

ANALYZING THE ALGERIAN APPROACH IN THE  
SAHELIAN CRISIS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW  
OF THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL

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**Abstract:** *This article examines Algerian regional policy in the Sahel, in the light of the instability and new regional geostrategic challenges in the Sahel, including the presence of terrorist organizations in the region, which is an undeniable threat to the security of the region, especially in the context of the Arab uprisings. The Copenhagen School and the concept of securitization can provide the best explanation of the Algerian approach to the Sahel crisis. Algeria, as a pivotal state, plays a key role in the establishment of security and stability; and also in the protection of the region from all the repercussions of crises that affect some countries with which it shares wide borders. Hence, security threats in the Sahel have extensively influenced Algerian foreign policy towards the region; however, Algeria strongly opposes any external involvement which would radically destabilize the Sahel region.*

**Keywords:** *African Sahel, Algerian regional policy, securitization, terrorism, Arab Spring, Sahelian Security Crisis.*

*Introduction*

The Sahel region faces particular vulnerabilities, owing to factors such as geography, fragile state structures and demographics. The most common and unrelenting affliction for the Sahel has been regular and severe droughts; the ongoing drought is the third to hit the region within a decade. The most recent crisis in the region has been caused by a combination of the drought, insufficient food supply, high grain prices, environmental damage and the large numbers of internally displaced people and refugees. More than 17 million people currently face possible starvation in Western Sahel. It is important, though, to note that most

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of the challenges confronting this region pre-date the Arab Spring, and have or are likely to be exacerbated in the wake of recent revolts. The Arab Spring has posed varied challenges to countries in the North African region, while Egypt and Tunisia have transitioned to their first democratically elected governments following decades of autocratic rule. The consequences of these events for regional security are stark. In addition to migration as a direct result of the Libyan revolution, the Malian crisis has forced refugees and local populations to flee into neighboring states. More than 250,000 Malians are estimated to have poured into Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Algeria, increasing pressure on local communities and state governments that are already grappling with severe drought and food shortages. This figure is rapidly on the rise owing to the suppression of native populations by the armed Islamist groups who control northern Mali. The region is also turning into a breeding ground for armed and terrorist groups. The existence of transnational criminal networks across the Western Sahel has, in all likelihood, facilitated the entry of new violent groups into the region. Terrorism, much like increased illegal activity, constitutes not only a security threat but also an economic one; kidnapping for ransom by the AQIM over the past two years, for example, has reduced tourism and hurt local economies.

Moreover, the Libyan crisis in particular has unleashed unforeseen consequences on the West African Sahel states, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Mauritania. Following an inflow of weapons, ammunition, and armed fighters from Libya's Islamic Legion into northern Mali, a dormant Tuareg rebellion has revived, leading Malian government forces to launch an offensive. The succeeding months witnessed a military coup and the takeover of northern Mali by armed and Islamist groups in a battle for autonomy. Northern Mali has become the shelter of AQIM katibas, and more recently a fertile ground for other newly created non-Algerian groups (MUJWA and Ansar al-Sharia). However, Algeria seems to be best positioned to play a significant role in a cooperative regional security effort. It is the wealthiest country in the region, its military budget exceeds that of all of the Sahelian countries combined and, its military force is the best equipped and experienced in leading such an effort. However, several reasons exist for Algeria's failure to fill the leadership gap in the region. Algeria's complex relationship in the Sahel in general, and with Mali in particular, is also rooted in the role that Algiers is thought to have played in supporting rebellions by the Tuareg, both in Mali and Niger, at the time in apparent competition with Muammar Kaddafi.

Using this framework, we will examine first the theoretical framework of the article, with reference to the Copenhagen School and the concepts of securitization; the second part of the paper presents an introduction to the region profile of the Sahel. Then, it analyzes the Algerian approach built on a multidimensional strategy, which aims to bring an end to the crisis, including financial capacity building on the economic level as well as in the political, military and security fields, combining this with the effective work of regional development in order to ensure long-term stability and to establish an environment for the peace process.

