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Policy Brief

Will the Accra Initiative Succeed Where the G5 Sahel Failed?

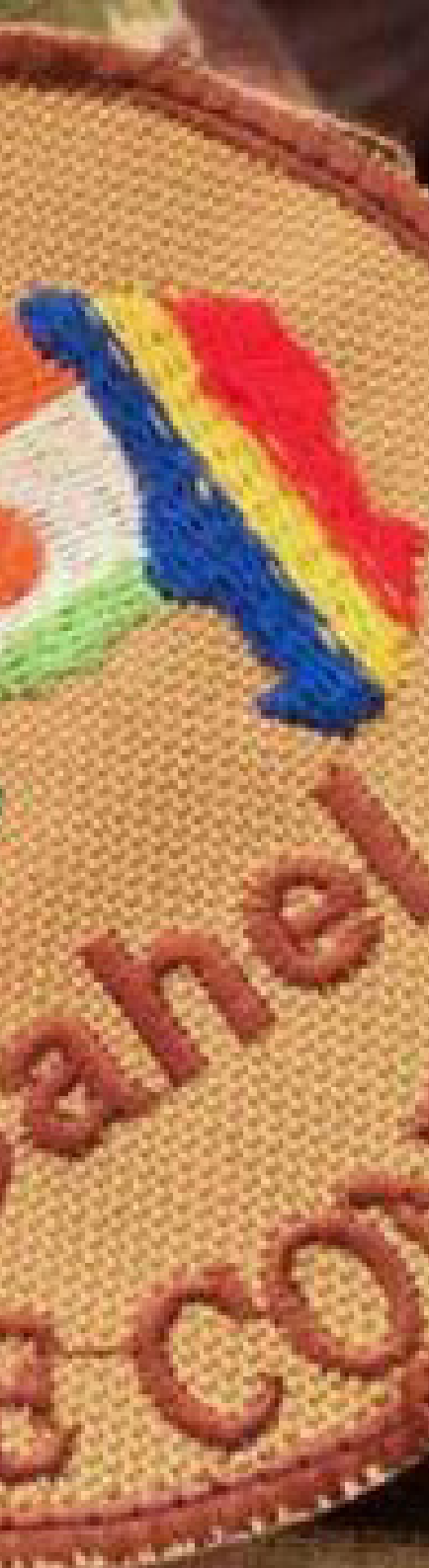
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





The Accra Initiative (AI) and the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) want to make West Africa and the central Sahel area safer amid both groups having similar structural issues such as; local grievances stemming from weak governance in member states, rising cross-border criminality and violent extremism, to name a few. The G5 Sahel seems to be approaching a decline, especially with Mali's recent withdrawal and strained relations with Niger in the midst of the persistence of terror. Hence, to avoid the same path as the G5 Sahel, the AI will have to closely examine the G5 Sahel's shortcomings to optimise their decision-making and operational framework, if not, the AI may repeat the same mistakes in addressing similar concerns, leading to limited results.

This research raises questions about how AI currently carries out the Koudanlougou operations series. It seeks to predict the impact AI will have by comparing its institutional framework and operational strategy with the G5 Sahel. This research shows that the AI and the G5 Sahel have analogous frames for approaching counterterrorism (mainly ad hoc military operations), which may birth similar outcomes despite organisational and operational differences that give a fair advantage to the AI. By looking at the case of the G5 Sahel, this policy brief says AI can learn from the G5 Sahel to make better decisions and run more sustainably.

Key Points

- AI must deal with local and national security issues for military operations to go well. Since the G5 Sahel didn't do so, the AI should be more attuned to local essentials.
- AI may never be more effective than the G5 Sahel and will fail to deliver sustainable results if it does not integrate ad hoc military efforts into comprehensive and long-term strategies.



