

# ISSUE

REPORT Nº 19 – June 2014

## Re-mapping the Sahel: transnational security challenges and international responses

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## Reports

**ISS** European  
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Institute for  
Security Studies



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Director: Antonio Missiroli

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ISBN 978-92-9198-239-4

ISSN 1830-9747

QN-AF-14-002-EN-C

Doi:10.2815/39205

Published by the EU Institute for Security Studies and printed in Condé-sur-Noireau (France) by Corlet Imprimeur.

Graphic design by Metropolis, Lisbon.

Cover photograph: EUTM Mali – Cérémonie de fin de formation GTIA Balanzan © European Union

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## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

States – whether classified as strong or fragile – and nations still matter in the Sahel, but local and country dynamics are better understood in the broader regional context.

This report goes to print in the early summer of 2014, roughly 18 months after the French-led intervention Serval halted the takeover of Malian territory by jihadist terrorists, and jump-started the process to regain national state control and restore order and stability in the vast area of northern Mali and its borders. Unfortunately, Mali continues to attract international media attention due to the difficulties encountered in the ongoing deployment of the international force MINUSMA, and with the national negotiations initiated after the Ouagadougou Agreement having run into stalemate. One of the latest violent incidents, in the northern city of Kidal, saw bloody clashes between Malian state forces and Tuareg rebels (notably members of the MNLA) during a visit by the Malian prime minister. The Malian government, which assumed power following the 2013 presidential and parliamentary elections, is determined to enforce territorial unity and state authority. Yet the Malian armed forces have limited strength – as the events in Kidal showed – and the international community is encouraging local actors to resume negotiations, perceived as the only viable basis for a long-term resolution of the crisis. The population remains hopeful that the country will definitely turn the page after years of institutional crisis, but President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta's legitimacy is eroding fast. One year after the international community gathered in Brussels and committed the sum of €3.25 billion to foster economic development in Mali, progress on big infrastructure projects and major state reforms is frustratingly slow.

In the meantime, Algeria and Niger and, further afield, Nigeria and Cameroon, have suffered terrorist attacks on their territory; other countries (such as Mauritania) claim they have averted planned attacks, and increasingly monitor Islamist radicalisation among their populations. The Central African Republic faces a dramatic humanitarian situation and a deep security crisis, with violence there having taken on an alarming religious and sectarian dimension that is not completely isolated from broader trends in the region. Every country features a complex – and often dangerous – mix of poverty, poor governance, and armed threats emanating from undemocratic domestic political systems. Furthermore, the governments in power are often opposed by armed groups (broadly labelled as 'rebels') that have gained control over part of their territory. These may sometimes be connected to jihadists and their global quest for radical Islam, in a volatile landscape of shifting alliances, enmities and resistance.

However, while it is important to understand the distinctive circumstances of each Sahelian country, the pertinence of a regional approach to the 'Sahel', the 'Mauritania-Somalia arc' or the 'Sahelo-Saharan space' is increasingly confirmed by security



threats that do not stop where state borders are drawn. Humanitarian crises generate chaos and massive population movements (with people either internally displaced or displaced across borders); agriculture, cattle, markets, etc. are also interdependent in the region and are equally affected by conflict, public health crises, or drought. Policies to address all of these threats and challenges have been marked by increasing cooperation among countries in the region, through the different institutions – notably ECOWAS – and *ad hoc* groupings, such as the ‘Sahel G-5’ initiated in Nouakchott in 2014.

In 2011, the European Union formulated a broad approach in its *EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel*, setting out specific aspects of a ‘comprehensive approach’ where security and development are both necessary and complementary objectives, and where military and civilian tools may be of use. In its Conclusions of March 2014, the Council of the EU invited the European External Action Service, the EU Special Representative for the Sahel and the Commission to further extend their implementation of the Sahel Strategy from Mauritania, Niger and Mali to Burkina Faso and Chad.

The importance of state structures and country plans notwithstanding, a regional approach has thus been confirmed to improve security and to foster resilience and economic integration in West Africa. In the international community, ‘Sahel Strategies’ have proliferated: the United Nations, the World Bank and France each have their own, the African Union is set to approve the AU Sahel Strategy before the end of June, and ECOWAS is in the throes of finalising a document, known by its French acronym PCAR (*Programme de cohérence et d’action régionales de l’Afrique de l’Ouest pour la stabilité et le développement des espaces saharo-sahéliens*), in which a common strategy will also be elaborated.

Each of the Sahel Strategies must be understood as an internal policy document, proper to the institution or country that signs it. In that sense, the documents reflect each of the actors’ own institutional perspectives and procedures regarding development and security policy in this region of Africa. In addition, each Sahel Strategy involves a specific understanding of the Sahel, which is a way for stakeholders to ‘map’ the Sahel region to fit their own purposes and policies. In the course of this ongoing ‘re-mapping’ exercise, the meaning of the term ‘Sahel’ has undergone interpretations and adaptations, which may vary in terms of geographical scope, actors involved or areas for cooperation (food security, the fight against terrorism, trade, transport, etc.).

This reflects a flexibility and a pragmatism in adapting responses that is much needed, although there is a concomitant risk of redundancy, dispersion, and lack of coordination of the international community. For the time being there is only a platform for technical coordination led by the United Nations and currently co-chaired by Mali, but it is not yet fully operative. It remains unclear whether this panoply of frameworks and policies will be able to help provide security and economic development for the approximate 145 million deprived people in the Sahel.

## Mapping challenges and responses: chapter summaries

The present report is based upon the monitoring exercise and discussions the EUISS held within the framework of its Sahel Task Force. In a series of seminars over the course of eight months (September 2013 until April 2014), a small group of experts from academia (mainly think tanks), as well as from various EU institutions and EU member states, met regularly to discuss the security situation in the Sahel region. Among the themes discussed were the issues of terrorism and other forms of organised crime in the region, the link between security and development challenges, as well as the efforts to increase regional cooperation to tackle the challenges in the Sahel.

The report by no means gives an exhaustive account of all the topics that fuelled the lively discussions that took place during the various Sahel Task Force meetings. But it seeks to address in further depth some of the issues that are of particular importance and to provide food for thought for further discussions. This ‘re-mapping’ of the Sahel is thus by definition not definitive but we hope that it will contribute to an enhanced understanding of the current key questions in the region through the entry-points addressed in each of the chapters and that it will help frame policy options and build bridges between different research approaches.

In the first part of the report, the contributors focus on some of the various challenges that the regional actors as well as the international community are faced with in the region. Particular attention is devoted here to the challenge of radical Islamist terrorism, which is the main reason why events in the Sahel have made the international headlines over the last couple of years.

*Tobias Koepf* starts by giving an overview of the various terrorist actors that are currently active in the Sahel. He identifies ‘who is who’ in the terrorist ‘landscape’ in the region and shows why it is often difficult to gain a clear picture due to the fact that the Sahelian terrorist groups are constantly shifting ties and affiliations. He also points out that while it is certainly important to strengthen the Sahelian states’ counterterrorism capacities, the fight against terrorism can only be won if the various root causes of the problem are addressed successfully in the long term.

In the second chapter, *Kacper Rekawek* puts terrorism in the region in a global context. While he admits that the terrorist groups pose a serious threat to the stability of the region itself, he argues that they are less of a direct danger for Europe and the West than is often assumed. In particular, he argues that comparing terrorism in the region to violent extremism in other parts of the world – such as Afghanistan, for example – is misleading and can in fact act as a potential ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ strengthening the militant groups in the long term.

In the third chapter, *Mathieu Pellerin* takes a closer look at the often-discussed nexus between terrorism and organised crime (in this context, mainly drug trafficking) net-

works in the region. He concludes that while links certainly exist between some terrorist groups (mainly MUJAO) and narcotraffickers, these links tend to take the form of short-term, opportunistic alliances to ensure the continuation of the respective groups' activities rather than more substantive long-term bonds of affiliation. Accordingly, both issues also have to be dealt with using distinct approaches and, most of all, not via a 'one-size-fits-all' military response.

In the fourth and last chapter of the first part of the report, *Paul Melly* focuses on the challenges of poverty and food (in)security in the Sahel, which have plagued the region for a long time already and are potential root causes that can spur individuals to join terrorist outfits, rebel groups or criminal networks. He argues that despite the continuing problems, the region now finds itself at a rare point of opportunity to at least partially tackle these challenges, given the massive support the Sahelian states now receive from the international donor community.

In the second part of the report, the responses of some of the regional and international actors towards the challenges in the region are examined in more detail. The main actors in this context are certainly the Sahelian states themselves, since it is they who are primarily affected by the problems in the region.

As *Aline Leboeuf* shows in the fifth chapter of the report, however, there is still a long way to go before these states will be capable of dealing themselves with the challenges they are facing. She shows that there are signs that the capacities of the local governments to get a grip on the security situation in their territories are slowly improving. But security challenges can only be tackled successfully if security sector reform is combined with long-term investments in development. She argues that, in this context, an Islam-driven civil society can play an important role in state-building, especially by offering the local population a counter project to violent radicalisation.

In chapter six, *Julien Daemers* explores possible ways to get the Maghreb states, here mainly Algeria and Morocco, on board regional cooperation efforts to address the problems in the region (such as the Nouakchott Process under the auspices of the African Union and the 'Sahel G-5' initiative). He suggests that – while certainly an ambitious endeavour – a replication of the '5+5 EU-Mediterranean dialogue' model as a new forum of discussion between the North African and the Sahelian states could be an alternative avenue to overcome Algero-Moroccan tensions, which have undermined most of the cooperation efforts so far.

In chapter seven, *Amandine Gnanguênon* sheds light on the latest attempt by the West African regional organisation ECOWAS to provide an answer to the challenges in the region: the Consistency and Regional Action Programme in West Africa (PCAR) which was published in March 2014. She concludes that the action plan, while not yet launched, offers at least in principle a promising approach, because it explicitly tries



to also address development issues, and does not limit itself to the security sphere (as most of the other regional cooperation attempts do).

In the eighth and last chapter of the report, *Thierry Tardy* offers an account of the United Nations' approach towards the Sahel region, and especially towards Mali. He argues that while the UN has shown that it is the only institution able to deploy a multidimensional peace operation (MINUSMA) in the country, it should moderate its expectations that it can contribute to long-term peace. As the recent events in May 2014 in Kidal have shown, only a home-grown solution can lead to stability in Mali and especially in the north of the country.

One of the Sahel Task Force's objectives was the publication of a report that would address the main questions we set out to investigate, with analysis provided by selected experts. The report is thus a self-standing contribution of the Sahel Task Force, not a summary of the proceedings or the four seminars attended by policy-makers and experts and which took place under the Chatham House rule. Nevertheless, most of the authors of this report participated regularly and actively in the Sahel Task Force seminars throughout 2013-2014, and benefited from the discussions and information shared in them as they drafted their respective chapters. We would like to thank each of the authors for their contribution towards this collective effort, and our warmest thanks go to our colleague Gearóid Cronin at the EUISS, whose excellent editing has greatly enhanced the final product.

*Cristina Barrios and Tobias Koepf*

*Paris, June 2014*



**Part One:  
Mapping challenges  
in the Sahel region**



## 1. THE 'NEW' SAHELIAN TERRORIST LANDSCAPE – ACTORS AND CHALLENGES

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*Tobias Koepf*

The rising threat of terrorism has been the main reason why the Sahel region has found itself in the international spotlight over the last few years. Things came to a head in 2012 with the takeover of northern Mali by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) together with AQIM splinter group Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Ansar Dine, led by former Tuareg rebel leader Iyad Ag Ghali, following the March 2012 military *coup* in Mali.

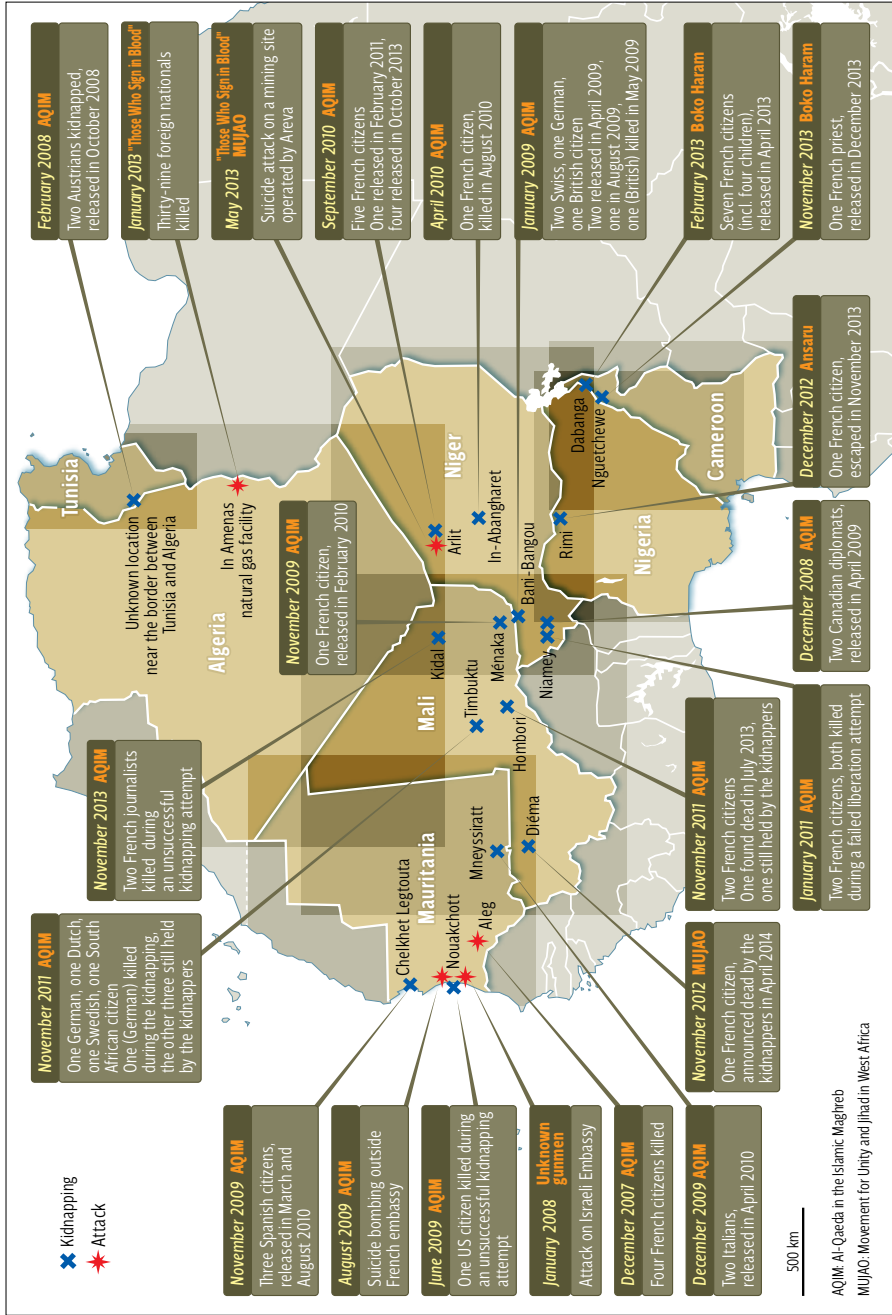
The onset of the French military intervention, Operation Serval, in January 2013 challenged the terrorist 'landscape' in the wider region. Northern Mali's significance as a terrorist 'safe haven' has decreased due to the permanent presence of the French troops and the UN peacekeeping operation MINUSMA. But despite this, several terrorist groups are able to continue their activities in Mali and the wider region because favourable conditions such as weak control of the national territories, corruption, and a lack of border control allow them to do so.

As Kacper Rekawek discusses in detail in the next chapter, the 'global' ambitions attributed to the different groups – namely their association with the al-Qaeda organisation led by Ayman al-Zawahiri – seem to be overstated. Nevertheless, the terrorist groups remain a threat to the region itself and could continue to harm Western economic interests in the Sahelian countries and to target Westerners working or travelling in the region (for an overview of kidnappings of Western citizens and terrorist attacks on Western interests in the Sahel-Sahara region between 2007 and 2013 see the map overleaf).

The key to effectively fighting terrorism in the Sahel lies in enabling the countries of the region to tackle the problem themselves. This approach has however to go further than simply supporting the military, intelligence and law enforcement agencies in their effort to counter the terrorist groups' operations. In the long run, the fragile states of the region have to present their populations with an alternative project to that of the terrorists by restoring confidence in the state institutions, effectively fighting corruption, improving economic conditions, and preventing the spread of radical forms of Islam.



# Kidnappings of Western citizens and terrorist attacks on Western interests in the Sahel-Sahara region (2007-2013)



Source: EUISS

## Who is who

When the French army intervened in northern Mali in January 2013 and managed relatively quickly to push AQIM, MUJAO and Ansar Dine out of the main cities of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal, there was hope that this had dealt a serious blow to terrorist activities in the region. The deployment of the UN peacekeeping operation MINUSMA in July 2013 also raised expectations that the problem could be resolved swiftly. However, as of today terrorist groups continue their activities in Mali and have even expanded their operations in some of the neighbouring countries.

MUJAO has proved to be the most active of these groups since early 2013. In Mali, the group has carried out a large number of attacks, including attacks on the Malian army, local infrastructure, and on the UN peacekeeping operation MINUSMA, killing two Chadian and two Senegalese peacekeepers on 23 October and 14 December 2013. In addition to its activities in Mali, MUJAO has extended its reach to Niger, where on 23 May 2013 it carried out two coordinated attacks on a Nigerien military base in the city of Agadez and a uranium mine in Arlit run by the French nuclear company Areva. Only a few days later, in early June 2013, the group attacked the main prison in Niamey, Niger's capital, and helped several jailed terrorists to escape.

MUJAO has also established itself as a player in the kidnapping business, mainly in Mali. The group is still holding captive three Algerian diplomats who were kidnapped from the Algerian consulate in Gao in April 2012, during the time MUJAO was in control of the city. In February 2014, the group kidnapped four Malian nationals working for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who were freed two months later by the French army, and in April 2014 it announced the death of French hostage Gilberto Rodrigues Leal, who was abducted by a MUJAO commando in western Mali in November 2012.

