
Stabilizing the Sahel: A Multitrack Diplomatic Approach

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ABSTRACT: The Sahel region has been prone to persistent conflicts and instability. However, official (government) efforts to address these challenges have proved limited. In addition, there is limited scholarship in stabilizing the Sahel region. This article addresses these gaps by exploring the role of multitrack diplomacy (MTD) in Sahel's stabilization efforts. This study hinges on systems theory as its theoretical framework. The article also relies on descriptive research design; data obtained from secondary sources and 20 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The article uses content analysis to analyze the gathered data. The article finds that stabilizing the Sahel requires the input of governments; NSAs and professional bodies; business entities; private citizens; research, training, and education; activism; religious organizations; funding institutions/ donor agencies; and the media. These nine tracks are beneficial owing to i) MTD's complementary role to the efforts of governments (official diplomacy) ii) MTD's participatory nature and iii) opportunities for empowerment and socio-economic development. This article concludes that MTD provides avenues for inclusive conflict resolution, empowerment, and sustainable development in the Sahel. Therefore, this article concludes that MTD provides avenues for understanding and addressing instability in the Sahel by enabling a shift towards networked and systemic approach to peacebuilding. However, the effectiveness of MTD in the Sahel is contingent upon stronger coordination among tracks.

KEYWORDS: Sahel, Stabilization, Peace, Multitrack Diplomacy

1. INTRODUCTION

This article explores the application of MTD in stabilizing the Sahel. The article seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on innovative peacebuilding frameworks. It also aims to provide insights for practitioners engaged in stabilizing the Sahel. This article acknowledges the imperative of moving beyond conventional state-centric interventions. Instead, it embraces inclusive, participatory, and adaptive strategies that embody the complexity of Sahel's challenges and opportunities. Recent studies in diplomacy and international political economy increasingly underscores the importance of multidimensional and adaptive diplomatic engagements in addressing contemporary global crises (Justinek, 2021a; 2021b; 2023). Such approaches extend diplomacy beyond traditional interstate engagements to include economic, corporate, humanitarian, and societal dimensions. This evolving understanding aligns with the principles of MTD, which advocates for the inclusion of multiple actors in peacebuilding. The article entails six main sections: an introduction, a theoretical basis, a methodology, a discussion and analysis of findings, a conclusion, and recommendations. The preceding part introduces the article's background before delving into the other five sections mentioned above.

The Sahel is a semi-arid African region stretching approximately 3,860 kilometers from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea (Suleiman, 2017). The Sahel stretches from Eritrea on the Red Sea coast, through parts of Sudan, Chad, Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Mauritania to Senegal on the Atlantic coast as shown in Figure 1 below. The region is located between the Sahara Desert and the savannas of tropical Africa. Scholars like Suleiman (2017) regard the Sahel as a physical and cultural buffer zone. Physically, it is situated between the desert in the north and the fertile tropical lands to the south. On the other hand, the Sahel represents a cultural transition from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and the Middle East: an interaction zone for the African indigenous and traditional culture of the south, and nomadic, Islamic, and Arabic cultures of the north.



Figure 1: Map of the Sahel

Source: Suleiman (2017)

Despite Sahel's rich cultural diversity and strategic significance, concerns abound over its vast spaces. The Sahel has emerged as a hotbed for instability. According to Carbone and Casola (2022), the Sahel is marred with political unrest amid weak governance systems and institutions; natural disasters and environmental degradation with adverse effects on livelihoods; chronic poverty; famines; increasing violence-ethno-religious tensions, anti-state rebellions or insurgents and military coups, and terrorism such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram; and human, drug, and arms trafficking. Nevertheless, the Sahel is an increasingly important geopolitical arena shaped by strategic competition among international and regional actors. According to Tambo (2025), the region's geopolitical significance stems from its strategic location, abundance of natural resources, demographic pressures, and persistent insecurity. In addition, external actors like the United States (US), China, Russia, the European Union (EU), and Turkey increasingly influence political, economic, and security dynamics within the region (Tambo, 2025). These geopolitical contestations complicate stabilization efforts in the Sahel. These challenges demonstrate the increasingly interconnected nature of contemporary conflicts.

Table 1 below summarizes the fragility of the Sahel countries as per the Fragile States Index (FSI) of 2024. The FSI was developed by the Fund for Peace (FFP). It measures the vulnerability of 179 countries to conflict based on five groups of indicators: cohesion, social, economic, political, and cross-cutting indicators (FFP, n.d.).

Table 1: Fragility of the Sahel Countries

Country in the Sahel	Rank	Total Score
Sudan	2 nd	109.3
Chad	10 th	102.7
Mali	14 th	97.3
Nigeria	15 th	96.6
Niger	19 th	95.2
Burkina Faso	21 st	94.2
Eritrea	26 th	92.1
Mauritania	34 th	87
Senegal	70 th	74.2

Source: Author (2024).

