

## TI-DS POLICY BRIEF

# THE COMMON DENOMINATOR: HOW CORRUPTION IN THE SECURITY SECTOR FUELS INSECURITY IN WEST AFRICA

‘It is little surprise that six out of the ten lowest-scoring countries in the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)<sup>1</sup> are also among the ten least peaceful countries in the 2020 Global Peace Index.<sup>2</sup>’

Corruption in the security sector has a detrimental impact both on the security apparatus itself and on wider peace and security, by fuelling tensions and adding to conflict and instability.<sup>2</sup> Quantitative studies have underscored how corruption and state instability are correlated, with states dominated by narrow patronage-based systems more susceptible to instability.<sup>3, 4</sup> It is little surprise that six out of the 10 lowest-scoring countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2019 are also among the 10 least peaceful countries in the Global Peace Index 2020.<sup>5, 6</sup> Corruption undermines the efficiency of security forces, damages populations’ conception of the legitimacy of central authorities and feeds a sense of disillusionment, which threatens the social contract, and ultimately the rule of law.<sup>7</sup> In some situations, corruption can also facilitate the expansion of non-state and extremist groups and has become one of the lynchpins of recruitment narratives, which position these groups as a legitimate alternative to corrupt governments and elites.<sup>8</sup>

### Box 1. Corruption: What’s in a name?

Transparency International defines corruption as the “abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. This definition includes an element of subversion or illegitimate use of resources meant for a particular purpose to further another goal. It involves a benefit that should not have been obtained, as well as harm to someone who was entitled to a benefit they did not receive. When applied to the public sector, it entails expectations and norms being flouted due to misuse of a public (often state) system for a private (individual or group) benefit, rather than public good. If repeated regularly, it leads to the degradation of a system meant to benefit the public into one that benefits certain groups to the detriment of others.

#### Corrupt practices include:

- bribery, most readily identified as a form of corruption
- nepotism and favouritism in hiring and promotions
- embezzlement of (state) funds
- extortion and sextortion
- electoral fraud

#### The scale of corruption

- petty: low-level bribery and influence peddling
- grand: affecting institutional processes such as procurement
- kleptocracy and state capture: the repurposing of entire state apparatus for personal or group enrichment

<sup>1</sup> Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2019, available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/results/table>

<sup>2</sup> Transparency International Defence and Security, *The Fifth Column: Understanding the Relationship between Corruption and Conflict*, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> P. Le Billion, “Buying Peace or Fuelling War: The Role of Corruption in Armed Conflict”, *Journal of International Development*, No. 15, p. 417, 17 April 2003.

<sup>4</sup> P. Mauro, “The Effects of Corruption on Growth, Investment, and Government Expenditure”, Working Paper No. 96/98, *International Monetary Fund*, September 1996; Stimson Center, *Mapping and Fighting Corruption in War-Torn States*, Report No. 61, March 2007; Christian Michelsen Institute, *Risks of Corruption to State Legitimacy and Stability in Fragile Situations*, 2012. See also “Why Corruption Matters: Understanding Causes, Effects and How to Address Them”, *Department for International Development*, pp. 51-52, 25 February 2015; “Literature Review on Corruption in Fragile States”, *Anti-Corruption Resource Centre*, U4 Expert Answer, 24 January 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2019, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/results/table>

<sup>6</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Peace Index 2020, [http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2020/06/GPI\\_2020\\_web.pdf](http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2020/06/GPI_2020_web.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> “Corruption and State Instability in West Africa: An Examination of Policy Options”, *Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Training Centre*, Occasional Paper, 3 December 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Transparency International Defence and Security, *The Big Spin: Corruption and the Growth of Violent Extremism*, 21 February 2017.

## “For the past three decades, corruption has underpinned some of the worst episodes of violence the region has witnessed.”