#### Research Questions:

The following questions were raised to guide the study:

- Will the Algerian strategy be able to prevent the worsening of an already fragile humanitarian situation and to eradicate hardliners, extremists and criminal elements which are expanding in northern Mali?
- Given its counter-terrorism expertise, and its long inflexible positioning toward violent Islamism, how will Algeria manage to keep the door open for a dialogue with Ansar Eddine?
- How will the crisis in Tighadouine's gas platform and its bloody end play out in the overall Algerian positioning in this increasingly unstable environment?

### *Securitization and Desecuritization*

The concept of securitization was developed by a group of scientists at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI) as a theoretical framework to find out what turns a phenomenon into a security problem. The concept was developed during the security discussions in the 1990s and, in less than two decades, it turned into a major approach in contemporary security studies. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and other Copenhagen School scientists have significantly contributed to our understanding of the dynamics of security by developing the concepts of "securitization" and "being securitized." In this article, we use the term as the concept, approach, process and initiative to explain the Algerian approach to the Sahelian crisis. Although the theoretical framework of "securitization" has been extensively developed, few efforts have been made to apply this concept, except in Europe<sup>1</sup>.

Barry Buzan formed the Copenhagen School in his book entitled *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, published in 1983, which was revised in 1991.

Since 1985, the school has sought to extend security studies beyond military relations between countries.

Apart from developing the concepts of securitization, being securitized, and the theory of regional security complexes, the scientists of this school have taken other measures, including:

- Incorporating economic, political, social and environmental issues into the concept of security;
- Developing the definition of security as a multilevel concept;
- Presenting the theory of interconnected regional security;
- Applying Wæver's securitization theory to the analysis of security.

According to Wæver, securitization theory aims to analyze security using a new method. In other words, although it is loyal to the main principles of the traditional theories on security (existential threats, existence), it is not inflexible and dogmatic. However, it incorporates many areas beyond the military and doesn't

<sup>1</sup> Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and powers: the structure of international security*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 44.

view governments as the sole players. In the process of desecuritization, a specific security issue will be given priority over the other issues<sup>2</sup>. As a result, the security players assume special rights for themselves to resort to specific measures such as the use of force in an attempt to deal with the issue. Here, security is not viewed as a material objective but it is used as a “speech act.” Indeed, an issue will be securitized when the elites describe it as such<sup>3</sup>. From this angle, security is clearly a social issue.

What turns an issue into a security problem is its introduction as a threat which requires extraordinary actions. When an issue is described as a security issue, it paves the way for resorting to extraordinary tools and non-political actions as necessary measures. Examining the social context in which securitization occurs will help analyze the securitization and desecuritization process in Sahel region.

In fact, securitization is not a neutral process, but it is a power based measure adopted by different players to make claims which are socially acceptable with regard to threats. Therefore, the process of securitization can pave the grounds for the players to resort to security issues in an attempt to win social support for applying a specific action or policy.

On the other hand, desecuritization is the opposite process of securitization. In other words, desecuritization means normalizing politics and ending the extraordinary condition. The present article tries to apply these concepts to the analysis of Algerian regional policy in the light of the current securitization process in the Sahel regions.

