

Globalization of Security Threats: A Vicious Circle

Katarzyna Maniszewska 

International Relations Department, Collegium Civitas, Poland

Correspondence: Katarzyna Maniszewska (katarzyna.maniszewska@civitas.edu.pl)

Submitted: 20 May 2024 **Accepted:** 30 September 2024 **Published:** 21 November 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue “War, Economic Strife, Climate Change: Understanding Intersectional Threats to Inclusion and Security” edited by Mustapha Sheikh (University of Leeds), Roland Zarzycki (Collegium Civitas), and Leah Burch (Liverpool Hope University), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i409>

Abstract

Statistical data and research suggest a strong correlation between various types of threats, radiating and enhancing each other: terrorism, violent conflicts, ecological threats, and political and economic instabilities. The most affected are the most vulnerable: countries of the Global South, and within those the underprivileged communities and peoples, including Indigenous populations. In this article, the interdependence of various types of threats will be presented based on data from the Global Terrorism Index, the Global Peace Index, the Ecological Threats Report, and the World Bank database. As of November 2023, according to World Bank estimates, over 1 billion people live in fragile and conflict-affected situations. At the same time, violent conflicts are the primary drivers of terrorism (according to the Global Terrorism Index, in 2023, over 90% of attacks and 98% of terrorism deaths took place in countries in conflict). Moreover, data suggest that ecological threats and resource scarcity can contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of violent conflicts and terrorism. Among the case studies, the situation in the Sahel region will be analyzed with a particular focus on Burkina Faso—one of the least developed countries in the world that, as of 2024, is estimated as the country the most impacted by terrorism in the world. The author hypothesizes that the interdependence of security threats requires addressing those threats in a systemic way (with coordinated actions at local, national, and international levels) to effectively counter the negative impact on societies.

Keywords

Burkina Faso; least developed countries; peace; terrorism; the Sahel; war

1. Introduction

In March 2023, the United Nations estimated the number of people living in conflict-affected situations at 2 billion. The numbers are on the rise, and the United Nations stated that the world is experiencing the highest

number of violent conflicts since World War II (United Nations, 2022). The World Bank, on the other hand, estimates the number of people living in “fragile and conflict-affected situations” to be 1 billion (the latest data for the year 2022). The difference lies in the methodologies of calculations. However, based on the data provided by both institutions, we can state that a) the number of people and countries in conflict-affected situations is on the rise, and b) at least one-eighth of the world’s population lives in conflict-affected situations.

The statistical data suggest a correlation between various threats that affect human security. In this article, the author hypothesizes that interdependence of security threats requires systemically addressing those threats (with coordinated actions at local, national, and international levels) to counter the negative impact on societies effectively.

In the first part of the article, selected threats to human security will be presented based on statistical data aggregated by the World Bank, the United Nations, and the non-governmental Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) that produces the Global Peace Index (GPI), the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), and the Ecological Threat Report (ETR). Adopting the descriptive and correlational methods of research, the author will analyze violent conflicts, terrorism, and ecological threats, and cross-check with the list of least developed countries (LDCs) in the world as identified by the United Nations.

In the second part of this article, the situation in Burkina Faso will be highlighted. As one of the countries where various types of threats are concentrated, it presents a suitable case study to, on the one hand, analyze the interdependence of security threats and on the other seek sustainable solutions that could be adapted and adopted in various countries.

2. Least Developed Countries

The LDC category was introduced by the United Nations in 1971. Since then, the United Nations has identified LDCs as the “poorest and weakest segment” of the international community. There are three criteria to assess a country as one of the least developed: income (per capita below USD\$1,018), a low score on the Human Assets Index (HAI, which takes into account literacy rate, health and education outcomes, under-five mortality rate, maternal mortality, adult literacy rate, and gender parity for secondary school enrolment), and economic and environmental vulnerability (here, the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index [EVI] is taken into account; see United Nations, 2024a).

