Gen. (ret.) Tom Middendorp and Reinier Bergema

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The Warning Signs are Flashing Red

The interplay between climate change and violent extremism in the Western Sahel

Climate change is well known for its ability to act as a threat multiplier and in specific cases has also been found to provide a fertile breeding ground for violent extremism. The Western Sahel[1] is especially vulnerable, as climate change has a catalyst effect on the already present complex palette of interlinked security threats, including violent extremism. While the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq has been dealt significant blows, the movement, along with its underlying ideology, is still looming, adapting, and looking for new breeding grounds. With the demise of the territorial Caliphate the significance of regional affiliates to the Islamic State (IS) will continue to grow. The recent renewal of IS interest in the Western Sahel is particularly worrying, given their recent experience of weaponising natural resources such as water and food, allowing them to successfully bolster their recruitment efforts. With the temperature rise in the Western Sahel projected to be 1.5 times the global average, the pressure on such resources will further increase, creating a dangerous window of opportunity for the resurrection of terrorist organisations.

Introduction

After an absence of nearly five years and presumed dead by some,[2] Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made a surprise appearance in a new video in late April 2019. The contrast in circumstances compared to his previous appearance in July 2014, in which he delivered his first sermon as the newly proclaimed Caliph, is vast. Following the defeat in Baghouz and the territorial loss of IS, al-Baghdadi applauds the bravery, perseverance and steadfastness of the *mujahidin*.[3] Sitting on the floor, with a Kalashnikov leaning against the wall

1   Although geography definitions vary, this article places particular emphasis on the six core Western Sahel countries, i.e., Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, as well as (northern) Nigeria.

2   Dmitry Solovyov and Ahmed Rasheed, 'Russia's military says it may have killed IS leader; West, Iraq skeptical'. *Reuters*. 16 June 2017; https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-baghdadi/russias-military-says-it-may-have-killed-is-leader-west-iraq-skeptical-idUSKBN1970O2

3   New video message from the Islamic State's Shaykh Abu Bakr al-Hussayni al Qurayshi al-Baghdadi: 'In the Hospitality of the Leader of the Faithful'. *Jihadology*. 29 April 2019. https://jihadology.net/2019/04/29/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-states-shaykh-abu-bakr-al-%e1%b8%a5ussayni-al-qurayshi-al-baghdadi-in-the-hospitality-of-the-leader-of-the-faithful/. Transcript of the video in possession of the author.

behind him, al-Baghdadi reasserts his leadership, suggesting the battle is far from over, despite recent losses.[4] By singling out several Australian, Belgian and Saudi operatives and praising the efforts of 92 operations in eight different countries, he emphasises the transnational nature of his organisation. With IS' territorial defeat, and the organisation morphing from a proto-state to a covert terrorist network, the significance of its regional affiliates will continue to grow, forcing them to actively look for areas in which to expand its influence and operations.[5]

These expansive efforts are illustrated by a series of attacks across the globe, from Sri Lanka to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique. In his video, Al-Baghdadi congratulates his brothers in Mali and Burkina Faso for joining the *Caravan of the Caliphate* and accepts their *bay'a* (pledge of allegiance), originally dating from 2015.[6] He trusts them 'to intensify their attacks on crusader France and its allies', and 'to avenge their brothers in Syria and

Iraq'.[7] In the weeks prior, shaky footage of an exchange of fire in northern Mali had surfaced. The video, produced by IS' Amaq News Agency, shows a skirmish between French forces and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).[8] Although it was not the first ISGS video to be made (nor was it their first combat activity),[9] there was typically not an inclusion of combat footage,[10] indicating an intensification of propaganda efforts in the country.