In the attacks it mounted in Niger in May 2013, MUJAO had been joined by a relatively new group named 'Those Who Sign in Blood', founded by former AQIM brigade commander Mokhtar Belmokhtar in December 2012 after Belmokhtar and several of his supporters broke away from AQIM following a dispute between Belmokhtar and AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel. Belmokhtar's new group made the headlines for the first time in January 2013, when it carried out by far the most spectacular terrorist attack in the region so far on the In Amenas gas facility in Eastern Algeria. During this attack, gunmen took hostage several hundred employees of the site, run jointly by the Algerian state company Sonatrach, British Petroleum and the Norwegian company Statoil. During a liberation attempt by the Algerian army, which took several days, most of the terrorists but also 39 foreign workers were killed.

In August 2013, Belmokhtar himself declared the merger of MUJAO and his own 'Those Who Sign in Blood' outfit to establish a major regional terrorist player. According to Belmokhtar, the new group, called 'Al Mourabitoun', should pursue the

goal of ‘uniting all Muslims from the Nile to the Atlantic Ocean’ to fight ‘the Zionist campaign against Islam and the Muslims’. Despite this impressive rhetoric, however, ‘Al Mourabitoun’ has yet to prove that it consists of more than a loose association of MUJAO and Belmokhtar’s group. It claimed responsibility for some terrorist attacks that occurred in the region after its creation, such as for example the attacks on MINUSMA in Mali in October and December 2013. But whether these attacks were really carried out under a joint command remains largely unclear. It is more likely that they were autonomous acts by the ‘old’ MUJAO brigades.

AQIM, which was the most visible actor on the scene between 2007 and 2012, suffered most from the intervention by the French army in northern Mali. On 25 February 2013 the French military announced that it had killed Abdelhamid Abou Zeid, then in charge of one of the two AQIM ‘Southern’ brigades (the other one was led by Belmokhtar) active in the Sahel. Shortly before, the defection of Belmokhtar had already had an impact on the group’s operational capabilities. This might explain why AQIM appeared less active in the first half of 2013 than during the years before and primarily concentrated its activities on its northern sphere of action in Algeria (mostly controlled by Droukdel himself).

The second half of 2013, however, witnessed the group’s resurgence in Mali with a suicide attack on a Malian military camp on 28 September 2013, injuring six Malian soldiers and killing several civilians. AQIM also claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and killing of two French journalists in Kidal on 2 November 2013, even though confirmation of this claim is pending while investigations by French and Malian authorities are still ongoing. The French army reportedly killed AQIM radicals on several occasions during raids it carried out in northern Mali, for example in December 2013.

### **Moving targets**

Identifying clearly who is leading these groups today, how they are organised internally, where from and how they recruit their members, and where they operate exactly, remains a difficult challenge however. The borders between the various groups are fuzzy and primary sources that could give further insights into the structure and goals of the groups are not available.

A lot of what is known about the relationship between the different terrorist outfits – including the dispute between AQIM leader Droukdel and his former ‘Southern’ brigade commanders Abou Zeid and Belmokhtar, which eventually led to Belmokhtar’s split from AQIM – is derived from an internal AQIM document that was found by journalists of the news agency Associated Press in January 2013 in Timbuktu. The document revealed that Droukdel was deeply critical towards the Islamist takeover of northern Mali because he feared that an external intervention to liberate the region

could weaken the group by depriving it of its ‘safe haven’ (and the French intervention in January 2013 proved him right). But the document dates from mid-2012 and since then no other sources have been found that could reveal reliable information about the development of the groups and their objectives.

Most of the groups do not have a coherent structure and are often a result of ‘marriages of interest’ between certain individuals and/or smaller groupings, who can quickly change sides from one group to another for opportunistic reasons. A good example (but certainly just one out of many) was Omar Ould Hamaha, a notorious jihadist from northern Mali, who held positions in basically all terrorist outfits in the region before he was reportedly killed by the French army in March 2014. Hamaha was a close collaborator of Belmokhtar when the latter was still an AQIM commander, a leading member of MUJAO, but also a military leader in Iyad Ag Ghali’s Ansar Dine movement.

In addition, there are overlaps between the Sahelian terrorist groups and separatist movements in the region, most notably in northern Mali. The links between the terrorists and the Tuareg rebel group *Mouvement national de libération de l’Azawad* (MNLA) are hard to track and are often played up by Malian politicians to delegitimise the Tuareg groups’ claim for the independence of northern Mali. But few would doubt that they exist. The second armed Tuareg group in Mali, called *Haut Conseil pour l’Unité de l’Azawad* (HCUA), is a political wing of Ansar Dine (the latter group having largely disappeared from the terrorist scene in the Sahel, at least for the moment). When HCUA was created in May 2013, it renounced the terrorist cause. But its leadership is still made up of figures who were involved in the Islamist takeover of northern Mali in 2012.

Ethnic and traditional economic links across national borders make it easy for the groups to extend their spheres of action to several countries. It is therefore not so surprising that, after the French intervened in northern Mali, the Sahelian terrorist groups quickly shifted parts of their activities to Niger and allegedly found a new major terrorist safe haven in southern Libya. The latter region serves as a perfect sanctuary in which to regroup, train, and plan terrorist operations because it almost completely escapes the control of the post-Qaddafi Libyan government. Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s group ‘Those Who Sign in Blood’ and MUJAO are believed to have prepared the major attacks on the In Amenas gas site in Algeria (very close to the Algeria-Libya border) and in northern Niger in May 2013 from southern Libya.

There are also signs that the Sahelian terrorist groups have expanded their connections with other terrorist groups that are active in North Africa, Nigeria, and in the Horn of Africa. Especially with regard to the Nigerian group Boko Haram it has repeatedly been stated that close links exist between the group and AQIM as well as possibly also MUJAO. According to intelligence sources, Boko Haram fighters were trained by AQIM members in Algeria and Mali, while other sources mentioned that

Boko Haram members fought alongside AQIM and MUJAO in northern Mali. In Tunisia and Libya, AQIM leaders publicly supported the activities carried out by the respective branches of Ansar al-Sharia (Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia [AST] and Ansar al-Sharia in Libya [ASL]) and it was rumoured that arms were traded between the groups. Arms, money, and possibly training could also link AQIM and al-Shabaab, which is active in Somalia and several neighbouring countries in East Africa. While these connections are hard to prove and still seem to be of a relatively moderate scale, they could well intensify in the future.

### **Counterterrorism capacity-building: a long way to go**

Since early 2013, the EU and the international community have engaged strong efforts to strengthen the Sahelian states' capacities to tackle terrorism in the region, seen as the key to successfully address this issue. However, most of the factors that are enabling terrorist groups to operate with relative ease in the region still exist today. None of the governments in the region is yet able to fully control its territory. Even in Mali, where French troops are chasing down terrorist cells on a regular basis, uncontrolled spaces remain where terrorists can hide and from where they can plan further operations. Niger and Mauritania fared better than Mali in the past in controlling their state territories, but it is no secret that parts of these two countries are today being used by terrorist groups for transit and to plan activities in the region.

Despite the work done by the EU Training Mission (EUTM) and MINUSMA in Mali, as well as several other capacity-building initiatives in the region, the local military forces are still understaffed, inadequately trained, and not capable of effectively carrying out counterterrorism activities (see also Aline Leboeuf's chapter in this volume). The Sahelian countries' intelligence and law enforcement agencies also remain weak. A functioning police force hardly exists in most of the countries and a lot of the tasks that should normally come under the remit of the police are carried out by the military. According to the latest US State Department country reports on terrorism, the judicial systems are also performing poorly, apart from the notable exception of Mauritania. In Mali, several hundred terrorism suspects have been arrested, but so far none of them has been prosecuted by the country's judiciary. The same holds true for Niger, where a lack of resources and investigative capacity has so far prevented the holding of terrorism trials. To make matters worse, coordination between the various government agencies in the field of counterterrorism is not very well developed either *within* the Sahelian countries or *between* them.

As a consequence, border control between the Sahelian countries is also weak. The borders in the region are extremely long and run mostly through desert territory that is difficult to access, which would make controlling them a big challenge even for fully-functioning security forces. To strengthen border control and security cooperation across the region (including the states in North and West Africa), several initiatives



have been launched recently (see Julien Daemers' chapter, pp. 51-58). Unfortunately, the various coordination efforts have produced few concrete results so far. Getting the various actors around the negotiating table is certainly already a partial success. But getting them to cooperate more closely, for example in sharing intelligence information, remains a big challenge.

Building the counterterrorism capacities of the Sahelian countries cannot be effective without tackling corruption, which remains a major problem within the respective government agencies of all countries in the region – as it does in Sahelian societies at large. In Mali, for example, the complicity of state officials and leading members of the military allowed the terrorist groups to create a safe haven in the north of the country. Recently, Sahelian governments declared that they want to increase their anti-corruption efforts with support from the international community. But very little has been done in this regard yet, which is hardly surprising given how deep-rooted and long-standing the problem is.

### **Addressing the root causes**

In the short and medium term, therefore, further efforts to strengthen the local military, intelligence services, police and judiciary, as well as fighting corruption within them, have to be a priority. In the long term, however, counterterrorism efforts have to go much further than that. The reasons why terrorism has been (and still is) spreading in the region go much deeper than just the favourable conditions that allow terrorist groups to thrive and operate in the region. The key lies in discouraging individuals from joining terrorists groups in the first place.

Firstly, showing local populations that governments are serious about creating more stable and reliable political institutions is of paramount importance in this context. Often it is the frustration about the ineffectiveness of the state that drives people to join terrorist groups. Secondly, there can be no doubt but that the dire economic situation in all Sahelian countries serves as a motivating factor for some individuals, too. The countries in the region are among the poorest in the world with very high unemployment rates (as shown in Paul Melly's chapter, pp. 32-42). Under these conditions, joining terrorist groups can be an attractive option for the disaffected young and unemployed to either express their frustration about their situation and/or feed their families. Thirdly, the ideological dimension of terrorism in the Sahel also has to be taken into consideration. Initially, terrorism in the Sahel was mainly interpreted as politically and/or socio-economically motivated because the Sufi Islam that is practised by most of the local population in the Sahel is a moderate form of Islam and less prone to radicalisation than others. Over the last few years, however, a more conservative Wahhabist strain of Islam has gained importance in the whole region (for more on this, see also Aline Leboeuf's chapter).

Only if all the abovementioned factors are addressed can the fight against terrorism in the region be successful in the long term. Achieving this goal will certainly be a difficult challenge. Since the beginning of the French intervention in early 2013, the terrorist groups in the region have shown that they are adept at adapting to changing conditions and, even though they attract few foreign fighters, they still find enough local recruits to join their cause. But rooting out terrorism in the Sahel is a goal worth striving for – to protect Western interests in the Sahel, but most of all for the sake of the stability of the region itself.

## 2. TERRORISM IN THE SAHEL IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT: DISMANTLING THE NARRATIVE OF 'AFRIGHANISTAN'

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*Kacper Rekawek*

Efforts to combat an existing terrorist menace anywhere in the world should be based on precise and reliable data on the nature of the threat and its components, whether these be individuals, groups, organisations or networks. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and recent developments in the Sahel region offer a valid case study of how counterterrorism initiatives undertaken by the West (including the EU) are based on a distorted perception of what is actually going on in the region. While attempting to justify more active involvement in this seemingly far-flung corner of the world, which is theoretically of relatively little interest to Western public opinion, the decision-makers and experts have invoked the spectre of 'Afrighanistan' – i.e. Afghani-style terrorist statelets proliferating in Africa and threatening not only their immediate neighbours but also the West. This theory or narrative has received a lot of media attention, but it fails to account for the far less straightforward reality on the ground. By globalising what is essentially a local and regional phenomenon, the West risks giving the Sahel terrorists too much publicity – and by extension credibility – and creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of the impending triumph of global jihadism in the southern neighbourhood of the European Union. It is argued here that winning the war against regional terrorists in the Sahel should not morph into an overarching 'war on terror', and that an effective response must start with dismantling the narrative surrounding the West's and the EU's interest in countering terrorism in the region.

### **The myth of 'Afrighanistan'**

The 'Afrighanistan' narrative leads the global public to perceive all politically (as well as economically) motivated armed attacks in the Sahel as 'jihadist terrorism' but this, to put it mildly, is a misrepresentation. Moreover, in today's era of 24/7 media coverage, news of such attacks spreads fast and they almost immediately acquire a global dimension. Post 9/11, not even the most desolate spot on the planet can be seen as beyond the reach of a myriad of terrorist groups, organisations or networks which seek to infest ungoverned spaces and threaten a variety of states and regimes with their activities. In the eyes of many, such areas are consequently transformed into territories defined solely by the presence of members of terrorist organisations capable of co-opting the local rebel, sub-state and criminal structures. The latest victim of this impressive exercise in global misrepresentation is the Sahel.

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that some of the academic literature on terrorism is facilitating international recognition of the ‘terrorist threat’ in the Sahel. This leads to a skewed perception of the reality and presents a relatively new terrorist threat, which previously seemed confined to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (comprising Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt), as a menace of epic proportions. At the same time, it could be argued that during previous decades researchers overlooked the terrorist nature of scores of violent activities perpetrated by non-state actors with political goals south of the Sahara. Instead, these events formed the background of narratives on failed states, ethnic conflict and civil war in different parts of Africa. Currently far more studies exist dealing with terrorism in different parts of the Western World than in, for example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where several million people perished in the so-called Great War of Africa (1998-2003).

If we were to attempt to map the alleged ‘arc of terrorism’ in Africa in general, and in the Sahel in particular, then we would at best be left with a series of dots with often ill-proven connections between them. This is because in reality the alleged key actors of the ‘Afrighanistan’ scenario do not exert sufficiently broad territorial control to justify talk of such an arc of terrorism. This being said, it is to an extent understandable why first impressions might be misleading in this regard: two al-Qaeda affiliates (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb [AQIM], and the Somali al-Shabaab) as well as the so-called ‘Nigerian Taliban’, Boko Haram (whose official name is the Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad), are all now active in different parts of Africa. What is more, the aforementioned organisations appear to be converging in the Sahel with AQIM (plus its splinter groups such as MUJAO in Mali and the allegedly ‘allied’ or ‘affiliated’ jihadi/Islamist organisations from Tunisia, Libya and Egypt) forming the northern and western flanks of the ‘arc of terrorism’, and Boko Haram (and its internationally-oriented splinter group Ansaru) and al-Shabaab spearheading the rise of terrorism on the southern and eastern flanks.

This pan-African reading of the terrorist threat in the Sahel, however, fails to take into account the Northern African, and especially Algerian, roots of all ‘Sahel terrorism.’ Moreover, when considering the ‘arc of terror’ theory, it has to be remembered that the first bridgeheads of jihadi terrorism in Africa appeared well outside the Sahel – in Egypt (the Islamic Group and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad) and Somalia (with al-Qaeda members allegedly training forces loyal to Mohamed Farrah Aidid) respectively. Even the fact that between 1992 and 1996 al-Qaeda and some of its Northern African allies operated from Sudan, located on the Western edge of the Sahel, should not be seen as a prelude to the recent ‘Afrighanistan’ narrative. It was only AQIM’s short-lived control of parts of northern Mali after the March 2012 Malian military *coup*, and its unsuccessful southern push towards Bamako in January 2013, which appeared to validate the ‘Afrighanistan’ theory. With terrorist elements from the west of the ‘arc’ allegedly attempting to combine forces with those operating in the south (i.e. Boko Haram in Nigeria) it seemed as if the vision of a new Taliban-lite state in Af-

rica would come to pass. The jihadists' failure to hold northern Mali and establish a permanent bridgehead for their future conquests in the Sahel region speaks volumes about the inability of the Africa-based terrorist organisations to successfully coordinate their actions and challenge the global order with the establishment of viable jihadi statelets forming the backbone of another arc – 'the arc of instability'. Nonetheless, that is not to say that the defeat of AQIM and its allies in Mali in early 2013 relegates the problem of terrorism in Africa in general, and in the Sahel in particular, to a minor security issue. There might be no 'arc of terrorism' in existence in Africa but the reality is far from reassuring as a plethora of armed groups, organisations and networks continue to thrive in the ungoverned spaces and vulnerable states in the Sahel. What is more, these terrorist structures often crudely attempt to project an international, if not global, image designed to give enhanced credence and legitimacy to relatively localised, if not often national, violent campaigns for establishing radically Islamist states.

### **'Global' terrorists: AQIM and Boko Haram**

The onset of terrorism in Africa (though not yet in the Sahel) dates back to the 1990s when al-Qaeda relocated to Sudan and plotted the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania from its African hideout. That decade also saw the eruption of local jihadi campaigns in Algeria, Egypt and Libya whose instigators had known each other from their participation in the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union during the 1980s. The leaders and some of the foot-soldiers of those nationally-based and organised jihads in North Africa often had troubled relationships with al-Qaeda, and with each other, and were reluctant to pool their resources together in any sort of a trans-national coordinated campaign. For example, the Algerian local jihadists did not welcome any foreign 'meddling' in their war with the Algerian state in the 1990s, and even went so far as to 'disappear' or murder representatives of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) sent to Algeria. However, as the Algerian jihad was running out of steam in the late 1990s, the jihadists performed a surprising U-turn and began to wage their struggle under the banner of global jihad. Their repudiation of local in favour of international jihad allowed African terrorism to go global. By default, it also introduced the concept of global terrorism to the region of the Sahel.

