



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



Reforming the security sector in the Sahel: Governance issues and institutional challenges

Mahamane Hamani Massaoud *

Department of International Relations, Institute of Social Sciences, Ankara Yildirim Beyazıt University, Türkiye.

International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 16(01), 1429-1436

Publication history: Received on 11 June 2025; revised on 15 July 2025; accepted on 17 July 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2025.16.1.2161>

Abstract

The Sahel region of Western Africa confronts complex challenges of governance, weak democratic institutions and persistent insecurity, making it a significant focus for Security Sector Reform (SSR). From past two decades countries like Chad, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali have fought with political instability, transnational organized crime and violent extremism. These threats have highlighted the requirement for effective, transparent and accountable governance and have exposed institutional flaws. While SSR is considered as important for enhancing the resilience of the state and democratic consolidation, its application throughout the Sahel remains constrained and fragmented by political resistance, institutional deficiencies and low trust of the public in security forces. This article analyses the governance obstacles to SSR and regional and national responses, including initiatives by the Economic Community of West African States and the G5 Sahel Joint Force. It argues that limited coordination between international and regional actors, weak civil-military associations and fragmented political stability undermine SSR efforts. The exclusion of marginalized groups and civil society further deepens public distrust and insecurity. Drawing on academic studies, recent policy reports and regional case analysis, the article identifies emerging opportunities and structural barriers for improving SSR. It stresses that in the Sahel Region, sustainable security governance requires an inclusive approach that incorporates institutional reform with human rights protection, democratic accountability and inclusive political engagement.

Keywords: Institutional Responses; West Africa; Governance; Sahel Region; Security Reform

1. Introduction

The Sahel area, extending through West and Central Africa, has emerged as a significant focal point for global security issues owing to ongoing instability and increasing violence. Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad confront a multifaceted spectrum of security issues, encompassing terrorism, armed insurgency, transnational organized crime, human trafficking, and intercommunal violence. The diminishing state authority, especially in peripheral regions, has created governance vacuums that enable extremist organizations such as Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Boko Haram to function with considerable impunity. This situation is exacerbated by fragile institutions, widespread poverty, underdevelopment, and environmental challenges like as desertification and resource shortages, which contribute to increased instability and population displacement. Attempts to stabilize the region have been obstructed by inadequate institutional capacity, feeble rule of law, political instability, and tenuous civil-military ties, resulting in a detrimental cycle of violence and fragility. Security Sector Reform (SSR) is acknowledged as an essential instrument for promoting good governance and stability in fragile democracies. Security Sector Reform (SSR) denotes a thorough process designed to improve the efficacy, accountability, and governance of security institutions, encompassing the military, police, intelligence agencies, and the judiciary, while maintaining democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law. In the Sahel, where numerous nations are experiencing democratic

* Corresponding author: Mahamane Hamani Massaoud

transitions marked by institutional instability and social divisions, SSR is especially pertinent. Democratic government cannot be established in contexts where security institutions are deficient in professionalism, accountability, or legitimacy. Without effective SSR, security agencies may become sources of insecurity owing to abusive behavior, corruption, or political intervention.

Disregarding the deficiencies within the security sector erodes public confidence in the state's democratic institutions, significantly increasing the likelihood of state failure and a return to conflict. Consequently, SSR beyond mere effective administration; it involves the state executing its regulatory responsibilities in a manner that ensures the safety of its population. The state is re-establishing its legitimacy and returning to a secure position where the likelihood of peace is significantly enhanced. This paper offers a comprehensive examination of the governance challenges faced by SSR projects in the Sahel and evaluates the national and regional institutional measures used. The objective is to elucidate how the efficacy of SSR initiatives has been compromised by the interplay of an inadequate governance structure, political instability, and frail civil-military ties.

The article examines measures used by national governments, regional entities like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the G5 Sahel, as well as international stakeholders to enhance and strengthen security governance in the Sahel. The paper analyses how efforts in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, using diverse sources such as policy reports, scholarly treatises, and case studies, are interconnected with the prevailing political dynamics of the age. The essay concludes that although several structural obstacles now obstruct efficient governance and security in the Sahel, there are indications of both new efforts and modified existing ones that may enhance accountability and efficacy in the security sector.