Instability in the Western Sahel

The renewal of interest by IS in the Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger tri-border area, catalysed by its losses in Syria and Iraq, is particularly relevant. The Western Sahel is awash with challenges, as it is faced with a complex, multi-facetted palette of interlinked security threats.[11] High levels of extreme poverty, food crises, rapid population growth, rural-urban migration and fragile governance, have created a power vacuum that transnational

4   Ben Hubbard, 'ISIS' Mysterious leader is not dead, new video shows'. *New York Times.* 29 April 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/29/world/middleeast/isis-baghdadi-video.html

5   Liesbeth van der Heide, Charlie Winter and Shiraz Maher, *The Cost of Crying Victory: Policy implications of the Islamic State's territorial collapse.* The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT). November 2018. https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ICCT-VanDerHeide-Winter-Shiraz-The-Cost-of-Crying-Victory-November-2018.pdf; National Coordinator Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV), *A perspective on the transformation of ISIS following the fall of the caliphate.* The Hague: National Coordinator Security and Counterterrorism. 2018. https://english.nctv.nl/binaries/WEB_112216_ENG%20Rapport%20Transformatie_tcm32-361123.pdf

6   Although ISGS' pledge was recognised, it was not *accepted* until Al-Baghdadi's recent video. See: Jason Warner, 'Sub-Saharan Africa's Three "New" Islamic State Affiliates'. *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 10, No. 1. January 2017. https://ctc.usma.edu/sub-saharan-africas-three-new-islamic-state-affiliates/; Robert Postings, 'Islamic State puts the Sahel in West Africa - for now'. *Defense Post.* 30 May 2019. https://thedefensepost.com/2019/05/30/islamic-state-greater-sahara-west-africa/

7   New video message from the Islamic State's Shaykh Abu Bakr al-Hussayni al Qurayshi al-Baghdadi: 'In the hospitality of the leader of the faithful'. *Jihadology.* 29 April 2019. https://jihadology.net/2019/04/29/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-states-shaykh-abu-bakr-al-%e1%b8%a5ussayni-al-qurayshi-al-baghdadi-in-the-hospitality-of-the-leader-of-the-faithful/. Transcript of the video in possession of the author.

8   Caleb Weiss, 'Islamic State releases first combat video from Mali'. *Long War Journal.* 3 April 2019. https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/04/islamic-state-releases-first-combat-video-from-mali.php

9   ISGS carried out at least half a dozen attacks over the course of 2016 and 2017, including attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. See: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?chart=country&search=islamic%20state%20greater%20sahara

10   Caleb Weiss, 'Islamic State releases first combat video from Mali'. *Long War Journal.* 3 April 2019. https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/04/islamic-state-releases-first-combat-video-from-mali.php

11   United Nations Security Council, *8313th Meeting: Briefing Security Council on West Africa, Sahel, Special Representative warns volatility could reverse democratic gains in region.* 17 July 2018. https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13426.doc.htm

organised crime networks, terrorist organisations and a variety of other violent non-state actors have capitalised on.[12] Such systemic weaknesses have allowed these actors to build and expand their power base, which, in turn, has exacerbated these weaknesses, creating a dangerous downward spiral.

Faced with this power vacuum, the Western Sahel has been familiar ground for other jihadist terrorist organisations, including IS' affiliates Boko Haram and the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP),[13] as well as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).[14] The number of terrorist attacks in the region has increased sharply since 2013 (see Table 1) – the same year in which the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSMA was deployed in Mali. Since then, an increase in terrorist activity has been witnessed in other countries in the region, initially in Chad, Mauritania and Niger – and more

recently in Burkina Faso,[15] killing more than 3,000 people.[16] To make matters even worse, parallel to these developments, Boko Haram's deadly campaign intensified from 2011 onwards, wreaking havoc across northern Nigeria and neighbouring regions, killing more than 20,000 people since then.[17]

Some argue that IS' expansion into the region may further fuel rivalry with al-Qaeda, given the latter's long-standing presence in the region.[18] Others observe some degree of cooperation and communication between ISGS and Al-Qaeda-affiliated organisations in the region.[19] One might wonder what is the least desirable alternative. Nonetheless, an escalating level of activity in the Western Sahel as a result of either is not only likely to result in various direct costs, such as loss of life and damage to infrastructure, but will also have significant indirect costs. It will further devastate local economies, disrupt health and education services, and force people from their homes.