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From the table above, the stability of Sahelian countries shows substantial variation across the region. Countries such as Senegal and Mauritania at the western edge are relatively more stable compared to several central Sahel states. However, high levels of fragility were observed in countries such as Mali (14th), Niger (19th), and Burkina Faso (21st). At the same time, countries located further east, like Chad (10th) and Sudan (2nd), also exhibited extremely high fragility levels. Eritrea (26th), despite its eastern location, recorded comparatively lower fragility than Chad and Sudan. Overall, the data highlights that fragility in the Sahel and adjacent regions is unevenly distributed and primarily driven by internal and regional dynamics as opposed to geographic position. As the international community continues to grapple with the complexities of the 21st century, a focus on the Sahel appears inescapable. The region is increasingly emblematic of contemporary global challenges. These complexities align with what Kaldor (2013) describes as 'New Wars' owing to their difference from the 19th and 20th century wars in terms of actors, goals, methods, and forms of finance. Kaldor (2013) also highlighted the persistent and recurring nature of 21st-century conflicts. Such persistence poses unique threats to state-building and regional stability. The Sahel's trajectory encapsulates these trends. Therefore, the Sahel underscores the urgency of innovative approaches to address the persistent instability in the region.

Carbone and Casola (2022) argue that the efforts to stabilize the Sahel have traditionally focused on militarized interventions like establishing the G5 Sahel Joint Force and deploying United Nations (UN) peacekeepers in countries like Sudan and Mali. While these initiatives have yielded some security gains, their impact has been limited. Some of the shortfalls include insufficient coordination, inadequate funding, and the absence of inclusive governance mechanisms (Carbone & Casola, 2022). In addition, there is limited scholarship in stabilizing the Sahel region. Similarly, Justinek (2021b) notes that contemporary crises increasingly require integrated diplomatic interventions that go beyond conventional security measures. According to Justinek (2026), this is mainly necessitated by complex global risks, strategic competition and uncertainty. Therefore, there is growing recognition that stabilization efforts must incorporate broader socio-economic and diplomatic dimensions alongside security interventions.

Although some studies have examined security interventions, terrorism, governance deficits, and humanitarian crises in the Sahel, limited attention has been paid to the role of MTD as a comprehensive framework for regional stabilization. Much of the literature predominantly focuses on militarized responses, state-centric diplomacy, or isolated peacebuilding interventions without sufficiently examining how multiple state entities and non-state actors (NSAs) could collectively contribute to sustainable peace in the region. Furthermore, limited studies explore how the nine tracks of diplomacy interact within the Sahel's complex security environment. Consequently, this article seeks to answer the following research question: How can MTD contribute to the stabilization of the Sahel region? This article is guided by the hypothesis that the integration of state entities and NSAs via the MTD enhances the effectiveness of stabilization efforts in the Sahel region.

This article argues that there is a place for MTD in addressing the Sahel's stability. MTD is a concept popularized by Louise Diamond and John McDonald. It emphasizes the integration of multiple actors and approaches in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. According to Omeje and Nwaoha (2021), MTD denotes an intricate system of peace-making activities and processes with diverse actors or stakeholders. Unlike traditional diplomacy which is predominantly state-centric, MTD operates through nine interconnected tracks (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). These include the state or government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, private citizens, research and education, activism, religious groups, funding institutions, and media). McDonald and Diamond (1996) argue that while each of the tracks has its resources, values, and approaches, they are also interlinked and complementary to each other. This perspective resonates with contemporary diplomacy studies emphasizing collaborative and multidimensional approaches to global governance and conflict management (Justinek, 2023; 2026).

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

This article uses systems theory as its theoretical framework. This theory was developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in the late 1920s. According to Von Bertalanffy (1972), society is made up of several components or subsystems that are interconnected and interdependent parts of a larger whole. Stability or instability within a system depends on its adaptability and the effectiveness of its internal processes (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). The theory assumes that interactions among components (sub-systems) influence the functioning of the system. The theory posits that systems operate within an environment, and changes to one component affect the entire system (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Therefore, the systems' components need each other, interdependently rather than antagonistically. From the systems theory perspective, the Sahel is a complex system influenced by political, economic, social, security, environmental, and cultural subsystems. The goal is to restore and maintain stability within this complex system. The need for collaboration between state entities and NSAs in the Sahel arises from the realization that the government cannot control the scope of transnational conflict on its own.

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3. METHODOLOGY

This article utilized descriptive research design to explore the role of MTD in stabilizing the Sahel. The article utilized desk research to gather secondary data from reputable publications including books, journals, reports, and online sources. The study also gathered primary data using 20 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The number of the KIIs was determined through saturation where data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved. The KIIs involved representatives from ministries of foreign affairs, defense, and internal security; academia; regional institutions like the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and Economic Community of States of Central Africa (ECCAS); NGOs like West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP); Sahel Alliance; and community leaders in the 9 Sahel countries. The data gathered in this study were analyzed using content analysis. This qualitative technique facilitated the identification of recurrent themes, patterns, and insights across the data set. The findings of the content analysis were then presented in narrative form.