2. Conceptual Foundations and Global Importance of Security Sector Reform

Security Sector Reform (SSR) isn't just a technical toolkit it's a political vision. At its core, SSR refers to the policies, programs, and initiatives aimed at making a state's security institutions more effective, accountable, and legitimate. These institutions include not only the military and police, but also intelligence services, the judiciary, and other entities charged with protecting both state power and public safety. The concept gained momentum in the 1990s as part of international efforts to support post-conflict reconstruction, promote peacebuilding, and encourage democratic transitions, particularly in states emerging from prolonged crises. (1)

At the heart of SSR lies a governance-centered approach. Instead of focusing solely on efficiency or operational success, SSR frameworks especially those developed by the OECD (2) and the United Nations (3) stress a series of guiding principles

- Civilian control over the security apparatus
- Transparent management and operational clarity
- Professional conduct grounded in service, not domination
- Respect for human rights and international legal frameworks
- Participatory reform processes involving civil society, marginalized groups, and local actors

These aren't simply technical recommendations they reflect a deeper commitment to ensuring that the state serves its citizens, not the other way around. Globally, SSR has become a key pillar of post-conflict peacebuilding. In countries like Bosnia, Afghanistan, and East Timor, international interventions recognized early on that sustainable peace required more than ceasefires or elections. Reforming security institutions transforming them from instruments of fear into foundations of trust was often the first step toward rebuilding public life. It's not just about who holds the guns, but about who controls the people who do. Looking at Africa, SSR takes on a particular urgency. The legacies of colonial rule, centralized authoritarianism, and chronic political instability have left many states with highly politicized, often abusive security institutions. The breakdown in civil-military relations and the persistent erosion of the rule of law have fueled cycles of violence, mistrust, and state fragility. In response, the African Union and ECOWAS have moved to integrate SSR into their broader peace and governance strategies. But reform is rarely linear. Efforts to reshape the security sector in post-conflict African states or young democracies are not simply about building new institutions they're about rebuilding social contracts. This requires strengthening public trust, ensuring security forces are seen as protectors rather than predators, and preventing the re-emergence of authoritarian tendencies. SSR, in this sense, becomes as much a moral question as a structural one. (4)

Beyond its institutional targets, SSR is a cornerstone of broader security governance. It deals with how security is managed, monitored, and held accountable. Security governance refers to the full array of norms, processes, and

structures that ensure the sector operates in line with democratic values and public needs. Effective SSR identifies and fixes systemic flaws, modernizes outdated systems, and elevates both the capacity and credibility of security agencies. In regions facing compounded insecurity like the Sahel SSR can't function in isolation. There's a pressing need to pair it with wider institutional reforms and improved socio-economic frameworks. SSR efforts flounder without genuine political will, an engaged civil society, and a deeper commitment to address root causes such as poverty, marginalization, and legal fragmentation. SSR, then, is both a technical reform strategy and a political struggle. It reflects the tension between old structures and new visions, between state power and civic accountability. It's a reminder that stability built on coercion is fragile and that true security must be earned, not imposed. (5)

3. The Sahel Region: Security, Governance, and State Fragility

Stretching across a wide band of territory between the Sahara and the savannahs of West and Central Africa, the Sahel is less a singular region than a fragile frontier. Countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad sit at its core, but its reach touches Senegal, Mauritania, parts of Nigeria, Sudan, and Eritrea. This geographic expanse is marked by sparse populations, limited infrastructure, and loosely controlled borders. These features have long enabled both informal economies and illicit trade to flourish, but in recent years they've also created a vacuum that violent actors have rushed to fill. (6)

Much of the answer lies in historical and structural failures. Colonial-era borders were drawn with little regard for local dynamics, separating kinship groups and lumping together rival communities. Post-independence regimes inherited weak institutions and struggled to govern vast rural peripheries. Despite moments of democratic transition, political instability punctuated by coups and recurring legitimacy crises has prevented many states from consolidating inclusive governance systems or exercising consistent authority. The security threats facing the region are complex and rapidly evolving. Terrorist groups such as Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Boko Haram have exploited widespread grievances, porous borders, and failing institutions to entrench themselves. Their tactics rely on asymmetric warfare targeting soldiers, administrators, and civilians alike to destabilize national governments and undermine already fragile institutions. But extremism isn't operating in a vacuum. Armed actors often manipulate local disputes over land, ethnicity, and political power to ignite intercommunal violence. This is especially visible in Mali and Burkina Faso, where the rise of self-defense groups has added new layers of volatility. (7)