12 United Nations Security Council, *8435th Meeting: Peace in Sahel requires tackling causes of instability, Special Adviser tells security council amid calls to advance development, fight terrorism.* 20 December 2018. https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13637. doc.htm

13 Boko Haram, then led by Shekau, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015 and was rebranded to the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). Following tensions with central Islamic State leadership, Shekau was replaced by Abu Musab al-Barnawi. Although Shekau split away from ISWAP, he never renounced his allegiance to the Islamic State. As of June 2018, US military officials estimate that Shekau's faction, generally referred to as Boko Haram, consists of approximately 1,500 fighters, while ISWAP is estimated to have approximately 3,500 fighters in its ranks. See also: Jason Warner and Charlotte Hulme. 'The Islamic State in Africa: estimating fighter numbers in cells across the continent'. *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 11, No. 7. August 2018 https://ctc.usma.edu/islamic-state-africa-estimating-fighter-numbers-cells-across-continent/; Lauren P. Blanchard and Katia T. Cavigelli, *Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province.* Congressional Research Service. June 2018. https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10173.pdf

14 See: Samuel L. Aranson, 'AQIM's Threat to Western Interests in the Sahel'. *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 7, No. 4. April 2014. https://ctc.usma.edu/aqims-threat-to-western-interests-in-the-sahel/

15 United Nations Security Council, *8313th Meeting: Briefing Security Council on West Africa, Sahel, Special Representative warns volatility could reverse democratic gains in region.* 17 July 2018. https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13426.doc.htm

16 Based on data provided by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). *Global Terrorism Database* [Data file]. 2018. Retrieved from https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd

17 *Ibid.*

18 Manni Crone, 'Islamic State's incursion into North Africa and Sahel: a threat to al-Qaeda?'. *Connections QJ,* Vol. 16, No. 1. 2017. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26326471.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A53da2d20c775c390c46a006c517961c6

19 Caleb Weiss, 'Islamic State claims several ISGS attacks across the Sahel'. *Long War Journal.* 29 March 2019. https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/03/islamic-state-claims-several-isgs-attacks-across-the-sahel.php; Robert Postings, 'Islamic State puts the Sahel in West Africa - for now'. *Defense Post*. 30 May 2019. https://thedefensepost.com/2019/05/30/islamic-state-greater-sahara-west-africa/

Figure 1   Terrorist attacks across the Western Sahel[20]
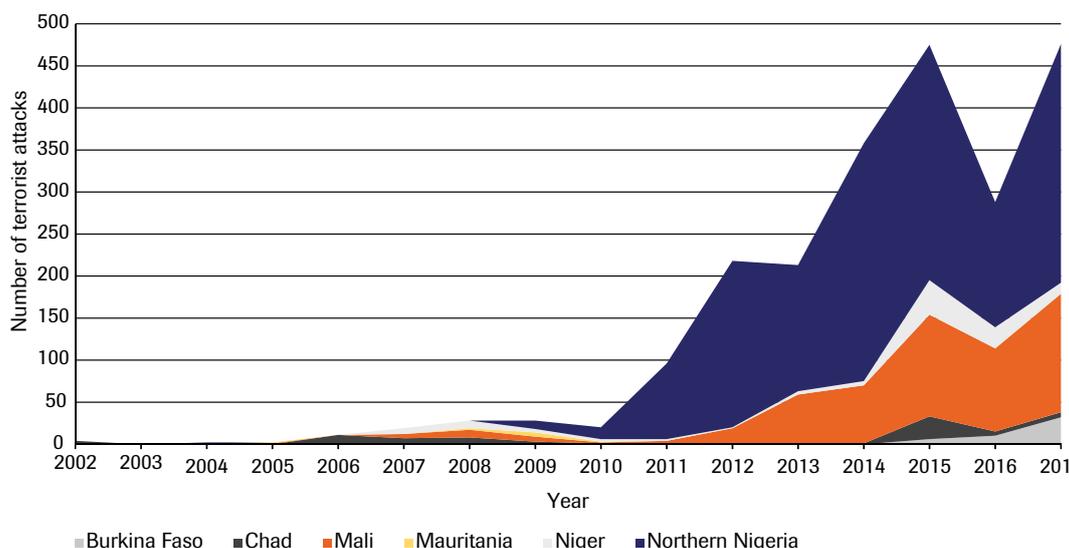
Moreover, it is likely to have negative repercussions for MINUSMA also, as regional IS and al-Qaeda affiliates consider the UN mission a legitimate target.[21]