As of 2024, there are 45 countries listed as a LDC:

1. Afghanistan
2. Angola
3. Bangladesh
4. Benin
5. Burkina Faso
6. Burundi
7. Cambodia
8. Central African Republic
9. Chad

10. Comoros
11. Democratic Republic of Congo
12. Djibouti
13. Eritrea
14. Ethiopia
15. Gambia
16. Guinea
17. Guinea-Bissau
18. Haiti
19. Kiribati
20. Lao People's Democratic Republic
21. Lesotho
22. Liberia
23. Madagascar
24. Malawi
25. Mali
26. Mauritania
27. Mozambique
28. Myanmar
29. Nepal
30. Niger
31. Rwanda
32. Sao Tome and Principe
33. Senegal
34. Sierra Leone
35. Solomon Islands
36. Somalia
37. South Sudan
38. Sudan
39. Timor Leste
40. Togo
41. Tuvalu
42. Uganda
43. United Republic of Tanzania
44. Yemen
45. Zambia

The majority (33 out of 45) are located in the African continent. The United Nations estimates that LDCs are home to 40% of the world's poor. At the same time, LDCs account for only 13% of the world population. Among those countries, some are rich in natural resources, including oil, gold, cobalt, lithium, and tantalum—particularly in Africa. In general, the United Nations estimates that the African continent is home to some 30% of the world's mineral reserves, 8% of the world's natural gas, and 12% of the world's oil reserves (UN Environment Programme, n.d.). Examples include the DRC (about 63% of the world's cobalt production), Rwanda (the world's largest producers of tantalum), and Mali, one of the world's top gold

producers (Al Jazeera Staff, 2022). Even though some LDCs are rich in natural resources, foreign direct investments are scarce in LDCs—below 1% FDI. Below 1% is also the share in global trade by those countries. LDC populations are also underprivileged in terms of access to technologies. According to UN estimates, only one-fifth has access to the Internet, leaving millions excluded from access to digital media and services (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2021).

Most LDCs share a similar historical background related to postcolonial history and inherited challenges stemming from the colonial period and conflicts fueled by the colonial “divide and rule” policy. Violence cascading into war (and, potentially, terrorism) is one of the consequences (Parashar & Schulz, 2021).

As previously mentioned, the LDC category was created in 1971 during the 26th session of the United Nations General Assembly. In the first list, 25 countries were included: Afghanistan, Benin, Bhutan, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen. The criteria have been expanded over the decades. In 1971, the original criteria were somewhat limited compared to today’s multi-dimensional assessments. In 1971, LDCs were defined as countries with deficient levels of per capita gross domestic product facing the most severe obstacles to development; GDP per capita, adult literacy rate, and the share of manufacturing in GDP were considered. Today, the criteria set is more complex. LDCs are defined as low-income countries suffering from the most severe structural impediments to sustainable development. Gross national income (GNI) per capita, the HAI, and the EVI are all taken into account. Within HAI, attention is paid to the following criteria:

- Under-five mortality rate
- Prevalence of stunting
- Maternal mortality ratio
- Lower secondary school completion rate
- Adult literacy rate
- Gender parity index for lower secondary school completion

EVI indicators are as follows:

- Remoteness and landlockedness
- Merchandise export concentration
- Share of agriculture, forestry, and fishing in GDP
- Instability of exports of goods and services
- Share of population in low-elevated coastal zones
- Share of the population living in drylands
- Victims of disasters
- Instability of agricultural production

Despite the change in the criteria to better reflect the current stages of development, most of the countries included in 1971 are still among the LDCs. From the original list, only four countries graduated from the LDC status in over 40 years: Bhutan (in 2023), Botswana (in 1994), Maldives (in 2011), and Samoa (in 2014). Lao People’s Democratic Republic is expected to graduate in 2026.

More countries were included over the past decades. The overall picture is far from optimistic: More countries are joining the LDC group than are successfully overcoming the development barriers. One factor that hampers development significantly is violent conflict (Cortez & Kim, 2012).

3. Conflicts

The second category that is helpful in examining the interdependence of security threats and their impact on societies is “countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations” as defined by the World Bank. The list overlaps with the LDCs to a large extent. Statistically violent conflicts are more common in “poor countries—seven out of ten of the poorest countries in the world are undergoing or have recently experienced some sort of civil war” (Stewart, 2008, p. 4). In the 90s, Auvinen conducted research on a sample of 70 less developed countries in 1981–1989. One of the conclusions was that the extent of political conflict varies directly, among other factors, with poor economic performance and is inversely proportional to the level of economic development (Auvinen, 1997). Jeníček and Grófová (2014) identified a principal cause of conflict in food security in LDCs and saw food security as one of the fundamental requirements for sustainable peace.