Criminal networks further complicate the picture. Human trafficking, arms smuggling, drug transit, and illicit resource extraction all thrive in zones with little government oversight. These operations don't just fund violence they challenge the very legitimacy of the state. These networks are deeply embedded in the economic fabric of certain regions, making reform both urgent and deeply complicated. The cumulative impact of these crises has been devastating. States in the Sahel face a legitimacy deficit, particularly in peripheral zones where the government is either absent or viewed with suspicion. In these areas, traditional leaders or armed actors often provide basic services and mediate disputes. The consequence is a parallel system of governance one that sometimes meets local needs but often entrenches violence and inequality. Across the region, repeated coups and contested elections have derailed democratic processes. The growing reliance on military solutions without corresponding political reforms has weakened civil-military relations and, in some cases, led to rights abuses that further alienate the population. (8)

The human toll of the crisis cannot be overstated. Millions face displacement, chronic food shortages, and diminished access to health care and education. Children grow up not just without basic services, but without trust in any formal institution. Tackling these issues demands more than security patrols or peacekeeping missions. It calls for a multi-pronged strategy strengthening institutional capacity, deepening political inclusion, reforming governance structures, and addressing the root causes of marginalization. The challenge is enormous, but so is the cost of continued inaction.

4. Governance Shortcomings and Structural Barriers to Security Sector Reform in the Sahel

It's difficult to imagine Security Sector Reform (SSR) taking root in the Sahel without confronting the region's entrenched governance problems. Reform here isn't just a question of policy it's a question of capacity, stability, and trust. Across many Sahelian states, weak administrative institutions, under-resourced bureaucracies, and poorly functioning justice systems have made even the planning stages of SSR a challenge. The absence of reliable infrastructure, a shortage of skilled personnel, and inconsistent funding all contribute to a landscape where reform efforts struggle to take hold. In rural and border regions especially, the state is nearly invisible. These are precisely the areas where insecurity thrives, and where people often turn to informal or non-state actors for protection and dispute resolution. How can reforms be implemented where the state barely exists? Political instability compounds these structural weaknesses. (9)

The past few years have seen a wave of coups and contested transitions in countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Chad interrupting democratic progress and eroding public confidence in political institutions. In these contexts, SSR becomes politically vulnerable. When military actors control transitions or justify their interventions as necessary for security, reform tends to reflect regime interests rather than public needs. Instead of building neutral and professional security institutions, SSR is co-opted reshaped to serve elite agendas or reinforce existing power structures. (10) Civil-military relations across the Sahel remain deeply problematic. The legacy of military dominance in politics still shapes contemporary governance structures. In many countries, there is a fundamental lack of clarity around who controls the security sector and how it should be held accountable. (11)

Civilian oversight mechanisms are either weak or nonexistent, while parliaments and judicial systems lack the authority and independence to check the power of security forces. As a result, military and police units often act with impunity, eroding public confidence and undermining SSR at its roots. That erosion of trust may be the most difficult obstacle of all. For many in the Sahel, the security sector is not viewed as a source of protection but as a threat. Reports of abuse, extortion, and corruption are widespread. In some communities, local militias or traditional authorities are seen as more reliable than state forces. This lack of trust isolates the state from its citizens and derails reform efforts before they can even begin. SSR, after all, isn't just about training personnel or drafting new policies it's about rebuilding the social contract between state and society. Without community engagement and public participation, that contract remains broken. (12)

The role of international actors in this space is both vital and fraught. France, the EU, the UN, and other external institutions have invested heavily in supporting SSR and stabilization in the Sahel. Their involvement brings technical expertise, funding, and political pressure but also conflicting priorities. At times, international efforts are poorly coordinated, with overlapping mandates and contradictory approaches that confuse rather than clarify reform objectives. Even well-intentioned support can be counterproductive if it sidelines local ownership or imposes imported frameworks disconnected from local realities. If SSR is to succeed in the Sahel, it cannot be reduced to a checklist imposed from abroad. It must emerge from within from the specific political, social, and historical realities of Sahelian states. That means empowering local institutions, ensuring inclusive political participation, and addressing the foundational drivers of insecurity alongside institutional reform. Anything less risks repeating a familiar pattern: ambitious programs with little sustainable impact. (13)