By the early twenty-first century, the Algerian jihadists, under the banner of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), began to turn southwards and effectively 'Sahelise' and internationalise their operations. GSPC fundraising operations, mostly through kidnappings for ransom and smuggling carried out on the territories of the Sahelian countries Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, consumed an increasing amount of the organisation's energy and resources, but provided the embattled organisation with rare good news regarding the successes of its fighting units. The internationalisation, however, went a step further in 2006/07 when GSPC joined al-Qaeda and changed



its name to AQIM. The group hoped for a boost to its waning local jihad ideology, especially in the light of its defeat at the conclusion of Algeria's civil war, and for a renewed legitimisation of its struggle if it projected itself as allied to the leaders of what appeared to be a global organisation. Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, wished to extend its footprint into Northern Africa and potentially, via myriad GSPC 'cells', into Western Europe. This strategy, however, seems not to have borne fruit for either of the two contracting parties, as AQIM maintains very little contact with the so-called al-Qaeda Central led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, whose weakening appeal has hardly enhanced the credibility of AQIM. Moreover, the Algerian jihadists failed in their quest to achieve a united jihadi front extending across Northern Africa. They nonetheless succeeded in their short-lived imitation of the successes of other al-Qaeda cells – i.e. the Yemeni, Iraqi and Somali affiliates who had been able to control and hold territory, which was then administered and governed with Talibanesque zeal. While reaching further southwards, AQIM crossed paths with an initially more local and nationalistic insurgency group – Boko Haram, the self-styled 'Nigerian Taliban'.

The AQIM-Boko Haram encounter, however, failed to unite and ignite the African 'arc of terrorism' as the logistical, ideological, linguistic and cultural obstacles and differences between the terrorist universes of the two organisations proved too great to be overcome. Boko Haram, which threatens the Sahel from the south, encompasses a string of factions, subgroups and conflicting influences and objectives. The organisation, or to be more precise, collective, is part religious movement, part sect, and part militant outfit focused on Nigeria and the application of 'real' Sharia law on the totality of the country's territory. But from 2009 onwards at least it has been courted by the likes of AQIM to join a trans-regional if not global jihadi alliance. Undoubtedly, elements of the Boko Haram movement, especially the splinter group Ansaru, are more internationally oriented and it is possible that they interacted with AQIM while the latter effectively ran northern Mali, and might have even allowed the North African jihadists to carry out kidnappings in areas previously regarded as the turf of Nigerian armed Islamists. These contacts and the sharing of experiences do not yet, however, resemble the 1980s alliances between German, French, Italian and Spanish leftist terrorist groups that orchestrated a 'Euroterrorist' conspiracy, and are more an aspiration than an operational reality.

### **A local rather than a global agenda?**

The activities of the two Sahel-oriented bridgeheads of global terrorism in Africa to an extent define international public opinion's understanding of this part of Africa. The situation in the Sahel certainly gives grounds for grave concern as the local terrorists are more than just 'a bunch of guys in pick-up trucks' and have shown serious intent of expanding their activities beyond their original base areas, and perhaps linking up with each other in the south of the Sahara. Nonetheless, operationally they have very little in common with al-Qaeda and cannot be seen as the latter's agents. They do not

form flanks of an imagined ‘arc of terrorism’: essentially they are regional, quasi-guerrilla, militant organisations opportunistically using the tactic of terrorism to take advantage of events in ‘their’ core and neighbouring countries. In short, the two organisations and their splinter groups, and allies, may not have succeeded in bringing to life a pan-African or pan-Sahelian terrorist alliance but have simultaneously exploited unstable socio-political and economic conditions in different parts of the continent. To make matters worse, these were subsequently aggravated by the global economic crisis and the fall-out from the Arab Spring which highlighted the disastrous democratic deficits and failures in governance not only in Northern Africa but also among its Southern, Sahelian neighbours. Hence, the narrative of a rising terrorist threat, the ‘Afrighanistan’ scenario where an African ‘Taliban’ or al-Qaeda-linked organisation goes on the offensive and expands its activities to new areas and countries.

In reality, the aforementioned expansion, which has been real but overhyped, focused world attention on the African jihadists’ transformation into regional or local rebels who at times control territories but whose international or global capabilities are limited. Some of their successes (e.g. AQIM taking over parts of northern Mali) have dominated the headlines but it must be remembered that there is still far more to Mali or Nigeria (or Libya, Niger, and Mauritania for that matter) than the rise of the globally-oriented jihadists. Perceiving the Sahel purely as the world’s next battleground with jihadism fails to account for the reality on the ground and gives too much credence and legitimacy to groups like AQIM or Boko Haram. These organisations, and their shifting allies in different parts of the Sahel, are not to be underestimated but ultimately should be perceived as lone enterprises with relatively little operational, advisory or financial input from al-Qaeda. What is even more interesting is that their determination to control territory and move into ungoverned spaces undermines their terrorist character. Paradoxically, the Sahel-based terrorists might actually be, out of strategic choice, shedding some of the attributes that led to them being labelled as terrorists. The more they focus on consolidating their local power bases and the less reliant on terrorism they become, which to an extent is also a sign of growing confidence and ability to project power comprehensively, the less internationalist and globalist they are likely to be in their strategic orientation. Success could, in their cases, bind them more with the regions and localities in which they currently operate. In the long term, this could diminish their non-African ambitions, and undermine the ‘Afrighanistan’ narrative. Moreover, notwithstanding all of the AQIM statements threatening France, the anti-American and anti-Israeli invective of Boko Haram’s leader Abubakar Shekau, or kidnappings of foreigners carried out by Ansaru, the immediate focus of terrorists threatening the Sahel is local. In short, taking the war to the ‘far enemy’, along the lines of the bombing and plane hijacking campaign conducted by the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA, forbearers of the GSPC and AQIM) in mid-1990s France, is still beyond the capabilities of most of the African terrorists. From the EU’s point of view, this could be interpreted as good news, but it will certainly not bring any comfort to the governments of the Sahelian countries.

The EU might assist the threatened countries in challenging the growth of the Sahel-based terrorist groups, organisations and networks which already target European interests and citizens in the region. Combating them in the long term, however, would be better served by countering and discouraging the ‘Afrighanistan’ narrative which to an extent works as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It overstates a terrorist menace and gives too much recognition to terrorist actors who might have overreached themselves while attempting to take over Mali, and whose movement is splintered and scattered around half of the continent. According to one expert,<sup>1</sup> this movement has attracted very few of the alleged circa 1,000 Islamists from the West who joined jihadist organisations abroad between 1990 and 2010 (in contrast to hundreds if not thousands flocking to Syria after 2011). It often appears to be exclusively focused on criminality, and seems to be pursuing a wide range of goals with both AQIM and Boko Haram possibly stretching their thin resources to assist the persecuted Muslims in the Central African Republic. In short, the combat begins at home and not necessarily via counterterrorism assistance to Western or Central Africa but rather through appreciation of other, often quite low-key, aspects such as the capacity-building needs and demands in the field of governance and personnel training of the EU’s African partners. Such support and active (through official, media, expert and academic channels) deconstruction of the global jihadist narrative by the West could prove a welcome change from the ‘Afrighanistan’ discourse which currently dominates the information field concerning the events in the Sahel. In short, going local in the Sahel and beefing up the resilience of the very states the jihadists are combating, while simultaneously downplaying the scaremongering elements of the ‘Afrighanistan’ narrative at home and globally, could constitute the beginning of a better informed external counterterrorism policy. The EU, while working in a variety of fields in the region, and not only in countering terrorism, is uniquely positioned to assist both efforts.

1 Thomas Hegghammer, ‘Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists’ Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting,’ *American Political Science Review*, vol. 107, no. 1, February 2013.

### 3. NARCOTERRORISM: BEYOND THE MYTH

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*Mathieu Pellerin*

What exactly do we mean by ‘narcoterrorism’ and how can it best be combated? Drug trafficking and terrorism are two distinct problems that destabilise the already fragile states of the Sahel. Although some may consider ‘narcoterrorism’ a useful umbrella term to depict criminal activity in the region, it may actually obscure the many facets of what is in reality a complex phenomenon. Attention was first drawn to the ‘drug-terror nexus’ in the Sahel region by the Algerian authorities at the end of the 1990s but there is now a global consensus that a symbiotic relationship exists between drug trafficking and terrorist networks in the Sahel. On 18 January 2013, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared: ‘we are facing narcoterrorism (in Mali)’.

However, for the time being, drug dealers have not been the target of counterterrorist policies. Only Baba Ould Cheikh, the mayor of Tarkint, has been prosecuted in Mali in the well-publicised ‘Air Cocaine’ case, in which the burnt-out remains of a plane believed to have delivered a large consignment of cocaine from Venezuela were found in a remote region of northern Mali. Many other well-known narcotraffickers roam freely across the region (in Algeria, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Morocco), despite international warrants issued against some of them. Moreover, the military operations launched since January 2013 against al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) or cells of the terrorist group Al Mourabitoun have not targeted drug dealers. This implies that drug dealers do not receive the same treatment as terrorists, even those drug dealers who are suspected of having developed connections with terrorist organisations. Such a situation challenges the idea of a drug-terror nexus and the combat against ‘narcoterrorism’.

This chapter argues that ‘narcoterrorism’ is in fact a myth, and that efforts to combat drug trafficking and terrorism need to be undertaken separately, although in parallel. The term ‘narcoterrorism’ implies that narcotraffickers (drug dealers on a large scale) and terrorists share structural goals to the point that it is impossible to dissociate the former from the latter. It is argued here that no narcoterrorist organisation exists in the Sahel that corresponds to such a definition, even if some of the narcotraffickers may have developed links with terrorist organisations – mostly for opportunistic and overwhelmingly pragmatic reasons.

## A drug-terror nexus?

Historically, the term ‘narcoterrorism’ was first used by Peru’s President Belaunde Terry in 1983. He accused cocaine traffickers and the Maoist guerrilla Sendero Luminoso of working in unison to launch attacks against the Peruvian security forces. Since then, many studies have demonstrated that the term ‘narcoterrorism’ was misleading because of the low level of trust between drug dealers and terrorists in Peru and the general incompatibility of their goals. The same could be argued about the ‘drug-terror nexus’ in the Sahel. Contrary to popular belief, these threats are more distinct than connected.

A link between them can nevertheless be traced in the trajectories of individual criminals, specifically narcotraffickers who turn to terrorist activities. This is usually due to essentially pragmatic and materialistic reasons – to make money by kidnapping for ransom, or to obtain armed escorts to accompany their drug convoys – but rarely because of ideological motivations. There are of course some exceptions, e.g. in the cases of criminals (including traffickers) who have converted to the cause of radical Islam. For example, some former narcotraffickers, such as Sultan Ould Bady, one of the leading figures of MUJAO, or other less well-known Arab figures based in southern Algeria, have turned to Islamist terrorism.

On the other hand, it is extremely rare to see terrorists becoming actively involved in drug trafficking. As one study has noted,<sup>1</sup> press reports that evoke such a nexus are generally unfounded and no cases exist of terrorists legally convicted of drug-smuggling. The case of Mokthar Belmokthar has been widely quoted as an example of an Islamist terrorist associated with drug-trafficking, but this has been somewhat overstated. He may be known by the nickname ‘Mr. Marlboro’ and it is not impossible that he started out as a cigarette smuggler, as did many other local ‘entrepreneurs’ in the area during the 1980s. But there is no evidence that he got involved in the business of drug trafficking at the end of the 1990s when the illicit cannabis trade began to proliferate in the Sahara. His connection with smuggling networks was specifically limited to offering armed protection to convoys in exchange for intelligence from smugglers, who know the local population and territory well.

Another example is that of Abdelhamid Abou Zeid, the leader of AQIM when the group took control of Timbuktu in 2011. One of his first decisions was to drive out Berabiche militia who had formerly been involved in drug trafficking, and to force them to take refuge in Mauritania. Indeed, prior to the launch of Operation Serval, there was no evidence of any drug convoy transiting through Timbuktu, unlike the situation in Gao.

1 Wolfram Lacher, *Le mythe narcoterroriste au Sahel*, document de référence de la WACD n°4, septembre 2013.

## **Narcotraffickers, terrorists and kidnapers**

Nevertheless, there may be a connection between AQIM and the drug routes as the organisation is alleged to have extorted a tax – estimated at 10% – from each drug convoy that has crossed its territory since AQIM settled in northern Mali in the early 2000s. The existence of such a tax has been widely adduced, and the fact that AQIM tried to justify what is for many a transgression of Islam (which forbids the use or trafficking of drugs) lends credence to this speculation. According to a Mauritanian columnist, Isselmon, AQIM representatives explained in an interview in October 2013 that they are ready to accept money from drug trafficking because drugs are sent to Europe, and are hence considered as a weapon against the West. Nevertheless, money obtained in this way probably represents a very low percentage of AQIM's income because, before 2011, the area of the country over which AQIM had control was limited to territory that was not at the heart of drug trafficking routes. Some sources have also asserted that the tax was levied by other organisations close to AQIM, such as former Arab militias affiliated to the Malian state, but not directly by AQIM. Once again, AQIM's involvement seems to have been limited, and narcotrafficking to have constituted an extremely marginal source of income for Saharan terrorist organisations. For both AQIM and MUJAO, profits derived from kidnapping for ransom were far more significant.

In addition, both drug trafficking and terrorist groups have long shared an interest in establishing a safe haven in northern Mali. Rather than a common goal, both groups of actors saw this as a precondition for their being able to pursue their own objectives independently. They sought to establish this safe haven by any means, and the easiest way to obtain it before the outbreak of the Tuareg rebellion in January 2012 was to ally with the Malian state. This explains why AQIM did not target Malian officers until 2009, and why drug smugglers from the Berabiche and Lemhar tribes tried to strengthen links with state representatives. The launch of an attack by the Malian army against AQIM in 2009 (partly in retaliation for the assassination of a Berabiche army colonel) and the construction of military bases in the north of Mali in 2011 convinced AQIM to change its strategy, and to ally with MNLA Tuareg rebels in 2012. Narcotraffickers operated the same reversal of strategy. Many of them found that the best way to ensure a safe haven and protection for their convoys was firstly in cooperation with the MNLA at the very beginning of the rebellion before switching allegiance to the MUJAO.

Most importantly, terrorist groups and criminals – but not necessarily drug traffickers – have cooperated in the very lucrative business of kidnapping for ransom. As previously noted, this business represents the main source of income for terrorist organisations, especially in the Sahel where ransom payments from various governments or companies may have financed AQIM and MUJAO to the amount of at least 75 million USD since 2003. Individuals in some communities (the Lemhar or Ifoghas for instance) that are close to terrorist groups have become powerful intermediaries



thanks to the practice of kidnapping for ransom: this role confers them with a certain amount of power and also buys some political influence. The ‘ransom industry’ is highly profitable: the prospect of quickly acquiring huge amounts of money encourages petty criminals or simple drug dealers to turn to kidnapping. Participating in kidnappings and/or ransom payments does not require complex logistical resources beyond a 4x4 truck and a good intelligence network. But kidnapers tend to be less organised and less predictable than narcotraffickers. For these reasons, and since it has been proven that kidnapping for ransom directly finances terrorist organisations, this phenomenon needs to be eradicated, as Algeria and the UN have requested for many years. Unfortunately, many countries are believed to keep paying ransoms to free their citizens.

### **Opportunistic alliances**

Pragmatic cooperation in the quest for a safe haven, but also ‘business protection’, led to the closest nexus between terrorism and narcotrafficking that has actually been observed in Mali, within MUJAO. A Berabiche militia group – linked to narcotrafficking – originally decided to join the Tuareg rebellion in Mali through the FNLA (Front national de libération de l’Azawad), later renamed MAA (Mouvement Arabe de l’Azawad), to secure the militia’s business interests. Similarly, the Lemhar narcotraffickers found that the Malian army, weakened by the rebellion, was no longer able to protect their contraband business; the Lemhar group found an alternative ‘security umbrella’ first by joining the MNLA and then in MUJAO.

Many local observers and witnesses suggest that several very powerful Lemhar narcotraffickers financed MUJAO in 2012, and maybe after that too. For many years before the rebellion, the Lemhar had developed relations with AQIM representatives, not for ideological reasons but essentially to integrate the lucrative hostage-taking networks. Furthermore, some Lemhar smugglers decided to support some of their relatives who were actively engaged in MUJAO because of family loyalty or, even more likely, in order to maintain prestige and strength in the Lemhar community. There is another (tribal) reason behind the Lemhar’s backing of MUJAO, namely the will to weaken the MNLA, in which Arabs (especially Lemhar) were a minority. The best illustration of such pragmatic cooperation was the expulsion of the MNLA from Gao on 26 June 2012. Nevertheless, a closer observation of the group dynamics during the occupation of Gao in 2012 reveals a less straightforward picture: Arab Lemhar influence within MUJAO was limited and they probably did not have any decision-making role. For example, if MUJAO arrested an Arab person ‘for moral reasons’, even the most powerful members of the Lemhar community were not always influential enough to be able to get MUJAO to release the prisoner.

We have to bear in mind that, in most cases, the drug-terror nexus is based on expediency. In recent history, we can easily find examples of drug traffickers, especially

Tuareg rebels, who decided to wage war against AQIM (or GSPC, AQIM's predecessor) – for instance in 2006, because they considered that their trafficking channels were threatened by the presence of AQIM. Incentivising traffickers to dissociate from terrorist organisations could pave the way for such proxy wars if narcotraffickers perceive that it is in their interest to adopt this strategy. More broadly, many Tuaregs with no involvement in drug networks have lost their lives during the last few years because of their contribution to antiterrorist operations. Among them, the most famous was Sidi Mohamed ag Acherif, aka 'Merzouk', assassinated by AQIM on 11 August 2010.

In sum, although MUJAO and the northern Mali experience have shown that there can be a nexus between traffickers and terrorists, this kind of partnership does not have a very strong basis and is essentially the outcome of opportunistic alliances. Nevertheless, it could be reproduced in the future for the same pragmatic reasons outlined above.

### **Drug trafficking and terrorism: different combats**

Introducing the term 'narcoterrorism' either in our analysis or in the sphere of policy-making is misleading, in this author's view. First, the term has been used widely and loosely to discredit individuals or groups, but designating terrorist groups as 'narcoterrorists' has not prevented them from recruiting militants into their ranks. Secondly, there is a danger that labelling AQIM or MUJAO as 'narcoterrorist' may lead to the ideological dimension that underpins these groups being overlooked, reducing the terrorist organisations – and their actions – to simpler forms of criminality. Finally, looking at the situation in the Sahel through the lens of 'narcoterrorism' inevitably leads to a narrow and reductive perspective that distorts the stakeholders' understanding of the region and can also be inimical to the policy-making process.