4. DISCUSSION/ ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This section discusses the findings gathered through a desktop review and KIIs on the role of MTD in stabilizing the Sahel. It covers how the nine tracks of MTD could contribute to stabilizing the Sahel. The findings underscore that the stabilization of the Sahel requires the integration of all nine tracks of diplomacy. Each track addresses a specific dimension of the region's challenges. The MDT approach to stabilizing the Sahel region includes the following;

4.1 Track 1: Government

According to McDonald and Diamond (1996), this track covers the formal processes and institutions of the government in diplomacy. Each state of the Sahel region has a government in place for such activities. Examples of this track include the official diplomats, the police, the army of every Sahelian state; and inter-governmental organizations like the UN, the AU, and relevant regional bodies like the ECOWAS, ECCAS, CEN-SAD, IGAD, and the recently formed Alliance of the Sahel States (ASS, comprising of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso).

At the local level, every Sahelian state's government is responsible for the stability of their state. In addition, the foreign ministries and diplomatic corps of the Sahelian states engage in bilateral and multilateral negotiations to foster peace and security in the region (Grütjen, 2024). The AU and its regional organs like the ECOWAS, ECCAS, CEN-SAD, and IGAD spearhead diplomatic interventions in the region. These interventions also include military interventions through the African Standby Force's (AFS) sub-regional organs like the ECOWAS Standby Force, Eastern Africa Standby Force, and ECCAS Standby Force. International organizations like the UN have also intervened through peacekeeping operations (PKOs) in Mali, Chad, and Sudan (De Coning & Peter, 2019).

One respondent noted that;

"Government diplomacy is the foundation of multitrack efforts in the Sahel. It sets the agenda for other tracks because of its position as the political system's engine hub." (KII17, 2024).

This observation reiterates the importance of Track 1 efforts to stabilize the Sahel. However, these official (Government efforts are not without challenges. For example, one respondent aptly noted that;

"Track 1 relies more on force and coercion and leaves less space for creativity, although it has legitimate power due to its extensive resources. It abuses its privilege and power because it has a monopoly on tools of coercion and force, and it seems to be rigid, red tape-prone, or bureaucratically slow in its attempts to keep the peace." (KII3, 2024).

The creation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has introduced new geopolitical tensions within Track 1 diplomacy in the Sahel. The AES comprises Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. According to Klomegah (2024), the AES was formed as a mutual defence pact following deteriorating relations between these military-led governments and the ECOWAS, particularly after ECOWAS threatened military intervention following coups in Niger and Mali. This breakaway undermines ECOWAS' authority and its coordinated efforts to address security and governance issues. The AES's emphasis on sovereignty and rejection of external interference creates a confrontational dynamic with ECOWAS and its international partners (Grütjen, 2024).

ECOWAS, alongside the AU and Western partners such as France, the EU, and the US, has traditionally supported a liberal multilateral security and governance framework in West Africa. In contrast, the ASS has increasingly sought alternative external partnerships, particularly with the Russia (Klomegah, 2024). This is a shift towards non-Western strategic alliance. The realignment is significant because it introduces competing geopolitical influences into the Sahelian security architecture. While ECOWAS and its partners promote collective regional governance and democratic transitions, the AES's orientation toward Russia signals a more sovereignty-driven and anti-interventionist posture. This divergence has created fragmentation within regional security cooperation mechanisms. As a result, the geopolitical polarization between ECOWAS-aligned states and AES members complicates

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Track 1 diplomacy and reduces the effectiveness of unified stabilization strategies in the Sahel. This could have a ripple effect on other Sahelian countries aiming to counter interventions by legitimate AU-recognized regional entities.

4.2 Track 2: Non-Governmental and Professional Associations

NGOs and professional associations are essential to supplementing official diplomacy. Diamond and McDonald (1996) aver that the fundamental idea behind the track was the understanding that citizens with a range of backgrounds and skill sets have something to contribute and can make a difference, rather than relying exclusively on government personnel or processes. This track comprises organizations, groups, and individuals that operate outside state institutions.

One respondent noted that;

“In order to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts and promote peace, Track 2 diplomacy offers grants, donations, and support for development initiatives. They participate in activities like dialogues, workshops for problem-solving, and cultural exchanges. They also provide for or take full responsibility for human needs in areas where the government does not pay attention.” (KII8, 2024).

From the observation above, Track 2 (the NGOs and professional associations) is critical to stabilizing the Sahel. NSA’s flexibility and grassroots engagement make them invaluable in contexts where official diplomacy may face bureaucratic or political constraints. Track 2 diplomacy exhibits knowledge, originality, adaptability, and a fair amount of transparency, but its main drawbacks are a lack of funding and human resources (Ahmad, 2023).

