

## **The Strategy of Securitization in African Sahel: Regional Arrangements and Transnational Security Challenges**

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**Abstract:** *The following paper discusses the current securitization process of the Sahel regions, in the light of the instability in the Sahel which is an undeniable threat for the security of the region. As the Sahel-Sahara region has witnessed a steady build-up of foreign military and intelligence forces over the last decade in line with US and European attempts to counter the spread and threat of radical Islamist ideas associated with the al-Qaida network. In this framework, first, the paper presents an introduction to Sahel region profile. Then, it analyzes the securitization process in the Sahel, assessing its specific dynamics. Next, it presents a Geopolitical perspective discussing the origins of terrorism in the region; also, it further analyzes the immanent contradictions to the current methods employed against terrorism and transnational threats in the regions. The main division focuses on the role of the European Union in the Sahel region and compares it to that of the United States, which continues to be considered as the key player in the international security landscape.*

**Keywords:** *Securitization, Sahel, Terrorism, Islamism, Organized Crime, AQIM, Algeria, EU Strategy, US Strategy.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Sahel is obvious example of regions suffering from multiple forms of recurring violence, weak governance and instability. The threats to state stability in the region have diverse sources and take different expressions. These include secessionist armed struggles and terrorism in Mali and Niger and unstable narco-states in Guinea-Bissau and Guinea financed by the influx of money from the trafficking of South American cocaine. In addition to that chronic poverty and underdevelopment, state inability, neglect, clientelism and corruption have created unstable regimes with low internal and external legitimacy. The conflicts that exist in many Sahel states have often been exacerbated by the government, due perhaps to a lack of resources or competence to deal with a crisis or conflict, but possibly also to active government complicity with organized crime, armed Islamists or other armed groups such as militias. The threat to state and human security, state stability and development created by separatism, armed Islamism and organized crime, all issues with transnational connections. These are not the only threats to security in the Sahel, as the region is simultaneously experiencing food shortages, chronic underdevelopment, lack of functioning infrastructure and environmental threats, to name but a few of its problems. Moreover, the Sahel region is significantly closer to both the US and Europe geographically and through transportation links and increased linkages between criminal and terrorism elements in Latin America and West Africa. As such they constitute a potentially much more troubling and dangerous springboard for international terrorist activity a fact that clearly hasn't escaped al- Qaeda's attention.

Understanding the nature and intensity of these threats in general and a discussion of the challenges in the Sahel regions may help to provide a better view to this acceleration which poses an increasing threat not only to political and economic reforms in the region, but also to potential US and European targets likely to be in terrorist groups sights as future opportunities for attack.

The paper focus on the threat to state and regional security, state stability and development created by armed Islamism and organized crime, all issues with transnational connections. These are not the only threats to security in Mali and the Sahel, as the region is simultaneously experiencing food shortages, chronic underdevelopment, lack of functioning infrastructure and environmental threats, to name but a few of its problems. These are important issues with great ramifications. As this study examines how transnational threats, armed Islamism and organized crime affect security and stability in the Sahel region.

## 2. THE AFRICAN SAHEL, A GEOPOLITICAL APPROACH

In order to understand the security challenges confronted by the countries of the Sahel, it is necessary to begin with the specific details of geography and the sociological make-up of the region, it is important to recall that the Sahel region, which covers the expanse stretching from the Atlantic to the Red Sea and encompasses parts of Senegal, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, and Somalia, is more than 80 percent comprised of desert lands. Hence, the Sahel spreads from Mauritania and Senegal in the west of Africa to Sudan and Eritrea in the east, The Sahel is a critical zone of convergence. Geographically, it links two oceans and three seas. Itself a semi-arid corridor, it functions as a giant dry river that traverses the central-north of Africa from coast to coast, demarcating the transition between the Sahara desert and the savannah. Across the land and the water came traders and adventurers seeking goods and power, bringing ideas, opportunities and challenges, sometimes, as with slavery, inflicting heavy damage upon flourishing institutions.<sup>1</sup>



**Fig1.** Sahel Region Map

**Source:** [http://www.acegeography.com/uploads/1/8/6/4/18647856/6372964\\_orig.jpg](http://www.acegeography.com/uploads/1/8/6/4/18647856/6372964_orig.jpg)

Always rich in human diversity, bringing into contact North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans, West Africans and East Africans long before others came from outside the continent, in the Sahel cultures mixed, not always comfortably. And so they continue to mix even now.<sup>2</sup> Indigenous religions met Islam, imported from the Arabian Peninsula, and Christianity from the Middle East by way of Europe. Another consequence of the geographic particularities of the Sahel is the strong correlation between the economies of the countries in the region and the variations in rainfall. Years of drought, such as those that have just passed, always result in a drastic reduction in cereal production and in subsequent problems of food security. According to estimates from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), more than 16 million people in the Sahel are directly threatened by malnutrition in the wake of the 2011 drought.<sup>3</sup> In this context, no country in the region can do without international emergency aid; but delivery of aid to the people presupposes that the states are able to guarantee the security of its passage. The real menace in the region stems from poverty, bad governance, lack of democracy, corruption and economic mismanagement.<sup>4</sup>

The Sahel is among the poorest in the world; and it is these very countries that are being assembled in the new US-led security arrangements. On the list of the 100 poorest countries with the lowest GDP per capita, Niger ranks 7<sup>th</sup>, Mali 11<sup>th</sup>, Burkina Faso 22<sup>nd</sup>, oil-rich Chad 32<sup>nd</sup>, Senegal 33<sup>rd</sup>, Mauritania 35<sup>th</sup>, and even the major oil-producer Nigeria ranks 45<sup>th</sup>, in comparison, Morocco ranks 66<sup>th</sup>, Algeria 83<sup>rd</sup> and Tunisia 96<sup>th</sup>.<sup>5</sup> Before examining regional key players activities in the region, it will be useful to provide an overview of the major problems that the Sahel countries are facing.