Climate vulnerability in the Western Sahel

Although these developments are already alarming enough, the problem becomes even more pressing considering the region's vulnerability to the effects of climate change. The *Country Vulnerability Index*, produced by the University of Notre Dame, ranks countries in the Western Sahel among the most vulnerable worldwide (see figure 1). Over the past five decades, the Western Sahel has faced a rise in average temperatures between 0.6°C and 0.8°C, an increase in the number of warm days, a decrease in

rainfall (less frequent, of shorter duration, albeit with greater intensity), and increases frequency and severity of extreme weather events (e.g., droughts, extreme rainfall, flooding).[22] Such climate-related shocks will have significant consequences for people's ability in the region to earn a living and feed their families.[23] And the mid- to long-term future looks bleak, as climate projections for the Western Sahel indicate that it will only become hotter (about 1.5 times higher than the global average) and drier, combined with an increased likelihood of more frequent extreme weather events.[24]

20   National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). *Global Terrorism Database* [Data file]. 2018. Retrieved from https:// www.start.umd.edu/gtd

21   Manni Crone, 'Islamic State's incursion into North Africa and Sahel: a threat to al-Qaeda?'. *Connections QJ,* Vol. 16, No. 1. 2017. https:// www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26326471. pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A53da2d20c 775c390c46a006c517961c6

22   Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Climate Change Profile: West African Sahel.* April 2018. https://www.government.nl/binaries/government/ documents/publications/2019/02/05/climate- change-profiles/West+African+Sahel.pdf

23   United Nations, *Building climate resilience and peace, go hand in hand for Africa's Sahel – UN forum.* November 2018. https://news.un.org/en/ story/2018/11/1025671

24   Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Climate Change Profile: West African Sahel.* April 2018. https://www.government.nl/binaries/government/ documents/publications/2019/02/05/climate- change-profiles/West+African+Sahel.pdf; 'Building climate resilience and peace, go hand in hand for Africa's Sahel - UN Forum'. *UN News.* 13 November 2018. https://news.un.org/en/node/1025671/ building-climate-resilience-and-peace-go-hand- in-hand-for-africas-sahel-un-forum-2

Figure 2   Exposure, sensitivity and capacity to adapt to the negative effects of climate change[25]
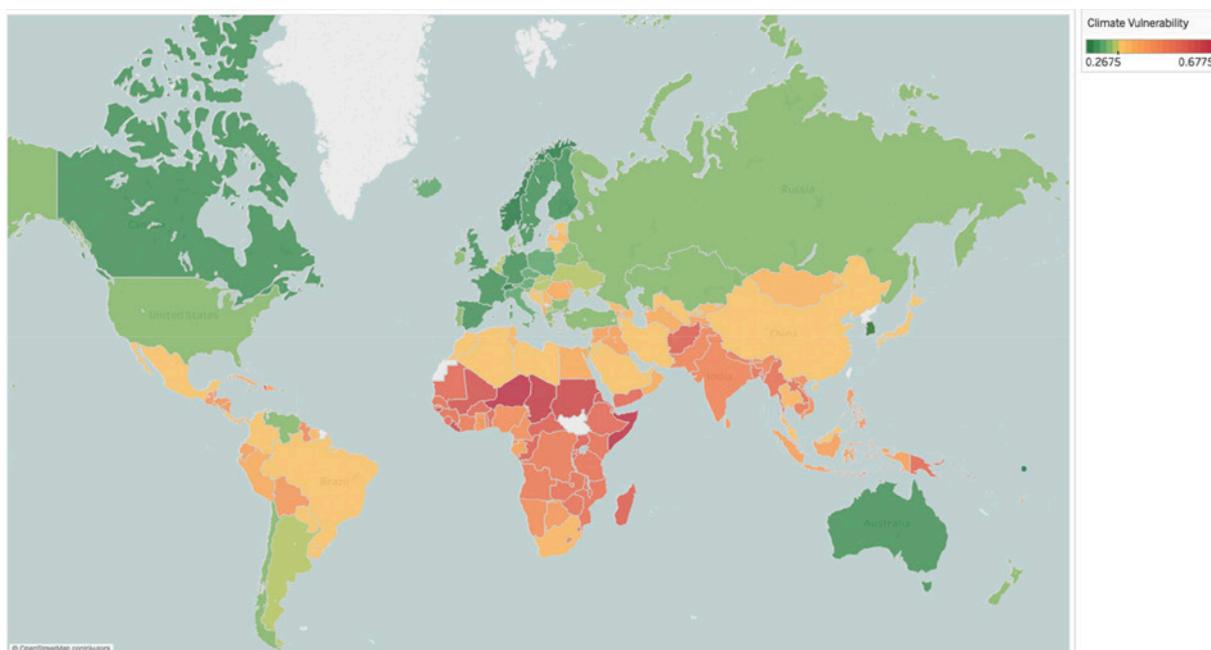
Although the region is one of the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, the Western Sahel's political, economic, governance and social readiness to effectively deal with these risks is rather low.[26] With high levels of political instability and violence, corruption, poor regulatory frameworks and weak rule of law, Chad, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali and Mauritania are poorly positioned to adapt to the effects of climate change (bottom 20 per cent).[27] Moreover, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Chad are faced with high levels of social inequality and low levels of education and innovation (bottom 15 per cent), further limiting their ability to convert investments into adaptation actions.[28]