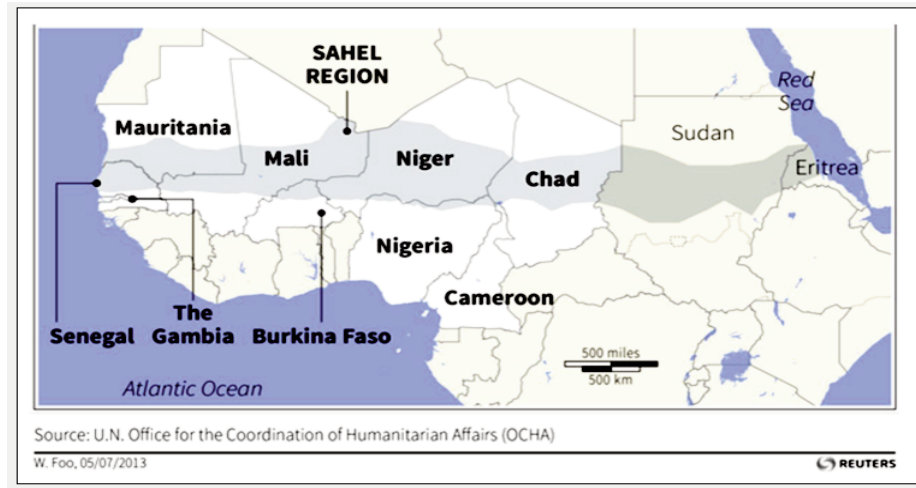
### *The African Sahel, a Geopolitical Approach*

In order to understand the security challenges confronted by the countries of the Sahel, it is necessary to begin with the specific details of the 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>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Pinar Bilgin, “The Politics of Studying Securitization? The Copenhagen School in Turkey,” *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 42, Nos. 4-5, August-October 2011, pp. 399-412.

<sup>3</sup> For further information see Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, UK, ECPR Press, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Yve Lacoste, ‘Sahara, perspectives et illusions géopolitiques’, *Hérodote*, Vol. 142, No. 3, 2011, pp. 12-41.



**Figure 01.** *Sahel Region Map*

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, cultures mixed in the Sahel, not always comfortably. And so they continue to mix even now<sup>5</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 been experienced, 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>6</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 and lack of democracy, corruption and economic mismanagement<sup>7</sup>.

The Sahel is among the poorest in the world; and it is these very countries that are being brought together 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>,

<sup>5</sup> Marcel Kitissou and Pauline E. Ginsberg, "The Sahel: Focus of Hope, Focus of Fear," <http://sahelconsortium.org/the-sahel-focus-of-hope-focus-of-fear/> accessed on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>6</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>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

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>8</sup>. Before examining regional key player activities in the region, it will be useful to provide an overview of the major problems, which the Sahel countries are facing.

Post colonial legacy:

History and 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. A failed state is defined as follows, "Failed states are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions."<sup>9</sup> There is no failed state without disharmony 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 and Niger are in the advance stages of this process and more recently, Libya. But even more or less functioning states such as Mali, Mauritania, and Cameroon are hardly capable of maintaining an effective monopoly of violence and controlling the entire territory of the country<sup>10</sup>.

On the other 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, and 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 these newly formed states, 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 redrawing 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>11</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

<sup>8</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, 07th, 2015.

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

<sup>10</sup> Angel Rabasa, *Radical Islam in East Africa*, USA, Rand Corporation, 2009, pp. 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Mohamed Mahmoud Mohamed Salah, *op.cit*, p. 2.



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>12</sup>.

*The African Sahel,  
a Geo Securitization Approach*

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 client systems<sup>13</sup>. Even the long-standing practice of a moderate interpretation of Islam is subject to change. A radicalization 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 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 radicalization have one thing in common. Where Muslims are in the minority, they generally belong to those groups, which have lost out under the process of social and political change that Africa has gone through over the past ten years<sup>14</sup>. That is especially the case in the coastal states of West and East Africa. In West Africa, democratization 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>15</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>16</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</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.

<sup>14</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>15</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>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

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>17</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 into 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 on the on-the-ground actions of Islamic militants. Groups feature a high degree of selective interpretation 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>18</sup>.

#### Terrorism and Criminal network:

The Sahel has become the sanctuary of choice for criminal networks and terrorist groups in search of 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 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, formed 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. 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 neighboring 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>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Terje Ostebo, “Islamic Militancy in Africa,” *Africa security brief*, Washington DC: Africa center for strategic studies, No. 23, November 2012, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</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.