<sup>1</sup> Yve Lacoste, 'Sahara, perspectives et illusions géopolitiques', *Hérodote*, 142 (3), (2011), pp.12-41.

<sup>2</sup> Marcel Kitissou and Pauline E. Ginsberg, "The Sahel: Focus of Hope, Focus of Fear," at: <http://sahelconsortium.org/the-sahel-focus-of-hope-focus-of-fear/> accessed on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Mohamed Mahmoud Mohamed Salah, "Threats to Peace and Security in the Sahel: Responding to the Crisis in Mali", *Issue Brief*, (NY: The International Peace Institute, December 2012), pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *Global finance*, "The Poorest Countries in the World," (2013), at: <https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/the-poorest-countries-in-the-world> accessed on February, 07<sup>th</sup>, 2015

*Post colonial legacy:* History particularly that of the recent decolonization of the states of the region, contains the seeds of certain elements that are conducive to these states' destabilization. The Sahel region is home to more failing states than any other region, The failed state is defined as "Failed states are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions,"<sup>6</sup>. There is no failed state without disharmonies between communities. Yet, the simple fact that many weak nation-states include haves and have-nots, and that some of the newer states contain a heterogeneous array of ethnic, religious, and linguistic interests, is more a contributor to than a root cause of nation-state failure. Somalia, Chad, Niger are in the advance stages of this process and Libya recently. But even in more or less functioning states such as Mali, Mauritania, and Cameroon are hardly capable of effectively maintaining a monopoly on violence and controlling the entire territory of the country.<sup>7</sup>

In another hand, the region of the Sahel, as elsewhere on the African continent, the territorial boundaries were drawn with the interests of the colonizing countries in mind, not according to the national cohesion of the peoples concerned. Since the early 1960s, these boundaries have been the basis for international recognition of sovereign states in the region. To avoid undermining the young state formations, which could lead to a cascade effect, the African Union and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) before it established the inviolability of the borders inherited from colonization as a founding doctrine. Reinforced by the validation of respect for the territorial integrity of states in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, the new doctrine has partially fulfilled the task it was assigned namely, avoiding or at least slowing thoughts of secession that might have resulted from an unpredictable recasting of the map of the continent. It was not, however, able to settle the question of the cohesion of diverse communities in a manner that would, in each state, make these communities into a nation.<sup>8</sup>

The result is that, in several countries of the Sahel, the state continues to be perceived by certain parts of the national community as the state of the dominant ethnic group only—whether that group is in the majority or not. This perception has been nourished by political practices, such as patronage and nepotism that have succeeded in reinforcing the feeling of exclusion among certain parties. The perception leads in turn to demands that can range from the simple sharing of political power to the recognition of self-rule, and even to secession and the creation of an independent state. The absence of true national integration constitutes favorable grounds for identity-based demands that, depending on the circumstances and the evolution of the balance of power between the state and the groups contesting the state, can be minimal or extreme.<sup>9</sup>

### **3. THE AFRICAN SAHEL, A GEO SECURITARIAN APPROACH**

#### **3.1. The Rise of Political Islamism**

The majority of the Sahel region areas appear to share two common features. Islam did not develop into an exclusive state religion and the interpretation of the Islamic legal code appears to have been moderate across the board. This does not mean that Islam is not a political force in these regions. On the contrary. In West Africa, for example, spiritual leaders and traditional Islamic leaders have played, and continue to play, a central role in exercising political power and maintaining clientele systems.<sup>10</sup> Even the long-standing practice of a moderate interpretation of Islam is subject to change. A radicalisation has taken place with the introduction of *shariah* in several Nigerian states, rigid adherence to *shariah* in Somalia and extremist tendencies among Muslims in South Africa. The reasons for this are in part rather varied. In the case of Nigeria, it appears that aggressive missionary work in the north by Saudi Wahabis has played a decisive role in escalating the conflict between Christians and Muslims, a conflict that flared up again during the Miss World competition last year. Still, despite all the differences, these processes of radicalisation have one thing in common. Where

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<sup>6</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, *When States Fail*, (Princeton University Press, 2004), pp 5-9.

<sup>7</sup> Angel Rabasa, "Radical Islam in East Africa," (USA: Rand corporation, 2009), pp. 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Mohamed Mahmoud Mohamed Salah, *Op.cit*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>10</sup> Moshe Terdman, "Factors Facilitating the Rise of Radical Islamism and Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa," *The Project for Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM)*, GLORIA Center, African Occasional Papers, Vol. 1, No. 1, (March 2007), p. 3.

Muslims are in the minority, they generally belong to the losers of the social and political change that Africa has gone through over the past ten years.<sup>11</sup> That is especially the case in the coastal states of West and East Africa. In West Africa, democratisation has removed Muslim leaders and their followers from the levers of power; in East Africa the social advancement of the Muslim minority has trailed that of the region's already low average.<sup>12</sup>

The partial loss of power for Muslims in West Africa stands in fundamental conflict with claims to power based on tradition. The social conflicts in the coastal states of West Africa are increasingly developing along a north–south divide that is largely congruent with the geographic division between Christians and Muslims. This is particularly noticeable in Nigeria, Ghana and the Côte d'Ivoire<sup>13</sup>.