These high levels of climate vulnerability, combined with low overall levels of readiness, could amplify existing vulnerabilities

(e.g., low levels of human development,[29] food insecurity,[30] rapid population growth,[31] urbanisation,[32] gender inequality[33]), increasing stress on people's livelihoods and weakening economic prospects. Scarcity, poverty, (youth) unemployment, and

25   Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN), *ND-GAIN Country Vulnerability Index*. 3 April 2019. Accessed 11 May 2019. https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/

26   *Ibid.*

27   *Ibid.*

28   *Ibid.*

29   United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Index*. http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi

30   The Economist Intelligence Unit. *EIU Global Food Security Index 2018. Building resilience in the face of rising food-security risks.* 2018. https://foodsecurityindex.eiu.com/Home/DownloadResource?fileName=EIU%20Global%20Food%20Security%20Index%20-%202018%20Findings%20%26%20Methodology.pdf

31   World Bank, *World Bank Data. Population growth (annual %)*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.GROW?most_recent_value_desc=true&view=map

32   World Bank, *World Bank Data. Urbanization (% of total population)*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=NE-NG-TD-MR-BF

33   United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Indices and Indicators 2018 Statistical Update*. 2018. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2018_human_development_statistical_update.pdf

ultimately, the erosion of livelihoods could lead to population displacement, rural-urban migration and increased local demand for resources – leading to competition for land and water that might fuel social tensions and violent conflict.[34] It is imperative to further deepen our understanding of the interplay between climate change and violent extremism, and to develop early warning indicators on a more detailed, subnational level, allowing us to identify climate change hotspots and prevent them from turning into breeding grounds for violent extremism.

Climate change creating a window of opportunity for terrorist organisations

While the relationship between climate change and violent extremism is not linear and context dependent, a change in the natural environment can lead to stresses on resource availability, population dynamics, and societal institutions. Having fewer resources to adapt to the impacts of climate change, the poor are hit hardest, forcing them to sell their production resources or to migrate.[35] Resulting feelings of frustration, injustice and anger play into the hands of terrorist organisations, like AQIM and ISGS, who thrive in such fragile environments, as it provides them with an opportunity to gain a foothold, as we have witnessed in the recent past in the Western Sahel and beyond.

In March 2017, the UNSC listed climate change and ecological changes, among other factors, as root causes of the ongoing instability in the Lake Chad region, resulting in water scarcity, drought, desertification,

land degradation and food insecurity.[36] Its shrinking waters, again combined with poor governance, has put significant strain on the livelihood of communities dependent on the lake and its resources. By controlling large swathes of territory and key access roads, Boko Haram has been able to control access to (parts of) the lake.[37] These factors combined allowed Boko Haram to successfully recruit young men to its cause, as they lacked alternative means for employment. Despite its strong local character, the conflict has significant consequences for the wider region.[38]

Outside the Western Sahel, similar dynamics have unfolded. Already ranked among the poorest worldwide, Iraq's water infrastructure further deteriorated with the rise of IS. Through capture, control, sabotage, and looting of water installations, IS was able to turn water into a weapon.[39] Having control over water across water-poor areas in northern Iraq, IS has actively recruited farmers forced to give up their farms or sell their cattle due to the lack of

34 Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Climate Change Profile: West African Sahel*. April 2018. Via https://www.government.nl/binaries/government/ documents/publications/2019/02/05/climate-change-profiles/West+African+Sahel.pdf

