sef: insight

"Institutional frameworks are often lagging behind the reality on the ground"
Interview with Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni on African responses to the crisis in Sahel

What are the main causes and drivers of the crisis in Sahel?

I think we perhaps have to start with the national crisis in Mali which is the result of the domestic political, economic and, we could even say, development governance failure. And these were compounded with regional instability, the regional spread of violent extremism. I think we could probably sum up the drivers by those domestic and regional dimensions. And the result now is that we have this phenomenon that we call violent extremism that has spread from northern Mali to the centre of the country. Then it has spread to the north of Burkina, the west of Niger and, as we know from the news over the past few weeks, the phenomenon has now also moved to the north of some coastal states such as Benin. So, we're literally facing now an expansion of the phenomenon beyond Mali, beyond even the five Sahel countries (Mali, Burkina, Niger, Chad and Mauretania) which perhaps calls for a redefinition of what we consider a regional response.

> **"A redefinition of what we consider a regional response."**

What is the role of the G5 Sahel in regional crisis management?

When we talk about the G5 Sahel a lot of people actually think only of the joint force of the G5 Sahel which was created in 2017. But it's perhaps important to remember that the G5 Sahel has at least two components. One is the permanent secretariat of the G5 Sahel States. That was created in 2014. And the other component is the joint force that was created in 2017. I believe this is important to be highlighted because the response to instability in the region requires of course some security measures, but it also requires tackling deeper structural issues linked to governance, linked to development, linked to the way in which the population feels included within the state. That goes through probably a redefinition of the relationships between the central state and population living in peripheral areas of those states that are currently touched by a high level of insecurity.

> **"The response to instability requires tackling deeper structural issues."**

What impact does G5 Sahel as a new player have on APSA?

There are at least to ways to look at the impact of the G5 Sahel on the larger African Peace and Security Architecture. There is, I guess, a normative way and there is perhaps a more creative way in looking at it. So the normative way is to say that this coalition is contributing to the fragmentation of the collective security arrangements that were put in place since the beginning of the years 2000. But, I guess, there is also a more creative way of looking at ad hoc coalitions. And into that category we have to put not just the G5 construct but also theMultinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram that was put in place in the Lake Chad Basin. These coalitions basically illustrate that the African Standby Force, that component of the African Peace and Security Architecture as initially imagined, is outdated. For APSA to be efficient, it needs to be able to tackle the evolution of security threats on the continent. And as such it then requires if not a flexible architecture than at least a flexible way of thinking of this architecture. And in that sense ad hoc coalition could be seen as a hybrid response. Hybrid in the sense that it combines dimension of both the African Standby Force and what is called the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises

> **"Ad hoc coalitions could be seen as a hybrid response."**

(ACIRC). And the two dimensions that I'm thinking about is the regional base of the African Standby Force and the ad hoc coalition of the willing that is included in ACIRC. So we can basically see ad hoc coalition as combining these two dimensions. And in that sense and in addition to the fact that they are authorized by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, we could see them as, in a way, already included in the African Peace and Security Architecture. For sure, it is not the language that was conceived initially, it is not also the language that is included in the various scenarios that are currently in the PSC protocol. But institutional frameworks are often lagging behind the reality on the ground. That's probably a more constructive way of seeing this situation.

Dr Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni

Dr Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni is Director of the Institute for Security Regional Office for West Africa, the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin. She leads a team of researchers working on key policy issues such as violent extremism and terrorism, political instability, community conflicts and peace operations.Before being appointed director in 2014, Lori-Anne worked as a senior researcher for the ISS, the Network on Peace Operations at the University of Montreal, Canada and the Carter Center in Côte d'Ivoire.