Is the conflict situation the factor causing these challenges, or are the severe challenges resulting in conflict? Cortez and Kim (2012) examined whether the inclusion of criteria directly linked to the conflict would be appropriate in better assessing the least developed status of the countries. The conclusion is no. “Adding conflict indicators is unlikely to introduce changes in country classification,” they write in the abstract of their report. In addition, they point out the fact that non-conflict LDCs have, on average, higher GNI and HAI scores than conflict LDCs; however, at the same time, those higher scores do not necessarily imply the absence of conflict (Cortez & Kim, 2012). It could be extrapolated to the geopolitical situation: Not all countries in conflict (including countries that are, in fact, at war) are among LDC or developing countries. As Stewart (2007, p. 410) noted, “violent conflict, of course, is not confined to poor countries, even though its incidence is greatest among them.”

The World Bank (2024a) maintains a list of fragile countries affected by conflict. Fragile countries are defined as experiencing one or more of the following situations:

- They have the weakest institutional and policy environment;
- There is the presence of a UN Department of Peace Operation, as this reflects a decision by the international community that a significant investment is needed to maintain peace and stability;
- There are flights across borders of 2,000 or more per 100,000 population who are internationally regarded as refugees in need of international protection;
- They are not in medium- or high-intensity conflict, as such countries have moved beyond “fragility.”

Countries in high-intensity conflict are defined by the World Bank (2024a) as those with (a) an absolute number of conflict deaths above 250 according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, n.d.) and 150 according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, n.d.), and (b) a number of conflict deaths relative to the population above 10 per 100,000 according to both ACLED and UCDP, reflecting widespread and intense violence across many parts of the country (see also Table 1).

Table 1. List of fragile and conflict-affected situations for 2024.

Conflict	Institutional and social fragility
Afghanistan	Burundi
Burkina Faso	Chad
Cameroon	Comoros
Central African Republic	Congo, Republic of
Congo, Democratic Republic of	Eritrea
Ethiopia	Guinea-Bissau
Iraq	Haiti
Mali	Kiribati
Mozambique	Kosovo
Myanmar	Lebanon
Niger	Libya
Nigeria	Marshall Islands
Somalia	Micronesia, Federated States of
South Sudan	Papua New Guinea
Sudan	São Tomé and Príncipe
Syrian Arab Republic	Solomon Islands
Ukraine	Timor-Leste
West Bank and Gaza (territory)	Tuvalu
Yemen	Venezuela, RB
	Zimbabwe

Source: World Bank (2024a).

According to the Classification of Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations, 20 countries listed by the World Bank are located on the African continent, including most of the Sahel countries. The Sahel is understood here not in geographical terms but as a geopolitical region in Africa where ten countries are located: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal (United Nations, n.d.-a).

When comparing the categories of LDCs and that of “conflicts and fragile situations,” it is already visible that the Sahel region (although not uniform and with significant development differences between some of the Sahel countries) is represented in both: the least developed and conflicts affected. In this article, a closer look is taken at the Sahel as the situation is rapidly deteriorating in the region, as shown by reports by the IEP.

The data supporting the statement that the situation is rapidly deteriorating can be found, among other sources, in the Global Peace Index (GPI). The GPI, issued annually by the IEP, ranks 163 independent states and territories according to their level of peacefulness. According to the findings of the GPI 2023, the least peaceful countries are Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Russia, Ukraine, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, Mali, and the Central African Republic. In the group of 30 countries with the lowest levels of peacefulness in the world, there are also: Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Eritrea (IEP, 2023a). In addition, the Sahel region has witnessed a rise in violent conflict in the past 15 years, including terrorism. At the same time, the GPI notes that the geopolitical rivalries, foremostly between France and Russia could hamper efforts to address the terrorism crisis in the Sahel (IEP, 2023b).

4. Terrorism

In February 2024, the IEP published its annual Global Terrorism Index (GTI) report. The report provides a comprehensive summary of the key global trends and patterns in the development of terrorism. It assesses the impact of terrorism on a given country, taking into account the total number of terrorist incidents in a given year, the total number of fatalities caused by terrorists in a given year, the total number of injuries caused by terrorists in a given year, and total number of hostages caused by terrorists in a given year. It also includes the dimension of the five-year average, which helps highlight the psychological effect of terrorism over time (IEP, 2024a).