The WANEP is an example of Track 2 in the Sahel. This NGO was established in Ghana in 1999 by Samuel Gbaydee Doe and Emmanuel Habuka Bombande (Tahiru, 2020). Since its founding, the organization has expanded its operations across West Africa and the Sahel region. It has national networks in all ECOWAS member states and over 750 organizations spread across West Africa (WANEP, n.d.). WANEP works closely with regional institutions such as ECOWAS through its Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), which supports conflict prevention and timely response mechanisms across the region. WANEP implements peacebuilding and conflict prevention programs that engage women, youth, traditional leaders, civil society organizations (CSOs), and state institutions. These initiatives focus on mediation training, early warning systems, community dialogue, and capacity building for local conflict resolution (Azis et al., 2023). By linking grassroots actors with regional security frameworks, WANEP contributes to strengthening local ownership of peace processes and enhancing preventive diplomacy in fragile contexts such as the Sahel.

4.3 Track 3: Business Entities

This track covers the corporate social and environmental responsibility of business entities (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). This track is based on the idea that no commerce thrives in environments marred with violence. Diop (2019) argues that conflicts in the Sahel result in higher costs and risks for business entities. Therefore, it is in the interest of these business entities to support efforts that manage or resolve such conflicts. According to Justinek (2021a), corporate diplomacy and economic engagement are essential dimensions of modern conflict management and international cooperation. Business entities are not just economic actors; they are stakeholders capable of contributing to social stability, sustainable development, and peacebuilding processes. One respondent observed that:

“Private sector investments are essential in addressing some of the structural drivers of conflict in the Sahel, particularly unemployment, poverty, and economic marginalization among youth populations. Businesses that invest responsibly in local communities contribute indirectly to peacebuilding and stability.” (KII16, 2024).

The Sahel has several business entities including local, small and medium-sized enterprises, multinationals, and large national. Business entities could contribute to stabilizing the Sahel through investments in critical sectors such as agriculture, renewable energy, and infrastructure. For example, the Great Green Wall project is supported by several stakeholders including business entities like international corporations (Goffner, Sinare & Gordon, 2019). This project aims to combat desertification and create economic opportunities in the Sahel. Another example is Sahel Business Coalition (SBC) developed by the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE, 2023). The SBC is a regional private-sector network established in 2018 to elevate the voices of local businesses in the economic and security policy conversations of the G5 Sahel nations (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger). It also facilitates structured public-private dialogue aimed at building regional resilience. The SBC has created a platform for Sahelian private sector actors to share their views on promoting regional cooperation for programming and investments in the Sahel (CIPE, 2023). Key focus areas of the SBC include economic stabilization, inclusive focus, policy advocacy, and institutional ties. Such efforts demonstrate the growing interconnection between economic diplomacy and regional stabilization emphasized in contemporary diplomatic discourse (Justinek, 2020; 2023).

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4.4 Track 4: Private Citizens

According to Diamond & McDonald (1996), Track 4 covers the involvement of private citizens in diplomatic or peace-making processes. This track entails the inputs and initiatives of private individuals in promoting peace through citizen diplomacy. Such initiatives grant individuals an opportunity to showcase their citizen influence and power. Private citizens also engage in community development programmes and activities that promote peaceful co-existence within the community and society at large. One respondent noted that:

“Community elders and respected local figures often possess social legitimacy and trust. These individuals’ mediation and negotiation efforts have been useful in peacebuilding in the Sahel.” (KII13, 2024).

Examples of Track 4 diplomacy include individuals who engage in peacebuilding efforts outside official government mandates. At the local level in the Sahel, Track 4 includes traditional elders, community leaders, and respected citizens who mediate and facilitate local reconciliation, and promote peaceful coexistence within communities. For example, in 2023, Assinamar Ag Rousmane managed to bring together two Tuareg factions in the Tessalit region in Mali to the negotiating table in 2023 (CCFD-Terre Solidaire, 2024). Subsequently, the two factions were able to sign a peace pact. In a nut shell, Rousmane helped bring together conflicting factions and broker reconciliation agreements in northern Mali. Such interventions demonstrate how individuals leverage personal networks, experience, and moral authority to complement official diplomatic efforts. Therefore, stabilizing the Sahel could make more use of these private citizens.

4.5 Track 5: Research, Training, and Education

As per Diamond and McDonald (1996), Track 5 pertains to research, training, and education. The track represents the intellectual hub of MTD. This track relies on learning to generate pertinent information on conflict situations for policy and action with the aim of peace-making. As the think-tank of every society, the track promotes peace by engaging in research, training, and education. One respondent noted that;

“Research institutions, universities, and training centers provide critical insights into the complexities of the Sahel's challenges. Track 5 conducts academic research on the causes, and effects- this informs policy-making and interventions; teaches practitioner skills about conflict resolution, management, and prevention; and organizes seminars, workshops, and conferences concerning conflict management and resolution.” (KII12, 2024).