5. Institutional Responses, Regional Cooperation, and International Support for Security Sector Reform in the Sahel

Institutional responses to the Sahel's security crisis have been widespread, yet their depth and coherence remain contested. At the national level, governments have attempted to initiate reform despite persistent instability. In Mali, the 2012 collapse of state control in the north catalyzed a wave of SSR efforts focused on rebuilding the armed forces, reforming police institutions, and recalibrating civil-military relations. Foreign actors, particularly the EU through EUTM Mali, played a significant role in supporting these measures. Niger, facing growing insecurity along its borders, has similarly sought to professionalize its security services, while Burkina Faso introduced reforms aimed at strengthening governance structures. In the case of Burkina Faso, repeated military takeovers have halted or reversed democratic progress, making SSR efforts harder to sustain. A closer look reveals that many national SSR efforts still fall short of addressing deeper governance deficits. Reforms often emphasize technical training and operational capacity military exercises, border patrols, counterterrorism rather than addressing structural flaws such as civilian oversight, corruption, or institutional fragmentation. Many programs bypass public engagement altogether, reinforcing the idea that SSR is something done to communities rather than with them. Financial constraints, fragmented leadership, and weak accountability mechanisms further weaken these national efforts. (14)

On the regional level, cooperation has expanded in both scope and ambition. ECOWAS has long played a role in managing political crises and conflict prevention, offering frameworks for human rights, SSR, and democratic governance. The G5 Sahel, established in 2014 by five core countries, reflects a more focused regional strategy to confront terrorism, organized crime, and cross-border insecurity. Its Joint Force (FC-G5S) seeks to coordinate military responses along shared frontiers, where state authority is often weakest. Still, limited operational capacity, inconsistent political will, and funding gaps have hampered its overall impact. The African Union, through its 2013 Policy Framework on SSR, has tried to offer guidance rooted in democratic norms and human rights. Yet translating policy frameworks into actionable reforms remains an ongoing challenge. (15)

The role of international actors remains deeply embedded in the region's SSR landscape. The EU has established multiple missions EUTM Mali, EUCAP Sahel Mali and Niger providing training and advisory support to local security forces. The UN, through MINUSMA, has focused on peacekeeping, civilian protection, and stabilization in Mali.

Development partners like the United States, France, the World Bank, and the UNDP have all contributed to reform funding and capacity-building. While this international engagement has helped develop technical expertise, it has also exposed serious issues fragmented coordination, duplicated efforts, and misalignment with local priorities. Too often, externally designed programs overlook the complex political realities on the ground. (16)

What emerges is a mixed picture. There have been notable gains more funding, stronger regional coordination, and partial rehabilitation of security institutions but these gains remain fragile. Reform initiatives tend to privilege operational concerns over governance and legitimacy. Political instability continues to interrupt progress, while corruption and capacity shortages obstruct consistent implementation.

Several key limitations persist

- Reforms still prioritize short-term efficiency over long-term accountability
- Political instability and contested authority interrupt reform timelines
- Institutional fragmentation and corruption weaken reform efforts
- Civil society, particularly marginalized communities, is largely absent from SSR processes
- External support, while necessary, often undermines national ownership and sustainability

These barriers point to deeper structural issues weak democratic foundations, limited state legitimacy, and unresolved societal grievances. Addressing these problems requires more than technical reform. It demands political will, inclusive governance, and a deliberate effort to link security to justice and rights. Without that shift, SSR risks becoming a revolving door of foreign-funded initiatives with limited local impact. Isn't it time reform meant more than restructuring institutions and started rebuilding relationships between states and the people they serve.

6. Country Case Analyses: Diverse Pathways and Outcomes of Security Sector Reform in the Sahel

Security Sector Reform (SSR) in the Sahel does not follow a single trajectory. Each country's political conditions, institutional resilience, and exposure to conflict have produced distinct paths some showing cautious progress, others falling into cycles of instability and reversal. What's consistent, however, is that reform outcomes are deeply tied to local political dynamics and the broader trust between citizens and the state. Mali remains one of the most prominent and troubled cases in the region. The 2012 rebellion in the north laid bare the state's deep institutional fractures, from a fragmented security apparatus to widespread governance vacuums. In response, the government, backed by international partners, initiated SSR programs aimed at restructuring the military, professionalizing the police, and improving judicial oversight. The EU's EUTM Mali and the UN's MINUSMA were central to this effort. Yet despite these interventions, the reform process has been consistently undermined. Civilian control over the military remains weak, and public participation in shaping SSR is minimal. The 2020 and 2021 coups only deepened the crisis, raising urgent questions about the military's actual commitment to democratic accountability. Mali's SSR process today is marked by fragmented implementation, low public trust, and persistent gaps in institutional coordination. (17)

