

## Program

### **Sahel Research Group /International Crisis Group** *Second Annual Scholars/Practitioners forum on the Sahel*

17 April 2023

The University of Florida, Gainesville

8:30-8:45 *Welcome and Introductions*

Alioune Sow (SRG) and Jean-Hervé Jezequel (ICG)

#### **Session I: Scanning the Horizon: Sahelian politics at a crossroads**

*--panels in this session will be organized as roundtables: followed by open discussion--*

8:45- 10:00 *Panel 1: Jihadism in motion/ The evolving shape of insurgencies*

Chair: Leonardo Villalón, (SRG)

Panelists: Ibrahim Yahaya Ibrahim (ICG)

Olivier Walther (SRG)

The presence of Jihadist groups and their ability to seize and hold territory in the central Sahel has grown in the last decade. As recently documented by the International Crisis Group, new places like the “Park W,” shared between Niger, Burkina Faso and Benin, have become way stations for jihadist groups seeking to move south toward the coast. Counter-insurgency strategies have largely failed to contain the advance of these groups. Negotiation between states and jihadist groups, which has only been tried in a very cautious and limited manner, has not yielded significant results. Yet despite their growing presence and influence, the next step for jihadists’ strategy remains unclear. On the one hand, jihadists have unprecedented opportunities, and it is no longer unrealistic to imagine a Sahelian state falling into jihadi hands. On the other hand, these groups remain largely present in rural areas, avoiding urban centers while cementing their control in the regions. Inter-jihadist rivalries, particularly between *Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin* (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), also present a major challenge to jihadist groups. This panel aims to analyse the dynamics shaping the future of jihadist groups—from internecine conflicts to governance issues in rural areas—and discuss different scenarios for the evolution of these group.

10:00-10:30

*coffee break*

10:30-11:45 *Panel 2: Governance in question: The return of military regimes?*

Chair: Azizou Garba (CNESS, Niger)

Panelists: Ibrahim Maiga (ICG)

Andrew Lebovich (Clingendael Institute)

A series of military coups have recently struck the central Sahel as well as the wider West Africa region: Mali in August 2020 and May 2021, Chad in April 2021, Guinea in September 2021, Burkina Faso in January and October 2022, as well as a failed coup in Niger in March 2021. While the juntas have officially committed to organizing elections and handing over power to civilians, a new generation of military leader determined to stay in charge and to replace the aging and largely discredited ruling elite seems to be emerging and consolidating their hold on power. In both Mali and Burkina Faso, new regimes have also gained significant popularity in part by turning their backs on French influence and promising better outcomes. Yet their capacity to in fact do better than their predecessors in addressing the security crisis is far from certain. Indeed, some have expressed fears that new military regimes will

exacerbate tensions, armed violence, and the risk of civil war. In terms of governance, it also remains to be seen whether these regimes have the capacity and willingness to respond to the thirst for change among Sahelian societies. This panel will address these many concerns to attempt to sketch out the factors shaping the evolution of these new regimes.

11:45-12:00 *break*

12:00-1:15 **Panel 3: International realignments: The end of the Sahel stabilization system?**

Chair: Michel Liegeois, Université Catholique de Louvain

Panelists: Jean-Hervé Jezequel (ICG)

Tania Smirnova, Program FrancoPaix, Université de Montreal)

The decade-long crisis of the central Sahel has recently entered a new chapter. The situation is defined by an increased uncertainty and a newfound fluidity. The political and institutional architecture of the French-led stabilization efforts since 2013 is falling apart, while multilateral regional stabilization efforts are in an increasingly difficult situation. The G5 Sahel seems to be at the end of the rode, struggling to remain relevant after Mali's withdrawal. MINUSMA is facing worrying withdrawals from national contingents, and an internal review recently raised the prospect of the force's full withdrawal. Operations Takuba and Barkhane are both over. The region has seen a wave of so-called "anti-French sentiment," leading to the departure of French forces from Mali and Burkina Faso and the erosion of France's historical leadership role in the region. Sahelian countries seem to be increasingly turning to bilateral agreements to solicit security partners both within and without the region. Thus Russia has emerged as Mali's favourite military partner. Yet despite all the geopolitical noise, the conflict continues unabated, with regional governments largely struggling to make headway against the jihadist threat. His panel will interrogate these shifts to explore prospects for the future of stabilization efforts in the Sahel.

**Lunch 1:15- 2:15 PM**

**Session II: Climate change, conflict, and natural resource management**

-- 20 minutes presentations, followed by comments and discussion led by panel chair--

2:15-3:30: **Panel 4: Resources and new dynamics of conflict**

Chair: Adib Bencherif, Université Sherbrooke

Panelists: • Rhoumour Ahmet Tchilouta (U of Grenoble and SRG): "Organized crime and conflict in the Sahelian Goldrush"

• Mathieu Pellerin (ICG): "The future of pastoralism in the changing conflict landscape"

3:30-4:00: *coffee break*

4:00- 5:15: **Panel 5: The Emerging challenges of climate change**

Chair: *tbd*

Panelists: • Ibrahim Garba Brimaka (CNAP, Niger), "The Climate Change and Security Nexus in the Sahel"

- Sarah McKune and Renata Serra: (UF SRG) “Climate change and emerging challenges of health and livelihoods: An agenda for research.”

5:15-5:45: *Concluding discussion*

**Following: Reception and informal discussion**