Terrorism is a challenging term to define. In 1984, Schmid analyzed over 100 definitions of terrorism, examining similarities and differences and in 2023 in a report (Schmid, 2023); Polish researcher Jałoszyński (2001) counted over 200 definitions of terrorism. The definition proposed by Hoffman is that terrorism is a deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change (Hoffman, 2006). The psychological effect of terrorism was highlighted frequently in research, with researchers noting the significant role of the media for the terrorists to achieve one of their main goals, which is instilling fear. Jenkins (1974) noticed that phenomenon already in the 70s when he compared terrorism to theatre, stating that terrorist attacks are often staged in order to attract media attention.

Psychological effect with embedded use of media is among the main criteria for defining terrorism (main criteria, called the “sine qua non conditions” that must be met in order to define an act and/or actor as terrorist) identified in this article, next to violence, illegality, and ideological motivation (Maniszewska, 2024). Not underestimating the definitional challenges and elusive character of the phenomenon, this article will adopt the definition proposed by the GTI as the GTI will be the primary source of data analyzed in the research.

The GTI defines terrorism as:

The systematic threat or use of violence, by non-state actors, whether for or in opposition to established authority, to communicate a political, religious or ideological message to a group larger than the victim group, by generating fear and so altering (or attempting to alter) the behaviour of the larger group. (IEP, 2023a, p. 6)

According to the GTI 2023, deaths by terrorism in the Sahel accounted for 43% of the global total for 2022; for the year 2023, the GTI 2024 assesses that the deaths in the Sahel accounted for 47% of the world total (which represents a rise, despite of the fact, that in the same year, the deadliest terrorist attack was perpetrated by Hamas in Israel, and claimed over 1,000 victims). As a comparison, in 2007, the statistics for the Sahel countries amounted to a mere 1% of terrorism-caused deaths (IEP, 2023a).

The 2024 GTI report shows that terrorism is rising and has become more geographically concentrated (IEP, 2024). The Sahel remained the world’s epicenter of terrorism. Burkina Faso was assessed as the country most impacted by terrorism, followed by Israel. Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, was unprecedented in scale and, in fact, could be statistically only compared to the 9/11 attacks on the United States. Here, it must

be underlined that the author of this article understands the pitfalls of judging the risk level posed by terrorism based on statistics only. Terrorism is a complex phenomenon directly affecting societies on various levels and having a lasting psychological impact. However, the statistical data help present and understand trends in the development of terrorism, including its geographical dimension, which may be crucial for a holistic response to today's global and interconnected security threats.

In 2023, the lethality of terrorism grew; at the same time, the number of countries experiencing terrorist attacks, as well as the number of attacks, declined. In total, in 2023, deaths from terrorism rose by 22%: 8,352 people died in terrorist attacks (in 2022, as stated by the GTI 2023, 6,701 deaths were from terrorism).

The top 10 countries most impacted by terrorism identified in the GTI 2024 are:

1. Burkina Faso
2. Israel
3. Mali
4. Pakistan
5. Syria
6. Afghanistan
7. Somalia
8. Nigeria
9. Myanmar
10. Niger

The case of the Sahel, especially Burkina Faso, shows how interconnected terrorism is with other types of threats (political, economic instability, ecological challenges). When the first Global Terrorism Index was published in 2012, covering data for 2011, Burkina Faso was placed at the end of the ranking in the group of countries with the lowest terrorism impact, assessed at 0.0. Burkina Faso went up to the top of the GTI ranking in just 14 years (Maniszewska, 2024).

The GTI 2024 highlights the interdependence of violent conflicts, terrorism, and ecological threats but also fully-fledged links to organized crime visible in the Sahel. Further, instability in the Sahel is fueled by Russia's support of the Wagner Group operating in the region, including Burkina Faso, where the presence of the Wagner Group was identified in November 2023 (Olech, 2024).

5. Environmental Security

The Ecological Threat Report (ETR) analyzes ecological threats in 221 independent states and territories. Like the GPI and the GTI, the ETR is also published by the IEP (2023c). The ETR assesses threats relating to food insecurity, water risk, natural disasters, and demographic pressure. The categories are directly related to drivers of conflicts and are classified by severity from very low to severe. As it does not refer to countries only but to regions, a straightforward comparison is not possible in many countries (where different regions present different levels of ecological resilience). When it comes to the Sahel, however, the comparison is relatively simple. Sub-Saharan Africa has the worst global resilience, and ecological threats are considerably

higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in any other region: 42 countries face severe food insecurity and almost four billion people live in areas with high or severe food insecurity, with the majority in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the water risk (measured by the percentage of the population that has access to safe drinking water) is also the highest in sub-Saharan Africa (IEP, 2023c).

