threat multiplier in these countries since it triggers, accelerates, and deepens the current instabilities (Sofuoğlu, 2020). According to Evans & Munslow (2021): "These three Sahelian countries - Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger - have become the epicentre of a Jihadi upsurge since 2012 with climate change acting as a powerful compounding factor: weakening livelihoods place pressure on economic and social systems with radicalising political ramifications". And they conclude the following: "Climate change is exerting a multiplier impact on health challenges and conflict in the Sahel region".

As was mentioned earlier, the sources and drivers of instability and conflict (either internal or external) are already there; what the effects of climate change do is multiply and accentuate their negative consequences. One of the sub-regions of Africa that is most affected by this vicious cycle is precisely the Central Sahel region; a region that is highly vulnerable to climate change and has a legacy of political instability. In the Central Sahel, temperatures are rising 1.5 times faster than the rest of the world and are projected to increase by 35.6 to 39.7 degrees Fahrenheit (2°C - 4.3°C) by 2080 (The central sahel: How conflict and climate change drive crisis, 2023). Niger loses between 100,000 and 120,000 hectares of arable land to soil erosion and desertification annually. Parts of central Niger experience temperatures of 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35 °C) and above for more than 300 days a year. This strongly reduces the number of areas available to farmers and herders and has contributed to increased conflict in the country. Similar patterns across the region have fueled an unprecedented food insecurity crisis. In Burkina Faso alone, 2.2 million people are facing crisis levels of food insecurity. More than 20,000



people in the country's northeast face daily risk of death from starvation and disease (The central sahel: How conflict and climate change drive crisis, 2023).

This pattern of linking climate change to instability and conflict is also noted in the findings of this Initiative: "As global temperatures rise, conflicts stemming from drought, desertification, land degradation and food insecurity are increasing. People leaving their homes to flee these crises often compete with local populations for scarce resources, exacerbating inter-communal tensions. The loss of arable land and livelihoods leaves youth more vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization by armed groups or victimization by organized criminals, while fewer socioeconomic opportunities lead to more exploitation of natural resources" (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2019).

It's not just in the Sahel that this phenomenon occurs. It has already been noted in the Horn of Africa, the Mekong Delta, Central Asia, in Small Developed Insular States (SDIS) and some regions of Latin America. These are precisely the region's most vulnerable to the damaging effects of climate change, combined with situations of fragility, vulnerability and stress, which are precisely what induce tensions, instability and conflicts. This phenomenon also affects the Arctic region particularly acutely, albeit in a different dimension. The States concerned (in this case those directly concerned are the Arctic coastal States - USA, Canada, Russia, Denmark and Norway - and in a second line those that complement the Arctic Council, the five aforementioned plus Sweden, Finland and Iceland) are not in a situation of fragility. However, the consequences of climate change - in this case melting ice - will create new oceanic routes linking Europe, America and Asia and provide opportunities for exploiting resources that until now have not been possible. This new reality is already exacerbating conflicts, particularly over the delimitation of maritime borders, control and access to natural resources and the geopolitics of the new potential maritime routes.

Another highly worrying situation is water stress in the Horn of Africa. The entire sub-region has suffered the effects of climate change, particularly persistent drought and rising temperatures, as well as related erratic phenomena such as locust plagues or the increased intensity of diseases such as malaria and cholera, among others. This whole situation has a devastating effect on agriculture and livestock, leading to widespread famines, the total destabilization of ancestral ways of life, growing population movements and the resulting instability and conflicts. Attempts to mitigate this situation often end up exacerbating the instability even further, as is the case with the construction of the great Renaissance dam in Ethiopia. Downstream countries have protested vehemently, with Egypt being the most vocal. This concern is understandable since Egypt, as Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian said, almost 2500 years ago, "is a gift of the Nile". A significant reduction in the flow of the Nile waters would jeopardise tens of millions of Egyptians who live right on its banks and, to a large extent, derive their livelihoods from it, whether through fishing, livestock farming, agriculture or even tourism. It's a situation in which climate change will end up exacerbating latent instability, which could escalate into large-scale international conflicts.

In the Small Developed Insular States (SDIS) the situation is particularly acute. Some of them could literally disappear due to rising sea levels. Especially in the Pacific, many of these archipelagos, such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, Fiji, among others, due to their low



altitude in relation to sea level, have seen vast coastal areas literally disappear, due to the combined effect of erosion, poor planning and, in particular, the rise in sea level due to the melting of ice caps that is happening especially in the Arctic and Antarctic regions. This situation has led to increased instability and conflicts, which also stem from the fact that these countries are poorly prepared for these phenomena and their level of resilience is very low.

In short, we have seen that the correlation between climate change and the exacerbation of instability and conflicts indeed has a global reach. This aforementioned "multiplier effect" ends up exacerbating pre-existing situations and being a catalyst for grievances, injustices, bad governance, corruption, nepotism, abuse of power, violence, radicalism, inequities and discrimination, which lead to insecurity and destabilization. The sub-region we have taken as an example, the Central Sahel, is the prototype of this situation. Some of the poorest and most vulnerable countries in the world (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), located in an area that is one of the most affected by climate change and with all the instability and conflict triggers mentioned above. The conditions are in place for the "multiplier effect" of conflicts created by climate change to thrive here. If we add to this situation several external actors who also contribute significantly to this outcome, the result is that, unfortunately, these three countries are perhaps some of the most perfect examples of the phenomenon we have been describing.

Conclusions

According to the literature and the reports from various sources and organisations, that were mentioned above, there seems to be no doubt that climate change is very likely to have a multiplier effect on instability and conflict in societies where it already exists. Among the regions of the world where these effects appear to be most visible is the Central Sahel sub-region and the three countries mentioned above: Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The low resilience of these countries to the combined effects of prolonged droughts, sometimes interspersed with torrential rains that cause devastating floods, land degradation, loss of biodiversity, global warming and the emergence of agricultural pests and zoonoses, precisely as a result of the secondary effects of climate change, make the Central Sahel one of the world's hotspots in terms of its adverse effects.

Of course, it is not climate change that directly increases terrorism or political instability that can lead to coups, or the growing influence of Russia and the Wagner Group (Africa Corps), or the mistakes made by post-colonial France in its relations with its former colonies; but, it has a multiplier effect on pre-existing drivers of instability and grievances significantly increasing the likelihood of conflict. For example, drought destabilises the livelihoods of farmers and herders, putting their subsistence at risk; if they don't find support from the formal structures of the State, they may turn against it and join radical groups that promise to change things for the better. Or they may support alternatives, such as military juntas or the Wagner Group (Africa Corps), to the detriment of French military operations, because these have apparently been ineffective in solving their problems and unfortunately, in some cases, they have become even worse.



However, we should not be tempted to think, as many of the reports mentioned have stressed, that there will be no quick response to the eventual resolution of these conflicts, since climate change and its effects will last for decades. As has been pointed out, climate change reinforces the drivers of these conflicts, it does not cause them; therefore, we should not give up trying to break the vicious cycle of insecurity/underdevelopment/conflict, which should be one of the potential solutions for this sub-region.

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