While the risks of escalation are significant, the gains of these Islamic militant groups are not attributable to their military strength. Rather, their expanded influence is just as much a symptom of fragile and complex political contexts. More generally, Islamic militancy in Africa today represents the intersection of broader trends in contemporary Islam and local circumstances. Responding to the challenge is all the more difficult in that very little is known about these often secretive Islamic groups, some of which have only recently emerged.<sup>14</sup> Yet, political and socioeconomic factors are important, the very fact that these movements define themselves in *religious* terms makes it imperative to recognize their ideological content. Islamic militancy in Africa is part of a broader, global ideological current. In some cases, this includes links to like-minded organizations outside Africa. Unfortunately, the lack of thorough investigations of such connections often reduces the complexity of such ideological bonds to the diffuse notion of “global Islam.” In fact, contemporary Islam is characterized by increased doctrinal heterogeneity and fragmentation, which inevitably impact the on-the-ground actions of Islamic militants. Groups feature a high degree of selective interpretations of religious tenets, particular local appropriations, and a lack of ideological coherence that propel them on multiple potential trajectories that can be difficult to chart.<sup>15</sup>



Fig2. The arc of Islam in Africa

Source: *Perspectives on terrorism*, October 2013

### 3.2. Terrorism and Criminal network

The Sahel has become the sanctuary of choice for criminal networks and terrorist groups in search for bases from which they can secure financing and plan attacks. In September 2006, four Islamist groups from the Sahel region, the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat – GSPC*), the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (*Groupe Islamique Combattant au Maroc – GICM*), the Libyan Islamic Combatant Group (*Groupe Islamique*

<sup>11</sup> Ricardo Laremont and Hrach Gregorian, “Political Islam in West Africa and the Sahel,” *Military Review*, Vol.86, N°1, (January/February 2006), p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Stefan Mair, *Terrorism and Africa on The Danger of Further Attacks In Sub-Saharan Africa*, *African Security Review*, Vol. 12 No 1, (2003), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Terje Ostebo, “Islamic Militancy in Africa, Africa security brief ,” (Washington DC: Africa center for strategic studies, no. 23, November 2012), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

*Combattant Libyen* – GICL) and the Tunisian Islamic Combatant Groupe (*Groupe Islamique Combattant en Tunisie* – GICT), as well as other small Islamic groups from countries such as Mauritania, Mali and Niger, built an alliance with Al Qaeda. They then renamed themselves Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). From supplying fighters to hotspots such as Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan between 2004 and 2006, Islamic groups in the Maghreb then became a united Salafist movement in the region. A central command unit was established by Islamist groups in the Sahel with a view to expanding AQIM's scope for action. This terrorist group found sanctuary in the Sahel not only to train Jihadists from neighbouring countries, Europe and elsewhere, but also to carry out kidnappings in order to generate revenue from ransoming. The GSPC's change of name went hand-in-hand with a change of strategy, placing their activities in the Sahel within the broader thrust of international terrorism.<sup>16</sup>

The presence of terrorist groups affiliated to AQIM in some countries of the Sahel region constitutes a serious threat to peace and security in the sub-region.<sup>17</sup>

AQIM takes advantage of the lack of state presence in the region to establish operations in various countries. They operate over a vast area of the region, covering thousands of kilometres from the eastern part of Algeria to northern Niger through to eastern Mauritania, and to Mauritania's border with Senegal. The movement is currently made up of up to 800 fighters scattered all over this vast desert area. It is divided into several sub-groups which are particularly mobile, capable of rapidly moving from one country to the next to evade security services. AQIM mainly recruits from amongst the *Tuaregs*, Arabs, and Moors because of their excellent knowledge of the desert. However, it is possible to find people from sub-Saharan Africa among the fighters. Elements of AQIM have become increasingly present in cities of Northern Mali.<sup>18</sup>

Networks of traffickers thrive in the vast and mountainous desert area of the Sahel. This area has witnessed the development of militia groups such as the Gandakoye.<sup>19</sup> arms and drugs trafficking, cigarette smuggling, and vehicle and merchandise theft. Arms trafficking networks extend beyond the Sahel region to include other countries, especially those around the Mano river. The development of arms trafficking emanates from the multiplication of conflicts in both West Africa and in countries such as Chad, the Sudan, and Somalia. It is also due to the diversified nature of supply chains. In the north of the Sahel, arms traffickers favour several routes: in the Kidal region, they favour the Kidal-Tin-Essako axis and the Tamassina valley-Tedjerert border with Algeria and Niger; in the Timbuktu region arms are supplied through the Timbuktu border with Mauritania (Polisario axis).<sup>20</sup>

These routes are still very popular today. To date, several routes are still used and contribute to the ongoing proliferation of arms in the north. Local networks are linked to their regional and international counterparts. Besides, a transnational network of drugs trafficking is well established in the north of Mali. Some argue that the role of tribal groups is central to the development of drug trafficking: 'No trafficking takes place without the association of local tribal groups. Several other transnational actors are involved in drugs trafficking, especially the Sahraouis of the Polisario Front, Mauritanian 'businessmen' belonging to the Rguiba and Smacid tribes (influential and respected traders in Mauritania), elements of AQIM, Algerians, Moroccans, and other international networks.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Reeve and Zoë Pelter, "From New Frontier to New Normal: Counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel-Sahara, (London: Oxford Research Group, August 2014), p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM: The evolution of an Algerian Islamist terrorist group into an Al-Qa'ida Affiliate and its implications for the Sahara-Sahel region," *Concerned African Scholars, Bulletin* no. 85, (Spring 2010), p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> The Gandakoye are Sonrhāi militias who live in fixed settlements and organised themselves against the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s. Some regard their movement as a political product of the Malian government to combat the rebellion during this period. Today this movement, despite initially being organised for purposes of self-defence, has grown into an awareness-raising body that promotes peace in the north of the country.