Intersecting with factors that includes poverty, human rights violations, ethnic marginalisation and proliferation of small arms, security sector corruption has had an alarmingly negative effect on human security in West Africa.<sup>9</sup> For the past three decades, corruption has underpinned some of the worst episodes of violence the region has witnessed. From civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone to the ongoing conflict in Nigeria, where rampant corruption has weakened defence and security forces, fuelled resentment against states' representatives and enabled non-state armed actors to fill the vacuum, corruption has been a common denominator of most conflicts in the region.<sup>10 11 12</sup>

## Weakened Defence and Security Governance

Corruption's impact on the effectiveness of security institutions is often detrimental and can threaten peace and breed instability.<sup>13</sup> In Mali, years of corruption and neglect in the run-up to the 2012 coup d'état undermined the capacities of the armed forces to counter the rebellion in the north. For instance, the Malian government thought it could count on a reserve force of 7,500 soldiers, but in reality, the force existed only on paper as a way for officials to siphon off salaries.<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon of ghost soldiers was also seen in garrisons at Ménaka and Aguelhoc in 2012, and again in Mopti in 2013, with devastating results.<sup>15</sup> Mali is not an exception; Nigeria has historically struggled with the issue of ghost soldiers, which has led to huge gains in terms of territory and equipment for Boko Haram.<sup>16</sup> Côte d'Ivoire has also recognised the threat and has pledged to eliminate thousands of fictional troops from the army's payroll.<sup>17</sup> In Guinea too, ghost soldiers have hampered combat readiness. A 2011-12 census and biometric registration of all personnel reduced the assumed number of soldiers by a staggering 40 per cent.<sup>18</sup> In such contexts, a reformed security sector that had strong anti-corruption provisions may have been better placed to tackle the issue of ghost soldiers.

### Box 2. Tackling ghost soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Substantial lessons can be drawn from EU support to security sector reform in the DRC in 2005, which assisted in integrating various armed groups into the national army. One of its initiatives, the “Chain of Payments” project, aimed to rehabilitate the salary system and delink wage distribution lines from the chain of command. A biometric census was undertaken (finding 120,000 soldiers instead of the official count of 190,000); army identifications were issued; a central database and payroll system were created; and, the salaries of the lowest ranks increased from US\$10 to US\$40/month, improving morale and reducing dependence on illegal activities for subsistence. This intervention was credited with cleaning up a part of the financial management system commonly associated with embezzlement and ghost soldiers. However, two limitations were highlighted: (1) the programme did not lead to regulatory or functional reforms, undermining its long-term impact; (2) the limited political engagement of the European mission restricted its ability to address the political aspect of reforming security sector structures and institutions.<sup>19</sup>

Corruption in personnel management can also take other forms, as seen during Côte d'Ivoire's disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process following the post-electoral crisis (2010-11). Rebel commanders from the armed wing of the New Forces (Forces Nouvelles) called com'zones, who had controlled areas in the north of Côte d'Ivoire, received a military rank

<sup>9</sup> A. Abass, *Protecting Human Security in Africa*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> N. Annan, “Violent Conflicts and Civil Strife in West Africa: Causes, Challenges and Prospects”, *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, vol.3, no.1, 2014; T.D. Sayndee, “Developments in Legislative Oversight in Liberia”, p. 63-64, in A. Bryden and F. Chappuis (eds.), *Learning from West African Experiences in Security Sector Governance* (London: Ubiquity Press, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/04/boko-haram-feeds-corruption-nigeria-170413082413479.html>. [accessed: 15 March 2020]; United States Institute of Peace, *Why do Youth Join Boko Haram*, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> “Corruption and State Instability in West Africa”.

<sup>13</sup> Transparency International Defence and Security, *Building Integrity in Mali's Defence and Security Sector: An Overview of the Institutional Safeguards*, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> D. Tull, “Rebuilding Mali's army: The Dissonant Relationship between Mali and its International Partners”, *International Affairs*, Volume 95, Issue 2, pp. 405-422, March 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Tull, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with international expert, 6 February 2015.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/cote-divoire> [accessed: 29 September 2019].

