



## Why Defense Accountability is the G5 Joint Force's Achilles Heel

*Without genuine reforms to defense accountability and transparency, the G5 Joint Force will be subject to the same vulnerabilities currently crippling the G5 countries' security systems. As in any institution, waste weakens capacity and effectiveness, which is an unaffordable price for conflict-affected countries facing numerous security threats.*

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Since the 23 February Summit, the G5 Joint Force (FC-G5S) has developed significantly, establishing its headquarters in Sevare, Mali, and carrying out its first two operational missions. The FC-G5S notably received further technical assistance with a signing of a joint Memorandum of Understanding between the African Union Commission and the G5 Permanent Secretariat on 23 March 2018.<sup>1</sup> In the 759<sup>th</sup> meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, members agreed to extend the deployment of the FC-G5S for an additional 12 months, effective from 12 April 2018.<sup>2</sup> Finally, Rwanda made a noteworthy contribution of \$1 million, marking the first African contribution from a non-G5 member country.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations. Security Council Press Statement on Joint Force of Group of Five for Sahel. 2018. Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13353.doc.htm>

<sup>2</sup> African Union Peace and Security Council. Communique 759<sup>th</sup> Meeting. 2018. Available at: [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/psc.759.com\\_g5sahel.23.03.2018.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/psc.759.com_g5sahel.23.03.2018.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> African Union. Communique on Rwanda's Contribution to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. 2018. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20180322/communique%C3%A9-rwandas-contribution-g5-sahel-joint-force>

To date, G5 countries and the African Union have successfully lobbied the international community to contribute a considerable sum of roughly \$510 million, and continue to insist upon the need for a permanent financing mechanism that would allow periodic funding through the United Nations Security Council. Nevertheless, given these efforts to mobilize additional funding should be taken with a grain of salt. A brief analysis of the existing G5 countries' defense financing landscape reveals that corruption and lack of accountability not only impede national economic and security interests, but also pose a serious threat to effective operationalization of the FC-G5S.

### **Trends in Spending- Up, Up and Away:**

First, analyzing Sahel's military financing landscape requires context, and a brief overview of the previous decades spending trends. While all African states combined make up a small sliver of global defense spending, it is key to note that the continent's military spending is growing faster than anywhere else in the world. Since 2005, military spending has increased by 75% in Africa, and by 245% in the G5 Sahel countries over the same period.<sup>4</sup> In 2005, the G5's combined military expenditure totaled \$315 million, and in 2016 it reached \$1.09 billion.<sup>5</sup>

Considering the serious security threats that countries in the Sahel and across Africa face, some increases are undoubtedly justified. However, such dramatic increases almost inevitably require an increase of military spending as a percentage of national spending, meaning that resources are reallocated from other sectors. The most extreme case in the G5 group is Chad, where President Deby repealed all control mechanisms to mandate the spending of oil revenues on social services and public spending. Military spending skyrocketed from \$55 million in 2005 (7.2% of government spending) to \$223 million in 2006 (21.5%) and \$739 million in 2009 (33%). Mali's military spending as a share of government spending rose from 6.5% in 2005 to 11.4% in 2016.<sup>6</sup>

### **Where is the Accountability?**

The key issue at hand is not how much states are spending on defense, but whether it is being efficiently spent, and whether budgets and procurement are subject to accountability mechanisms. For legitimate reasons of national security, countries rarely publically publish the full details of their defense spending, but instead maintain accountability by granting parliaments and specialized auditors authority to review budgets and purchases. As in any institution, military corruption and fiscal waste weakens capacity and effectiveness, which is an unaffordable price for conflict-affected countries facing numerous security threats.

Yet despite the ballooning size of defense budgets in recent years, the Sahel G5 countries largely exempt defense ministries from audits and oversight. According to the most comprehensive index of military financial transparency, Chad, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso rank in the lowest band, and Mali and Niger in the second lowest category.<sup>7</sup> The index

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<sup>4</sup> SIPRI. Military Expenditure Database. 2016. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Transparency International Defense and Security. Government Defense Anti-Corruption Index. See: <http://government.defenceindex.org/#intro>

measures how vulnerable defense sectors are to corruption by evaluating the presence of transparent internal and external audits, parliamentary oversight, corruption regulations, and procurement procedures. With the exception of Niger, military spending is simply “off-limits” from scrutiny, budgets are provided in aggregate numbers, and external auditing is simply non-existent.

In Chad and Mauritania, scrutiny of defense assets is completely absent, with military accountants acting independently from Ministers of Economy and Finance.<sup>8</sup> In some cases, national audit institutions have theoretical authority to evaluate defense accounts, such as Mali’s Auditor General and Burkina Faso’s Supreme Audit Institution, however this does not happen in practice.<sup>9</sup> In both countries, military spending can benefit from ‘Secret Defense seals’ or unofficial off-budget projecting that bypass any control procedures, allegedly due to national security.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, while national parliaments in Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger have the opportunity to debate draft military legislature in specific security committees, these bodies are heavily influenced by the executive branch. In Mali, the National Assembly’s Defense and Security Committee (DSC) is responsible for examining the defense budget, but its president is Karim Keita, the son of Malian President Kieta.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in Mauritania, the President is constitutionally awarded a chief position in the legislature’s Defense and Security Committee, undermining its independence.<sup>12</sup>

### **Economic and Security Implications:**

Lack of scrutiny and oversight over military spending has negative ramifications on both the economy and security of the G5 countries. In the rare instances where defense contracts were put under scrutiny, significant fraud was discovered. In 2014, Mali paid \$4.9 million for supplies valued at \$980,000, simply because high-ranking government officials acting as intermediaries added millions in fake fees and prices to pad their pockets.<sup>13</sup> This level of waste in the world’s poorest countries has a direct impact on the government’s ability to invest in human and economic development.