<sup>20</sup> Kalilou Sidibé, "Security Management in Northern Mali: Criminal Networks and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms," *Research Report*, (UK: Institute of Development Studies (IDS), No.77, Vol. 2012), p.27.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.3. The Touareg Question

The Tuareg rebellion started in the 1960s and effectively developed during the 1990s. The different waves of Tuareg rebellion emerged to challenge state authority and pertain to the marginalisation of Tuareg and Arab nomadic communities living in the north of Mali. These movements launched a series of attacks against government forces. These attacks were the work of extremely mobile commandos that relentlessly targeted paramilitary forces such as the gendarmerie and the police, as well as the armed forces. Successive Malian regimes have had to deal with these rebel movements in the north of the country. Between 1962 and 1964, the government of Modibo Keita dealt with the rebellion through military repression. In 1990, the regime of General Moussa Traore also refused to negotiate with the rebels, accusing them of being armed bandits. Repression was therefore the preferred means by which the second Republic attempted to deal with the Tuareg issue.<sup>22</sup> One of the most important sources of recurring violence in Mali is the struggle for autonomy or independence by rebel groups, notably Tuareg, in the north. The Tuareg constitute a small minority in Mali as a whole, but also in the northern regions of the country, where they are only in the majority in the region of Kidal. The political conflict in Mali gains its transnational character from the distribution of the roughly 1.5 million Tuareg to several Sahel-Sahara countries. Most Tuareg live in Niger (850,000), Mali (550,000) and Algeria (50,000), with smaller numbers in Libya and Burkina Faso and a very limited presence in Nigeria. The Tuareg are most clearly defined by their language, Tamasheq.<sup>23</sup>

From a sociological point of view, Malian communities living in the north of the country are all nomadic: Tuaregs (1.7 per cent of the national population); Arabs, including Moors and Kuntas (1.2 per cent of the national population); Peuls, nomadic pastoralists (data not available); the Sonrhais or Songhoys, a community living in fixed settlements (7.2 per cent). The Sonrhais are the largest community in the Timbuktu and Gao regions, followed by the Tuaregs, who are predominant in the Kidal region. They can also be found in Ménaka and Bourème in the Gao region, and around Timbuktu. Arabs can mainly be found in Timbuktu, Bourème, and in Kidal. The Kuntas inhabit the Telemsi valley, between Gao and Kidal. The nomadic Peuls are scattered around these three regions. The Tuaregs, also called 'blue people' due to the colour of their clothing, have light skin. Just like the *Tuaregs*, Arabs and Moors also have light skin; *Kunta* Arabs are a skin shade between black and white, just like the *Peuls*. These three communities share relatively similar physical traits (tall, slim, with fine facial features), and they look different from the black African features of the Songhai populations. The social organisation of these three communities is very similar (highly hierarchical, caste-based, where authority is based on Islamic chieftaincy).<sup>24</sup>

The Treaty, which ended the rebellion of the 1990s, was supposed to lay the foundations for socioeconomic development in Northern Mali (decentralization, turning Kidal into a region, and the introduction of development projects and programmes). However, the Tuareg rebellion re-emerged on 23 May 2006. The Alliance Démocratique du 23 Mai pour le Changement (ADC), led by Ibrahim Ag Bahanga brought the Tuareg issue back to the forefront of the national debate.

Following a long period of peace, some Tuareg officers attacked units of the national army in Kidal and Ménaka and took with them weapons and ammunition. They then declared a new rebellion against the government of Mali, which they accused of breaching the terms of the 1996 Treaty. The recurrent Tuareg rebellion remains a national security challenge for the Malian authorities. The recurrence of the crisis can be explained by the lack of developmental vision for the region, as well as weak state presence, especially in the region of Kidal. Besides, the Tuareg issue has always been exploited by neighbouring countries, such as Algeria and Libya under Qaddafi, and has always been played out in a context of regional rivalry and interference. What is at stake is the regional positioning in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, with each actor seeking to appear pivotal in the fight against AQIM. In placing themselves as the true regional leader in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, each state tries to build close links with Western powers and support for their regime.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> Magdalena Tham Lindell and Kim Mattsson, *Peace and Security in the Sahel Consequences in Mali*, (Stockholm: Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI), June 2014), p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> "Political Stability and Security in West and North Africa," *World Watch: Expert Notes* series publication, April 2014, p. 1719. Available at: [https://www.csis.gc.ca/pblctns/wrldwtch/2014/NorthWestAfrica\\_POS\\_T\\_CONFERENCE\\_E\\_SOC](https://www.csis.gc.ca/pblctns/wrldwtch/2014/NorthWestAfrica_POS_T_CONFERENCE_E_SOC) accessed on March, 04<sup>th</sup>, 2015

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

### **3.4. The Regional Agendas in the Sahel Region**

The Sahel Strategy confronts major challenges in terms of the complexity of the region, the divergent approaches of key players to Mali's crisis, and the EU's slow pace of adjustment to the new realities on the ground. Whilst the Sahel Strategy hinges on improved regional cooperation to make a real difference, it has papered over the widening regional cracks, particularly since the Libya conflict. Meaningful cooperation among local and international actors in the Sahel is now arguably at the lowest it has been in recent decades. This situation is not helped by the EU's failure to link the strategy to existing regional initiatives or explicitly complement them. Fragmented regional responses to challenges in the Sahel are therefore compounded by European as well as regional actors' actions.

On the other hand, in recent years the Sahel has increasingly become a region of great interest to policymakers in Washington. This new significance attached to the Sahel, derives from a number of considerations that fall into two broad groups: namely, political and economic/energy interests, and military, strategic and security interests. The first are linked to America's energy needs, and focus on oil and gas in Algeria, Chad and Libya, and perhaps in Mali and Mauritania; they also favour the development of a stronger regional entity, which could provide a potentially important market for US businesses, especially since competition has heightened with China's recent gains in Africa. The second group of motives, which are not totally separate from the first, are related to Washington's refocusing of strategic and security policies since the attacks on New York and Washington of 11 September 2001.