The above-mentioned initiatives could empower Sahelians with basic skills in conflict management. The application of the knowledge and skills gained from academia to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts is essential to ensuring peace and stability in the Sahel. An example of Track 5 in the Sahel is the Timbuktu Center for Strategic Studies on the Sahel (research-to-action peacebuilding institution). This is a Sahel-based think tank engaged in applied peacebuilding work. The Centre conducts research and projects pertaining a wide range of issues on governance, development and security in the Sahel region. This think tank has thus far issued over 500 guides; advised over 220 individuals; ensured 90% NGO success (Timbuktu Center for Strategic Studies on the Sahel, n.d.). By bridging the gap between academic knowledge and policy application, such institutions enhance informed decision-making and improve the responsiveness of peacebuilding interventions in the Sahel. This reinforces the importance of Track 5 actors as knowledge producers that support the broader multitrack system through research-driven insights and technical expertise rather than direct political engagement.

4.6 Track 6: Activism

Track 6 pertains to using an individual or organization’s advocacy for peace-making (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). This track entails peace activism on issues such as economic and social justice, human rights, governance, and environmentalism. According to Sikkink (2018), the goals of activism are justice and equity. In the Sahel, activism could be used in mobilizing against and challenging structural violence and all forms of injustice in an effort to close the gap between the oppressor and the oppressed. The track is highly educational and has the ability to mobilize people, but it can also be combative and involve actions that could endanger national security. One respondent stated that:

“Civil society activism in the Sahel has been important in advocating for accountability, human rights protection, democratic governance, and community inclusion. This particularly crucial in contexts where state institutions are weak or mistrusted, as is the case in the Sahel.” (KII15, 2024).

Examples of Track 5 in the Sahel include international organizations like the Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Other examples within the Sahel include CSOs, women’s peace networks, and local governance advocacy organizations. For example, Tournons La Page (TLP) have mobilized citizens against unconstitutional governance and democratic backsliding in Francophone Africa, including Sahelian states. The TLP is an advocacy coalition of over 250 organizations in 16 countries, including Sahel Countries like Senegal, Mali, Chad, and Niger (Tournons La Page, n.d.). Similarly, the People’s Coalition for the Sahel (PCS) empowers affected Sahelian communities and CSOs to actively participate in both peacebuilding and policymaking. This group was formed in

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2020 and has over 50 CSOs (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2025). In 2021, it launched a landmark publication that advocated for the reorientation of security responses to one that centres on protection of civilians. This was followed by another report to assess the successes and the challenges on protection of civilians. In addition, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (one of the constituent CSO of the PCS) has actively participated in advocacy initiatives to shape and influence policies in protection of civilians and atrocity prevention. This is mainly done through its weekly Atrocity Alert which amplifies reports of Sahelian CSOs and sharing letters of PCS with pertinent experts in the UN Security Council teams (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2025). These activist networks contribute to stabilization by promoting civic engagement, accountability, and inclusive governance.

4.7 Track 7: Religion

Track 7 pertains to the peace initiatives of religious or faith-based organizations (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). This track assesses the beliefs and peace-oriented actions of spiritual and religious communities in addressing violence in societies. According to Porras et al. (2020), the Sahel is made up of religions like Islam (the majority), Christianity, and traditional African religions. Islam, Christianity, and traditional African religions have all peacefully coexisted in the area in the past. However, this harmony is now in jeopardy as government policies influenced by a colonial history of secularism are pushing religious communities to the margins, and extremist organizations like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) continue to target minority religions and Christians. Brito (2021) avers that terrorists with religious motivations frequently have one political goal in the Sahel: to install an Islamic government that is defined by religious principles.

Track 7 could address such religious terrorism by fostering interfaith dialogue and countering extremist ideologies. In addition, religious leaders and organizations in the Sahel can bridge divides between marginalized communities and the state. This initiative advocates for inclusive policies that respect religious diversity. One respondent observed that:

“Religious leaders are influential actors in the Sahel because communities often trust them more than political institutions. Their involvement in dialogue and countering extremist narratives has been critical to peacebuilding in the Sahel.” (KII10, 2024).

Therefore, Track 7 can appeal to the conscience of the Sahelian people to avert religiously-motivated conflicts in the Sahel. However, it can also be manipulated by the political class to engage in bigotry and extremism that instead exacerbate conflicts. Examples of Track 7 in the Sahel include the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA). The NSCIA has participated in interfaith dialogue initiatives and public campaigns against violent extremism (KII10, 2024). Similarly, Muslim leaders in Mali have engaged in mediation and reconciliation efforts between communities affected by insurgency and communal violence (KII20, 2024). These interventions demonstrate the potential of faith-based diplomacy in promoting social cohesion and preventing radicalization in the Sahel.