Niger, by contrast, offers a more stable if cautious example of gradual reform. Faced with significant cross-border threats from armed groups and smuggling networks, Niger has prioritized enhancing operational security, particularly at its borders. With assistance from France, the US, and the EU, the state has strengthened its military and police through targeted training, logistical support, and strategic planning. The difference in Niger lies partly in its relatively stable political environment and a more deliberate approach to building civil-military relations. There is stronger institutional engagement with oversight mechanisms, and the state has made some progress in involving civilians in SSR dialogues. Still, the central government's authority often fades in rural regions, where insecurity and distrust linger. (18)

Burkina Faso, meanwhile, has followed a turbulent and at times chaotic path. The fall of Blaise Compaoré in 2014 opened a window for reform, and early steps were taken to rebuild institutions and improve cooperation with regional actors. However, the security situation rapidly deteriorated. The rise of violent extremist groups, the spread of self-defense militias, and frequent attacks on military and civilian targets quickly overwhelmed SSR efforts. A 2022 coup further complicated matters, signaling a sharp turn away from the democratic governance SSR ideally supports. National security forces have since faced allegations of serious human rights violations, undermining the credibility of reforms and raising concerns about impunity. The state's increasing dependence on irregular forces like the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) has blurred the line between formal and informal security providers, weakening the state's monopoly on legitimate violence and complicating any path toward sustainable reform. These case studies illustrate not just the uneven progress of SSR in the Sahel, but the fragility of reform when it's disconnected from public legitimacy, democratic accountability, and inclusive governance. Each country's experience highlights a difficult reality:

reforming the security sector is not just about better training or more equipment it's about rebuilding the foundational relationship between state and society. (19)

6.1. Divergences in SSR Methodologies and Outcomes

Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso has followed markedly different trajectories each shaped by the state's internal fragility, political context, and the nature of international involvement. These aren't just variations in pace or scale. They reveal how deeply SSR outcomes depend on local political dynamics and the credibility of state institutions. Niger, comparatively, stands out for its steadier progress. The government has adopted an incremental, capacity-focused approach emphasizing professionalization, logistics, and civil-military coordination. It hasn't been without problems, but a relatively stable political environment has allowed for more consistent reforms. Mali's SSR path has been more turbulent. While supported by substantial international assistance, the reform agenda remains fragmented. A lack of national ownership, repeated coups, and weak oversight mechanisms have consistently derailed efforts. The result is a cycle where reforms are imposed from outside but never fully absorbed within. In Burkina Faso, the situation is even more complex. Political instability, growing insecurity, and heavy reliance on informal militias like the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland have blurred the boundaries between state and non-state security actors. These dynamics not only complicate command structures but also weaken public trust and democratic control.

A simplified breakdown highlights these contrasts

- Mali depends on foreign aid but struggles with legitimacy and institutional coherence
- Niger invests in capacity-building and shows greater integration of reforms
- Burkina Faso faces fragmented authority and governance challenges tied to militia reliance

That SSR cannot be treated as a generic toolkit applied uniformly across unstable regions. Success depends not just on training or funding but on embedding reform into broader frameworks of democratic governance, institutional trust, and accountable leadership. Without that, even the most technically sound reforms risk being undermined from within. (20)

7. Critical Examination: Governance, Democratic Consolidation, and the Limitations of Security Sector Reform in the Sahel