In truth, divisions in the Sahel have deeper roots connected to the region's realities. First, assessments of the security threats facing the region have long been dominated by the concern over AQIM. However, understandings of the threat and needed responses often diverge. Second, Algerian reticence undoubtedly remains a problem for the EU but Algiers' single-mindedness on crisis management in Mali is only one of the many challenges. General distrust among regional actors is compounded by the lack of capacity and vision among the weakest states.

### **3.5. Us Strategy in the Sahel**

Needless to say, the Sahel is increasingly being referred to by the United States and its allies as the "new front" in combating terrorism. Since 9/11, a total of 126 terrorist attacks were recorded in the area, and more are expected in the coming months. The US has historically been a minor player in the Sahel-Sahara, where it does little trade or investment has small numbers of citizens and has limited energy interests. Its share of Algerian and Nigerian oil exports has fallen as domestic shale production has boomed in the 2010s.<sup>26</sup> US involvement in regional counterterrorism began to change radically in nature in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the US and the Sahel belt began to attract attention within unfolding thinking on "ungoverned spaces" as refuges for al-Qaida and its allies. The US launched its small-scale Pan-Sahel Initiative in late 2002, folding it into a larger Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) from 2005.<sup>27</sup>

Washington is committed to multiple military operations or diplomatic initiatives that have bearing over US relations with Morocco and Algeria.<sup>28</sup> For example, the US is beholden to the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, developed by the Group of Eight Industrialized Nations (G8) countries in 2004. It is a vague agreement to uphold democracy, human dignity, rule of law, economic opportunity, and freedom in countries spanning Afghanistan to Israel, Saudi Arabia to Mali. This agreement, proposed by the Bush administration, has had scant participation among the Arab countries to which it pertains, and has relatively little impact due to lack of funding and little enthusiasm among the G8. The Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) is an initiative coordinate by the US State Department that incorporates foreign military training and diplomatic cooperation in counterterrorism. The TSCTP grew out of the 2002 Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), which

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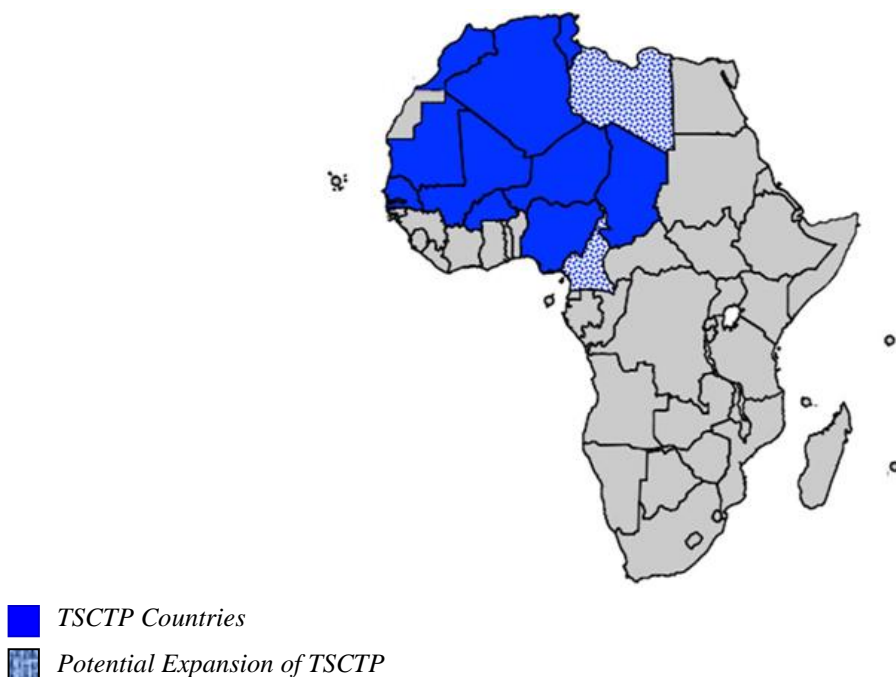
<sup>26</sup> Yahia H. Zoubir, 'The United States and Algeria: hostility, pragmatism, and partnership', in Looney, *Handbook on US-Middle East relations*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 219-230.

<sup>27</sup> Lesley Anne Warner, *the Trans Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership: Building Partner Capacity to Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, CNA Strategic Studies, (March 2014), pp. 22-24.

<sup>28</sup> William P. Pope, Acting Coordinator, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Non proliferation, March 10, 2005, at: <http://20012009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/43702.html>



also had the central goal of “preventative involvement in potential terrorist safe-havens.” TSCTP took over the PSI operations in 2005 when it launched a major joint military operation in the Maghreb called Flintlock 2005, a training mission to enhance tactical operations, land navigations and intelligence gathering in Algeria, Senegal, Morocco, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad.<sup>29</sup> Military operations are coordinated under the project entitled Operation Enduring Freedom – Trans Sahara (OEF-TS). The TSCTP is a multi-agency program under the supervision of the State Department that provides training and equipment to Algeria and Morocco, as well as nine of its Maghreb neighbors. Writing for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Emily Hunt writes that the TSCTP has as its goal the tactical military training to bolster the militaries of what Washington strategists have labeled “important” African countries. This refers to the strategic concept of ‘pivotal states,’ developed in the 1990s to illustrate the regional importance of certain handpicked American allies.<sup>30</sup> The map below indicates both the countries that are currently, and those that may soon be, part of TSCTP.