Clearly, drug trafficking and terrorist groups have to be considered – and combatted – using very distinct approaches.

International and national priorities are *de facto* focused on terrorism and not on narcotrafficking. There is less will and arguably less ability to fight against narcotrafficking. Regarding the French and international intervention in Mali, it is telling that no drug traffickers have been arrested so far, while many terrorists have been targeted. In Mali, it is not realistic to consider that the state is able – or will be able, and willing – to wage a war against narcotraffickers. The odds are stacked against this happening – at least in the short term – due to the high level of corruption, extremely weak governance (including the legal system), the financial and political clout of narcotraffickers, and the security forces' lack of equipment and training. The powerlessness of Mali and other neighbouring states is also explained by the regional dimension of the problem. Key figures in the regional drug trafficking net-



works are of various nationalities and can rely on the political elites of Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Algeria or Niger for protection. Unfortunately, there is clearly no intention to tackle this issue in a concerted way at regional level. In addition, the current debate on decriminalising cannabis production in Morocco and the collusion of officials and elites at the highest level of some states will reinforce this ‘wait-and-see attitude’ towards narcotrafficking in the region.

Drug trafficking cannot be considered solely in terms of its security implications but has to be seen, most importantly, from a socioeconomic perspective. The general context of state corruption, poverty and a lack of employment opportunities creates a climate which fosters the proliferation of an illicit underground economy. Drug trafficking is closely intertwined with the stability of some territories, where it is a source of livelihood for some of the local populations and even a way for certain tribes (the Lemhar for instance) to improve their social standing in Malian society. This explains the resilience of narcotrafficking networks. It is not a fleeting or temporary phenomenon destined to disappear, and the combat against it has been ‘prudent’ at best. In northern Mali and northern Niger, for example, drug trafficking and other contraband activities have ‘recruited’ former militia insurgents, so it provides a form of ‘youth employment’ and arguably prevents youths from turning to more dangerous or violent criminal activities, such as insurrection. According to the author’s own assessment for the three regions of northern Mali, at least 15, 000 people make a living either directly or indirectly thanks to drug trafficking. In most of the Sahel, this inherent importance of narcotrafficking in the local economy is facilitated by a widespread ‘social acceptance’ of trafficking and other associated activities, such as raids on drug convoys whose object is to resell stolen goods to the original traffickers. This is generally not socially condemned, except by some religious authorities. Such tolerance and even ‘local ownership’ of the phenomenon is illustrated by a popular song by singer/guitarist Bibi Ahmed from northern Niger, joyfully recounting the adventurous life of a bandit.

A militarised response to narcotrafficking could be counterproductive because it could have as a side-effect the reinforcement of the ‘drug-terror nexus’. If drug traffickers feel that they need to boost their protection they will turn to terrorist organisations. An alternative policy choice might be to try to co-opt narcotraffickers and to encourage them to dissociate themselves from any terrorist activity. There are two realistic scenarios in this case: protection provided for Arab groups but avoiding the backing from the Malian state which prevailed formerly, and a policy of greater incentives. The solution is not to encourage drug trafficking, but to envisage softer and smarter ways to combat it than simply by resorting to hard power. Some experts suggest using a carrot-and-stick approach: target the most disruptive actors (either with regard to their political power, or their connection with terrorism) and offer others ‘a way out’ of the business, maybe through a kind of financial amnesty that would allow narcotraffickers to launder part or all of their money.

A distinction embedded in the legal framework would also be helpful: the sanctions and punishments for ‘narcoterrorism’ should be more severe than for narcotrafficking. Right now there is no clear differentiation, and it is clearly problematic that drug dealers should be liable to the same penalties and prison sentences as terrorists. Such clarification would imply a detailed definition of ‘narcoterrorism’, and a reinforcement of the investigative prerogatives and technical capacities of law enforcement agencies dedicated to this issue. This does not mean that narcotrafficking has to become acceptable, but that legal repercussions would be less severe. A few exemplary arrests and prosecutions would already contribute to such a new environment. In parallel, the EU could support local initiatives to counter drug trafficking by setting up alert systems involving local communities and traditional religious authorities. These suggestions are not exclusive, and they would not preclude the emergence of a more enduring and structural solution in the medium and long term, i.e. sustainable economic opportunities (outside the money-laundering cycle), and a strong institutional framework that enables the Malian state and other states of the region to clamp down on these networks.

## **Conclusion**

Rather than a nexus, drug trafficking and terrorism are symptoms of the same disease: deep-seated structural weaknesses and dysfunctionalities in Mali (particularly in the north) and in other Sahelian countries. Both phenomena grow from similar roots: an inhospitable geographical environment, a lack of resistance from the local population, as well as the passivity, and even at times complicity, of state agents, in an area where there is no military presence. If both threats are to be tackled effectively it is imperative that these weaknesses be addressed. However, there is little point in focusing on the threats themselves as they are merely consequences of the particular context. Instead, the priority should be to improve governance, to restore the state and the army footprint in the north, and to recreate a social contract with local populations. Such improvements would shield the people from the corrosive effects of terrorism and narcotrafficking, and from the hypothetical nexus between them.

## 4. FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY REDUCTION

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*Paul Melly*

Crisis in Mali may have been the catalyst. But today the wider Sahel has become the focus of unprecedented global attention that extends far beyond the political or military arena or indeed the challenges facing one country.

In January 2014, international partners and national governments launched the region's first ever three-year strategy<sup>1</sup> to tackle humanitarian needs and strengthen 'resilience' – the capacity to withstand crises such as rainfall failure or conflict and ensure an essential minimum access to food and income.

Food security, and the creation of sustainable household livelihoods, are now generally recognised as essential steps towards the creation of a secure and stable region. Discontent fuelled by poverty and poor public services can undermine support for state structures – as has happened among parts of the population in northern Mali; a lack of employment and income opportunities can leave young men more vulnerable to the temptation of involvement in armed groups or criminal networks, some of which can pay recruits significant sums of money.

Donors have pledged massive sums. In November 2013, the EU pledged a €5 billion package for 2014-2020 and the World Bank an additional \$1.5 billion.<sup>2</sup> World Bank chief Jim Yong Kim and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon toured the Sahel in late 2013 in a public demonstration of the reinforced international focus on the region and its development.

In parallel, Sahelian national governments have stepped up their own efforts. The monitoring of farm output and food security by the Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS) – the Sahel's inter-governmental organisation that seeks to combat the impact of drought and enhance security<sup>3</sup> – is being extended to encompass coastal West African states. Their agricultural economies and food markets are closely interlinked with those of the Sahelian countries themselves.

And in February 2014 Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad decided to set up a new 'G5' grouping, which aims, among other goals, at coordinating major

1 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *2014-2016 Strategic Response Plan, Sahel Region*, January 2014.

2 Remarks to the UN Security Council by World Bank Group president Jim Yong Kim, 12 December 2013.

3 Current CILSS member states are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Togo.

projects and mobilising funding for priorities such as infrastructure, agriculture and pastoralism – an acknowledgement of the contribution that economic and social development can make towards security and reducing the risk of conflict.

These initiatives, instigated by governments in the Sahel, complement a decades-old engagement in the region by specialist international agencies and NGOs. Food security and the reinforcement of economic and social resilience are not new priorities. They have been the target of local community projects, national government policies and major donor-funded programmes over many years, following the major droughts of the 1970s.

Undeniably, there has been much progress in economic and wider development terms. However, the challenge of ensuring secure access to food and to essential survival incomes is still far from being met. Large-scale food crises remain a regular occurrence and a constant risk. Household livelihoods are still mostly precarious, and vulnerable to economic and environmental threats.

While all Sahelian states have sustained positive real GDP growth over most of the past decade, this has not always translated into comparable reductions in poverty, particularly at the household level. Despite increases in average *per capita* economic output, large sections of the population have not experienced a substantial improvement in their incomes or reliable access to adequate food. A significant proportion of the population of all Sahelian countries continues to live in deep poverty; child malnutrition remains chronic in many areas.

### **Headline successes**

In some key respects there have been real advances, particularly at the national macro-economic level, in the provision of essential public services and in access to tools of economic empowerment such as communications and finance.

After the crises of the 1980s and 1990s, Sahelian governments – supported by the IMF and external donors – finally succeeded in establishing relative monetary and fiscal stability. The 50% devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 bolstered the competitiveness of agriculture, enabling a resurgence in the production of cereals for local urban markets and other cash crops such as shea nuts and cotton.

As elsewhere in Africa, the development of mobile telecom coverage and internet access has transformed the availability of affordable communications, spread knowledge and enhanced economic and service efficiency at low cost.

Recent years have seen large-scale modernisation of the West African ports serving as trade gateways for landlocked Sahelian countries; and the region is now turning to

the upgrade and extension of rail networks, which should further cut the cost and improve the speed of the Sahel's access to international markets and sources of supply.

The reach of basic health and education services has been substantially extended. In contrast to the crude early models of 'structural adjustment' economic reform, the policy programmes negotiated with the IMF and international donors over the past 15 years have prioritised support for the poor and spending on key social services. The positive impact can be seen in statistics on school enrolment and health (see Table 1).

Microcredit is now widespread, while the West African banking sector has benefited from foreign investment, notably by Moroccan partners, and the overhaul of regulation. Financial service provision is now more diverse, more secure, and more attuned to the needs of the local business and consumer economy.

**Table 1: Education and health – illustrative indicators**

	Burkina Faso	Chad	Mali	Mauritania	Niger	Senegal
<b>Life expectancy (yrs)</b>						
<i>female</i>	57	52	55	60	58	62
<i>male</i>	55	50	55	63	58	65
<b>Births attended by skilled personnel</b>	67	17	49	57	18	65
<b>Primary school enrolment %</b>						
<i>female</i>	63	51	63	77	60	81
<i>male</i>	66	74	72	73	71	77
<b>Secondary school enrolment %</b>						
<i>female</i>	17	5	25	15	9	19
<i>male</i>	21	16	36	17	14	24

Source: UNFPA, World Bank

**Table 2: Access to telecoms and internet (average, 2009-2013)**

	Burkina Faso	Chad	Mali	Mauritania	Niger	Senegal
<b>Mobile cellular subscriptions – per 100 people</b>	57	35	90	111	32	88
<b>Internet users – per 100 people</b>	3.7	2.1	2.2	5.4	1.4	19.2

Source: World Bank

### **Food and livelihood insecurity persists**

Despite the undoubted advances in terms of development, Sahelian countries cannot yet ensure reliable and affordable access to adequate essential food for the large majority of their population. Malnutrition is a widespread and persistent problem. Many factors contribute to this continuing fragility. The poorest households often have little or no land or livestock of their own and must depend largely on minimal cash income.

There is wide variation from country to country in the effectiveness of the early warning systems (*systèmes d’alerte précoce* – SAPs) established to monitor the risks of food or health crisis. Niger has relatively well-developed networks for reporting risk indicators, based on detailed reporting by officials from a range of government agencies. This grassroots data is fed into a central SAP bureau attached to the prime minister’s office.

By contrast, the effectiveness of Mali’s once well-regarded agricultural sector strategies has been undermined by unreliable data reporting and corruption. But there are hopes that the reliability of the system may now improve, because the national food security commission has recently been placed under the oversight of relevant sectoral ministers, rather than the presidency, as was the case up to 2012.

Meanwhile, long-term desertification imposes inevitable strains, where resources are in short supply – even though it is over-simplistic to regard settled farming communities and nomadic pastoralist groups as condemned to a permanent confrontation over scarce land and water resources. (Frequently indeed their activities are complementary – for example, where farmers allow pastoralists to graze their livestock on the stubble of crops that have been harvested, and the animals’ droppings re-fertilise the land for the next growing season.)

The geography of settlement and infrastructure hinders the prospects for a diversification of the Sahelian economy. Other than western Mauritania and Senegal, the Sahelian regions are landlocked; transport costs are high; distances to urban markets can be huge.

In recent years the risk of kidnappings and terrorist attacks has driven away the Western tourists who had become an important source of income for certain communities such as Timbuktu or those staging the Festival du Désert music festival in Mali.

The effectiveness of development programmes has been patchy, undermined by corruption, national governments' weak capacity to deliver programmes in many of the more remote areas and, latterly, by insecurity – which has limited the ability of international partners and NGOs to operate in some regions, particularly in the north.

Beyond shortcomings in the operation of public services and the implementation of development projects, the Sahel's prospects for reducing poverty and providing food security and adequate livelihoods are jeopardised by long-term fundamental challenges. Some of these are beyond human control. Others could be mitigated through effective policies and projects, but only gradually over the medium term.

Fringing the Sahara, the Sahel region is exposed to a permanent risk of drought. It is almost certain that every few years the rains will fail. Tree planting, irrigation and other initiatives can help limit the corrosive effects of drought at a micro level but cannot alter the fundamental situation. Climatic risks are compounded by the seasonal pattern of farming: staple cereal crops are grown during a single wet season, from July to September – with some slight local variations. This leaves agricultural output highly vulnerable to the failure of rainfall, or shifts in the seasonal timing of rainfall, during this critical period; there is little margin for replanting or recovery if something goes wrong.

Moreover, because farming and local trading is such a fragile livelihood, many men from Sahel villages migrate to work in the cities and plantations of coastal West Africa for much of the year, returning for the key farming season. Europe and North Africa have also been important destinations for migration. But over recent years these opportunities have been limited – in the EU countries by economic slowdown and in Libya by the current instability and a post-revolution upsurge in intolerance towards sub-Saharan migrant workers.

Villagers, mostly women, do try to balance the annual cereals crop with the cultivation of off-season (*contre-saison*) crops, particularly vegetables. But the viability of this activity varies from one village to another, because it depends on access to wells, ponds and, where feasible, irrigation; moreover, villages close to towns or main roads are evidently much better placed to sell horticultural produce, to generate off-season cash income.



Some development specialists feel that the pastoral economy has suffered from a relative lack of attention or investment, despite its importance as a main source of livelihood for population groups such as the Tuareg and the Peul. This may be in part because nomadic peoples mostly tend to exert less domestic political leverage than settled urban or farming counterparts. In numerical and ethnic terms they are sometimes marginalised in the overall socio-political structure of Sahelian states.

Moreover, in Mali post-conflict mistrust and bitterness has undermined other communities' willingness to listen to the concerns of the northern Tuareg. Insecurity hampers the prospects for re-establishing development programmes, while the continued existence of armed groups and drug smuggling gangs threatens to draw young men away from pastoralism.

Rates of population growth remain high: at an average 7.6 children per woman, Niger has the world's highest fertility rate. The rapid increase in population imposes severe pressure on limited resources of land, water, firewood and food and compounds the challenge that Sahelian countries face in trying to raise living standards, improve access to public services and provide jobs and livelihoods.

Evidence from individual villages shows that effective community organisation, supported by outside agencies, can lead to a wider take-up of family planning. But overall national trends remain worrying.

Clearly, therefore, the underlying social and economic condition of the Sahel remains difficult, whether measured by levels of food security, economic output or overall poverty. The development challenge remains massive, in spite of the undoubted progress achieved in many respects over the past 20 years, as Table 3 shows (see overleaf). Levels of progress vary hugely from country to country, and sometimes between one indicator and another.

The picture of fragility that these development indicators illustrate is also reflected in the short-term outlook. In a recent assessment,<sup>4</sup> the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), warns that the number of people facing food insecurity is expected to rise from 11.3 million in 2013 to 20 million in 2014 – out of a total Sahelian population of 145 million.

4 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *2014-2016 Strategic Response Plan, Sahel Region*, OCHA, January 2014.

**Table 3: Population and development – selected indicators**

	Burkina Faso	Chad	Mali	Mauritania	Niger	Senegal
<b>Population (m)</b>	16.9	12.8	15.3	3.9	17.8	14.1
<b>Pop growth p.a. (%) average 2010-15</b>	2.8	3.0	3.0	2.5	3.9	2.9
<b>Fertility rate – average no. of children per woman</b>	5.6	6.3	6.9	4.7	7.6	5.0
<b>GDP per cap 2012 \$</b>	634	1,035	694	1,106	395	1023
<b>GDP per cap 2012 growth (%)</b>	6.9	5.7	-4.1	4.9	6.7	0.5
<b>% moderate or severe stunting in children under five average 2003-08</b>	36	41	38	32	47	19
<b>infants' low birthweight (%) average 2003-08</b>	16	22	19	34	27	19

Sources: UNFPA, World Bank, UNICEF

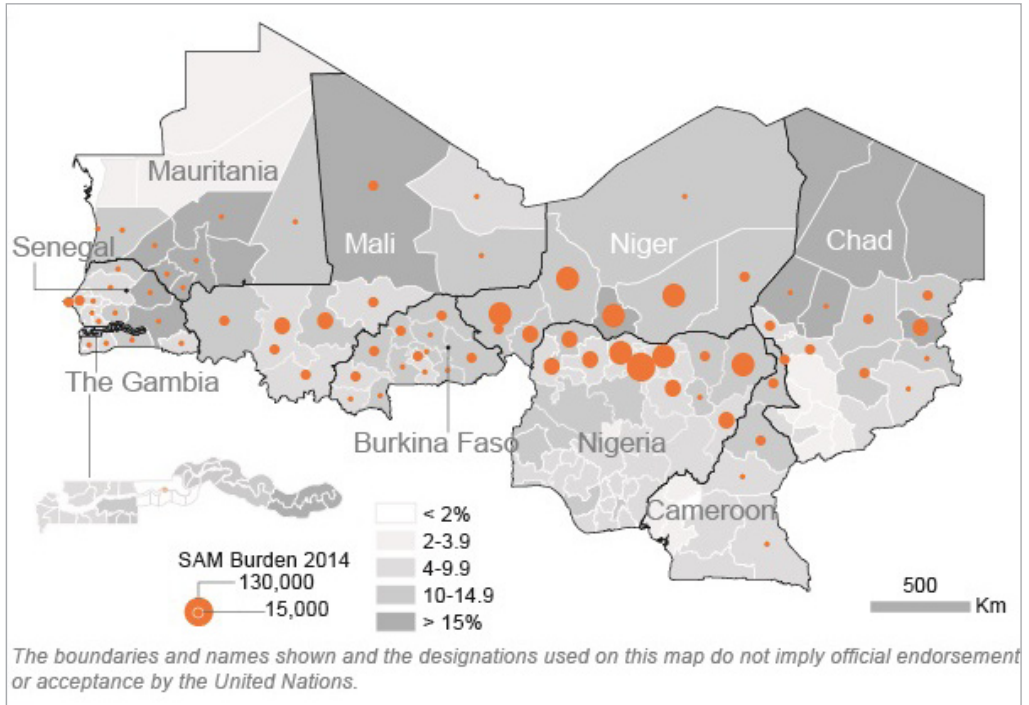
OCHA's projection of the global and severe acute malnutrition burden this year (2014) is shown in the map opposite.<sup>5</sup>

More than 1 million of the additional food insecure population is in Niger, but there is also a major rise in the numbers of food insecure in the southern fringes of the Sahel, in northern Nigeria and Cameroon and in Senegal.