4.8 Track 8: Funding Institutions

According to Diamond & McDonald (1996), Track 8 covers peace-making through funding. Securing adequate funding is a prerequisite for implementing stabilization initiatives in the Sahel. These funds could be channeled to individuals, groups, organizations, and communities. One respondent noted that;

“Multilateral and bilateral donors, international financial institutions, and philanthropic organizations provide resources for development and humanitarian programs. These donor agencies either initiate or buy into peacebuilding initiatives. Development efforts in the Sahel build resilience in Sahelian communities by addressing structural challenges in the region.” (KII2, 2024).

It is vital to note that the efforts above reduce the appeal of extremism and lay the foundation for sustainable peace and stability in the Sahel. Transparent and efficient allocation of funds is crucial to maximize impact and build trust among stakeholders involved in stabilizing the Sahel (Bøås, 2019). Although Track 8 is highly adaptable, influential, and resourceful, it is also capable of corruption and resource theft.

An example of Track 8 in the Sahel is the Sahel alliance. This international coordination platform was created by development partners in 2017. It comprises several countries and 27 organizations that focus on supporting Sahel’s development initiatives (The Sahel Alliance, n.d.). The Sahel alliance has five priority areas: education and youth employment; provision of basic services and decentralization; agriculture, food security, rural development; governance; energy and climate. For example, the Sahel Alliance had 1330 projects (worth€26.47 billion) under implementation in its portfolio in 2022 (The Sahel Alliance, n.d.). Therefore, the Sahel Alliance is a key Track 8 player in stabilizing the region through coordinated funding and development efforts in the Sahel region.

4.9 Track 9: Media/ Communication

This track pertains to peace-making through information (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). Media and communication channels are indispensable in shaping public perceptions and fostering informed dialogue. According to Stoica (2024), the media shapes

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opinions in peacekeeping and is essential to the collection and distribution of information about the escalation or de-escalation of conflicts. One respondent also noted that;

“Conflict actors' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions are frequently influenced—either favorably or unfavorably—by media coverage of conflicts. In addition, local and international media outlets highlight the Sahel's challenges. This could draw global attention and support of the international community and audiences.” (KII9, 2024).

From the observation above, the media has an impact on other tracks because it can affect the dynamics, context, and resolution of conflicts. Despite their capacity to influence public opinion regarding conflict transformation, the media can be biased, manipulated, subjective, and, for obvious commercial reasons, end up taking sides in a conflict. Examples of Track 9 in the Sahel include the Fondation Hironnelle and the MediaSahel project which focuses on Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso.

5. CONCLUSIONS

MTD is vital to the stabilization efforts in the Sahel. This is a holistic and inclusive approach to managing the persistent conflicts within the Sahel. Consequently, the approach has several benefits to the governments and the people inhabiting this region. First, MTD provides holistic conflict management by engaging multiple stakeholders. This engagement of other actors leads to the decongestion of cases the government handles and also relieves state actors of the sole burden of addressing persistent conflicts (Omeje & Nwaoha, 2021).

In addition, MTD's participatory nature empowers local communities to have a voice and control over the issues that affect them. Therefore, Sahelian communities will be able to contribute directly to decisions regarding the challenges they face in the region. The participatory processes of the MTD could also contribute to fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for peace among the Sahelians. This inclusivity is particularly valuable in addressing inter-communal and cross-border disputes, which are prevalent in the Sahel (Carbone & Casola, 2022).

MTD also offers opportunities for empowerment and socio-economic development (Omeje & Nwaoha, 2021). Through corporate social responsibility initiatives, business entities in the Sahel could invest in critical areas such as education, infrastructure, and economic development. Such investments enhance human welfare by addressing structural challenges like poverty and unemployment that fuel instability in the Sahel (Carbone & Casola, 2022). MTD also facilitates skill acquisition through training programs in negotiation, mediation, and arbitration as espoused in Track 5. These initiatives enhance local capacities to manage conflicts effectively. MTD approaches collectively strengthen social cohesion and also create a foundation for sustainable development in the Sahel.

Despite the benefits discussed above, MTD implementation is not without its challenges. The effectiveness of MTD depends heavily on the quality of coordination and collaboration among the various actors involved. Jones (2025) observed that while multitrack approaches promote inclusivity, they may also produce fragmented or overlapping interventions if not effectively harmonized. He contended that successful peacebuilding increasingly depends on the ability of actors across multiple tracks to coordinate their interventions and build upon one another's strengths through what he terms “Patchworked Peace-making.” This observation is particularly relevant to the Sahel, where fragmented interventions and competing interests have frequently undermined stabilization initiatives.