35 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Leaving No One Behind. Addressing climate change for a world free of poverty and hunger*. 2017. http://www.fao.org/3/i6371en/I6371EN.pdf

36 United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2349 (2017) / adopted by the Security Council at its 7911th meeting*. March 2017. https://digitallibrary.un.org/ record/863830

37 Toby Lanzer, 'The Lake Chad crisis: drivers, responses and ways forward'. *Humanitarian Exchange*, No. 70. October 2017. https://odihpn.org/ magazine/the-lake-chad-crisis-drivers-responses-and-ways-forward/

38 Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), *The relationship between climate change and violent conflict*. 2018. https://www.sida.se/contentassets/ c571800e01e448ac9dce2d097ba125a1/working-paper---climate-change-and-conflict.pdf

39 Tobias van Lossow, *More than infrastructures: water challenges in Iraq*. The Hague: Planetary Security Initiative & Clingendael - Netherlands Institute for International Relations. July 2018. https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/sites/ default/files/2018-07/PSI_VonLossow_2018_ More%20than%20infrastructures%20water%20 challenges%20in%20Iraq.pdf

water.[40] Those who complied and joined their ranks received money, food and other riches, oftentimes exceeding their previous incomes.[41] Those who did not were forced to hand over a share of their crops, cut off from water and electricity, put on trial – or worse.[42] A blueprint retrieved following the killing of a high level IS strategist, describes in detail the IS strategy to seize mills, silos and grain stockpiles across northern Iraq.[43] They knew that control over such food piles would be an important determinant in their success. Hence, as pressure mounted on remaining IS pockets, agricultural areas were set ablaze by IS fighters, destroying the livelihoods and economic prospects of farmers and undermining any post-Caliphate stabilisation effort.[44] If IS factors scarcity into its strategy, we should too.

Meanwhile, those depending on these natural resources are forced to turn to alternatives. The effects of climate change, oftentimes paired with poor resource

governance, will worsen such scarcity, putting pressure on the ability of people to feed their families and creating windows of opportunity for terrorist organisations; it provides them with a mechanism to exert their influence over people. Hence, it is imperative that strategies that aim to combat such organisations take existing drivers into account.

Conclusion and recommendations

The relationship between climate change and violent extremism is not linear. Suggesting that climate change is a root cause of extremism would be overly simplistic. However, climate change does, albeit indirectly, increase the likelihood of violent extremism. Data shows that countries in the Western Sahel are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change on food and water security. Some 50 million people in the Sahel region depend on agriculture and livestock for their survival. The increasing droughts and water shortages makes it harder for them to support their families. Joining the ranks of an armed non-state actor for work and food then becomes a tempting, or sometimes even the only, alternative.

In recent months, terrorist organisations have taken advantage of this window of opportunity and intensified their campaigns across the region. The security situation across the Western Sahel is deteriorating and the outlook looks bleak, as climate change impacts make local populations more vulnerable to the influence of terrorist organisations such as ISGS, Boko Haram and AQIM. It is an explosive mix that affects our national security and requires a radical shift in our approaches.

To deal with this threat, it is not enough to only protect our boundaries and fight the symptoms of violent extremism. It is also important to understand and address the root causes of violent extremism in regions like the Western Sahel. Development and security are like yin and yang: the one cannot do without the other. Recent experiences

40 Bel Trew, 'Water Wars: Drought drove people into the arms of Isis, and it could happen again'. *The Independent*. 1 November 2018. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/drought-isis-recruit-iraq-water-shortage-pollution-war-terrorism-a8583311.html

41 Isabelle Gerretsen, 'How climate change is fueling extremism'. *CNN*. 10 March 2019. https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/06/world/climate-change-terrorism-extremism-africa-middle-east-intl/index.html

42 Bel Trew, 'Water Wars: Drought drove people into the arms of Isis, and it could happen again'. *The Independent*. 1 November 2018. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/drought-isis-recruit-iraq-water-shortage-pollution-war-terrorism-a8583311.html

43 Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Food Security and Peace*. 2016 http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/newsroom/docs/Peace_and_food8pp_web.pdf; Christoph Reuter, 'Secret files reveal the structure of the Islamic State'. *Der Spiegel*. 18 April 2015. https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-files-show-structure-of-islamist-terror-group-a-1029274.html

44 Wim Zwijnenburg, 'Torching and extortion: OSINT analysis of burning agriculture in Iraq'. *Bellingcat*. 3 June 2019. https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2019/06/03/torching-and-extortion-osint-analysis-of-burning-agriculture-in-iraq/

show how closely they are related and how important it is to include both of them in finding the right approaches. Such approaches should address the following.