While the number of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) is declining in Mali, new pressures flow from an influx into the Sahel of refugees from neighbouring areas affected by instability and conflict, such as the Central African Republic, northern Nigeria and the Darfur region of Sudan.

<sup>5</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *2014 Humanitarian Needs Overview Sahel Region*, OCHA, December 2013.

## The Sahel: Global acute malnutrition



SAM = Severe acute malnutrition

Source: United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs.

### More than a short-term crisis

However, the humanitarian strains imposed by refugee and IDP movements are not the fundamental challenge facing the Sahel, in terms of food and livelihood security. That remains the production of both food for the fast rising population – and the mass incomes that allow people to meet essential cash needs.

Despite all the development achievements of the past 20 years, the Sahel remains a region that is permanently under huge pressure. Even in years of good rainfall and adequate harvests, many households cannot grow the food they need and cannot afford to buy it. Despite a good harvest in the late 2011 production season, some 19 million people were food insecure in 2012 and it is projected that 20 million people will face food insecurity in 2014. These figures are not freak aberrations. They are the norm.

In 2013, improved rainfall led to a recovery in food production and the harvest was 1% above the five-year average. However, OCHA data shows that in fact the Sahel's ability to feed itself has deteriorated by 13% over the past five years. This is largely because population growth continues to exert pressure on land and water resources, and on the capacity of Sahelian economies to generate jobs and other incomes.

So there is a serious risk that food and livelihood insecurity will get steadily worse, rather than better.

### **A fresh opportunity for a regional approach**

However, today the political and military situation in the Sahel presents a fresh opportunity for long-term concerted action to address these fundamental problems – because of the international attention that is now focused on the region.

Of course, instability and violence are themselves major contributors to food insecurity and poverty. They provoke movements of refugees and IDPs, disrupt normal economic activity and development and subject the community fabric to strain and a breakdown of inter-communal trust. But over the past two years the threat posed by jihadist terrorist groups has generated an unprecedented level of international focus on the Sahel. Western governments and multilateral agencies are now treating the region as a strategic priority in a way that they have not done before.

Hitherto, donor support for enhancing food security and reducing poverty in the Sahel was driven essentially by a development agenda and, to some extent, a sense of moral obligation. But today there is an additional motivation: reducing poverty and ensuring secure access to adequate food, are seen as crucial contributions to building a Sahel region that is stable – and therefore less likely to harbour threats to the security of West Africa or even Europe.

This creates an opportunity. There is now the chance to establish a coordinated and sustained regional drive to tackle the Sahel's underlying development problems, particularly food insecurity, low levels of income and the fragility of livelihoods – and to mobilise the necessary committed long-term and large-scale international support.

The scale of international concern was well illustrated by donor pledges of more than €3 billion at a donor meeting for Mali in May 2013.

Moreover, there is now general recognition that there is a link between emergency humanitarian action and long-term development. The bridge between these two themes – hitherto often treated by donors, national governments and NGOs as distinct – lies in building resilience and the ability to cope with crises, whether at the micro or macro level.

The household that has developed a more diverse base of livelihood activities and income will be better equipped to survive when food is in short supply or prices rise, and will also be more likely to have a reasonable standard of living and nutrition in normal conditions. The country that has developed effective tools for monitoring potential crisis threats to food supply, nutrition and the natural environment can also use these information tools to better plan public services or new projects for long-term development.

The window of opportunity presented by the current unprecedented international focus on the Sahel has also been recognised by OCHA and a broad range of other humanitarian actors. For the first time they have produced a three-year regional strategy for meeting humanitarian needs and building up the Sahel's ability to cope with crises that imperil food security and the well-being of populations.

The *2014-2016 Strategic Response Plan, Sahel Region* published by OCHA in January 2014, sets out a programme of action agreed between humanitarian actors and other partners, with three priorities:

- to track and analyse risk and vulnerability and integrate the findings of this monitoring into the planning of humanitarian and development programmes
- to support vulnerable populations' ability to cope with shocks – through earlier response to warning signals, more effective post-crisis recovery measures and steps to strengthen the capacity of national governments and other local actors
- to deliver better coordinated and integrated emergency assistance to communities that are hit by crisis.

Moreover, the timing of this initiative coincides with encouraging developments at national level in some Sahelian countries. Niger is implementing the '3N' (*Nigériens Nourissent Nigériens*) programme – which aims to strengthen resilience by inviting communities to propose local projects to enhance food security and livelihoods, and match these to sources of funding and technical assistance. The country is also experimenting with a large-scale system of cash transfers to support the poorest households, funded by the World Bank. And the government has sought donor support for a programme of development for northern regions.

Meanwhile, the April 2014 reshuffle of the Malian government reflects a renewed focus on how to engender development, with ministers appointed specifically to deal with issues such as humanitarian relief or decentralisation. Already, late last year the oversight of emergency food security programmes had been moved from the presidency to the sector ministry responsible for longer-term agricultural development. And at regional level, the new G5 grouping of Sahelian governments reinvigorates the political focus on regional infrastructure projects to support economic activity.

## **Conclusion**

National and regional developments are coinciding with the international trend towards supporting the Sahel in a more strategic manner. We are in the aftermath of severe crisis, and certainly the region is still faced with massive political, security and development challenges. Even so, this is a moment of rare opportunity. There is at last the chance to establish a sustained long-term drive to establish more secure access to food and livelihoods across the region – both to cope with urgent crisis threats that arise and to sustain social and economic development over the long term.

With continuing coordination and political will, the current indigenous national and regional initiatives, combined with the new or updated strategies of international partners, represent an unprecedented opportunity to achieve a step change in progress. This is a real chance to move towards enhanced food security and reduced poverty across the Sahel.

It is a chance that must be taken.

**Part Two:**  
**Mapping regional and  
international responses**





## 5. THE SAHEL STATES – PART OF THE PROBLEM, PART OF THE SOLUTION

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*Aline Leboeuf*

The literature on *weak* and *failed* states in Africa – whether neo-patrimonial, fragile, corrupt, or all of these at the same time – is extensive. Most definitions concur that a fragile state implies a weak civil society, weak institutions, and a political elite that neglects or at least does not strengthen the state, as well as strong influence exerted by external donors which may destabilise local processes of statebuilding. Most Sahel states are fragile according to this definition and their capacity to deal with the two key issues of development and security is thus compromised. However, states' capacity (or lack thereof) to cater for the basic needs of their population is not set in stone and individual states are capable of improving their performance in this respect, provided that they mobilise resources in the appropriate way, including those received from donors. This chapter first elaborates on the fragility of Sahel states, then discusses lessons learned from jihadists' efforts to provide basic services to the population of northern Mali in 2012, and finally focuses on the existing capacities of Sahel states and how they may provide solutions towards improved security and development by building on existing assets. Sahel states are identified here as primarily Niger, Mali and Mauritania but references are also made to Burkina Faso, Senegal and Chad where relevant parallels can be drawn.

### **The quest for legitimacy**

Most states in the Sahel have witnessed various attempts by rulers or aspiring rulers to establish their legitimacy. Since independence, Niger has had seven republican regimes and experienced four military *coups*. Mali has undergone three military *coups*, and Mauritania at least four, depending on the definition of a *coup*. Burkina Faso confronted military mutinies in 2011 and is facing a potential transition from the regime of its ageing President Campaoré. All are clientelist states that lack legitimacy in the eyes of the people, and are undermined by corruption and its adverse impact on development. All too often the funding dedicated to development projects partly vanishes into private pockets; for example, in Mali, the Global Fund against HIV-AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis had to suspend payments in 2010 because funding had been misappropriated. As has been documented, teachers are often paid money by students to ensure that they will pass their exams, and judges' decisions are often influenced by bribery. Corruption has a direct impact on the legitimacy of the state authorities, and the result is very weak participation in elections. In Mali, for exam-

ple, before the 2012 *coup* less than 40% of the electoral population went to the polls in presidential and parliamentary elections. By contrast, the high turnout in 2013 may have shown ‘the will to believe’ in another chance for the Malian state.

Corruption directly impacts on the capacity of the state to provide security and support development for its population. The dire consequences that may result from such a situation were dramatically illustrated in Mali in 2012, when the Malian state forces proved powerless to protect the North against the Tuareg separatists (MNLA) and jihadist groups (Ansar Dine, AQIM, MUJAO). According to some observers, AQIM had established a safe haven and a lucrative hostage-taking industry in the region even before the occupation of northern Mali by the jihadists in April of 2012. This failure by the Malian state to protect its population and uphold law and order was linked both to issues of capacities (and the failure of military cooperation with other countries, namely France and the US, to strengthen the military) and of politics, as there may have been collusion and some form of informal agreement between some of the Bamako elites and jihadists. It has been suggested that the basis of such an agreement may have been that as long as they refrained from attacking Malian territory, jihadists would be provided with a safe haven and would not be directly targeted by security forces – no attack by AQIM took place on Malian territory until 2011. What is certain is that AQIM did manage to establish a base in the north of Mali in the early 2000s (the exact date is debated), without any strong resistance from Bamako, which adopted an overall rather conciliatory approach towards the jihadist group. For the Malian population, the state – or rather the regime – lacked legitimacy altogether: it did not provide security and thwarted development opportunities. Similarly, Niger and Mauritania have faced terrorist attacks; this has had a direct impact on tourism, which used to be a key resource for Niger in particular. Should terrorist attacks bring the exploitation of uranium in Niger by the French nuclear company Areva to a halt, this would prove even more disastrous for the Nigerien economy. International Crisis Group (ICG) drew attention to similar deficiencies in the state security apparatus in Tunisia in 2013, where the Ennahda-dominated government was strongly criticised by the opposition for not being capable of defeating jihadists on its territory.

Arguably, underdevelopment in the Sahel is both a consequence of insecurity and an issue in itself. Foreign aid is crucial for all the Sahel states, as they lack the necessary capacities to foster and promote development. In addition, donors may prefer to support security-related projects rather than investments that could have a longer-term positive impact on security but initially provide for economic growth, education and health. This seems to have been the case in Niger, where the government struggled to find sufficient funding for its Security and Development Strategy, according to ICG. The potential tension between security and development is reflected in the area of border control, as borders may be closed for security reasons, affecting vital cross-border economic links.

## **Religion in the Sahel: a tool for state-building?**

States in the Sahel are characterised by a highly fragmented civil society, where religion occupies a prominent place and plays a key structuring role. Conservative Islamic currents such as Wahhabism and Malekism exert a strong influence in the political sphere and in Malian society at large. This is shown by the fact that in Mali people tend to refer to Islamic law rather than to the official legal system, which is pervaded by corruption. In addition, engaging in official legal procedures is costly.

For example, efforts to implement new family codes have given rise to widespread religiously-inspired protests. In Niger there was a contentious debate on the family code in 1993 – the government eventually dropped the reform – and there were demonstrations in Niamey in March 2011 because of rumours that the government intended to promote a new family code. Controversies can sometimes lead to demonstrations, such as those following attempts to increase girls' access to secondary education in January 2013. In Mali, the debate on the new family code was also heated, and the final version dropped any improvements in women's and children rights. The High Council of Malian Islam (HCIM), where Wahhabist-inspired or Salafi militants are very powerful, played a central role in the process. The HCIM first maintained an ambivalent stance regarding the situation unravelling in the north, even if it later publicly advocated a tolerant and peaceful Islam 'against' the radical Islam promoted by jihadists.

According to ICG's last report on the country, an Islam-driven civil society will – together with the military and the government – play a key instrumental role in balancing weak state structures in Niger. But the real question is whether Sahel states can integrate their Muslim identity to become stronger, including through a better understanding of their pre-colonial Muslim past, without becoming theocratic Islamist states. Muslim communities in the Sahel are still divided, although some form of transnational homogenisation can be observed. If the reintroduction of Islam that those groups support managed to counter violent radicalisation processes, this would be a positive development, albeit one that would be difficult to achieve. Along those lines, Mauritania has launched an interesting experiment to counter radicalisation, featuring a highly-publicised debate on 'legitimate violence' between Muslim law clerics and Salafist prisoners. Such processes may show that, although weak, Sahel states have the capacity to respond innovatively and constructively to these issues, and that religion (Islam) can be channeled for state-building purposes.

## The AQIM state experience in northern Mali: lessons learned?

When asked in a study conducted in 2013<sup>1</sup> what they expect from the state, refugees from northern Mali explained that they want ‘basic security, health care, schools, and no impunity for criminals’. Often, the state’s failure to provide security and development is invoked to justify the Tuareg rebellion and the insurgents’ demand for independence for northern Mali. However, as refugees interviewed in the aforementioned study underlined, although several of the armed groups’ leaders were powerful before the rebellion, they did nothing to strengthen the state or to foster security and development. Furthermore, according to the refugees, when rebels seized power, they apparently destroyed some of the buildings and facilities (schools, health centres, and official buildings) that they could have used to house their own administrative structures, which seemed to prove that they just wanted ‘an area free from control by any organised state’.

A deeper analysis of the period during which Ansar Dine, MUJAO and AQIM occupied and controlled various territories in northern Mali attests that they did make efforts to provide basic services and to build up some sort of organised power structure, aiming to control the population not only through violence but also through the imposition of Islamic (Sharia) law. First, AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJAO restored a form of law and order; they meted out punishment for rapes, thefts and lootings perpetrated by the MLNA’s ill-disciplined combatants (even though MNLA’s exact behaviour may still need to be ascertained in more detail). The local population therefore perceived the jihadists as a ‘lesser evil’, even though they also violated women’s rights by imposing forced marriages and in some cases committed rapes. They offered a form of justice and security instead of the lawlessness that had prevailed right after Mali lost control of the north even though their enforcement methods were often violent and extreme. Furthermore, they provided paid employment to many young people either as combatants or in the ‘police’ force, thus facilitating a form of social integration regardless of their ethnic background. Even in Niger, according to the ICG, AQIM could be seen as ‘a business that pays better than Areva.’<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, AQIM also made a real effort to provide services, including access to water and health care. When they took control of Timbuktu, AQIM and Ansar Dine reportedly stated that water, electricity and healthcare would be free, but soon there were disruptions in the electricity supply as well as water shortages. AQIM made sure that Timbuktu’s hospital could continue to function; in both Timbuktu and Gao, international NGOs contributed to the provision of health services and electricity. In Gao, MUJAO was perceived by some as playing a constructive role in food

1 Kåre Kristensen & Boubacar Ba, ‘Mapping the views, interests and expectations of the population in Mali’, *Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF) Report*, April 2013. Available online at: [http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow\\_site/storage/original/application/bb4cfb4033f0e70a5b2e0615d7e4b554.pdf](http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/bb4cfb4033f0e70a5b2e0615d7e4b554.pdf).

2 ICG, ‘Niger: Another Weak Link in the Sahel’, *Africa Report*, n° 208, 19 September 2013, p.39. Available at: [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/niger/208-niger-another-weak-link-in-the-sahel-english.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/west-africa/niger/208-niger-another-weak-link-in-the-sahel-english.ashx).

distribution. Such efforts indicate that jihadists are well aware of the importance of making sure that some basic services are delivered to the people, at least as a way to earn legitimacy. The road map for Azawad that is said to have been drawn up by Abdelmalek Droukdel, the head of AQIM, would have also strengthened AQIM's legitimacy by reducing to some extent the abuses that occurred during the implementation of Sharia law. It should however be remembered that such 'state-building initiatives' and assessment of the jihadists' impact is based only on their occupation of the main cities, which always proved to be easier than controlling the rest of the north, and that little is known about their influence and behaviour outside of these urban areas.

### **Providing development and security: national examples**

Legitimacy is therefore a central issue, not only for Sahelian states but also for AQIM, which in northern Mali sought to project itself not as a terrorist group but as a provider of security and social services. In this context, it is useful to look more closely at the Sahel states and at how, occasionally, they do at least partly manage to provide development and security. Such efforts strengthen national ownership of the state building and reform process, especially in the case of Mali.

Paul Melly gives an interesting example to highlight the discrepancies between Sahel states in terms of capacities: the provision of an *early warning system* (EWS) for food security, as a tool to manage development.<sup>3</sup> Niger succeeded in setting in place a EWS that is slow and cumbersome, but that gathered broad and sufficiently reliable data on the ground to successfully improve the management of famine and international support and coordination in that field. Niger's 'functioning state machine' proved effective in this instance. This is however not the case of Senegal, Mali or Chad, where the problem is either technical (local administrations that are too weak to gather and process data in the case of Chad) or political (characterised by a tendency to ignore or deny realities on the ground, as in the case of the Malian government).