<sup>18</sup> Transparency International Defence and Security, *Regional Results Africa. Government Defence anti-corruption Index*, p. 11-12, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> <https://issat.dcaf.ch/fre/Apprendre/La-bibliotheque-des-ressources/Etudes-de-cas/Chain-of-payments-project-within-the-Armed-Forces-of-the-Democratic-Republic-of-Congo-FARDC> [accessed: 9 September 2019].

related to their political influence and support among local populations, but not to their competency. This had a considerable impact on the whole Ivorian army.<sup>20</sup> According to a former French general, “The Ivorian army is fragile. There has been no reconciliation, its training is poor [...] bringing together the two forces that had opposed one another has taken precedence over cohesion. Structurally, there are groups which lie outside the army’s control and are directly under the president. This creates an unhealthy rivalry between units. In part, the army is poorly commanded. Some of the leaders of major units are former com’zones, untrained officers who are not up to the responsibilities they bear, and whose authority is sometimes challenged by their own troops.”<sup>21</sup>

Before 2012, evidence suggests that recruitment in the Malian army was often secured through bribes and relied less on merit than on personal connections.<sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> Despite the precarious security situation, this practice has not ended, and some recruits still need to pay in order to be accepted in basic training.<sup>24</sup> While paying does not necessarily skew the system against those who are competent, it severely disadvantages those who are unable to pay.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, as a result of corruption, a career in the military can be seen as a means of personal enrichment.<sup>26</sup> In Mali, for instance, evidence suggests that money paid for entry into the system can be considered as a financial investment, which will increase rent-seeking potential.<sup>27</sup> In Nigeria, access to certain positions requires a patron’s financial support with the expectation that they will be reimbursed by their “client” once they are in a position to benefit.<sup>28</sup> This system has a direct effect on the way soldiers act in the field, increasing the likelihood of them engaging in corruption.<sup>29</sup>

Corruption also affects the payment of wages and risk bonuses. In 2013, Nigerian soldiers complained that 50 per cent of their allowances for dangerous field duties were stolen by commanders, with troops living in poor conditions and lacking basic resources.<sup>30</sup> “Despite being budgeted and paid for, ammunition rarely reached the front, leaving soldiers with a few bullets each to fight militants armed with RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades). Soldiers also had to buy their military uniforms themselves and cover their medical expenses when wounded in battle.”<sup>31</sup>

This has seriously undermined morale and driven unethical behaviour by some soldiers who have sold weapons and equipment to insurgents to boost their salaries.<sup>32</sup> The situation has barely improved in recent years, with reports emerging in 2020 of the systematic non-payment of Nigerian soldiers’ combat allowances, despite this being budgeted for, leading soldiers to write directly to the president asking for them to be paid their dues.<sup>33</sup>

Security sector procurement is another salient issue given the size of budgets, the sector’s considerable requirements and the high levels of secrecy that characterise it. In 2014, the Malian auditor general published a report on two defence contracts. It found that a company with an equity of a few million West African Francs (XOF) obtained a contract of XOF9 billion (US\$16 million), making a profit of more than XOF2 billion (US\$3.4 million) in the process.<sup>34</sup> One year later, in Nigeria, Sambo Dasuki, the former national security adviser, was arrested for allegedly stealing US\$2.1 billion from the defence budget by awarding phantom contracts.<sup>35</sup> Since then, numerous other cases have come to light including the alleged involvement of military officers in the diversion of US\$15 billion meant for arms procurement.<sup>36</sup> In Ghana, the European aircraft manufacturer Airbus, is alleged to have paid over EUR3 million of bribes to high-ranking officials when it sold three military aircrafts to the government between 2009 and 2015.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> French Institute of International Relations (Institut Français des Relations Internationales IFRI), *La Réforme du Secteur de Sécurité à L’ivoirienne* (Ivorian Security Sector Reform), (Paris : IFRI, 2016); [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/04/13/cote-d-ivoire-il-est-clair-que-notre-armee-n-est-pas-reunifiee\\_5110723\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/04/13/cote-d-ivoire-il-est-clair-que-notre-armee-n-est-pas-reunifiee_5110723_3212.html), (Ivory Coast : “It Is Clear That Our Army Is Not Reunited” [accessed: 3 October 2019].

<sup>21</sup> B. Clément-Bollée, “Les Forces Armées de Côte d’Ivoire: Portrait d’un Dispositif Fragile”, *Afrique contemporaine*, vol. no. 263-264, no. 3, p. 291, 2017. The lack of cohesion and professionalism has also been mentioned by an interviewee (security expert in Côte d’Ivoire, 26 February 2019).