The ecological threats, according to the ETR, increase the risk of conflict: A 25% increase in food insecurity, as measured by the ETR, increases the risk of conflict by 36%; a 25% increase in water risk increases the risk of conflict by 18% and natural disasters increase the risk of conflict by 21%. The ETR states that the Sahel is the region with the most significant impact of ecological threats and is especially prone to conflict in the aftermath of a natural disaster. Such impact may rise in the future with climate change. However, the authors of the ETR also state that the impact of climate change on conflict is still under-researched, and many factors can contribute to the development of conflicts. In addition, once conflicts develop, one of the consequences is the forced displacement of people (IEP, 2023c).

Further, it is essential to emphasize that ecological threats and resource scarcity can contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of violent conflicts and terrorism. Climate change, water scarcity, food insecurity, and competition over natural resources can exacerbate existing social tensions, create new ones, and provide favorable conditions for radicalization. Conflict and environmental degradation aggravate each other. The United Nations (“On International Day,” 2014) estimated in 2014 that 40% of the internal conflicts over the past 60 years were related to natural resources. Moreover, conflicts related to natural resources and/or environmental degradation are twice as likely to return to violence or become “re-wars” within five years (European Commission—Competence Centre on Foresight, 2020). Furthermore, research indicates that violent conflicts and wars have a significant ecological impact (Weir, 2020), deteriorating the environment, and the vicious cycle becomes evident. It is a security system whose elements need to be addressed systemically. Even if more research is still needed with respect to the links between environmental stress, such as desertification of land in Sahel countries (United Nations, 2022), and mass migrations or conflicts, the data suggest it does lead to increased instabilities.

When we compare 2023 data between the ETR and the GPI, it becomes apparent how security threats amplify each other: Violent conflicts, ecological threats, and terrorism are interconnected. As previously detailed, the epicenter of terrorism shifted in recent years to sub-Saharan Africa (prior to that, South Asia was the most impacted region). The GTI 2024 confirmed that the Sahel countries are among the states most affected by terrorism.

6. Burkina Faso as Case Study

A passage from the Lonely Planet Guide on Africa published in 2013 reads:

Burkina Faso stands out as a beacon of stability in a region rocked by insecurity. Despite widespread riots in 2011, the country managed to steer itself back on course and held peaceful municipal and legislative elections in December 2012. (Lonely Planet et al., 2013, p. 233)

In just ten years, the country’s security situation has deteriorated dramatically.

This landlocked country in the Western part of the Sahel gained independence from France in 1960—the Historical Year of Africa. After several brutal military *coup d'état* and failed democratization efforts, the last coups (two separate coups in 2022) led to the ousting of the democratically elected president Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, and the country is currently ruled by a junta that enjoys the support of the Russian Federation.

Freedom House (2023) also confirms a dramatic deterioration in the security situation in Burkina Faso. In the Freedom House Index, Burkina Faso's status declined from “partly free” to “not free” due to the effects of two successive military coups, including the suspension of the constitution and dissolution of the legislature, and an expanding conflict with Islamist militant groups. The country has over 22 million citizens and is predominantly Muslim (Central Intelligence Agency, 2024). It is one of the LDCs in the world, is highly agrarian, has a low-income economy, and has limited natural resources. Burkina Faso is home to over 60 ethnic groups. Some of the indigenous peoples, especially pastoralists, are subject to discrimination and are targeted by both jihadist terrorists as well as anti-terrorist militias (Diallo, 2021).

In terms of ecologic resilience, the country performs extremely poorly. On a scale of 1 (*low*) to 5 (*severe*), data from 2023 used for the ETR for Burkina Faso registers an overall score of 5—food insecurity: 4.82, natural disasters: 2.7, demographic pressure: 5, water risk: 5 (IEP, 2023c).