Another interesting example is the fight against insurgencies, a security factor often analysed by ICG. This 'fight' may involve negotiation, co-optation or hard security (repressive) policies. The fact that Mali was the only country where AQIM managed to build a base indicates that Niger and Mauritania, although they could not prevent all terrorist attacks, did manage to retain adequate control of their own territory. Niger has managed to negotiate a satisfying *modus vivendi* with its own Tuaregs which has so far prevented the emergence of a new insurgency. The Nigerien prime minister is a Tuareg, and Tuaregs seem to be well integrated in the administration. Niger also managed to successfully contain the effects of the Libyan crisis and tried as best

<sup>3</sup> Paul Melly, 'Translating Famine Early Warning into Early Action: A Sahel Case Study', Chatham House, April 2013. Available at: <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/191067>. For more on this, see Paul Melly's chapter in this volume.

as it could to control returning combatants, as well as refugees and weapons flows coming from Libya. Rather than targeting ex-combatants for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, it focused on facilitating the economic reintegration of 'young people at risk'. Mauritania adopted a more aggressive stance towards AQIM, as Mauritanian troops did not hesitate to cross the Malian border to target AQIM (in July 2010, September 2010, and June 2011) in cooperation with the French military. Both Niger and Mauritania are seen as having relatively efficient armies, especially compared to Mali. These countries still have to cope with difficult civilian-military relations but nevertheless they embody an approach that Mali could usefully emulate, in terms of security sector reform policies.

## **Conclusion**

The states in the Sahel are part of the problem because of their inherent weaknesses, but also part of the solution as they aspire to become effective providers of security and of development opportunities. Building more efficient states in the Sahel region is a difficult endeavour but remains possible. The role of religion – specifically Islam – and its diverse currents in the state will be an important factor to consider. In addition, the most pressing question is how to set priorities between security and development. For example, Niger's 2012 budget law doubled the defence budget – it now accounts for 7% of government spending – but reduced the education budget despite the fact that education is crucial in the development of democracy and meritocracy in state building. Furthermore, budget cuts may strengthen religious schools, which are outside the state education system and subject to radicalisation. Hence, this effort to promote security may prove to be effective only in the short term. The question thus is how to address two key challenges over different timeframes: on the one hand, the need to invest in the army and the security sector in order to be able to face current and short-term threats, and on the other the need for long-term investment in development.



## 6. MAGHREB-SAHEL SECURITY COOPERATION: FROM MIRAGE TO REALITY?

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*Julien Daemers*

Security threats in the Sahel/Sahara are regional and cross-border by nature. This region is at the crossroads of Islamist terrorist groups' networks, organised crime trafficking routes and traditional trans-Saharan trade routes. It is also the locus of competing zones of influence, where bordering states struggle for control.

The international military intervention in Libya in 2011, the fall of northern Mali following the *coup* in March 2012 and the launch of Operation *Serval* in early 2013 refocused the attention of the international community on the region. A wide array of international actors are now on the ground, sometimes acting in a complementary fashion, but often needlessly duplicating their efforts. In parallel, in recognition of the fact that regional threats require regional responses, Maghreb states<sup>1</sup> need to be actively involved in the Sahel-Saharan security equation. The Sahara and Sahel are interrelated, and the regions' countries and peoples are interdependent. However, these areas are often treated separately by analysts. Within foreign ministries, inter-departmental working groups between Sub-Saharan Africa and MENA directorates are not yet routine. Relevant financial instruments often target separate goals and recipients.

Unfortunately, despite the crucial need for regional security cooperation across the two shores of the Sahara, Maghreb-Sahel security cooperation has been and remains largely a chimera due to political tensions between Algeria and Morocco. Hostility and distrust between these two countries have constantly hampered efforts to establish such regional cooperation. There may however be some signs of hope, reflected in incremental cooperation initiatives as both countries run the risk of being excluded from new cooperation platforms.

### **Cross-Saharan initiatives undermined by Algero-Moroccan tensions**

There are numerous regional cooperation fora in the Sahel-Saharan region. However, none of these fora combines a comprehensive geographical scope – by including the Maghreb states in their framework – and a focus on security cooperation. Despite its security mandate and its key role in stabilising the security situation in northern

<sup>1</sup> Tunisia will be left out of the analysis as it does not seek to be a political and security actor in the Sahel – it is located far from the Sahel and needs to stabilise its domestic politics and its border with Libya as a priority.

Mali, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) contains neither Chad nor Mauritania and extends to none of the Maghreb countries. On the northern shore of the Sahara, among the existing fora, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), forever a victim of the Algeria-Morocco confrontation, does not even address security, and neither does the Arab League. The only cross-Saharan sub-regional organisation, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), does not include Algeria.

Countries in the region have thus preferred *à la carte* security cooperation in informal and pragmatic fora. Acronyms have thus flourished, reflecting the emergence of a range of new bodies and structures – ‘CEMOC’, ‘UFL’, ‘ACSRT’, ‘G5’ – while another initiative, the Nouakchott Process, intends to group these cooperation initiatives under an overarching political umbrella.

Algeria has been a driving force in the creation of the majority of these *ad hoc* initiatives. On the one hand, it has positioned itself as the *de facto* coordinator of regional counterterrorism policy, eager to project itself as an island of stability in the region, which has successfully secured its territory from terrorist threats. On the other hand, by controlling the membership of these platforms, Algiers has made sure that Rabat, which aspires to be a legitimate actor in the Sahel, is excluded.

Two regional initiatives, located on Algerian territory, were launched a few years before the 2012-2013 events in northern Mali, laying the foundations for a regional counterterrorism policy. A joint military headquarters, CEMOC (*Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint*), has been hosted in Tamanrasset (southern Algeria) since April 2010, bringing together Algerian, Nigerien, Mauritanian and Malian forces. This initiative aims at coordinating counterterrorism efforts across the region, facilitating the creation of joint patrols and cross-border operations. In October 2010, CEMOC was equipped with an intelligence service, UFL (*Unité de fusion et de liaison*), located in Algiers and currently comprising eight countries of the region (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Chad). It aims at systematising intelligence exchange between national services, and, in turn, centralising, processing and distributing information to operating armed forces.

However, neither of these two bodies has been able to react to, let alone prevent, terrorist actions in the region. No joint patrols have been ever set up, even though CEMOC announced the creation of up to fifteen 5,000-Tuareg military units before 2011 as its flagship measure. Moreover, no *ad hoc* cooperation with the French Operation *Serval* has taken place. These Algerian-driven bodies were and still are ‘empty shells’, as they require a high level of trust among stakeholders, which is still to be achieved.

Faced with a plethora of competing regional cooperation structures, the African Union (AU) has been conducting a mapping exercise of effective regional initiatives in the framework of its Nouakchott Process and intends to overcome their respective

shortcomings by bringing them together under one coherent roof. Created in March 2013, the Nouakchott Process comprises 11 countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Chad) from the Sahel-Sahara region subject to their membership of the AU, thereby excluding Morocco, which pulled out of the organisation in 1984. It currently seeks to enlarge UFL intelligence-sharing to the remaining three countries of the Process which are not members of UFL (Senegal, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire). A possible delocalisation of CEMOC from Tamanrasset is under discussion.

The Process can also count on an AU research-driven institute dedicated to the study of terrorism, the African Centre for Studies and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT). Created in 2004 and based in Algiers, it acts as a 'track-two' diplomacy platform by publishing research pieces and organising workshops on counterterrorism capacity building. Hampered by a very limited operational budget, it depends heavily on external donors; this has led some observers to argue that ACSRT is the anteroom of US counterterrorism policy in Africa. For instance, financially supported by the US and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), ACSRT played a major role in the development of the 2012 Algiers Memorandum on Good Practices on Preventing and Denying the Benefits of Kidnapping for Ransom by Terrorists. Despite some recent workshops aiming at supporting Sahel-Maghreb cooperation, the ACSRT cannot be expected to be a major forum for crystallising regional security cooperation. At most, it can build a shared understanding of terrorism threats and how to deal with them.

In the absence of a platform bringing together Algeria and Morocco, five countries (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso) created an alternative regional platform at Heads of State level, the so-called Sahel G5, in Nouakchott in February 2014. Unlike CEMOC or UFL, both of which focus exclusively on security aspects, this initiative intends to build upon the security-development nexus in the Sahel region, as indicated by the first declaration of the Heads of States. It is clearly too early to assess its effectiveness as a regional cooperation platform or its possible extension to Maghreb states as it will need to expand its membership in order to efficiently tackle regional security. Nevertheless, this forum has considerable potential as it is based on inter-personal relationships between Heads of States and has not allowed Algerian-Moroccan tensions to hinder its development.

### **The view from Algiers**

Algeria has been the most influential security actor in the Sahel-Sahara region since the end of its 'black decade' in 2002. Algeria always favours bilateral over regional cooperation even if it has been at the forefront of regional security initiatives. Indeed, despite the CEMOC and UFL initiatives having been applauded in some quarters, the experience of both fora illustrates that Algeria has only paid lip service to regional cooperation, as ultimately neither CEMOC nor UFL were equipped with the

tools to perform effectively. The Algerian Constitution and military doctrine do not allow military deployment outside Algerian territory. This automatically limits the joint military units, joint operations, or pursuit of terrorist groups in neighbouring countries as CEMOC originally conceived. Likewise, Algeria has never really pooled its far-reaching intelligence resources under UFL, arguing that the initiative deals with the harmonisation of intelligence exchange systems, not with the exchange of information itself.

Unlike most countries in the Sahel, Algeria has concluded bilateral agreements for border control – and developed matching capacities. Bilateral cooperation in this regard included cooperation with Qaddafi's Libya aimed at improving border security. Since Spring 2013, Tunisia and Algeria have cooperated in border management around Mont Chaambi, where terrorist groups remain active. The reopening of the Algeria-Mali border is now under discussion, after Algeria closed it at the very beginning of the northern Mali crisis.

The renewed terrorist threat in its south<sup>2</sup> has highlighted the limits of Algeria's security policy towards the Sahel region. Constrained by its reluctance to engage in effective regional cooperation for fighting terrorism, Algeria has lost credibility as an efficient security actor in the eyes of its southern neighbours. Indeed, in the course of one month, in January 2013, Algeria suffered a blow to its diplomatic pride (i.e. the deployment of a foreign military operation – French, to add insult to injury – at its southern borders), as well as to the reputation of its intelligence services and its army (i.e. a significant terrorist attack on its territory at the In Amenas industrial facility producing its most crucial resource – hydrocarbons). As terrorism is a national security issue for Algeria, the Algerian government took important internal measures to secure its eastern and southern borders: the creation of a seventh military region (near the Libyan border) was decided in July 2013; additional military outposts were created close to oil and gas fields; and at least 35,000 additional troops were deployed to reinforce security in the zone.

In order to remain perceived by all actors as the most legitimate agenda-setter in Sahelian security affairs, Algiers can also count on its historically strong diplomatic presence in the AU (formerly the Organisation of African Unity – OAU), building on the prestige derived from its anti-colonial past. This influence remains a reality today due to highly experienced Algerian diplomats holding influential seats within the structure of the organisation. For three mandates in a row and more than a decade, the position of AU Peace and Security Commissioner has been held by Algerians: Saïd Djinnit (2003-2008), then Ramtane Lamamra (2008-2013), and currently Smail Cherguï (since 2013).

<sup>2</sup> In addition to terrorist attacks on Algerian territory, Algerian citizens are now liable to be taken as hostages, as happened for example when four Algerian diplomats were taken hostage near Gao in April 2012.

Despite the vacuum left by the fall of Qaddafi's Libya, Algeria still lacks political will to engage in concrete and meaningful regional security cooperation. Bilateral cooperation remains Algiers' clear preference. However, this policy has not proved beneficial for Algeria's national security, with the result that Algiers has lost credibility as an effective security actor in the region. This has occurred in a regional context where other countries' support for the Algerians' position on the Western Sahara is diminishing, and recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a legitimate state is no longer the rule.

Nevertheless, the rise to prominence of Algerian diplomatic figures with expertise in African affairs may foster a new climate of increased trust, which may reduce suspicion between Algeria and Sahelian countries and whet Algeria's appetite to engage in regional security cooperation. Fortified by their AU experience, Lamamra and Djinnit have been appointed to key diplomatic positions, respectively as Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs (since September 2013) in the case of the former and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) in the case of the latter. For the moment, these changes have not led to a significant shift in Algerian policy towards regional security cooperation apart from Algeria's willingness to let the AU, via the Nouakchott Process, take charge of UFL and CEMOC, as this ensures that Morocco remains sidelined from regional security cooperation.

### **The view from Rabat**

In February 2014, King Mohammed VI of Morocco toured Sub-Saharan Africa for three weeks. He visited Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta for the second time in six months. This confirms how Morocco has adopted a proactive Sahel policy, making the best use of Qaddafi's regional integration attempts and cooperating on softer security issues and economic forums, for example with Mali. As Africa's only non-AU member, Morocco is somewhat isolated from regional and continental initiatives and it does not take part in 'Algeria-driven' ventures such as CEMOC or UFL, nor in AU initiatives such as the Nouakchott Process or the ACSRT. However, Morocco's contacts at bilateral level work rather well. Regarding Sahel-Saharan issues, Morocco has to carefully frame its own Saharan identity, as it remains focused on the Western Sahara issue which continues to be a thorny issue in the broader confrontation with Algeria. Since Chad's decision to freeze its recognition of the SADR in 2006, Mali and Mauritania are now the only two Sahelian States with formal diplomatic relations with the SADR. Consequently, since the fall of northern Mali, Morocco has been strategically placing itself as the most 'ardent defender' of Mali's territorial integrity in order to convince Mali to reconsider its position in this respect.

Given Morocco's rather fragile regional position, using existing regional mechanisms in order to expand the country's political reach represents a difficult challenge. Com-

prising 28 member states,<sup>3</sup> CEN-SAD (apparently an abbreviation from the Arabic letters *sin* and *sad* – for *al-sabil* and *al-sahara*) is the only regional organisation in which Morocco could engage to project its agenda to Sub-Saharan Africa, since it does not include Algeria. Faced with an existential crisis following Qaddafi's death, CEN-SAD is now shifting its focus towards security issues. Encouraged by Morocco, a reform of the institution was adopted in February 2013, notably creating a Permanent Council for Peace and Security. Morocco will insist on discussing security issues again when it hosts the 2014 CEN-SAD Summit, but the institution still has to consolidate its potential. Rabat also resurrected the Tripoli Process – a border cooperation initiative and another remnant of the Qaddafi era – in November 2013, convening twenty countries for a conference in Rabat. The ensuing Rabat Declaration called for the creation of a centre to train border security officers in the countries of the region in Rabat. There are also plans to open up a Secretariat in Tripoli, but this has not yet gone ahead in light of the unstable situation in Libya and the weakness of the Libyan authorities.

Rabat will clearly not engage in direct competition with Algeria on a purely military level. For one thing, the terrorist threat has never been a national security issue for Morocco. Secondly, Algeria is currently the leading weapons importer in the African arms race. Nevertheless, Rabat is engaged in a military training programme in Libya, and it announced the reinforcement of its bilateral military cooperation with Mali (by creating an exchange programme for Malian military officers) last February. In addition, Rabat has strengthened its role in the mediation with Tuareg rebel groups in Mali, traditionally an Algerian preserve. Presenting the President of Mali with a *fait accompli*, Mohammed VI received the MNLA leader Bilal Ag Acherif in Marrakech in February 2014, just a week after he had slammed the door on the Algerian mediation process.

'Religious diplomacy' is also a long-embedded feature of Moroccan policy towards West Africa. Rabat emphasises the country's moderate Maliki school of Islam, in opposition to AQIM's Wahhabi vision of Islam. Mohamed VI, also a religious leader by virtue of his claim to be a direct descendant of the Prophet and the so-called 'Commander of the Faithful', signed a cooperation agreement with Mali in September 2013 aiming at training 500 Malian imams in Morocco over a 6-year period – a 2-year training programme already started in November 2013. Framing its religious cooperation as a fight against radicalisation, Morocco thus seeks to deploy religion as an instrument of stabilisation and to counter and weaken AQIM and other jihadist groups. This strategy has the potential to convince other countries to accentuate their cooperation with Morocco.

3 Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo and Tunisia.



Also incentivised by major economic opportunities in West Africa due to its dynamic and diversified economy, Morocco is intensifying its cooperation with ECOWAS, the major economic integration organisation in West Africa. Rabat recently announced its support for ECOWAS' attempt to coordinate regional action programmes in West Africa via its *Programme de cohérence et d'action régionale* (PCAR). Morocco is progressively raising its profile as a soft security actor in the Sahel-Sahara, albeit from a different angle than Algeria.

## Conclusion

None of the existing cooperation platforms connecting the two shores of the Sahara are perfect. Two of them might nevertheless present key competitive advantages – but also pitfalls. First, as the most comprehensive regional forum, the AU's Nouakchott Process could act as an effective umbrella for existing *ad hoc* initiatives and try to build on existing assets rather than creating a new platform. In order to do so, the Process can count on Algeria's willingness to bring CEMOC and UFL under the umbrella. However, despite being convenient for Algeria as it isolates Morocco from regional cooperation initiatives, the Nouakchott Process cannot be fully efficient as long as it does not include Morocco, thereby encouraging Morocco to seek alternative avenues for action outside its framework. Secondly, the Sahel G5, by not including either Algeria or Morocco among its member states at this early stage, might set the ground for useful regional cooperation at interstate, governmental level. This would strengthen ownership from the Sahel countries before potentially later including both Morocco and Algeria in the framework. The G5 reproduces the informal setting usually found in Africa, where intergovernmental and notably interpersonal relations are privileged. Although this is presented as 'an additional stage' by the stakeholders, it becomes *de facto* an alternative informal arena that weakens institutions, in this case both the AU and ECOWAS.