<sup>22</sup> K. A. Harkness, *When Soldiers Rebel: Ethnic Armies and Political Instability in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> M. Caparini, “DDR and SSR Challenges in Mali”, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Working Paper 853, p. 17, 2015; <http://bamada.net/les-fama-une-armee-dysfonctionnelle-sous-equipee-et-mal-commandee-malgre-six-ans-de-formation-et-daccompagnement-etrangers> [accessed: 13 May 2019]; K. A. Harkness, “The Ethnic Army and the State : Explaining Coup Traps and the Difficulties of Democratization in Africa”, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol.60, no. 4, pp. 587-616, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/08/01/au-mali-le-systeme-est-infeste-par-la-corruption-et-les-citoyens-y-sont-habitués\\_5495410\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/08/01/au-mali-le-systeme-est-infeste-par-la-corruption-et-les-citoyens-y-sont-habitués_5495410_3212.html) [accessed: 1 August 2019].

<sup>25</sup> *Building Integrity*.

<sup>26</sup> *Building Integrity*.

<sup>27</sup> *Building Integrity*.

<sup>28</sup> S. Chayes, *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security* (London: WW Norton & Co, p. 125, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> *Building Integrity*.

<sup>30</sup> *The Big Spin*.

<sup>31</sup> *The Big Spin*.

<sup>32</sup> *The Big Spin*.

<sup>33</sup> <https://globalsentinelng.com/2020/02/10/insecurity-nigerian-soldiers-send-sos-to-buhari-on-poor-treatment-corruption-in-the-military/> [accessed: 10 February 2020].

<sup>34</sup> Malian auditor general, *Final Report : Aircraft and Supply of Equipment to FAMA (Rapport définitif: Aéronef et Fourniture d’Équipements aux FAMA)*, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/nigeria-orders-arrest-adviser-2bn-arms-deal-151118043340314.html> [accessed: 18 November 2015].

<sup>36</sup> <https://punchng.com/let-%E2%80%8Eburatai-resign-or-sack-him-falana-tells-buhari/> [accessed: 10 July 2016].

<sup>37</sup> *Thieves of State*.

## A crisis of confidence in the state

“States need to redeploy and establish virtuous governance. Corrupt states are no longer accepted. Nor in Mopti region [Mali], nor in Burkina Faso. As long as administrators are seen by locals as economic predators, the authorities will strengthen their presence, but they will always have enemies. The first fight of states should be the one against corruption.”<sup>38</sup>

Adam Thiam, Malian intellectual, 2019

In many West African countries, the armed forces are involved in internal security.<sup>39</sup> In Guinea, soldiers were dispatched to major cities during the 2019-2020 demonstrations against the change of the constitution. In Nigeria, from 2018 to date, the army has been deployed in 30 out of 36 states to conduct security operations.<sup>40</sup> Even in relatively stable Ghana, the armed forces are regularly called upon to carry out tasks, which are the police's remit.<sup>41</sup>

This military's involvement in internal security can result in heavy-handed tactics, which heightens tensions and exacerbate grievances. In many instances, evidence suggests a correlation between corrupt defence forces and human rights abuses, which then, in turn, contributes to the degradation of state legitimacy.<sup>42</sup> As the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reports, “corruption both drives human rights abuses and hinders the effective discharge of human rights obligations. It can be closely connected to the maintenance and proliferation of violent and discriminatory social orders which disproportionately impact on persons who are marginalised or in otherwise vulnerable or precarious situations.”<sup>43</sup> In West Africa, corruption has a deeply corrosive effect on trust in government, especially in contexts characterised by mass poverty and high levels of unemployment.<sup>44</sup>

In Mali, the armed forces “are [reportedly] seen as an instrument of repression rather than a positive actor.”<sup>45</sup> Recent abuses have contributed to the development of a fear of uniformed personnel. Seventy-five per cent of the villages surveyed by a team of researchers between December 2017 and January 2018 in Mopti (central Mali) and Sahel region (north of Burkina Faso) listed security forces among the entities threatening their communities' peace and security. A staggering 62 per cent also openly expressed the desire to form self-defence militias to protect themselves against all kinds of abuse, and 50 per cent said that violent extremist groups helped to protect them from security forces.<sup>46</sup> Corruption can also lead to abuses and exactions, and fuels popular resentment and mistrust: “when ethnic patronage is built into military, police and security bureaucracies, it corrupts them, weakens discipline, reinforces a sense of impunity and fosters public (and especially minority) distrust of the state itself.”<sup>47</sup>