Although the country is characterized as having limited resources (World Bank, 2024b), Burkina Faso still has a mining sector with gold production. Also, in 2023, lithium was found by the Australian mining company Red Rock Resources, which invested in Burkina Faso in 2008 and was primarily focused on gold mining (Jalloh, 2023; Red Rock Resources, n.d.). That said, gold production dropped due to insecurity, and the prognosis by the World Bank states that economic growth depends on security reinforcement. If the situation does not deteriorate further, growth could slowly rise, driven by recovering mining, agricultural production, and service sector growth. However, given the circumstances discussed in this article, further escalation of violence is more probable in the upcoming years.

In 2023, Burkina Faso became the country with the highest impact from terrorism for the first time, with deaths from terrorism increasing by 68% to 1,907 (IEP, 2024). Globally, the number of victims is 8,352. In Burkina Faso, an especially vulnerable region is the three-border areas (TBAs) with Niger and Mali—both countries are also struggling with deteriorating security.

Although the case study presented in this article is Burkina Faso, it is worth noting that the security challenges radiated throughout the region and the developments in neighboring Mali played a central role in deteriorating security in Burkina Faso. Operation Barkhane started in 2014 with the primary goal of countering Islamist terrorists in the region and aimed at eventually leading to the self-resilience of Sahel countries (Olech, 2023). The operation did not succeed; moreover, the withdrawal of French troops from Mali in 2022 provided ample opportunity for not only jihadist groups but also other global players. Russian military advisers arrived in Mali in 2021; through the Wagner Group, Moscow was strengthening its military influence in the region, capitalizing on the worsening of relations between the West and Sahelian countries (Stronski, 2023).

Here, it is also important to note that TBAs have been identified as challenging to control and have emerged as centers of the crime–terror nexus. It is not limited to the TBA Burkina Faso–Mali–Niger; other examples

include the maritime border between the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, a transit hub for illegal goods, including weapons. As the authors of the RAND Corporation's report *Non-Traditional Threats and Maritime Domain Awareness in the Tri-Border Area of Southeast Asia: The Coast Watch System of the Philippines* stated, it presents the "principal logistical corridor for local and transnational terrorist groups" (Rabasa & Chalk, 2012, p. 3). This concept may be extrapolated to other security-sensitive tri-border areas, such as the TBA Paraguay–Argentina–Brazil (US Department of State, 2022).

There are several reasons why TBAs become hubs for criminal and terrorist activities. They include (but are not limited to) topographical factors related to challenging geographical features, overlapping jurisdictions, and the resulting possible legal loopholes, but also the history of conflicts between involved countries and regions and the existent cultural and linguistic diversity, which can complicate law enforcement efforts (Maniszewska, 2024). The GTI 2024 states a clear correlation between the impact of terrorism and the level of organized criminal activity; this correlation is visible in the Sahel, with artisanal gold mining being an example in Burkina Faso. Gold, being difficult to trace and highly valuable, is a profitable business for organized crime and terrorists who look for funding sources, and jihadists getting access to gold mining revenue has been identified as a significant issue by the government of Burkina Faso, which tried in 2022 to limit artisanal gold mines (IEP, 2024).

Research by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) identifies two main issues for Burkina Faso that hamper development, stability, peace, and social cohesion: (a) the exacerbation of conflicts over natural resources and (b) the rapid development of insecurity (FAO, 2021). In addition, high levels of poverty, inequality, unemployment, poor leadership, and illiteracy present favorable conditions for extremists to operate, conducive to recruitment to terrorist organizations (Isilow & Basaran, 2023).

7. Conclusion

LDCs are the most fragile segment of the international community, struggling with economic and societal issues. They are especially prone to violent conflicts and radicalization leading to terrorism. Within LDCs, the Sahel countries emerged in recent years as the epicenter of terrorism, closely related to organized crime. It severely hampers development efforts. However, it is unclear whether the conflicts are the result or the cause of other threats to human security. They are intertwined and interconnected and form a vicious cycle that is challenging to break. Only four countries "graduated" from the LDC list over the past 40 years.

Regarding the practical application of sustainable solutions, the author believes that all the recovery plans should be elaborated in close cooperation with the countries concerned, including representatives of civil society organizations. The plans could be divided into three phases: short-term, medium-term, and long-term.