As for the EU, it can usefully build on the lessons learnt from the successful technical cooperation undertaken between Morocco and Algeria in the framework of the '5+5 Dialogue'. This cooperation is underway between 10 countries on the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea: Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia. Cooperation is taking place on internal affairs, transport, defence, migration, education and environment/renewable energy. Such an incremental step-by-step approach could be a way forward for overcoming the Algerian-Moroccan standoff in the Sahel. Although expanding the current format to Sahel states might be counterproductive and could end up putting unnecessary strain on the forum, two options (presenting both potential advantages and disadvantages) could be explored. The first, less risky, option would be to discuss the issue of Sahel security within the existing 5+5 framework, while the more ambitious scenario would be to encourage the replication of the 5+5 model using the Sahara desert as its core rather than the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, the EU can continue to encourage

synergies between the UN and the AU, building a platform where both Algeria and Morocco are legitimate parties, together with the Sahel states. For example, the EU hosted a meeting in Brussels in February 2014 in order to support the establishment of a Technical Secretariat for the Coordination Platform of the different institutions that have put forward Sahel Strategy documents. In addition to this convening role, the EU might also consider focusing its support on areas where it can bring a distinct advantage, such as integrated border management.

The EU could also play the ‘Moroccan card’. In this context, EUBAM Libya could support the development of the Tripoli Process that Rabat is trying to resuscitate. In addition, Morocco’s Advanced Status, the most far-reaching partnership that the EU has signed with a Maghreb country, theoretically opens the way for Moroccan participation in CSDP missions and operations. Why not envisage EUCAP Sahel Mali or EUCAP Sahel Niger comprising Moroccan units with strengthened capacity? However, this strategy has one drawback: it could introduce a bias into the Western Sahara equation, and transform the Sahel into a new playground for the Algero-Moroccan proxy cold war.



## 7. ECOWAS AND THE SAHEL ACTION PLAN (PCAR): A TOOL FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN THE SAHEL?

*Amandine Gnanguênon*

The fall of the Qaddafi regime in Libya in 2011, the 2012 political crisis in Mali and the ensuing regional repercussions have urged states, international technical and financial partners, as well as African organisations to refocus on the link between security and development and how this may be translated into practice. The Sahara/Sahel has become a testing ground to elaborate multiple strategies in this regard. Many initiatives have been launched with the inevitable concomitant risks of duplication, overlapping and confusion (see table below). Different actors and their strategies diverge on the precise geographical scope of the policies and their implementation in the Sahel. This problem of definition is not just theoretical; it has an impact on the effective implementation of a strategy.

**Table: Security actors and instruments in the Sahara/Sahel**

	PCAR (ECOWAS)	African Union (Sahel Strategy)	G5	Sahel Security College (EU)	Joint Military Staff Committee of the Sahel Region (CEMOC)	Fusion and Liaison Unit	Nouakchott Process (AU)
Algeria	*	*			*	*	*
Burkina Faso	*	*	*			*	*
Mali	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Mauritania	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Niger	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Chad	*	*	*			*	*
Nigeria		**				*	*
Libya	*	*				*	*
Côte d'Ivoire		**					*
Guinea		**					*
Senegal	*	**					*
Tunisia	*						
Guinea Bissau		**					
Sudan		*					

The 43<sup>rd</sup> ordinary session of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) heads of state and government conference, held in Abuja on 17-18 July 2013, requested the ECOWAS Commission to elaborate a strategy for the Sahel/Sahara. The organisation thus sought to strengthen its position and, rather than creating a parallel, additional strategy for the Sahel, it suggested a ‘political process of dialogue, consistency, and regional action’. ECOWAS produced a document entitled ‘Consistency and Regional Action programme in West Africa for the Stability and Development of the Saharan-Sahelian Areas: Regional Solutions to Regional Problems’, better known by its French acronym PCAR (*Programme de cohérence et d’action régionales de l’Afrique de l’Ouest pour la stabilité et le développement des espaces saharo-sahéliens*). The document recommends that ECOWAS and the other associated institutions should refocus on some priority Sahel countries, such as Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad. Whether Senegal should be included is under discussion.

In the light of the PCAR document (in its version of March 2014),<sup>1</sup> this chapter explores two important questions. First, what lessons can be drawn from ECOWAS’s experience in translating the security-development nexus into practice? Secondly, amidst the plethora of actors in the Sahel, what can the PCAR offer to improve coordination among Sahara-Sahel countries and especially among West African actors?

### **A shift in ECOWAS priorities: from development to security**

ECOWAS will celebrate its 40th birthday on 28 May 2015. It was initially established for economic purposes, as stipulated in Article 2 of its Treaty, signed in Lagos on 28 May 1975: the organisation aims to ‘promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions and in social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its people, of increasing and maintaining economic stability, of fostering closer relations among its members and of contributing to the progress and development of the African continent’.

Despite this economic focus, ECOWAS faced many security challenges from the onset and as a result seeks to promote security cooperation among the countries of the region. The 1978 Protocol on Non-Aggression and the 1981 Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance on Defence are the first two political instruments unrelated to economic development that aim at protecting member states against destabilisation emanating from another state. These agreements have never been implemented, however, and the Liberia war (1989-2003) disrupted the regional economic integration process. The risks of regional spillover put security issues at the top of ECOW-

<sup>1</sup> The author refers here to the text of the document drafted in March 2014. At the time of writing (June 2014), the PCAR had not yet been officially launched.

AS's agenda. ECOMOG (ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group), which was initially created by West African States to monitor the ceasefire, became Africa's first regional military intervention force.

In addition to the founding act, which sets out legal and technical provisions to achieve the community's objectives, Article 4 of the 24 July 1993 ECOWAS Revised Treaty listed a series of core principles, including 'the peaceful settlement of disputes among Member States, [the] active co-operation between neighbouring countries and [the] promotion of a peaceful environment as a prerequisite for economic development'. Significantly, this is the first official reference to the link between security and development in ECOWAS's legal framework. Drawing lessons from its involvement in conflict resolution and its limited prevention capacity, the 1993 Revised Treaty added a specific article dedicated to regional security: 'Member States undertake to co-operate with the Community in establishing and strengthening appropriate mechanisms for the timely prevention and resolution of intra-State and inter-State conflicts' (Article 58 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty, 24 July 1993).

The agreements signed over the last twenty years confirm that ECOWAS member states have, whether intentionally or not, viewed security as the ultimate goal, and not as a prerequisite to development. The following political and legal tools have anchored the organisation's role in the area of security: the December 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security; the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance; the 2006 Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Matters; and the 2008 Conflict Prevention Framework. West Africa is not the only region that now prioritises security over development. The development of a legal framework also contributes to give legitimacy to other Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in the domain of peace and security issues after the failure of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in conflict management in the 1990s. On the continent, the implementation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), created in 2002 under the auspices of the African Union (AU), has also been prioritised at the expense of the African Economic Community (AEC) Project, created by a treaty signed on 3 June 1991.

Even if ECOWAS, as one of the building blocks of the AEC, is now part of the APSA, the relationship between RECs and the AU is still a complex question. Even though the UN/AU/RECs are expected to work in a complementary fashion, there is a lack of real coordination between them. In addition to its legal framework, ECOMOG provided the legitimacy required for ECOWAS to be the first organisation to intervene militarily in West Africa. In the light of the PCAR document, ECOWAS member states could avail of the opportunity to (re)think about long-term needs. Development as a way to improve people's living conditions – initially ECOWAS's main objective – has been relegated to the bottom of the priority list over the years. More than

a simple response to development and security issues in the Sahel, this programme could be an opportunity to revive the regional economic integration process in West Africa, while taking into account ECOWAS's actions in the security field.

### **Tackling security *and* development**

Two observations have led to the creation of PCAR. First, regional responses to security and development challenges are inadequate and insufficient, and second, the transnational nature of threats requires extending the geographic scope of action, especially since the Sahara-Sahel region represents 40% of ECOWAS's surface area – but also 50% of the surface area of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).

Translating the security-development nexus into practice at the regional level is crucial for ECOWAS, much more than for any other West African organisation. The creation of mechanisms for conflict prevention and management aims to ensure mutual trust between states, which is a precondition for trade. However, ECOWAS's interventions since the 1990s have shown that states have prioritised security as perceived essentially through a military lens.

The reason behind this investment in security is that it has provided – and still provides – West African heads of state with more visibility and has made it easier for them to receive aid money (from the UN) and benefit from military capacity building programmes led by partner countries (notably France and the US), which in most cases has further reinforced the regimes in place. The poor state of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) today reveals that such training was not put to good use to fight long-standing transnational threats (criminal groups, rebels, arms trafficking) or to promote regional integration (supporting pastoralism, trade and tourism). These kinds of security challenges require significant logistical, human and financial capacities provided by states. The Mali crisis was a good illustration of the difficulty experienced by ECOWAS member states in implementing their commitments. More importantly, viewing security exclusively through a military lens has reduced ECOWAS's scope of action while states and populations have faced a wide range of sources of instability.

Many factors generate instability for the states and threats for the population, and they are connected to underdevelopment. In the Sahel, risks are economic (widespread poverty), political (poor governance), health-related (pandemics and diseases), social (low level of education and no access to basic social services), food-related (malnutrition and famine) as well as environmental (drought). Against the backdrop of an already fragile state, as in Mali, rebel elements, criminal groups and/or jihadists are only an additional threat to the state's sovereign prerogatives. Particularly weak and/or absent in the border regions, the ruling power does not have the capacity to meet popular expectations by providing protection of goods and people, justice, ba-

sic social services, etc. An overview of conflicts on the continent shows that in many cases national ‘human insecurity’ (political, social, economic, etc.) spills over state borders.

Although security challenges in the Sahara-Sahel region are inherently transnational, they are also the result of state fragility and poor governance at the domestic level. As a consequence, it is all the more difficult to translate the nexus into practice because it raises other sensitive, more political issues, including questions related to the sovereignty of African states. The main challenge for ECOWAS is to assess its member states’ capacity to anticipate and respond to a crisis. Otherwise, whether it is responsible for the crisis or not, the state can become a trigger for other conflicts inside or outside the region, as crises since the 1990s have shown (e.g. in Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, etc.). For instance, how would ECOWAS prevent or manage proxy wars, in which two or several states support feuding rebel groups leading insurgencies in each other’s respective countries, and at the same time invoke self-defence and respect for their territorial integrity?

According to the PCAR, regional programmes addressing security and development concerns should complement national strategies. But such strategies must match the reality on the ground. Hence, the transnational nature of threats, which is evident in the Sahara-Sahel context, is encompassed by ECOWAS’s primary sphere of action, which covers West Africa as a region.

### **PCAR: the right approach for ECOWAS and West Africa?**

No institution alone can respond to transnational security challenges in the Sahara-Sahel region. The PCAR aims to enhance cohesion, cooperation and coherence in what is currently a complex political and institutional environment (see table at the beginning of this chapter).

This means contributing to long-term stabilisation and economic development of the Sahara-Sahel region while encouraging action at the regional level. The programme’s general objective is to contribute to the stability and economic and social development of the areas concerned. It has three specific objectives: ‘increasing the quantity and quality of the different forms of regional action in security and development in three priority areas: connecting infrastructure, resilience and education’; ‘promoting consistency at the service of regional action’ and ‘promoting innovative systems to finance stabilisation and development in the Sahel-Sahara region’.

There has long been an overlapping of roles and prerogatives in the region, in particular between WAEMU and ECOWAS in terms of regional economic integration. In this context, the PCAR suggests including two other organisations: WAEMU and the Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS). Technical organisations that deal with specific issues such as water, food or the environment are

also included: the Niger River Basin Organisation (ABN), the Integrated Development Authority for the Liptako-Gourma Region (ALG), the Economic Community for Cattle and Meat (CEBV), the Gambia River Basin Organisation (OMVG), and the Senegal River Basin Organisation (OMVS). Therefore, the PCAR is a positive development because it provides a West African institutional framework of action for organisations that have so far always worked separately due to overlapping competences, or worked together only on an *ad hoc* basis.

Even if the PCAR can contribute by coordinating the actions of different institutions, the current lack of coordination remains a major challenge. The PCAR must identify relevant regional security and development structures, not only from West Africa, to promote their involvement. Yet, it is not really clear if, with the creation of a platform of action to support the Programme, the PCAR constitutes a new institution in an already crowded field. The ECOWAS Commission will chair the PCAR platform for political and strategic dialogue and WAEMU will act as the vice-chair. It should not become the rival of other strategies that are already being implemented in the Sahara-Sahel region. To a certain extent, the PCAR's platform for strategic and political dialogue replicates other coordination initiatives supported by the European Union (EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, 2011), United Nations (UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, 2013) and the African Union (AU Strategy in the Sahel region, 2014).

The transnational security challenges in three regions (west, centre and north) has raised the question of participation by other regional and international organisations within the PCAR, including seven continental and regional organisations (ECOWAS, Economic Community of Central African States [ECCAS], Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa [CEMAC], Community of Sahel-Saharan States [CEN-SAD], the African Union, the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union [WAEMU], Arab Maghreb Union [AMU]), as well as the CILSS, five development banks (the African Development Bank, the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development, the West African Bank for Development, and the World Bank), technical and financial partners (TFPs) and countries affected by chronic instability (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad, Tunisia – and others could be added to the list).

There is no doubt that a coordinated action programme for West African organisations is needed and the PCAR could be a relevant framework, but extending it to all actors already involved in the Sahel does not necessarily promote consistency at the service of national action. Rather, the PCAR should be focused on identifying the most relevant Western institutions and dialogue fora so as to promote their capacity and initiatives while coordinating them with ECOWAS's own missions. Yet, as geographically speaking the Sahel is not Western Africa, ECOWAS can only contribute within the PCAR framework to limit the risk of overlapping in this area.

## Conclusion

ECOWAS, with the PCAR among other instruments, aims to ensure greater consistency in the service of regional governance, development and security. It legitimately draws on the tradition of a development-security nexus. It remains to be seen how ECOWAS can contribute to coordinate West African organisations rather than seek to lead international strategies and action in the Sahel. In fact, many other actors (the UN, EU, AU, etc.) have already defined their strategy according to their interests and objectives and the resources available to West African states.

The PCAR presents some advantages. It is rooted in ECOWAS's 30 year-old vision of the Sahel-Saharan region, and tied in a regional integration process. For both of these projects, success depends on ECOWAS's capacity to simultaneously respond to the population's security and development needs. Amid institutional rivalries, ECOWAS is tempted – understandably – to boost its position in the Sahel. But it is important that its member states (which also belong to other organisations involved in the region, such as the AU) are willing to coordinate their initiatives to ensure that these are compatible with ECOWAS's priorities.

In West Africa today, ECOWAS is the only organisation that has experience both in security and economic development matters since the creation of ECOMOG and the implementation of the free movement of people, goods and capital. The PCAR could contribute to revive regional economic integration, which remains unachieved. One of the particular challenges will be the integration of populations' needs and perspectives, to which the programme does not seem to pay enough attention. The risk for ECOWAS, as for other actors in the Sahel, is that institutions define the security-development nexus without taking local expectations into account.

The other challenge will be for ECOWAS to refocus its agenda on conflict-prevention mechanisms that have proved more efficient for collecting information than implementing effective enforcement action, once the data has been analysed. For instance, since states can take a long time to react, early warning systems could be set up at the local level, as in Mali where populations develop their own capacities to respond to a food crisis. Moreover, involving specialised organisations such as CILSS in the PCAR can help share experience on technical and specific issues that are directly connected to development and people's living conditions.

The management of the crisis in Mali and the Sahel has taught one lesson: regional responses may occur but they mostly focus on security – e.g. intelligence cooperation within the framework of the Nouakchott Process and fight against terrorism with the establishment of the joint operational committee of chiefs of staff (Joint Military Staff Committee of the Sahel Region – CEMOC). It is often more difficult to implement concrete regional initiatives to improve adverse local living conditions, one of the major causes of insecurity. From the populations' point of view, states are using



coercion and violence, including against them, when what they should be doing is formulating and implementing constructive policies that respond to their daily needs.

Since the beginning of the Mali crisis, ECOWAS has played an active political role, as can be seen from its involvement (the ECOWAS Mission in Mali [MICEMA] developed a concept of operations, and promoted mediation) up until the elections in 2013. Although ECOWAS has been among the very first bodies to have to cope with the emergence of the multidimensional crisis, the organisation has run up against several obstacles in its attempts to manage the conflict: the junta's hostility to any armed presence in Bamako, the direct involvement of states, like Algeria, that are not ECOWAS members, and logistical and financial constraints – which means no deployment can be undertaken without international support. In terms of lessons learned, and bearing in mind its limited geographic scope, ECOWAS should prioritise conflict prevention and ensure a long-term follow-up process in areas beyond security. This is crucial because other actors will lose interest in development initiatives whenever 'the next crisis' overshadows the current emergency situation in the Sahel.