In Mali, this dynamic has had dire consequences for central government authority. With a reputation tarnished by endemic corruption, the government is unable to extend its authority throughout the territory. The deployment of troops on home soil has led to incidents of predatory behaviour, along with allegations of human rights abuses as the military is seen as a foreign occupier by some communities.<sup>48</sup> This risks enabling an ever-greater wedge between marginalised communities and the power brokers in the capital Bamako, and may force civilians to continue turning to alternative providers of security, justice and basic social services.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Adam Thiam by Morgane Le Cam, *Le Monde*, 14 June 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Assessing Attitudes of the Next Generation of African Security Sector Professionals*, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> J. A. Momodu, “The Nigerian Army and Internal Security Operations in the Fourth Republic” and Oshita, Oshita, Alumona, Ikenna Mike, Onuoha, Freedom C. (Eds.) *Internal Security Management in Nigeria: Perspectives, Challenges and Lessons* p. 401; (Singapore: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019); <https://www.arei24.news/2019/06/07/la-reconfiguration-des-forces-armees-nigerianes/> [accessed: 7 June 2019].

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/news/1758-defence-ministry-reviews-its-operations-since-2014> [accessed: 20 August 2019].

<sup>42</sup> D. M. Fuhr, “Of Thieves and Repressors: The Interplay between Corruption and Human Rights Violations”, *Elon Law Review*, 2013.

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Torture/SRTorture/Pages/Corruption.aspx> [accessed: 9 May 2020].

<sup>44</sup> United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), *Life after State House: Addressing Unconstitutional Changes in West Africa*, Issue Paper, p.38, March 2006.

<sup>45</sup> SIPRI, *Civil Society White Paper for Peace and Security in Mali (Livre Blanc de la société civile sur la paix et la sécurité au Mali)*, p. 24, (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2019).

<sup>46</sup> International Alert, *If Victims Become Perpetrators*, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> R. Luckham, *Democratic Strategies for Security in Transition and Conflict, in Governing Insecurity, Democratic Control of Military and Security Establishments in Transitional Democracies* (London: Z Books, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> FrancoPaix Center for Conflict Resolution and Peace Missions (Centre FrancoPaix en Résolution des Conflits et Missions de Paix), *Insecurity, the Breakdown of Social Trust, and Armed Actor Governance in Central and Northern Mali*, August 2017.

<sup>49</sup> J. Devermont, “Politics at the Heart of the Crisis in the Sahel”, *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, December 2019.

#### Box 4. The Malian Case

“The perfect storm of factional and regional divisions, weak management practices, and government and military corruption can be held at least partly responsible for the ease of the rebel victory in the north [of Mali] in 2012, as well as Captain Amadou Sanogo’s effortless coup in Bamako. Captain Sanogo’s takeover clearly illustrated the deep problems within the military that no Malian government has been able to address.”

Transparency International – Defence and Security, 2015.

Eight years later, a massive wave of protests arose in Mali to denounce state corruption, bad governance, and the inability of the Malian army to restore security. Initially carried out by civil society and religious organisations, the movement ultimately resulted in a military coup on 18 August 2020 with the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubakar Keïta and the dissolution of the National Assembly. Although corruption alone is not sufficient to explain the latent instability in Mali, and more widely across the Sahel region, this series of events suggests that it remains a key factor to be considered in stabilisation efforts.

The recent COVID-19 crisis has emphasised further the importance of trust between the citizens and the state’s institutions; this is even more acute in relations to the defence and security apparatus. The COVID-19 outbreak is not only a health crisis but poses wider risks to security governance systems with repercussions on human and state security worldwide. As countries started to declare states of emergency, security sector actors have been playing a significant role in supporting or implementing part of the COVID-19 response, sometimes outside the remit of their initial mandates.