**Fig3.** Countries part of TSCTP

These are countries whose stability upholds the political and economic order and political system, but whose collapse would drastically disrupt a region. Both Morocco and Algeria have taken turns on this list of important African countries in terms of American foreign policy priorities. The different administrative agencies that comprise the leadership of the TSCTP are indicative of its various purposes. Foremost is the State Department in providing the strategic and tactical coordination for the program. The State Department’s involvement highlights the diplomatic goal of building up the counterterrorism programs of the TSCTP’s nine participant countries within American parameters. The Department of Defense (DoD) is charged with organizing the joint military operations and military training of Saharan militaries alongside the US Special Forces operating out of the US Europe Command Center, or EUROCOM.<sup>31</sup> In 2007 it was announced that AFRICOM, the fifth and newest command center, would take over African operations for EUROCOM by the end of 2008, inheriting responsibility for the TSCTP. Finally, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) is the newest and smallest component of the TSCTP, or the ‘partnership’, as the TSCTP is sometimes called.<sup>32</sup> USAID looks to incorporate humanitarian projects into the partnership’s

<sup>29</sup> Emily Hunt, “Islamist Terrorism in Northwestern Africa: A ‘Thorn in the Neck’ of the United States?” *Policy Focus #65*, Washington DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 2007, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> John Davis, ed., *Terrorism in Africa: The Evolving Front in the War on Terror*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010, pp. 167-169.

<sup>31</sup> Emily Hunt, *Op.cit*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>32</sup> Eric Hilliard, “Multinational Exercise Sparks Change for Africa,” *American Forces Press Service*, available at: <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=52031> accessed on February, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015



objectives. The policy of giving aid according to compliance with the GWOT security rationale is controversial among other European aid agencies that do not take security and foreign policy concerns into aid distribution.<sup>33</sup> While TSCTP is instrumental in bringing the “3Ds” (Diplomacy, Defense, and Development.) together in a regional approach to counter terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel and Maghreb, it lacks the scope and scale to address the many structural problems in the region that enable terrorist activity. The 2013 TSCTP strategy review recognized that the program needs to create synergies with complementary U.S. government efforts in the region in order to address the underlying issues that inhibit the effectiveness of TSCTP’s CT/CVE activities. The example provided by the country team in Burkina Faso – using alumni from the State Department’s non- TSCTP exchange programs to work in the functional areas of USAID’s community engagement and vocational training as part of TSCTP – could be instructive for future attempts to magnify the impact of TSCTP engagement.<sup>34</sup>

#### **4. EUROPEAN STRATEGY IN THE SAHEL: FROM THE EUROPEAN SECURITY STRATEGY TO THE LISBON TREATY**

The Sahel Strategy argues that allied terrorist and criminal groups in the Sahel represent immediate and longer-term risks to European interests because of their growing ability to take advantage of weak state presence and other prevailing conditions in the region, including ‘extreme poverty... frequent food crises, rapid population growth, fragile governance, corruption [and] unresolved internal tensions’.<sup>35</sup> To address these challenges, it advocates policy interventions that better integrate the development and security dimensions of EU policies. In March 2011, the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted the Sahel Strategy and welcomed the identification of three ‘core’ countries – Mali, Mauritania and Niger – as its primary focus.<sup>36</sup>

The EU has shown increased interest and engagement in security developments of Sub-Saharan Africa/the Sahel in recent years. By early 2011 the EU adopted the Strategy of Security and Development for the Sahel. In that paper it was recognized that most countries in the region required a SSR more than the usual train and equip programs. It also located the core of the problem in Mauritania, Mali, Niger and determined areas of Chad and Burkina Faso.<sup>37</sup>

In a quick reading we can see that Title 3 is dedicated to “Mutual interests in improving the security and development situation in the Sahel”; that Title 4, focused on the goals, adopts a “5/10 years perspective: enhancing political stability, security, good governance, social cohesion in the Sahel” and set up the conditions for its sustainment; and that the “EU will need to promote and encourage actively African responsibility and ownership, particularly of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to demonstrate focus, urgency, pragmatism and political engagement, along with flexibility and a requirement to coordinate with other players, such as the Arab League and the Arab Maghreb Union, as well as other bilateral and multilateral partners with an interest in the region, including the UN4, United States, Canada and Japan and the Maghreb countries (Algeria, Libya and Morocco).”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Lesley Anne Warner, America's fight against terror in West Africa and its shortcomings, *The National Interest*, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014, at: <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/catch-22-the-sahel-10176> accessed on February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Lesley Anne Warner, “The Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership Building Partner Capacity to Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism”, (Washington: CNA Corporation's Strategic Studies, March 2014), p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Henceforth, the ‘Sahel Strategy’, the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel region was published in September 2011. Available at: [http://eeas.europa.eu/africa/docs/sahel\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/africa/docs/sahel_strategy_en.pdf)

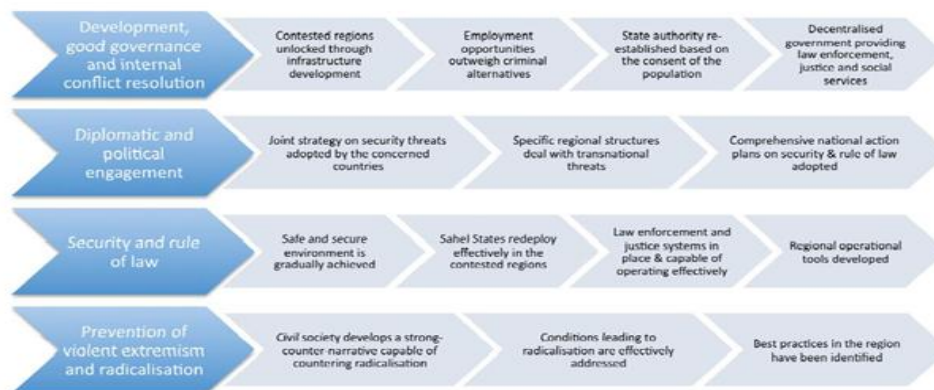
<sup>36</sup> Council Conclusions on a European Union strategy for security and development in the Sahel. 3076<sup>th</sup> Foreign affairs Council meeting. (Brussels, 21 March 2011), At: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/120075.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/120075.pdf) accessed on February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> César Pintado Rodríguez, “SOF, the Sahel and The African Peace And Security Architecture. Synergies And Opportunities for a New Mission,” *Espana: Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE)*, November 2014, pp. 2-3, Available at: SOF, the Sahel and the African Peace and Security architecture. Synergies and opportunities for a new mission (DIEEEO125-2014) accessed on accessed on March, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