- **Routinise and institutionalise attention to climate change in security institutions.** The impacts of climate change and their effect on violent extremism should be a routine element of any intelligence assessment and in intelligence briefings to decision makers. It is imperative that counterterrorism and stabilisation efforts, both in the Western Sahel and beyond, take the impact of climate change into account by improving our understanding of, and intel on, how climate change interlinks with violent extremism in different contexts, both directly (e.g., weaponising scarcity of resources) and indirectly (e.g., scarcity as a tool for recruitment). If they do not, underlying drivers for extremist violence will remain unaddressed.
- **And vice versa: Factor in (counter)violent extremism and counterterrorism into climate change efforts.** Mitigation and adaptation measures could have unintended negative effects that could exacerbate existing tensions, especially if local programmes are not (politically and economically) inclusive.[45] Initiatives that promote strengthening mitigation and adaptation capabilities can be successful only if they factor in risks associated with violent extremism and terrorism.
- **Create a comprehensive early warning mechanism.** Scarcity of food and water resources affects the livelihoods of local communities. They become desperate because it becomes harder to sustain their families. This negatively impacts levels of trust in

government, exacerbates local tensions and creates a window of opportunity for terrorist organisations to gain a foothold. Developing early warning indicators and warnings, not only including climate-related but also political, economic, governance and social indicators, on a more detailed, subnational level could help us identify hotspots of vulnerability early on and enable us to address these risks proactively.
- **Comprehensive engagements.** Combating the terrorist threat in the Western Sahel is not only a military issue. Responding to IS in Iraq and Syria also requires addressing its economic and financial sources, its recruiting through social media, and its supply chains. In terms of prevention, it is also about addressing root causes. Climate change acts as a threat multiplier, especially in fragile countries hampered by weak governance, poor economic perspectives, food and water scarcity, and failing local (security) institutions. It is imperative that stabilisation efforts address this full spectrum of weaknesses and threats comprehensively. Climate and security experts should therefore be embedded in intergovernmental institutions and/or interagency structures.
- **Improve regional cooperation.** The ways in which climate change affects security and violent extremism is not deeply understood and varies per region/country. Existing regional security platforms like the African Union can serve as vehicles to further develop that understanding, to exchange best practices, and to integrate counter-measures. They can also serve as platforms for more comprehensive cooperation with institutions like the UN, IMF, EU, World Bank, etc. And finally, they can serve as coordinating bodies for comprehensive engagement.

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45 See also: Tobias von Lossow, *More than infrastructures: water challenges in Iraq.* The Hague: Planetary Security Initiative and Clingendael – Netherlands Institute for International Relations. July 2018. https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative. org/sites/default/files/2018-07/PSI_ VonLossow_2018_More%20than%20 infrastructures%20water%20challenges%20in%20 Iraq.pdf

About the Planetary Security Initiative

The Planetary Security Initiative aims to help increase awareness, to deepen knowledge, and to develop and promote policies and good practice guidance to help governments, the private sector and international institutions better secure peace and cooperation in times of climate change and global environmental challenges. The Initiative was launched by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2015 and is currently operated by a consortium of leading think tanks headed by the Clingendael Institute.

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About the authors

General (ret.) Tom Middendorp was the Netherlands Chief of Defense for five-and-a-half years and is Chairman of the International Military Council on Climate and Security (IMCCS). He is also an Associate Fellow at Clingendael – the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, the Netherlands Special Envoy on European Defence Cooperation, and a Senior Advisor in the areas of security, defence and strategic leadership.

Reinier Bergema is a Research Fellow and Project Manager at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). Prior to ICCT, he served as a strategic analyst at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (2015-2019) and as a research assistant at the Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism (2014). During that time span, he was involved in a variety of (research) projects for several national and international actors, including, but not limited to, the Netherlands' Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, the Dutch National Police, NATO, and EUROPOL. His research interests include, inter alia, radicalisation and (jihadist) foreign fighters.