Security in the Sahel cannot be separated from politics. The region's ongoing crises reveal just how intertwined security governance is with democratic fragility. While Security Sector Reform (SSR) is often positioned as a technical solution to instability, the real barriers lie in governance failures, inconsistent implementation, and the persistent exclusion of local voices. The idea that reform alone can stabilize weak states without addressing underlying political dynamics feels increasingly hollow. Democracies rely on functioning security institutions not just strong ones, but ones that are accountable, transparent, and responsive to citizens. In the Sahel, where many states remain institutionally fragile, this balance is rarely achieved. Instead, security forces often serve elite or regime interests, and in some cases, they become political actors in their own right. Repeated military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger demonstrate how easily security institutions, when left unchecked, can derail fragile democratic processes. If a state's security forces are loyal to power rather than law, can democracy ever really take root? Even in cases like pre-crisis Niger, where incremental gains were made, the lack of deep institutional reform left democratic gains vulnerable to reversal. (21)

The Sahel's SSR failures often stem from reforms that are partial or disconnected from local political realities. Donor-driven initiatives tend to emphasize technical support more training, better equipment, new protocols without addressing why institutions fail in the first place. In Mali and Burkina Faso, this has produced reform programs that are ambitious on paper but hollow in practice. Security remains fragmented, local grievances are often ignored, and alternative security structures like militias or self-defense groups fill the void. While these groups can offer short-term relief, they often lack oversight, deepen community tensions, and further erode the state's authority. The question is no longer whether these informal actors help or hinder security, but whether their growth reflects the state's failure to earn public trust. Too many reforms stall because they don't confront political and structural realities. Superficial changes creating new oversight offices, launching donor-funded training programs rarely build lasting legitimacy. In fact, they can backfire, feeding public skepticism when people see little change in practice. When reform becomes performative, rather than transformative, it risks doing more harm than good. (22)

There's growing recognition that top-down reform models, especially those imposed by external actors, cannot succeed without deep local engagement. SSR in the Sahel must shift from being primarily technical to fundamentally political. That means involving civil society, local leaders, and marginalized communities not just as recipients, but as co-

architects of reform. A more grounded, inclusive SSR approach would draw on the knowledge of traditional authorities, women's organizations, youth groups, and religious leaders. Their inclusion doesn't just increase legitimacy it brings reforms closer to the lived experience of ordinary people. It also challenges the idea that state institutions alone can produce security, when in many parts of the Sahel, informal systems already fill that role. But for inclusion to mean more than tokenism, governments must show real political will, allocate sufficient resources, and ensure that international aid supports not supplants national priorities. Inclusive SSR also requires attention to justice systems, human rights, and long-term mechanisms for oversight. Otherwise, reform risks becoming an abstract exercise, detached from the political, social, and economic forces that shape daily life. What good is a new security protocol if it doesn't change how people experience state power? The lesson is clear: SSR cannot succeed in isolation. It must be part of a broader effort to build trust, deepen democracy, and redistribute political authority. Without that foundation, even the best-designed reforms will struggle to deliver lasting change. (23)

8. Conclusion

The persistent security crisis in the Sahel exposes the urgent need for more than just technical fixes. Security Sector Reform (SSR) must be comprehensive, accountable, and grounded in political and social realities. While national governments, regional institutions, and international partners have launched numerous initiatives in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, these efforts often fall short blocked by weak institutions, volatile politics, and widespread mistrust of security forces. Much of the reform so far has centered on training, equipment, and tactical coordination. But has this focus on operational capacity come at the expense of real governance reform? SSR that neglects institutional accountability, civilian oversight, and public inclusion risks becoming a cycle of repetition one that treats symptoms without addressing causes. This research shows that meaningful SSR in the Sahel is inseparable from broader governance transformation. Democratic consolidation, legitimacy, and social trust are not optional add-ons to reform they are its foundation. Without protecting human rights, strengthening the judiciary, and engaging communities in the process, SSR cannot produce the legitimacy or effectiveness it promises. For reform to take hold, several priorities must align, such as strengthening civilian oversight of security forces, ensuring transparent judicial processes and independent courts, building sustained partnerships with civil society and marginalized communities, and addressing the socioeconomic roots of conflict alongside institutional reform.

Regional cooperation is also essential. Initiatives under frameworks like the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS offer platforms for shared action and collective strategy but their success depends on political commitment, reliable funding, and institutional strength. Cooperation without coordination risks redundancy. Coordination without accountability risks failure. National governments, too, must invest consistently in local institutions not just to expand state presence but to make that presence credible and responsive. How can peace endure if the state remains absent or distrusted in large parts of its own territory? Military responses alone will not resolve the Sahel's complex crisis. Enduring stability demands a political solution one that integrates SSR with inclusive governance, regional solidarity, and long-term development. Only through a unified, locally grounded, and governance-focused approach can the region move beyond recurring insecurity and toward lasting peace and democratic resilience.