Introduction

Security cooperation through the Accra Initiative was established in September 2017 by Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Togo (AI). After its establishment, Mali and Niger partook but only in an observatory role.ⁱ In response to the spread of violent extremism and the persistence of transnational organised crime in West Africa, AI serves as a tool for coastal countries.ⁱⁱ AI rests on three foundations to function as the cooperative and flexible mechanism that it is portrayed to be. These cornerstones include; information and intelligence sharing, security and intelligence personnel training, and joint cross-border military operations to maintain border security.ⁱⁱⁱ This mechanism has coordinated four "Koudanlgou" (cohesion in the Gourmantché language) operations.^{iv} This event involved more than 9,472 personnel, heavy artillery, and a wide variety of weapons and arrests—including wanted individuals, in order to counter violent extremism and transnational crime.^v Over time, many onlookers have begun to wonder if AI can achieve success where G5 Sahel failed with an identical militarised approach. Such scepticism stems from the states' failure to address long-standing fragmentations, which has resulted in the local communities' anger. This situation does not allow for the civil-military cooperation necessary to efficiently cope with violent extremism and organised crime, as seen in the Liptako-Gourma region.

In light of this, the current brief contrasts the G5 Sahel with the AI, arguing that long-term strategies that balance local needs and security emergencies would guarantee the success of (military) responses to regional security threats. The brief therefore, is to provide input to help prevent the AI from making the same inaccuracies as the G5 Sahel.

Even though AI and the G5 Sahel have different structures and terrains, their strategic and operational concerns are similar.

- In contrast to bureaucracy, flexibility allows for greater adaptability.

The Ghanaian security secretariat acts as the central coordinator for the Accra Initiative and supports a lean administrative structure consisting of the country's focal points.^{vi} The Initiative relies heavily on funding from Member States, representing the strong political will and commitment of Member States, and is therefore essential to its success.^{vii} Since the member states own the initiative, each state has full say over its direction and priorities, and the organisation can adapt to changing circumstances. Furthermore, the AI's purview is limited to issues of collective security among its member states. In contrast, the G5 Sahel's remit spans the entire security-development spectrum.^{viii} It operates following a traditional structure that includes a Conference of Heads of State (CoHS), a Council of Ministers (CoM), an Executive Secretariat (ES), and National Coordination Committees (NCCs), each of which has its responsibilities and authority.^{ix} In various contexts, including the G5 Sahel, this bureaucratic framework has proven to be burdensome and

slow in decision-making. Likewise, the G5 Sahel's heavy reliance on external financial resources severely constrains the member-states' ability to determine the agenda and priorities of the organisation's operations.^x

Since the AI administrative configuration is more malleable than the G5 Sahel's, it paves the way for improved interstate cooperation, trust-building, and decision-making opportunities. In the short and long term, the AI's effectiveness may be guaranteed, at least in part, by its narrowed scope and flexibility, which allow for strategic focus and optimal use of available resources.

- Areas covered and related challenges.

Including Niger and Mali (observers), the entire length of the AI countries' border is 6,597 kilometres (km), and their total land area exceeds 3 515 181 square kilometres (km²).^{xi} The overall land area of the G5 Sahel region is around 5 096 38 km², and its total border area is approximately 4 864 000 km².^{xii} Fortifying borders is merely one of the numerous obstacles associated with safeguarding such enormous areas, which raises challenges for AI

and the G5 Sahel, given the task's resource-intensive nature (human, financial and material). Moreover, local environmental, climatic, and social circumstances necessitate context-specific counterterrorism methods. The AI's forested zones impact mobility, weapon effectiveness, supplies, and tactical operations differently from the G5 Sahel zones. Therefore, performance evaluations of AI and G5 Sahel must consider their different characteristics.

As managing porous borders and making do with limited resources in hostile areas are challenges for both the AI and G5 Sahel, the AI's success or failure would mostly depend on how well they can scan and fix the G5 Sahel's wrongs. This entails expanding military operations in locations where States and local populations are not getting along due to States' failure to satisfy local fundamental needs.^{xiii}

Is it not the case that the AI's military interventions are a repeat of the G5 Sahel's unsuccessful operational strategy?

The indigenous populations of the Sahel, especially those in the Liptako Gourma region straddling the borders of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, were first met with great optimism upon the creation of the G5 Sahel in 2014. However, various flaws and roadblocks at the administrative, financial, and operational levels stunted the institution's efforts.