Short-term solutions that could be implemented relatively quickly involve some of the already existing and discussed proposals, such as sustainable farming innovations, for instance, sustainable shea butter production in Mali (Ellerbeck, 2023), and coordination of existing aid and development programs, such as the UNDP Sahel Resilience Development Project, funded by Sweden (United Nations, n.d.-b). Mid-term solutions could include increasing access to education and digital connectivity and investing in infrastructure (van Trotsenburg, 2021), and should be aligned with actions aimed at strengthening civil society, which can

translate into increased societal resilience. Long-term solutions could include systemic water management and agriculture transformation.

These are only examples of actions that could be undertaken; more research and evidence-based solutions are needed. The main challenge the author sees in ensuring the buy-in from the international community is acknowledging its responsibility towards the LDCs, which should translate into enhanced economic and knowledge-transfer assistance.

The case of Burkina Faso shows how interconnected economic, societal, and security issues are. It is a case highlighting the cross-border character of threats with the TBA Niger–Mali–Burkina Faso discussed in the article. More research is needed on the direct correlations between different types of threats, which could provide valuable insights as to where to put most efforts to leverage and maximize the effect of actions (for instance, international aid efforts). At the same time, the struggles of LDCs to overcome their challenges also support the hypothesis that the issues need to be addressed systemically, involving actors at local, national, and international levels in order to ensure sustainable solutions and protect the most vulnerable groups.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

- Al Jazeera Staff. (2022, February 15). Mapping Africa's natural resources. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/2/20/mapping-africas-natural-resources>
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data. (n.d.). *ACDL Explorer*. <https://acleddata.com/explorer>
- Auvinen, J. (1997). Political conflict in less developed countries 1981–89. *Journal of Peace Research*, 34(2), 177–195. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343397034002005>
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2024). *The world factbook—Burkina Faso*. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burkina-faso>
- Cortez, A. L., & Kim, N. (2012). *Conflict and the identification of the least developed countries: Theoretical and statistical considerations* (CDP Background Paper No. 13). United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <https://www.un.org/ldcportal/content/conflict-and-identification-least-developed-countries-theoretical-and-statistical>
- Diallo, I. (2021). *Indigenous World 2021: Burkina Faso*. IWGIA. <https://www.iwgia.org/en/burkina-faso/3998-iw-2021-burkina-faso.html>
- Ellerbeck, S. (2023). *These start-ups are helping to make life in the Sahel more sustainable*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/03/sustainable-farming-innovations-sahel>
- European Commission—Competence Centre on Foresight. (2020). *Environmental security*. https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/topic/changing-security-paradigm/environmental-security_en
- Food and Agriculture Organization. (2021). *Burkina Faso: Analysis of conflicts over the exploitation of natural resources*. <https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1440560>
- Freedom House. (2023). *Freedom in the world—Burkina Faso*. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/burkina-faso/freedom-world/2023>
- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside terrorism*. Columbia University Press.
- Institute for Economics and Peace. (2023a). *Global Terrorism Index 2023: Measuring the impact of terrorism*. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GTI-2023-web-170423.pdf>