References

- [1] Abrahamsen R. Exporting decentered security governance: the tensions of security sector reform. *Global Crime*. 2016; 17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2016.1197507>.
- [2] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice*. OECD; 2007. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2008/02/the-oecd-dac-handbook-on-security-system-reform_g1gh8153/9789264027862-en.pdf
- [3] United Nations Inter Agency Security Sector Reform Task Force. *Security Sector Reform: Integrated Technical Guidance Notes*. United Nations; 2012. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/un_integrated_technical_guidance_notes_on_ssr_1.pdf
- [4] Egnell, R., and Haldén, P. Laudable, ahistorical and overambitious: security sector reform meets state formation theory. *Conflict, Security and Development*. 2009; 9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800802704903>.
- [5] Anderlini, S., and Conaway, C. *Security Sector Reform*. 2005
- [6] Bøås, M., and Strazzari, F. *Governance, Fragility and Insurgency in the Sahel: A Hybrid Political Order in the Making*. *The International Spectator*. 2020; 55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1835324>.

- [7] Idahosa, S., Savicheva, E., Ikhidero, S., and Adebayo, K. Regional Security Complex and Threat Dynamics of the Sahelian States. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*. 2023 <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2023-23-1-67-87>.
- [8] Mintoiba F. ecosystem of coups in West Africa: implications for Democracy and Regional Peace. *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies*. 2025 <https://doi.org/10.12700/jceas.2025.5.1.340>.
- [9] Venturi, B., and Toure, N. The Great Illusion: Security Sector Reform in the Sahel. *The International Spectator*. 2020; 55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1835326>.
- [10] Raleigh, C., Nsaibia, H., and Dowd, C. The Sahel crisis since 2012. *African Affairs*. 2020 <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adaa022>.
- [11] Elischer, S. Militaries in Sahelian Politics. *The Oxford Handbook of the African Sahel*. 2021 <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198816959.013.27>.
- [12] Venturi, B., and Toure, N. The Great Illusion: Security Sector Reform in the Sahel. *The International Spectator*. 2020; 55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1835326>.
- [13] Jayasundara-Smits, S. Bracing the wind and riding the norm life cycle: inclusive peacebuilding in the European capacity building mission in Sahel-Mali (EUCAP Sahel-Mali). *Peacebuilding*. 2018; 6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2018.1491683>.
- [14] Bagayoko, N. Explaining the failure of internationally supported defense and security reforms in Sahelian states. *Conflict, Security and Development*. 2022; 22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2022.2097776>.
- [15] Baldaro, E., and Lucia, E. Spaces of (in-)security and intervention: spatial competition and the politics of regional organizations in the Sahel. *Territory, Politics, Governance*. 2022; 12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2022.2097303>.
- [16] Plank, F., and Bergmann, J. The European Union as a Security Actor in the Sahel. *European Review of International Studies*. 2021 <https://doi.org/10.1163/21967415-08030006>.
- [17] Caparini, M. DDR and SSR Challenges in Mali. 2015 <https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.2670212>.
- [18] Wilén, N. The impact of security force assistance in Niger: meddling with borders. *International Affairs*. 2022 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa119>.
- [19] Kalfelis, M. With or Without the State: Moral Divergence and the Question of Trust in Security Assemblages in Burkina Faso. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*. 2021; 15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2021.1986255>.
- [20] Bagayoko, N. Explaining the failure of internationally supported defense and security reforms in Sahelian states. *Conflict, Security and Development*. 2022; 22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2022.2097776>.
- [21] Mintoiba, F. ecosystem of coups in West Africa: implications for Democracy and Regional Peace. *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies*. 2025 <https://doi.org/10.12700/jceas.2025.5.1.340>.
- [22] Bøås, M., and Strazzari, F. Governance, Fragility and Insurgency in the Sahel: A Hybrid Political Order in the Making. *The International Spectator*. 2020; 55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1835324>.
- [23] Jayasundara-Smits, S. Bracing the wind and riding the norm life cycle: inclusive peacebuilding in the European capacity building mission in Sahel-Mali (EUCAP Sahel-Mali). *Peacebuilding*. 2018; 6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2018.1491683>.