In contrast to other types of militancy in the Sahel, jihadism targets not only local and regional states and societies, but also global enemies, including European powers. As a consequence, European powers should actively support recent initiatives taken by the Sahel states to counter the rise in jihadism.

For the past two decades, states and societies in the Sahel and West Africa have faced an increasing threat from jihadist groups. While these groups originally stemmed from outside the region, in particular escaping military repression in North African countries like Algeria and Libya or in West African countries like Nigeria, they are now firmly rooted within the communities of the Sahel itself. Examples span the crisis in northern and central Mali, the recent terrorist attacks in northern Burkina Faso, events in the Ivory Coast, and more.

**EU HAS A STAKE IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST JIHADISM IN THE SAHEL**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

European powers should support and encourage governments in the Sahel in developing:

- economic programs that target marginalized groups outside their capitals and major cities where jihadists are exploiting the state’s absence to recruit and mobilize supporters.
- de-radicalization programs and re-integrating the Arab-speaking religious elites into the state administration, thus aiming to re-establish state control of the religious sphere in the longer term.
- military and police campaigns that target mobilized jihadists while also avoiding sweeping repression that risks pushing immobilized population groups into taking up arms against states and governments orchestrating the repression.
Coast and northern Cameroon and the war in the Lake Chad region. In contrast to other types of militant mobilization in the Sahel, jihadism is not purely a local threat to societies and states in the region. Most of the jihadist groups and movements that currently operate in the Sahel are the offspring or former affiliates of al-Qaeda, and they continue to combine their fight against representatives of the states and regimes in the region with a broader transnational or global struggle against Western and in particular French and European powers and interests. Hence, while jihadists mobilize for armed action on the basis of locally rooted issues, strains and conflicts, they combine these local struggles with a broader potential for global and transnational conflict that, depending on the context, may be more or less emphasized.

**Jihadism flourishes in failed states**

In general, jihadists flourish in contexts where states collapse or see their capacities to exercise control over their institutions, territories, borders and populations seriously weakened. The Sahel is no exception. Here jihadists have exploited the local, regional and global strains felt by population groups, who for decades have been abandoned by their governments, among others the Tuareg, Peul, Toubou, Songhai, and Haratin. While building social and family links with notable families and tribes in the region and intimidating opponents into passivity, jihadists have offered social and political answers to the strains felt by these marginalized groups. Jihadists respond with an offer to create a new state – the Islamic State – and a new and equitable justice system based on sharia law. In the face of ethnic rivalries, jihadists emphasise, for instance, the importance of their common Muslim identity as a means of conflict resolution and arbitration. The defeat of the Malian army by rapidly advancing jihadisists in 2012 in particular changed the perception of the jihadist threat and lead to the creation of a security cooperation framework between the Sahel states known as the G5-Sahel in 2014. This initiative, which is under French tutelage, is the first regional military response mechanism to target the transnational threats posed by jihadists in the Sahel. Although there are legitimate and serious doubts among experts and policy-makers about whether the G5-Sahel is up to the task of confronting the jihadist threats in the Sahel region, increased security cooperation is a necessity. It reflects a dawning understanding among the Sahel states and their European partners that a successful response to the jihadist threat in the Sahel in part depends on a recognition that jihadism poses a real and urgent threat to both the Sahel states and their European partners. Although poorly targeted and abusively implemented security policies against jihadists run the risk of pushing more people towards the jihadist movement, European powers should look for ways to support the recent initiatives taken by regional actors in the Sahel to counter the spread of jihadism in this region.