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>20</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 kilometers 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 Tuareg, 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>21</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>22</sup>. Trafficking includes 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 favor several routes: in the Kidal region, they favor 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>23</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>24</sup>.

<sup>20</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>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> The Gandakoye are Sonrhai 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>23</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>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

### The Tuareg 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 marginalization 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>25</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 over several Sahel-Sahara countries. The majority of the 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>26</sup>.

From a sociological point of view, Malian communities living in the north of the country are all nomadic: Tuareg (1.7 per cent of the national population); Arabs, including Moors and Kuntas (1.2 per cent of the national population); Peuls, nomadic pastorals (data not available); the Sonrhaïs or Songhoys, a community living in fixed settlements (7.2 per cent). The Sonrhaïs are the largest community in the Timbuktu and Gao regions, followed by the Tuareg, 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 Tuareg, also called 'blue people' due to the color of their clothing, have light skin. Just like the Tuareg, 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 Songhaï populations. The social organization of these three communities is very similar (highly hierarchical, caste-based, where authority is based on Islamic chieftaincy)<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>26</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>27</sup> "Political Stability and Security in West and North Africa," *World Watch: Expert Notes* series publication, April 2014, p. 17-19. Available at: [https://www.csis.gc.ca/pblctns/wrldwtch/2014/NorthWestAfrica\\_POST\\_CONFERENCE\\_E\\_SOURCE.pdf](https://www.csis.gc.ca/pblctns/wrldwtch/2014/NorthWestAfrica_POST_CONFERENCE_E_SOURCE.pdf) accessed on March, 04<sup>th</sup>, 2015

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 the weak state presence, especially in the region of Kidal. On top of this, the Tuareg issue has always been exploited by neighboring countries, such as Algeria and Libya under Qadafi, 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 to garner support for their regime<sup>28</sup>.

### *The Algerian role in the Sahelian crisis*

The implications of the Arab spring for the Sahel crisis:

The term 'Arab Spring' is the name used to designate the popular revolutions that have taken place in the Arab world to liberate and liberalize the states, ensure a change from autocratic governments, and institute social-economic and political reforms. However, the extent to which the name can be applied to the revolutions that have swept the whole of the Arab and the non-Arab world has been greatly contested. For some, using the name because of the geographical proximity of the states that experienced the revolution is inappropriate, not only because the countries affected are not all Arab countries, but also because the factors that motivate protesters are different from one country to the next, and have shaped variations in the intensity of the conflict<sup>29</sup>.

Furthermore, the inability of democratic regimes of countries in that axis to contain the excesses of armed groups may lead to coup d'états. In 2012, two countries – Mali and Guinea-Bissau – became victims of the 'Khaki boys'. In Mali, the reason for a military take-over was because of the inability of the democratically elected President to handle the armed groups in northern Mali.

Unfortunately, the taking of power by the 'Khaki boys' has not changed the situation; in fact, it has worsened it. The state under the military men lost control

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> Nathaniel Danjibo, "The aftermath of the arab Spring and its implication For peace and development In the sahel and sub-saharan Africa," *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2013, p. 20.

of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal – considered to be the three most important places in northern Mali for controlling the armed groups. Thus, these ungoverned spaces began to be used by the armed groups, including Boko Haram, as their training ground and the people living there used as human shields against the French military forces. As Van Vliet has observed, the consequent underdevelopment of the region compared to the south is greatly responsible for the crisis in Mali. However, the emergence of groups and their access to arms has wreaked havoc in places such as Timbuktu, and has resulted in the destruction of traditional monuments, with serious implications for the overall development of Mali<sup>30</sup>.

At the regional level, Algeria was simultaneously trying to create a “refusal front” by garnering allies who would support a local political solution to the Sahelian conflict<sup>31</sup>. In October 2012, the Algerian Minister for Maghrebi and African Affairs, Abdelkader Messahel, together with a military delegation, started a tour of Mauritania (which at that time was still opposed to any military intervention), Niger (which always asked for French government to act quickly against “terrorism” in Mali and was calling for an active role from Algeria), and Mali.