A recent study published by the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) suggests no evidence that emergency measures, or COVID-19 specific legislation have included better checks and balances.<sup>50</sup> In fact it underscores that although these measures vary from one country to another, most of them have introduced strict limitations on the exercise of fundamental rights. In addition, it suggests that many of these measures could lead to abuses by security sectors, especially in countries characterised by rampant inequalities, and socio-economic instability. According to Transparency International Defence and Security, since the start of the pandemic in late 2019, there have been worrying trends emerging worldwide in the defence and security sector, including: increased human rights violations, state repression, resource diversion and misuse of funds, as well as a progressive erosion of oversight and accountability and increased conflict and insecurity across the globe.<sup>51</sup>

The precarious situation in the Sahel may deteriorate further due to the interplays of corruption, the pandemic and weak governance systems. Security sectors have a prominent role to play in rebuilding trust in institutions and promoting state and human security by adhering to the principles of good governance and being subject to civilian, democratic control.

## A resource for violent extremist groups

“Violent extremist groups have been able to capitalise on state dysfunction and successfully position themselves as counter-models and alternative providers of security and justice.”

In a 2006 article published by Sada al-Jihad (Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia’s virtual internet publication) and disseminated on jihadist forums, the Al-Qaeda ideologue Abu Azzam al-Ansari advocated for the establishment and expansion of Al-Qaeda in Africa.<sup>52</sup> Among others, he listed corruption as one of the key justifications for why the continent needed a radical alternative to predatory central governments.

This narrative has become engrained in extremist group recruitment messaging. While religious tensions, ethnic violence and abuses by security forces play a role, anger in the face of rampant corruption also contributes to creating environments that bolster extremist group recruitment.<sup>53</sup> For instance, in central Mali in 2015-2016, violence developed amid a deep crisis of confidence in the state.<sup>54</sup> As a result, armed Islamist movements are increasingly composed of Malian nationals, who have grown to see these groups as the only alternative to an incompetent and predatory government. In Burkina Faso, security forces’ brutal tactics and support for ethnic community militias are pushing other communities to align themselves with

<sup>50</sup> DCAF, *Emerging Trends for SSG/R in view of States of Emergency and Disaster Risk Covid-19 Response Measures*, June 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Transparency International Defence and Security, *Trends in defence & security corruption arising from COVID-19*, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> Abu Azzam al-Ansari, “Al Qaeda is Moving to Africa”, *Sadda al-Jihad*, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> United Nations, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, (New York: United Nations, 2015).

<sup>54</sup> International Crisis Group, *Central Mali: The Making of An Insurrection? (Mali central: La Fabrique d'Une Insurrection?)*, 6 July 2016.

extremist movements for protection.<sup>55</sup> The same phenomenon has been observed in Niger.<sup>56</sup> In Nigeria, Boko Haram has garnered support by pointing to security forces' violations as proof that only a constitution based on a strict interpretation of Islam could guarantee a just and fair society.<sup>57</sup> In other words, violent extremist groups have been able to capitalise on state dysfunction and successfully position themselves as counter-models and alternative providers of security and justice.

Corruption is also used as a tool to legitimise armed non-state actors' actions and discredit their enemies. Boko Haram has regularly deployed this narrative, even before the group's turn to violence.<sup>58</sup> In Mali too, extremist Group to Support Islam and Muslims (Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin) has regularly denounced the corruption of politicians, parliamentarians and civil servants. Djamel Okacha aka Yayua abu al-Hummam, their now deceased deputy leader, also singled out the leaders of the G5 Sahel in an audio message broadcasted in March 2018: "We take this opportunity to remind peoples of five countries – Mauritania, Burkina, Niger, Chad, Mali – and at their head, their Ulama, to realize the truth of this new campaign and not be dragged behind the adventures of these corrupt rulers, ready to sacrifice their youth and their peoples for the residents of the Élysée."<sup>59</sup> Corruption and poor governance are also key enablers for extremist operations. According to a jihadist fighter arrested in Mali in April 2016, the false documents needed to facilitate attacks in Bamako took just two hours to obtain from State officials and cost XOF15,000 (US\$25).<sup>60</sup> Some groups' materiel is also acquired through misappropriation by state officials.<sup>61</sup> The majority of illicit weapons seized from armed groups in Northern Mali in 2015 were found to have been diverted from government stockpiles through corruption, theft or capture.<sup>62</sup> Boko Haram is also known to have obtained materiel from national arsenals, primarily through attacks on army positions, but also in some cases with the complicity of members of the security forces.<sup>63</sup>

## Final considerations

Corruption in West Africa is not just a consequence of conflict, but is itself also frequently a driver or enabler of armed violence. When corruption takes root in defence and security institutions, its effects on peace and security can be catastrophic and can lead to the degradation of human security, breakdown of the rule of law, and loss of trust in central authorities. As a result, countering corruption and mitigating corruption risks in defence and security forces should be a cornerstone of stabilisation and peacebuilding initiatives. A focus on strengthening defence sectors' resilience to corruption helps to reinforce and improve defence governance mechanisms, promotes civilian democratic oversight, empowers parliaments and civil society, and contributes to building a defence and security apparatus which is accountable, transparent, and dedicated to the protection of people.