Nevertheless, fostering linkages among the multiple actors and initiatives is not always straightforward. Federer et al. (2019) cautioned that interactions across societal levels could sometimes generate unintended negative consequences, including duplication of efforts, conflicting agendas, and tensions between grassroots initiatives and elite political processes. To address such shortfalls of MDT, Federer et al. (2019) identified five critical reflections for effective multitrack peacebuilding. First, there is a need to clarify the meaning and application of multitrack concepts because different actors often interpret these frameworks differently. Second, sustainable peace requires simultaneous engagement at multiple levels of society. Third, peacebuilding initiatives should focus on generating meaningful contributions to sustainable peace through context-specific theories of change rather than relying solely on formal political negotiations. Fourth, positive horizontal and vertical linkages among actors and initiatives should be deliberately fostered to ensure a sustainable peace process. Finally, linkages among actors and initiatives must be conflict-sensitive. These reflections are highly relevant to the Sahel, where multiple actors simultaneously engage in stabilization efforts with varying priorities and approaches. Therefore, effective implementation of MTD in the Sahel requires not only inclusivity but also strong coordination and strategic coherence among stakeholders.

This article explored the role of multitrack diplomacy in Sahel's stabilization efforts. The findings derived from the literature review and 20 KIIs demonstrated that stabilization in the Sahel is not achievable through state-centric diplomacy alone, but rather through a coordinated system of state actors and NSAs operating across multiple interconnected tracks. The study found that MTD contributes substantially to the stabilization of the Sahel through a complementary and interdependent system of actors. Government-led diplomacy (Track 1) remains central in setting political and security frameworks; however, it is often constrained

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by challenges like bureaucratic inefficiencies, legitimacy challenges, and limited reach in peripheral areas. This creates space for NSAs to complement official efforts. The KIIs consistently revealed that NSAs (Tracks 2–9) have a critical supportive role in stabilizing the Sahel.

NGOs (Track 2) such as WANEP strengthen early warning systems and grassroots conflict prevention. Business entities (Track 3) contribute through employment creation, infrastructure development, and digital inclusion initiatives that address structural drivers of conflict. Private citizens (Track 4) facilitate informal mediation and community reconciliation. Research and education institutions (Track 5) generate evidence-based policy knowledge and build local capacity for conflict management. Activist networks (Track 6) promote accountability and governance reforms, while religious actors (Track 7) contribute to social cohesion and counter-extremism narratives. Funding institutions (Track 8) provide essential resources for stabilization programs. Lastly, media actors (Track 9) shape public discourse and support early warning and information dissemination. These nine tracks were found to be beneficial owing to i) MTD's complementary role to the efforts of governments (official diplomacy) ii) MTD's participatory nature empowers local communities to have a voice and control over the issues that affect them and iii) opportunities for empowerment and socio-economic development in the Sahel.

The findings above strongly support the application of systems theory. The stabilization efforts in the Sahel are systemic in nature. The effectiveness of MTD arises from the interaction between subsystems (tracks) rather than from any single actor operating in isolation. This confirms the systems theory assumption that system-wide stability depends on the coordination and adaptability of interconnected components. The findings also validate the core assumptions of Diamond and McDonald's (1996) MTD framework, particularly the idea that sustainable peace requires the integration of multiple actors operating at different societal levels. Contemporary studies on diplomacy increasingly acknowledges that modern conflicts are too complex to be addressed solely through traditional state-centric or militarized approaches (Justinek, 2021a; 2026). Consequently, adaptive, participatory, and resilient diplomatic frameworks have become increasingly necessary in conflict management and peacebuilding, not just in the Sahel.

However, the study further aligns with Federer et al. (2019) and Jones (2025), who cautioned that the effectiveness of multitrack approaches depends not only on the existence of multiple tracks, but also on the quality of linkages between them. The KIIs suggested that while all nine tracks were active in the Sahel, their coordination was often uneven. Where linkages between actors are strong, stabilization outcomes are more effective. However, where coordination is weak or fragmented, interventions risk duplication, inefficiency, or limited impact.

This article concludes that MTD provides avenues for understanding and addressing instability in the Sahel. It enables a shift from state-centric peacebuilding toward a networked and systemic approach, consistent with both systems theory and contemporary multitrack diplomacy literature. Such an integrated approach is essential for addressing the interconnected challenges confronting the Sahel in the 21st century. However, the effectiveness of MTD in the Sahel is contingent upon stronger coordination among tracks. Without these conditions, multitrack efforts risk remaining fragmented rather than transformative.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

This article recommends the following;

1. The AU should create Sahel-specific coordination hubs involving ECOWAS, ECCAS, CEN-SAD, and IGAD to harmonize stabilization efforts. These hubs could reduce duplication and address cross-border challenges by pooling resources.
2. The Parliaments of Sahelian states should establish frameworks for the constructive engagement of traditional and religious leaders in peace processes. This engagement must include robust vetting mechanisms to ensure leaders have no ties to conflict-fueling activities like religious extremism. Where such ties are identified, governments and CSOs should prioritize deradicalization programs and dialogue initiatives to rehabilitate and transform these leaders into agents of peace. Ensuring accountability through legal and community-based mechanisms will help rebuild trust and foster sustainable conflict-resolution efforts.
3. Sahelian states should leverage the Sahel Alliance to mobilize resources to fund targeted stabilization efforts and ensure funds are accessible to local organizations and communities.
4. Sahelian governments should adapt their development initiatives to the environmental realities of the Sahel. In addition, relevant Ministries in the Sahelian states should develop inclusive policies addressing the specific needs of nomadic and pastoralist communities. This could allow effective adaptation strategies in the Sahel. For example, supporting climate-resilient agriculture and water resource management to reduce competition over scarce resources in the Sahel.