On the other hand, are cited as strategic lines of action in Title 7 the “to strengthen the capacities of the security, law enforcement and the rule of law sectors to fight threats and handle terrorism and organized crime in a more efficient and specialized manner”. Regarding the AU, there is a Strategy for the Sahel Region whose pillars are security, governance and development. Such strategy asks for mid and long-term action beyond the current crisis and welcomes the commitment of the EU and the UN, but entitles the AU as “the organization that can very legitimately provide an overall umbrella for the regional initiatives in the Sahel”. The paper concurs with the European strategy in the location of the geographical core of the Sahel crisis and cites the efforts of these countries in setting joint structures for fighting terrorism and organized crime. The Titles 31-33 state that “Given the particularity of the Sahel-Saharan zone, it is appropriate to consider to what extent the APSA5 could be applied to meet the security challenges of the region. In this perspective, the AU could [...] contribute to the implementation of the ECOWAS Strategy to fight against terrorism [...], deploy SSR experts in the countries that express the need” and “share the experiences of African countries that have undergone or implemented a successful SSR program”. From all above it can be distilled that the EU and the AU concur on the need of a region-level, long-term and open to third parts SSR, and that this reform must be implemented in coordination with ECOWAS and consistently with APSA goals.<sup>39</sup>

### **EU Strategic Lines of Action for Security and Development in the Sahel**



**Source:** *Simon, Mattelaer & Hadfield, 2012, p.24.*

With the important exception of the implications of the Libya conflict, the EU’s Sahel strategy accurately identified most of the challenges affecting the region. In order to counter such challenges, the strategy identifies a series of strategic lines of action that set the framework for a number of concrete projects. This section takes stock of the first year of implementation of the strategy, provides background information on potential future action and offers an assessment of the strengths and shortcomings of the strategy. The Sahel strategy proposed intensified engagement along four strategic lines of action: (I) development, good governance and internal conflict resolution; (II) political and diplomatic action; (III) security and rule of law; and (IV) the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation. On the basis of these four lines of action and in consultation with the partner countries, the EEAS developed a plan of action that built on the existing engagement and proposed a set of new initiatives.<sup>40</sup>

The EU Sahel Strategy is often regarded as a best case when it comes to regional strategies. However, the outbreak of crisis in Mali questions this, since the EU was not able to prevent this and since other problems within the region remain. Another flaw according to some is that the Strategy does not involve important regional players such as Nigeria and Algeria, preventing the Strategy from being truly regionally inclusive.<sup>41</sup> Both the Arab Spring and the Libyan crisis urged for an update of the

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Simon, Mattelaer & Hadfield, *A Coherent EU Strategy for the Sahel*, (Brussels: European Parliament, May 2012), p. 24.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

Strategy as they increased existing threats and created new ones. The easy access to the Libyan arsenals increased the proliferation and availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and weapons such as RPG, Manpads and explosives in the entire Sahel-Saharan region from the very West through to the Red Sea.<sup>42</sup> The old problem of porous borders has reemerged as the security system and border controls established by Gaddafi collapsed. Moreover, the crisis generated a flow of pro-Gaddafi fighters, mercenaries and Tuareg from Mali and Niger who returned to their countries with their weapons and equipment; adding to the fear of a renewed rebellion. Now that the Gaddafi regime has been defeated, there is an urgent need to tackle the issue of disarming all fighters – both pro-Gaddafi and the insurgents – and recovering the weapons in circulation.<sup>43</sup>

Despite a different context and some critiques, the Council adopted conclusions in March 2014 stating that the validity of the Sahel Strategy remains. It does invite the EEAS, the EUSR and the Commission to adopt the next regional action plan and also calls for the broadening of the Sahel Strategy's scope to include Burkina Faso and Chad as well.<sup>44</sup>

## **5. REGIONAL COOPERATION: ALGERIA'S APPROACH AS A PIVOTAL STATE**

The main regional cooperation organ in West Africa and the Sahel is ECOWAS.<sup>45</sup> Within ECOWAS, several programmes and initiatives have been established to deal with regional challenges. These include control of small arms and cooperation against organized crime. Other regional initiatives include a joint Mali, Niger, Algeria and Mauritania intelligence bureau and anti-terror command in Tamanrasset, talks between, among others, Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger to cooperate on transnational issues and the establishment of what has been dubbed the *G4 of the Sahel* with the goal of strengthening cooperation on development and security in the Sahel.<sup>46</sup>

Algeria's complex relationship in the Sahel in general, and with Mali in particular\*, is rooted in the role that Algiers is thought to have played in supporting rebellions of Tuaregs, both in Mali and Niger, at the time in apparent competition with Muammar Kaddafi. That is why Algeria saw the establishment of a Libyan Consulate in Kidal in February 2006 as a plot between Mali and Libya, which would allow the latter to spy on them from Mali. Algeria served as a mediator in the peace accords in Mali in 1991 and 2006 and brought a precarious end to previous Tuareg uprisings. Many former rebels offered their services to fight against AQIM and joined the controversial specialised armed unit settled by the 2006 Algiers agreement, which were supposed to maintain security in northern Mali. Within the dozen regional states, only two have sufficient capacity to play a unilateral role in regional Counter-terrorism operations.<sup>47</sup> By far the largest is Algeria, which has the most capable armed forces and largest military budget in Africa. However, Algeria is a relatively isolationist state that does not use its armed forces outside of its own territory. It has been a major player in counter-terrorism operations longer than any other in the region due to its extremely violent civil war against Islamist political factions. For most Algerians, this war had concluded by 2003, although the displacement into the Sahara of one faction of what became AQIM at this time played a major role in amplifying the current cycle of violence in the Sahel- Sahara.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> U.N. Security Council, United Nations Press Release. Spiking arms proliferation, organized crime, terrorism part of fallout from Libyan crisis afflicting Sahel, Security Council told. 6709th Meeting. PM Summary. 26 January 2012. (Press Release SC/ 10533). Internet. At: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10533.doc.htm> accessed on February, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Dario Cristiani, 'Missiles, Money and Migration: The Impact of the Libyan Crisis on the African Sahel', *Terrorism Monitor*, IX, (2011), pp. 6-8.