To mitigate corruption risks in the security sector, West African governments should consider the following:

- Large expenditures and a high level of secrecy inherent in the sector exposes defence and security procurement to a high risk of corruption. **Adopting specific legislation ensuring that defence and security purchases are carefully assessed, planned and carried out in accordance to a published defence and security policy**, would ensure that those purchases are not opportunistic but instead reflect the needs of the sector. Moreover, provisions should be made to reduce single-source procurement, to increase open contracting, and to ensure that the whole procurement cycle is overseen by an appropriate parliamentary committee. This would contribute to avoiding collusion between bidders and contractors, and would prevent selling countries from exercising undue political influence.
- Human resource management encompasses functions critical to Combat Readiness, including recruitment, career progression, and payment of salaries. Conversely, weak human resource management exposes the defence and security sector to phenomena such as ghost soldiers or bribery in recruitment and promotion. **Linking payments to a biometric database containing soldiers' fingerprints, personal details and bank accounts can mitigate the risk of ghost soldiers**. In addition, updating codes of conduct to make it explicitly clear that all forms of corrupt activity are prohibited – and outlining the possible sanctions for officers found guilty of corruption – could contribute to deterring would-be transgressors.
- Evidence suggests a correlation between corrupt defence forces and human rights abuses. **Updating codes of conduct to include provisions that prevent fraud and corruption** would contribute to enhancing the integrity and values of

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<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Watch, *By Day we Fear the Army, By Night the Jihadists: Abuses by Armed Islamists and Security Forces in Burkina Faso* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018).

<sup>56</sup> Overseas Development Institute, *What Do We Know about The Drivers of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Globally and in Niger*, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> S. Chayes, "Corruption: Violent Extremism, Kleptocracy, and the Dangers of Failing Governance", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 30 June 2016.

<sup>58</sup> *The Big Spin*.

<sup>59</sup> Audio message broadcasted on March 2018.

<sup>60</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/02/25/les-confidences-d-ibrahim-10-djihadiste-au-sahel\\_5427750\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/02/25/les-confidences-d-ibrahim-10-djihadiste-au-sahel_5427750_3212.html) [accessed: 25 February 2019].

<sup>61</sup> H. Anders, *Expanding Arsenal. Insurgent Arms in Northern Mali, Small Arms Survey 2015*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>62</sup> F. Mangan & M. Nowak, "The West Africa-Sahel Connection: Mapping Cross-Border Arms Trafficking", *Small Arms Survey, Briefing Paper*, p. 5, December 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Small Arms Survey, *At The Crossroads of Sahelian Conflicts. Insecurity, Terrorism, and Arms Trafficking in Niger* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2018).



defence and security institutions. In addition, establishing channels through which officials can safely report any suspicion of corrupt activity would contribute to increased safeguards against corruption. Moreover, **introducing specific and robust protections for whistleblowers**, and ensuring that the appropriate mechanisms for anonymously reporting suspected wrongdoing function properly, will contribute to deterring human rights abuses by uniformed personnel.

- Improved governance reduces the security vacuums in which extremist groups thrive, and helps to counter the narrative espoused by non-state armed actors that they are the only alternative to a corrupt state structure. **Mainstreaming anti-corruption in security sector reform** contributes to achieving accountability and effectiveness.<sup>64</sup> Identifying corruption as a strategic issue for security sector reform, and clearly outlining in national military doctrines how corrupt behaviours can undermine operations, would send a strong signal to the public and contribute to restoring their trust in the security apparatus – and the state as a whole.

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<sup>64</sup> Transparency International Defence and Security, *The Missing Element: Addressing Corruption through Security Sector Reform in West Africa*, 2020

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