DECLARATION

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

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ANNEXES

ANNEX I: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Study Title: Stabilizing the Sahel: A Multitrack Diplomatic Approach

Introduction to Respondents

The purpose of this interview is to gather expert perspectives on the role of Multitrack Diplomacy (MTD) in stabilizing the Sahel region. The information provided will be used strictly for academic purposes. Participation is voluntary and confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

Section A: Background Information

1. What is your current institution/organization?
2. What is your role or area of specialization?
3. How long have you worked on issues related to the Sahel, peacebuilding, diplomacy, or security?
4. In what capacity have you engaged with stabilization or peacebuilding initiatives in the Sahel?

Section B: Understanding Conflict and Instability in the Sahel

5. In your view, what are the major causes of instability in the Sahel region?
6. To what extent do external actors influence peace and security dynamics in the Sahel?
7. What are the main limitations of current stabilization approaches in the region?

Section C: Government and Official Diplomacy (Track 1)

8. What role do governments and regional organizations such as the AU, ECOWAS, ECCAS, IGAD, and CEN-SAD play in stabilizing the Sahel?
9. What challenges affect government-led stabilization efforts in the Sahel?
10. How has the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS) affected regional diplomacy and security cooperation?

Section D: Role of Non-State Actors and Other Tracks of Diplomacy

Track 2: NGOs and Professional Associations

11. What role do NGOs and professional organizations play in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the Sahel?

Track 3: Business Entities

12. How can private sector actors contribute to stabilization and socio-economic development in the Sahel?

Track 4: Private Citizens

13. How can influential individuals, community leaders, and citizen diplomats contribute to peacebuilding in the Sahel?

Track 5: Research, Training, and Education

14. What role do research institutions, universities, and training centers play in promoting peace and conflict management in the Sahel?

Track 6: Activism

15. How do activists and advocacy organizations contribute to peace, governance, and human rights promotion in the Sahel?

Track 7: Religion

16. What role do religious leaders and faith-based organizations play in promoting peace and preventing extremism in the Sahel?
17. How can interfaith dialogue contribute to stabilization efforts?

Track 8: Funding Institutions

18. How important are donor agencies and development partners in supporting stabilization initiatives in the Sahel?

Track 9: Media and Communication

19. What role does the media play in shaping perceptions of conflict and peacebuilding in the Sahel?
20. How can media platforms contribute positively to stabilization efforts?

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Section E: Multitrack Diplomacy and Stabilization

21. In your opinion, how effective is Multitrack Diplomacy in addressing the complex challenges facing the Sahel?

22. What lessons can be drawn from previous stabilization efforts in the Sahel?

ANNEX II: SUMMARY PROFILE OF KEY INFORMANTS

Overview of Key Informants

This study utilized twenty (20) KIIs drawn from diverse institutions and professional backgrounds relevant to diplomacy, as summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Summary Profile of Key Informants

KII Code	Institutional Category	Position/Area of Expertise	Country/Regional Focus
KII 1-2	International Donor Agency	Programme Officer	Sahel Region
KII 3	Ministry of Defence	Security Analyst	Mali
KII 4	Academic Institution	Professor of International Relations	Nigeria
KII 5	Regional Organization (ECOWAS)	Peace and Security Expert	West Africa
KII 6	NGO	Peacebuilding Practitioner	Sudan
KII 7	Ministry of Internal Security	Counterterrorism Officer	Chad
KII 8	NGO/Professional Association	Conflict Resolution Specialist	Senegal
KII 9	Media Institution	Journalist/Media Analyst	Mali
KII 10	Religious Organization	Interfaith Dialogue Coordinator	Nigeria
KII 11	Research Institute	Research Fellow	Mauritania
KII 12	University/Training Institution	Peace and Conflict Studies Scholar	Mali
KII 13	Community Leadership	Traditional Leader	Niger
KII 14	AU Regional Mechanism	Policy Advisor	East Africa/Sahel
KII 15	Human Rights Organization	Human Rights Advocate	Burkina Faso
KII 16	Development Agency	Development Specialist	Chad
KII 17	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Senior Policy Advisor	Mali
KII 18	Civil Society Organization	Youth Peace Activist	Nigeria
KII 19	Sahel Alliance-linked Institution	Programme Coordinator	Sahel Region
KII 20	Religious Organization	Muslim Religious Leader / Islamic Scholar	Mali



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