Evidence also suggests that the lack of oversight into weapons and equipment purchases directly cripples military effectiveness because procurement decisions are not based on needs. In 70% of African countries surveyed in the Government Defense Anti-Corruption Index, there was no evidence that procurement decisions are based on any national security strategy.<sup>14</sup> Instead, purchases were opportunistic or politically motivated. In Mali, it was reported that France successfully pushes sales of French equipment, regardless of its

<sup>8</sup> Transparency International Defense and Security. Government Defense Anti-Corruption Index, Chad Country Report. 2015. <http://government.defenceindex.org/downloads/docs/chad.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Transparency International Defense and Security. Burkina Faso Country Report. 2015.

[http://government.defenceindex.org/generate-report.php?country\\_id=6265](http://government.defenceindex.org/generate-report.php?country_id=6265); Mali Country Report. 2015 [http://government.defenceindex.org/generate-report.php?country\\_id=6312](http://government.defenceindex.org/generate-report.php?country_id=6312)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Transparency International Defense and Security. Government Defense Anti-Corruption Index, Mauritania Country Report. [http://government.defenceindex.org/generate-report.php?country\\_id=6313](http://government.defenceindex.org/generate-report.php?country_id=6313)

<sup>13</sup> Reuters. Mali Government Pressured to Make Arrests in Bribery Scandal. 2014.

<https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKBN0IR1HH20141107>

<sup>14</sup> Transparency International Defense and Security. Government Defense Anti-Corruption Index: Regional Results Africa. 2015. <http://government.defenceindex.org/downloads/docs/GI-Africa-results-web.pdf>

relevant to the Malian army, and that cheaper and more suitable weapons could easily be found on the international market.<sup>15</sup>

### **Impact on the G5 Joint Force:**

The G5 countries' serious problems concerning military budgeting, corruption and waste are already influencing the status of the G5 Joint Force. As the G5 lobbies more funds, the hefty €423 million price tag has come under increased scrutiny. In October 2017, French officials conceded that the budget can be reduced to closer to €250 million, which raised serious questions as to the legitimacy of the original €423 million.<sup>16</sup> Similar to previous military costings, details are conspicuously absent from the budget.

On a more technical level, another major concern is the lack of an overarching G5s institutional framework for channeling and disbursing donor contributions. At the recent G5 Heads of State Conference, the G5 and AU jointly proposed the creation of a Trust Fund to receive all contributions to the Joint Force, but did not provide details on governance, accountability, and oversight. Consequently, donors widely perceived it as a major fiduciary risk, and elected to channel aid bilaterally. Because the FC-G5S mandate was endorsed by the AU Peace and Security Council, the EU had the option to channel its €100 million through the AU, however elected to channel its funding through France's international technical cooperation agency, Expertise France.

Unfortunately, the prospect of having the remaining funds channeled bilaterally also carries risks due to the lack of established accountability mechanisms and limited administrative capacity. As most militaries rely on cash-based systems, funds are often skimmed as they move down the ladder, and soldiers are not paid on time or not paid at all. Furthermore, "ghost-soldiers" plague payrolls and divert funds to fictitious soldiers. Ultimately, the funds need to be disbursed to the battalion-level and sector commands, meaning that one of the biggest threats to the FS-G5S is that soldiers will lack sufficient means to conduct efficient operations.<sup>17</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

- G5 countries should review and reassess de facto policies of defense exceptionalism, and subject military and security institutions to oversight by anti-corruption bodies, audit functions and parliamentary committees.
- G5 countries should progressively work to improve defense budget transparency, and provide legislatures with detailed and timely information on military expenses.
- G5 countries should publish formal procurement procedures to ensure decisions align with strategic security needs. Competitive bidding and oversight should be encouraged throughout all stages of the procurement process.
- The G5 Permanent Secretariat and African Union should establish clear accountability, governance and oversight mechanisms to its proposed FC-G5S Trust Fund.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> France 24. France Seeks UN Funding to Fight Terror, Smuggling in Africa's Sahel. 2017.

<http://www.france24.com/en/20171030-france-funding-g5-sahel-force-terrorism-trafficking-united-nations-UN>

<sup>17</sup> Swedish Defense Research Agency. Joint Force of the Group of Five: A Review of Multiple Challenges. 2017. <https://foi.se/report-search/pdf?fileName=D%3A%5CReportSearch%5CFiles%5Ce4eb0a2e-927b-4d3f-bf02-7116c3a66c85.pdf>