## 8. THE UN IN THE SAHEL: MANAGING EXPECTATIONS IN THE QUEST FOR A 'HYBRID PEACE'

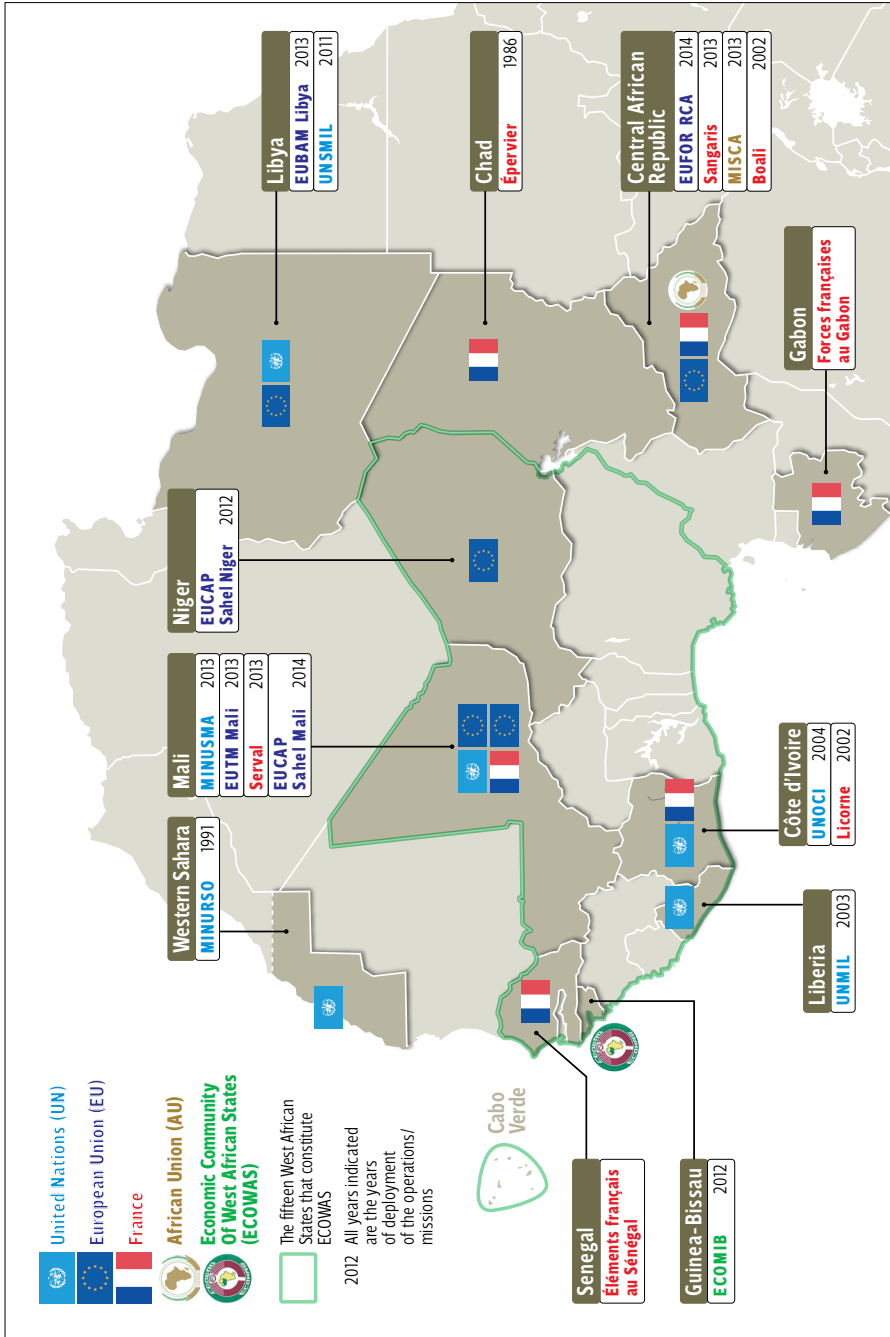
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*Thierry Tardy*

Political developments in North Africa and the Sahel over the last five years have slowly induced regional and international actors to develop multi-layered responses to instability in the region. From the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union (AU) mediation efforts in Mali to the drafting of a UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the establishment of various multidimensional operations by the AU, the UN and the EU in Mali and Niger, several attempts at stabilising the region have been undertaken by different actors within the multilateral system. In parallel, France has played a key role in confronting the armed groups in northern Mali and pushing for the subsequent establishment of UN and EU operations.

Mali initially attracted most of the crisis management efforts as it concentrated the most visible threat to regional security, embodied by the local and transnational radical Islamist groups, and to a lesser extent the Tuareg rebellion. The country hosts three parallel peace missions, respectively led by France (Serval), the United Nations (MINUSMA) and the EU (EUTM Mali) – current foreign military operations and civilian missions are shown in the map overleaf. The EU will soon augment its presence with the recent creation of a capacity-building mission (EUCAP Sahel Mali). Altogether these operations cover the full spectrum of crisis management activities and, counter-intuitive though it may seem, involve a division of labour among institutions and states that is based on a rational assessment of those actors' respective know-how and comparative advantages. The UN operation is the largest and the most multidimensional of these missions: it aims at contributing to the establishment of a 'hybrid peace' understood as the outcome of the activities of both external and internal actors. As in other African theatres though, it might well be challenged by the ambition of its own mandate, the constraints deriving from the Malian authorities' expectations and agenda, as well as by the absence of a 'peace to keep' in the northern part of Mali. It follows that, unless kept at a reasonable level, expectations that peace will be the exclusive product of the UN's multifaceted activities are doomed to be disappointed.

Foreign military operations and civilian missions as of May 2014



Source: EUISS

## **The UN prevails over African organisations**

The Sahel security imbroglio has shed light on the aspirations, positioning and actual capacities of security actors present in the region.

To start, crisis management in Mali – and similarly in the Central African Republic – has revealed the central role that the UN plays in security governance in Africa in an era simultaneously marked by the emergence of regional security actors. The creation of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in April 2013 came about as a response to the inability of both the ECOWAS and the AU to sustain their own operations by themselves.

Soon after the March 2012 *coup* and the subsequent seizure of the northern cities of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu by Tuareg rebels and later an alliance of radical Islamist groups, ECOWAS initiated diplomatic efforts and started the planning of an ambitious peace operation aimed at assisting the Malian government to restore its sovereignty in the northern part of the country. Difficulties encountered by ECOWAS in the planning phase led to the AU takeover of the operation under the label African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). However, the AU faced similar operational and above all financial difficulties that directly challenged the feasibility and sustainability of its efforts. Therefore, following the January 2013 southward offensive of the radical Islamist groups and the French military response (operation Serval), the AU option soon yielded to a more multi-dimensional and soundly financed UN alternative. Based on UN Security Council Resolution 2100 adopted on 25 April 2013, the UN took over the AU mission in Mali on 1 July 2013.

These developments have taken place against a background of increased tensions between the UN and the AU regarding their respective prerogatives in the crisis management field. As the AU develops its own capacity and profile as a peacekeeping actor in the framework of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter on Regional Arrangements, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) has repeatedly called for a ‘flexible and creative interpretation’ of Chapter VIII, and reiterated that the UN Security Council should take better account of the AU’s views and recommendations on African security issues. In response, the Security Council has underlined the ‘respective authorities, competencies and capacities’ of each organisation, in an unambiguous reassertion of its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. In Mali, the AU also called for AFISMA to be partly financed by the UN assessed contributions, as is the case for the AU operation in Somalia (AMISOM). But this request was rejected by the UN Security Council. In this context, the creation of MINUSMA in lieu of the AFISMA represented a disavowal of the AU’s involvement in Mali’s crisis management. The AUPSC criticised the lack of consultation in the drafting of the resolution authorising MINUSMA, and further stressed that the situation was not ‘in consonance with the spirit of partnership’ between the two

organisations.<sup>1</sup> In the same vein, the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and the Force Commander of MINUSMA came under criticism as AU candidates (namely Pierre Buyoya, until today AU High Representative for Mali and Sahel, and a Nigerian general for the Force Commander position) were sidelined by the UN Secretariat.

These tensions aside, the UN appeared as the only institution able to plan, deploy and finance over a relatively long period of time a multidimensional operation in support of Malian peace consolidation, and therefore as a pragmatic and consensual solution it took over from the African organisations.

### **A robust mandate, but no peace enforcement**

The establishment of MINUSMA in parallel with the existing French operation raises the issue of burden-sharing and coordination between different types of stabilisation operations. UNSC Resolution 2100 (2013) authorises the French troops of operation Serval to ‘use all necessary means’ to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat. Serval therefore operates partly as a rapid reaction force of the larger UN mission. On the ground, Serval has created dedicated liaison units (*Détachements de Liaison et d’Appui Opérationnel – DLAO*) with MINUSMA to ensure coordination of their respective activities. Those units also liaise with the Malian armed forces that have already benefited from the training provided by the EU Training Mission. In return, the presence of MINUSMA in the northern cities of Mali is supposed to contribute to stability there and allow the French forces to concentrate on counterterrorism in other areas and, in the long run, even withdraw most of their personnel. The UN operation is therefore part of a larger crisis management response that brings together actors with different mandates and capacities.

However, Serval’s openly coercive mandate distinguishes it from MINUSMA. The UN mission is mandated to assist the Malian authorities in the stabilisation of key population centres and the re-establishment of state authority throughout the country; to support the political and electoral process; protect civilians; and assist in the promotion and protection of human rights, humanitarian assistance, as well as national and international justice. Theoretically, MINUSMA’s mandate defines a ‘robust’ peace-keeping posture according to which Blue Helmets may resort to force in defence of the mandate, to protect civilians for example. However, in contrast to the French operation Serval, the UN mission is not about peace enforcement and should not directly or pro-actively engage in military confrontation with the armed groups. This poses the limits of what MINUSMA is able to do in conjunction with Serval, in support of the Malian armed forces or simply in the implementation of its mandate.

<sup>1</sup> Communiqué PSC/PR/COMM.(CCCLXXI) of 371st PSC meeting held on 25 April 2013 in Addis Ababa (para 10). The PSC noted ‘with concern’ (para.10) that ‘Africa [had] not [been] appropriately consulted in the drafting and the consultation process that led to the adoption of the resolution authorizing MINUSMA’, and that the resolution did not ‘take into account the concerns formally expressed by the AU and ECOWAS’.

Even a simple ‘robust’ peacekeeping mandate can be challenging for contingents that are ill-prepared and generally unwilling to run the risks of armed confrontation with radical Islamist groups or Tuareg rebels. A recent internal study by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services has shown how Blue Helmets are generally reluctant to resort to force in protection of civilians (they do so in only approximately 20 percent of cases despite a clear civilian protection mandate from the Security Council). This pattern of non-intervention may well characterise most of the MINUSMA contingents. Moreover, attacks on MINUSMA personnel (which occurred on several occasions in the first year of deployment in the Gao and Kidal regions) have highlighted the vulnerability of the force, and this is likely to negatively impact the civilian protection mandate as the focus will then shift to force protection instead. MINUSMA is the first UN peacekeeping operation to be directly exposed to terrorist attacks in most of its area of deployment, a threat that, combined with shortfalls in capacities, will impede its ability to deploy outside of the large cities and do ‘area security’. The deployment of a significant Dutch contingent (350 personnel out of 380 as of May 2014, including Special Forces and helicopters) will bring a certain level of credibility to the Force. However, the Dutch will mainly do reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, i.e. not primarily civilian protection, a task for which their level of training and preparedness is furthermore not necessarily optimal. Also the extent to which the intelligence gathered will be used by other contingents as a basis for acting in a proactive manner remains to be seen.

### **Slow force generation, limited impact on the ground**

As expected, the MINUSMA force generation process was laborious. Most contingents of the AFISMA re-hatted in the UN Mission, yet the necessity to meet UN standards (regarding battalions’ size, level of equipment, and human rights regulations on child soldiers) complicated and therefore delayed deployment. Troops from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Rwanda, Nepal, China and the Netherlands have joined the operation, but at a slow pace. Sweden will also deploy units in the second half of 2014. Together with the Dutch participation, this marks the return of European nations to UN peacekeeping in Africa, from which they have been largely absent over the last decade. Interestingly enough, if one adds the EU Training Mission and operation Serval, as well as EUCAP Sahel deployed in Niger, European countries have in the end become important crisis management actors in the Sahel region.

As of 31 April 2014, 8,255 MINUSMA personnel were deployed out of an authorised strength of 11,200, i.e. 74 percent. The police component counted 999 personnel, comprising 881 formed police unit elements and 118 individual police officers for an authorised strength of 1,120 personnel. Only 365 of its authorised 672 international civilian posts had been filled as of the end of March 2014. Several key force multipliers such as helicopters or medical evacuation enablers were also missing, making

MINUSMA dependent on operation Serval for medical evacuation and on-call close air support, and limiting the ‘ability [of the mission] to proactively protect civilians and deter attacks’.<sup>2</sup>

Early in its deployment phase, MINUSMA together with other UN agencies was able to support the presidential elections held on 28 July and 11 August 2013. The overall peacefulness of the process and the high participation rate signified the successful restoration of a legitimate President (Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta) and marked a first achievement for the UN. Yet almost a year after the beginning of the operation, the security situation remains tense in Mali and has even deteriorated in the north, where the cantonment and disarmament of armed groups have been stalled and the ‘risks of terrorist attacks against government institutions remain high.’<sup>3</sup> MINUSMA has deployed in the main cities of the north, and so have the Malian forces with the exception of Kidal, which remains partly controlled by Tuareg rebel forces. However, the restoration of state authority has been minimal in northern rural areas, and the overall reform of the governance structures has yet to begin. Most importantly, negotiations between the government and the Tuareg rebels have made very little progress since the June 2013 Ouagadougou Accords signed between the Malian government of transition, the *Mouvement national pour la Libération de l’Azawad* (MNLA) and the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA).

## Challenges of sustainable peace

Over the summer of 2012 the UN Secretariat started the lengthy process of drafting an Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, which was eventually released in June 2013.<sup>4</sup> In the meantime a Special Envoy for the Sahel was appointed (Romano Prodi from October 2012 to April 2014, followed by Hiroute Guebre Sellassie since May 2014) and tasked to monitor the implementation of the Strategy in coordination with the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA). The Strategy laid out three strategic objectives: the enhancement of inclusive and effective governance, national and regional security, and long-term resilience built through the integration of humanitarian and development activities. It emphasises the multifaceted nature of the root causes of instability as well as their regional ramifications, and advocates a comprehensive and sustained response.

In this context, MINUSMA can only be one instrument of a broader policy that, as suggested by the UN Sahel Strategy and as a matter of fact also by the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, must bring together security, development and governance considerations. A consensus now prevails on the necessity of a holistic approach to tackle the situation. However, there remain huge practical challenges

2 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, S/2014/229, 28 March 2014, para.20.

3 Ibid., para.12, 24, 27, 73-74.

4 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Sahel region, S/2013/354, 14 June 2013, Annex.

relating to the various operators' ability and will to act in a coordinated manner and accept the constraints of inter-institutional cooperation.

In Mali and the broader Sahel, the security-development nexus finds an illustration in the interaction between transnational organised crime and state fragility. Organised crime is arguably a structural source of instability in the region, yet its disruption is far less prominent than the fight against terrorism in MINUSMA's mandate. While transnational crime has increasingly become a source of concern within peace operations (from Kosovo to Haiti and the DRC), the UN has largely failed to mainstream crime disruption in its operations, both as a result of a generally weak assessment of the political economy of crime in peace operations' host states and inappropriate policy responses.<sup>5</sup> The fight against organised crime is much more central in the UN Integrated Sahel Strategy with a series of objectives and indicative actions at different levels. The extent to which this will be backed by the required resources and a sustained political commitment from the states of the region as well as from international actors remains to be seen.

This leads back to the issue of expectations management and what MINUSMA can realistically achieve given the multifaceted nature of the problems it faces. Long-term stability in Mali is dependent on the restoration of the rule of law and governance structures in northern Mali which cannot be achieved in the absence of an inclusive and successful political process, in particular with the Tuaregs. MINUSMA may facilitate such a process by helping building confidence and raising the cost of violent acts, yet experience in other African countries (the Democratic Republic of the Congo for example) shows that the UN mission cannot be a substitute for politics and is inherently constrained in a situation where there is no 'peace to keep'.

The developments in Kidal in May 2014 have highlighted these challenges. The low presence of Malian forces in Kidal due to the political situation puts MINUSMA and operation Serval in the difficult situation of having to fill the security vacuum in this area. Notwithstanding the Malian authorities' own agenda and understanding of the UN's role, the risk is then that any incident that would result in casualties within the civilian population or the Malian Defence and Security Forces is likely to undermine the credibility of both MINUSMA and Serval. Indeed the fighting that started in mid-May 2014 on the occasion of the visit of the Malian Prime Minister to Kidal raised questions regarding the role of MINUSMA and its ability to 'deter threats and take active steps to prevent the return of armed elements' in northern Mali as well as to support the 'authorities of Mali to extend and re-establish State administration throughout the country' (UNSC Resolution 2100, para. 16). Peace negotiations over Kidal are largely beyond the remit of MINUSMA, and the Force will not be in a position to stop the fighting between various determined armed groups in the north or between those groups and the Malian forces; yet public perceptions of the legitimacy

5 See Walter Kemp, 'Peace Operations and the Rule of Law: Recommendations for Dealing with Transnational Organized Crime', Background Paper, Challenges Forum Annual Conference, Geneva, May 2012.



of the operation are likely to be shaped by how it handles these armed groups regardless of its mandate.

## **Conclusion**

The role of the UN in bringing stability to the Sahel is defined in an ambitious manner in the MINUSMA mandate as well as in the Integrated Strategy. Objectives such as the protection of civilians, the enhancement of effective governance structures or the fight against organised crime raise expectations that will be difficult to meet. In Mali as in other places that have concentrated international attention, the sustainability of peace is to a large extent a product of the activities of both external and internal actors, in what is now referred to as 'hybrid peace'. The UN and other actors may facilitate the process, create incentives and raise the cost of disruption for spoilers, yet they are seldom substitutes for home-grown peace-making.



## ANNEXES

### ABBREVIATIONS

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ACSRT	African Centre for Study and Research on Terrorism ( <i>CAERT – Centre africain d'études et de recherche sur le terrorisme</i> )
AEC	African Economic Community
AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
CEMOC	General Staff Joint Operations Committee ( <i>Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint</i> )
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States ( <i>Communauté des Etats Sabélo-Sahariens</i> )
CILSS	Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel ( <i>Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel</i> )
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EWS	Early Warning System
FNLA	National Liberation Front of Azawad ( <i>Front national de libération de l'Azawad</i> )
GIA	Islamic Armed Group ( <i>Groupe islamique armé</i> )
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat ( <i>Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat</i> )
HCIM	High Council of Malian Islam
HCUA	High Council for the Unity of Azawad ( <i>Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad</i> )
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MAA	Arab Movement of Azawad ( <i>Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad</i> )
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MICEMA	ECOWAS Mission in Mali
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali

MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad ( <i>Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad</i> )
MUJAO	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa ( <i>Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest</i> )
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PCAR	Consistency and Regional Action Programme in West Africa for the Stability and Development of the Saharan-Sahelian areas ( <i>Programme de Cohérence et d'Action régionales de l'Afrique de l'Ouest pour la stabilité et le développement des espaces saharo-sahéliens</i> )
PSC	Peace and Security Council
REC	Regional Economic Community
SADR	Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
TFPs	Technical and Financial Partners
UFL	Fusion and Liaison Unit ( <i>Unité de fusion et de liaison</i> )
UN	United Nations
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNOWA	United Nations Office for West Africa
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
USD	United States dollars
WAEMU	West Africa Economic and Monetary Union

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