Yet, instability within Libya has exposed Algeria to many uncertainties and unexpected threats that have paralyzed the government. Algiers fears that popular protests may spread to Algeria and that, combined with years of demonstrations and protests (10,000 in 2011 according to the Minister of Interior), the regime could very well collapse. The inertia of the Algerian government and its ambiguity prior to the popular uprising in Libya explain the very late recognition of the Libyan National Transitional Council, leading to the increased isolation of Algeria on the regional scene. This position clearly showed to what extent the regional uprisings had taken the Algerian authorities by surprise.

Algeria’s role in the Sahel as regional power:

The main regional cooperation organ in West Africa and the Sahel is ECOWAS<sup>32</sup>. Within ECOWAS, several programs 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>33</sup>.

Algeria has long positioned itself as a traditional mediator of conflicts in the Sahel, at times in apparent competition with Gadghafi. Algeria mediated peace processes that brought a precarious end to previous Tuareg uprisings in Mali in

<sup>30</sup> Van Vliet, “The Challenges of Re-taking Northern Mali,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 5, Issue 11, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Laurence Aida Ammour, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Magdalena Tham Lindell and Kim Mattsson, *op. cit.*, p. 35. See also 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>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35.

1991–1995 and 2006. Indeed, the Algerian treatment of the Tuareg issue was always motivated by the fear of contagion among Algerian Tuareg and by the desire to contain Libya or any other neighboring state's influence. Algeria knows what is expected on it in this crisis, given its status as the largest regional military power, its influence in the far northern part of Mali (Kidal), as an intermediary in previous crises in northern Mali, and as the original home of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)<sup>34</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 Tuareg, 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 specialized armed unit established by the 2006 Algiers agreement, which was 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>35</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, being active longer than anyone else in the region due to its extremely violent civil war against Islamist political factions. For most Algerians, this war had come to an end by 2003, although the displacement into the Sahara of one faction of what subsequently became AQIM played a major role in amplifying the current cycle of violence in the Sahel-Sahara<sup>36</sup>.

Algeria is considered to have one of the Maghreb's most capable military forces and takes pride in having crushed the violent Islamist extremist insurgency of the 1990s. The government has built a reputation internationally as being the hard-line state in the region against Islamist terrorism and extremism. This has greatly enhanced Algeria's geostrategic importance and increased 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>37</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> The Kidal region (Adrar of Ifoghas mountains) where most of the leaders of the MNLA, the MIA (Movement of Islamic Azawad, a splinter group from Ansar al-Dine created in January 2013), and Ansar al-Dine come from, is locally renowned to be the influence zone of Algeria where cross border trafficking of food, oil, and various licit goods has been common practice since the 1960s. The Algerian subsidized foodstuffs sold illicitly in north Mali have created a shadow economy that allows the poor region of Kidal to maintain a degree of food security. Even the Malian President Amadou Amani Touré admitted this to be the case in 2009 by saying Northern Mali is Algeria's 49th province.

<sup>35</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>36</sup> Laurence Aïda Ammour, "Algeria's Role in the Sahelian Security Crisis," London, *International Journal of Stability, Security and Development*, June 2013, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 4-5.



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 continually invoked 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 neighbors, 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>38</sup>. The question then is why Algeria allowed some forces to enter 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>39</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>40</sup>. However, the Algerian approach focuses on 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's push for regional cooperation and discreet aid from the West has been crucial to helping the Sahel countries regain control of their territory from Al-Qaeda forces and prevent the terror group from taking hold in Africa.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the reluctance of some rebel groups to accept its mediation, Algeria initiated discussions and negotiations in Algiers in January 2014. What can be seen as a novelty in Algerian diplomacy is the way the negotiations are led: apart from the rebel groups (MNLA, HCUA, CPA), they involve different regional actors, including ministers from neighboring countries, ECOWAS, the African Union, the European Union and MINUSMA, which was not the case in previous private mediation efforts. For Algeria, which is keen to use the inter-Malian talks as a model in the Libyan national dialogue and reconciliation process, the Mali