- Institute for Economics and Peace. (2023b). *Global Peace Index 2023: Measuring peace in a complex world*. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/GPI-2023-Web.pdf>
- Institute for Economics and Peace. (2023c). *Ecological Threat Report 2023: Analysing ecological threats, resilience & peace*. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ETR-2023-web-261023.pdf>
- Institute for Economics and Peace. (2024). *Global Terrorism Index 2024: Measuring the impact of terrorism*. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf>
- Isilow, H., & Basaran, E. (2023, October 11). Paradox of Africa's Sahel: Rich in minerals but in the grip of grinding poverty. *Anadolu Agency*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/paradox-of-africas-sahel-rich-in-minerals-but-in-the-grip-of-grinding-poverty/3015838#>
- Jalloh, A. (2023, July 4). Burkina finds lithium in Cascades region. *APA News*. <https://apanews.net/burkina-finds-lithium-in-cascades-region>
- Jałoszyński, K. (2001). *Zagrożenie terroryzmem w wybranych krajach Europy Zachodniej oraz w Stanach Zjednoczonych*. Akademia Obrony Narodowej.
- Jeniček, V., & Grófová, S. (2014). Least developed countries—Characteristics. *Agricultural Economics—Czech*, 60(2), 65–73.
- Jenkins, B. M. (1974). *International terrorism: A new kind of warfare*. RAND Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P5261.html>
- Lonely Planet, Richmond, S., Butler, S., Clammer, P., Corne, L., Fitzpatrick, M., Holden, T., Lee, J., Smith, H., & Wheeler, D. (2013). *Africa*. Lonely Planet.
- Maniszewska, K. (2024). *Towards a new definition of terrorism. Challenges and perspectives in a shifting paradigm*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58719-1>
- Olech, A. (2023). French Operation Barkhane in Africa—Success or failure? *Stosunki Międzynarodowe—International Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.12688/stomiedintrelat.17737.1>
- Olech, A. (2024). The Wagner Group in Africa: The sham battle of Russian mercenaries against terrorism. *Terroryzm—Studia, Analizy, Prewencja*, 2024(5), 273–309. <https://doi.org/10.4467/27204383TER.24.010.19398>
- On International Day, UN urges protection of environment from ravages of war. (2014, November 6). *UN News*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/11/482922>
- Parashar, S., & Schulz, M. (2021). Colonial legacies, postcolonial 'selfhood' and the (un)doing of Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, 42(5), 867–881. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1903313>
- Rabasa, A., & Chalk, P. (2012). *Non-traditional threats and maritime domain awareness in the tri-border area of Southeast Asia: The coast watch system of the Philippines*. RAND Corporation.
- Red Rock Resources. (n.d.). *Faso minerals limited*. <https://www.rrrplc.com/projects-and-investments/gold/faso-minerals-limited>
- Schmid, A. P. (2023). *Defining terrorism*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-03/Schmidt%20-%20Defining%20Terrorism_1.pdf
- Stewart, F. (2007, July 9–10). *Horizontal inequalities and conflict: An introduction and some hypotheses* [Paper presentation]. Conflict Prevention and Peaceful Development: Policies to Reduce Inequality and Exclusion—A Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE) Policy Conference, Oxford, UK. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08bfc40f0b64974000f00/conferencepaper1.pdf>
- Stewart, F. (2008). *Horizontal inequalities and conflict understanding group violence in multiethnic societies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stronski, P. (2023). *Russia's growing footprint in Africa's Sahel region*. Carnegie Endowment. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/02/russias-growing-footprint-in-africas-sahel-region?lang=en>

- UN Environment Programme. (n.d.). *Our work in Africa*. <https://www.unep.org/regions/africa/our-work-africa>
- United Nations. (n.d.-a). *The Sahel: Land of opportunities*. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/sahel>
- United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.-b). *The Sahel resilience project*. <https://www.undp.org/africa/sahel-resilience-project>
- United Nations. (2022). *Bringing dry land in the Sahel back to life*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1110322>
- United Nations. (2024a). *Creation of the LDC category and timeline of changes to LDC membership and criteria*. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/creation-of-the-ldc-category-and-timeline-of-changes-to-ldc-membership-and-criteria.html>
- United Nations. (2024b). *The least developed country category: 2024 country snapshots*. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/2024-Snapshots.pdf>
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization. (2021). *Propelling LDCs in the digital age: A 4IR perspective for sustainable development*. https://hub.unido.org/sites/default/files/publications/Propelling%20LDCs%20in%20the%20Digital%20Age_2021_EN_0.pdf
- Uppsala Conflict Data Program. (n.d.). *Countries in conflict view*. <https://ucdp.uu.se>
- US Department of State. (2022). *Country reports on terrorism 2022*. <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2022>
- van Trotsenburg, A. (2021, February 17). *Towards a more sustainable future in the Sahel Region*. *World Bank Blogs*. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/nasikiliza/towards-more-sustainable-future-sahel-region>
- Weir, D. (2020). *How does war damage the environment?* Conflict and Environment Observatory. <https://ceobs.org/how-does-war-damage-the-environment>
- World Bank. (2024a). *Classification of fragile and conflict-affected situations*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/brief/classification-of-fragile-and-conflict-affected-situations>
- World Bank. (2024b). *The World Bank in Burkina Faso*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burkinafaso/overview>

About the Author



Katarzyna Maniszewska is an expert at the Terrorism Research Centre and lecturer at Collegium Civitas, Warsaw, Poland. She holds a PhD from the University of Warsaw. Her research and teaching focus on the development of terrorism, extremism prevention, and interdependence of security threats. As visiting scholar, she held lectures at West Virginia University, the Philippine Public Safety College, the Indonesia Military University (UNJANI), among others. Awarded the Kosciuszko Foundation Fellowship in 2024, she conducted research under the Program on Extremism, at George Washington University.