The Joint Force of the G5 Sahel (JFG5) has been criticised for being a hurried amalgam of weak units, leading some to forecast its imminent disbanding.^{xiv} A range of data showing that the G5 Sahel member states are among the world's poorest and lack the resources necessary to accomplish their goals

backs up this pessimism.^{xv} Given this, it is easy to see why the G5 Sahel relies on foreign aid. Yet, the institution appeared oblivious to its shortcomings while establishing ambitious aims such as counterterrorism/combatting transnational organised crime albeit with inadequate means. G5 Sahel's members contributing to a single regional institution for the same security concerns could have helped optimise the financial and material contributions required. Sometimes insensitive to local realities and cultural settings, the G5, specifically the JFG5, directed sporadic military operations on the ground with a hyper-centralised focus.^{xvi} This hampered intelligence-led initiatives, which are crucial for

counterterrorism success. The outcome of this harmed their connections with local populations.

As a supplement to their military response, AI member states would sometimes take domestic measures. Several nations are taking proactive steps to lessen local vulnerabilities, including Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo, and Ghana. These nations have established specialised administrative bodies and frameworks, begun development programmes, and implemented preventative measures.^{xvii} While efforts like the cross-border concertation framework between local authorities in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso are worthy, they are not being used to their full potential in strengthening communities and reducing the likelihood of terrorist infiltration.^{xviii} In addition, the AI's plan for interventions appears to have yet to adequately consider the decades-long grievances accumulated due to the States' (prolonged) limited presence in most of the intervention zones, especially in the borderlands.^{xix} Despite the importance of military operations, all the arrests and seizures that have already taken place are no assurance that the AI will succeed; instead, building trustworthy links to the affected communities is crucial.^{xx} However, not addressing the root causes of local populations' discontent, but rather prioritising ad hoc military operations would only deepen existing wounds and heighten tensions between States and local actors.

A similar pattern to that seen in G5 Sahel countries like Mali and Burkina Faso would be fuelled, allowing for the growth of terrorist organisations.^{xxi} Hence, sporadic interventions by the AI will have about as much effect as strikes on an anthill so long as the causes and tactics feeding and perpetuating the expansion of terror groups in the frontiers of West African coastal countries remain. As a result, AI actions should be conceived holistically and made permanent to meet immediate security needs while also addressing the social grievances that give rise to extremists and criminal groups.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

Compared to the G5 Sahel, the AI's administrative structure is more fluid and informal. The AI has designed its organisational structure to facilitate efficient operations on the ground and speed up decision-making. In contrast, the G5 Sahel relies on a rigid traditional organisational structure, making it more difficult to define and carry out strategic initiatives. AI hasn't built trust with local people much, so they haven't yet found a good balance between resolving regional problems and focusing on military goals. If things continue, tensions will rise between AI governments and their local communities, as a result terrorist groups will be able to capitalise on public outcry over inevitable military blunders to gain power, as seen in the G5 Sahel. As such, AI needs to re-evaluate its current operational strategy. Otherwise, the Koudanlgou series would temporarily disband terrorist organisations and the familiar cartels they work with without affecting their capacity to reform and forge strong linkages with depressed communities.

As a result, AI's member-States should:

- Prioritise the satisfaction of deprived populations, particularly in areas the military operates, to avoid unintentionally strengthening terror groups and cartels.
- Work towards assimilating military actions on the fly into more comprehensive and long-term tactics to permit the AI to be more effective and produce sustainable impacts.
- Build trust with local communities to aid in implementing intelligence-led initiatives, particularly in rural areas. Over the last decade, the G5 Sahel region has seen a ruralisation of violent extremism that terrorist groups might duplicate in West African coastal countries.
- Leverage existing local resilience and early warning frameworks to defuse potential inter-communal tensions frequently used as entry and anchor points by terror groups and cartels, as seen in the G5 Sahel region.
- Rather than operating as a stand-alone entity, work closely with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to develop a systemic response mechanism. Such an initiative would help reduce duplication of frames, actions, and competition and optimise resource utilisation since member-States would direct their financial and technical contributions to a single system.

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