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Laurence Aida Ammour, *Security Issues Emerging in the Maghreb and the Sahel after the Arab Spring*, EMED, 2012, p. 2

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Could Al-Qaeda Turn African in the Sahel?", *Carnegie Papers*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA, Washington D.C., N° 112 – June 2010, p. 1.



crisis might be the first real test for its new-look regional diplomacy, according to International Crisis Group<sup>42</sup>.

Risks of instability have been further heightened with the proliferation of weapons that have flowed into the region following the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya. Looted arms and the return of experienced mercenaries threaten to bolster the capacity of AQIM, the violence of illicit trafficking, and the risk of insurgency in a number of Sahelian countries.

Despite the serious implications and transnational nature of these threats, regional security cooperation remains fragmented. According to Ammour, Algeria is seemingly well-positioned to play a leading role in such a cooperative security effort. Algeria seems to be best positioned to play a significant role in a cooperative regional security effort<sup>43</sup>. It is the wealthiest country in the region, its military budget exceeds that of all of the Sahelian countries combined and its military is the best equipped and experienced in leading such an effort. At the regional level, Algeria was simultaneously trying to create a “refusal front” by garnering allies who would support a local political solution to the Sahelian conflict.

In October 2012, Algerian Minister for Maghrebi and African Affairs Abdelkader Messahel, together with a military delegation, began a tour of Mauritania (which at that time was still opposed to any military intervention), Niger (which always asked for French government to act quickly against “terrorism” in Mali and calling for an active role from Algeria), and Mali. “Algeria is right to push for regional cooperation to address the threat, 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.” Filiu writes<sup>44</sup>.

In many ways Algeria has always wanted recognition as a regional leader. Yet, Algiers worries about being dragged into a Saharan quagmire and seems reluctant or unable to maintain stability in its backyard. Both the country’s neighbors and the West are questioning Algeria’s decision not to take a more active role in Mali.

In the other hand, deepening economic integration between Maghrebian, Sahelian, and Sub-Saharan partners through joint infrastructural projects such as building roads, railways, and pipelines would also increase the accessibility of marginalized regions. The \$69 million Special Program for Peace Security and Development in northern Mali, which is part of the national security strategy Mali adopted in 2009 aimed at curbing extremism, is a model of such investment.

### Conclusion

This article argues that Algerian regional policy in the African Sahel region has adapted to new regional threats. Algeria has developed a clear geostrategic vision which could forge a more realistic foreign policy to create a stable

<sup>42</sup> International Crisis Group, “Mali: Last Chance in Algiers,” *Policy Briefing Africa*, Briefing N°104, Dakar/Brussels, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Laurence Aïda Ammour, *op. cit.*

<sup>44</sup> Jean Pierre Filiu, *op. cit.*

geopolitical environment. Furthermore, Algeria's relations with the Sahel states and its domestic strategy of counter terrorism could increase the space for political maneuvering, in order to serve the purposes of the new approach of playing a key-role in the issue of terrorism and all security issues related in the region.

Algeria has adopted a new policy of active participation in regional affairs, which is the result of drastic changes in the domestic, regional and international arenas. In line with its new policies, Algeria has sought to promote its role as a regional power. It has also tried to assume a mediator role in regional crises (Mali, Libya) and to present its new regional policy based on minimizing the challenges with its neighbors. However, following the Arab Revolutions, Algeria's new policy is aimed at accelerating regional developments and changing the surrounding region based on its own interests.

Algeria's credibility and influence in regional politics depends heavily upon how much it is perceived as an independent power by the rest of the players in the region. However, regional and international assistance will be a prerequisite to negate the threat of terrorism and manage the consequences of political and economic instability.

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