<sup>44</sup> Council of the European Union, "Council Conclusions on Sahel", February 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Magdalena Tham Lindell and Kim Mattsson, *Op.cit*, p. 35.

\* Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Algeria. Indeed, given the leadership of Algeria in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region, nothing can be undertaken without its consent and its involvement.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> Laurence Aïda Ammour, *Regional Security Cooperation in the Maghreb and Sahel: Algeria's Pivotal Ambivalence*, Africa Security Brief, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, No.18, (February 2012), pp. 2-4.

<sup>48</sup> Laurence Aïda Ammour, *Algeria's Role in the Sahelian Security Crisis*. (London: International Journal of Stability, Security and Development, Juin 2013), p. 3.

Algeria is considered to have one of the Maghreb's most capable militaries and takes pride in having crushed the violent Islamist extremist insurgency of the 1990s. The government has built a reputation internationally as being the most hard-line state in the region against Islamist terrorism and extremism. This has greatly enhanced Algeria's geostrategic importance and the advantages of maintaining perceptions of an ongoing threat, particularly one that is nearby but does not pose an immediate threat to the Algerian regime.<sup>49</sup>

Algiers' opposition to participation in a regional intervention force is formally expressed in a constitutional article which forbids its forces from taking part in military action outside its own territory.

Algeria has been continually invoking this constitutional principle, thus justifying why its forces have not crossed into Mali to eradicate AQIM, even when invited to do so by its Sahelian neighbours, particularly by Niger. Yet the Algeria-led CEMOC (Joint Military Chief-of-staff Committee) was created in 2010 for precisely this purpose. However, on 20 December 2011, a few weeks before the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) proclaimed the independence of Azawad, Algerian army forces crossed into Mali. This move occurred exactly five days before Iyad ag Ghaly announced the creation of a new jihadist group called Ansar al-Dine (defenders of the faith) in Northern Mali.<sup>50</sup> The question then is why Algeria had some forces entered in Mali if Algeria is so keen not to intervene militarily on foreign soil? It is not clear what kind of forces were sent, but according to the official Algerian statements, Malian military elements were reported to be training with Algerian military counterparts in Kidal Region. Algeria is a major producer of oil and gas, mostly from its Saharan regions, and thus has a vital interest in the security of its very sparsely populated southern regions. The Sahel region, already weakened by a number of security challenges such as drug, arms and human trafficking and the intensification of kidnappings and terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), is now facing new threats associated with the instability born of the Arab Spring, particularly in the area where the Sahara meets the Sahel.<sup>51</sup>

The January 2013 attack on the In-Aménas gas facility in eastern Algeria demonstrated the ongoing threat to such interests from radical groups.<sup>52</sup> However, the Algerian approach focus on the increased regional cooperation which is considered to be vital in combating Islamist groups and criminal gangs operating in Algeria and in the wider region. For many years, Algeria push for regional cooperation and discreet aid from the West is crucial to help the Sahel countries regain control of their territory from al-Qaeda forces and prevent the terror group from taking hold in Africa.<sup>53</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Sahel includes a broad geographic net of countries spreading from East to West Africa. Mali, Chad, and Niger represent a serious security challenge with both regional and interregional implications. Most area specialists agree that problems of terrorism, illegal migration and trafficking of all kinds are epiphenomena that cannot be understood in isolation from the roots that engender them. And yet, as has often been correctly pointed out, external security assessments of the region focus precisely on the visible part of the iceberg, that is, the spread of terrorism in the region, the risk of illegal migration and criminal networks moving across the Mediterranean towards Europe.

The complex connections between the threats lead to the conclusion that a broad approach is necessary, as it is impossible to counteract the threats separately. As the threats are transnational in nature, the solution to the situation must be equally transnational, involving not just the neighbouring states but also states in the extended region, as well as the international community.

While European security policy has consisted of managing bilateral relations with its neighbours in the south to tackle illegal migration and trafficking, the United States has slowly but surely succeeded in creating a security network that brings together the Maghreb and Sahel states. While the threat of

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp. 4-5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Laurence Aida Ammour, *Security Issues Emerging in the Maghreb and the Sahel after the Arab Spring*, EMED, 2012, p. 2

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Could Al-Qaeda Turn African in the Sahel?", *Carnegie Papers*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (USA: Washington DC , N° 112 - June 2010), p. 1.

terrorism is real. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) carries out lethal attacks in Algeria and resorts to kidnappings of foreign nationals it has nonetheless been exaggerated; according to some, it has actually been fabricated.

The international military presence will probably prevent the territory from being taken over once again by rebels or terrorist groups. However, a risk with foreign military engagement is that it might prolong the status quo, since an acceptable security situation makes solving political conflicts less urgent, and unresolved political conflicts increase the long-term risk of new violent uprisings. Yet The Sahel remains vulnerable, due to the Instability in Libya and the lack of government control over its southern territory will continue to post an ever-present threat to the Sahel.

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