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From Fragility to Security Challenges:
Counter Terrorism Missions in The Sahel

Security Studies: From Terrorism to Peacekeeping

Relatore

Chiar.mo Prof Fabrizio Coticchia.

Candidato

Federico Visino

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Abstract.

Il Sahel è una porzione di territorio molto vasta che attraversa l'Africa, dalla costa atlantica, su cui si affaccia la Mauritania, fino alle coste del Mar Rosso, sul quale si affaccia il Sudan. Questa fascia di territorio è delimitata a Nord dal deserto del Sahara, e a sud dalle Savana sudanese.

Il termine Sahel deriva dall'arabo e significa "costa", e questo nome ben definisce che cosa la regione rappresenti dal punto di vista geografico ma anche in qualche modo umano. Infatti, il Sahel si può considerare la costa del Sahara, che con le sue dune ricorda più un elemento mobile e fluido come un mare o un oceano. Ed è in questa area geografica che si incontrano diverse etnie e culture che rappresentano la differenza tra il movimento e la stanzialità, come i Tuareg e i Peul, e le comunità agricole del Sud. È quindi facile intuire come il "sistema" Sahel sia estremamente complesso.

Il 2022 segna il decimo anniversario dello scoppio di quella che è conosciuta come "Crisi Saheliana", decennio che però non è altro che una manifestazione accentuata di quelle che sono le molte e differenti problematiche che interessano quest'area del mondo e che hanno visto coinvolti, nel tentativo di risolverle, molti attori internazionali, specialmente l'Unione Europea e i suoi stati membri quali in particolare la Francia e l'Italia. Sempre il 2022 rappresenta il momento chiave in cui gli attori Europei sono stati messi difronte al fallimento dell'approccio adottato per contrastare le minacce identificate nell'area, e al deterioramento dei rapporti diplomatici con gli agenti statali Saheliani, i quali sempre di più si rivolgono ad attori come la Russia per ottenere aiuti.

Questo fallimento porta a galla diversi quesiti a cui si è cercato di dare risposta in questa tesi; quesiti come; quali sono le sfide alla sicurezza che attori come l'UE, la Francia e l'Italia miravano e mirano a risolvere nel contesto Saheliano? Quale è l'approccio che si è deciso di adottare, e articolato in quali missioni? Quali sono stati gli effetti collaterali di questo approccio?

Le risposte a queste domande sono naturalmente complesse e inevitabilmente partono dalla dovuta descrizione del contesto in cui gli attori europei si sono ritrovati ad agire.

I paesi presi in considerazione in questo elaborato sono quelli che compongono la coalizione del G5 Sahel, ovvero Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger e Ciad, portando però l'attenzione sui paesi maggiormente interessati dalla crisi - al momento della stesura-, localizzata maggiormente nell'area del Liptako-Gourma o "zona delle tre frontiere", in quanto coinvolge principalmente Mali, Burkina Faso e Niger.

Questi paesi sono caratterizzati da una forte fragilità e bassissimi livelli di sviluppo umano. Descrivendo prima la fragilità e il peso che ha su questi paesi, si è cercato quindi di restituire la giusta immagine del contesto in cui le missioni si sono svolte e continuano a svolgersi.

Successivamente sono state descritte quelle che svengono identificate dagli attori europei come le principali sfide alla sicurezza e alla stabilità nella regione, la migrazione irregolare e il terrorismo jihadista.

A riguardo della migrazione si è cercato in prima battuta di restituirne la dimensione e funzionalità a livello subcontinentale. La migrazione interessa tutti gli stati dell'Africa occidentale e coinvolge circa sette milioni di persone che si spostano tra le diverse frontiere poco controllate, seguendo pattern stagionali e circolari. Solo una piccola porzione dei migranti africani decide di intraprendere la pericolosa via della *Central Mediterranean Root*, e quindi di attraversare il Niger in direzione della Libia per poi raggiungere, attraverso una pericolosa traversata, le coste dell'Italia.

Ma è proprio in Niger che L'Unione Europea ha cercato di rallentare il flusso di migranti tramite missioni e progetti finanziati attraverso l'*European Trust Found for Africa*.

Purtroppo, la grande leva economica Europea si è rivelata poco efficace e le spinte politiche dell'unione sul governo nigerino hanno prodotto effetti collaterali colpendo la stabilità locale. Analizzando il Caso chiave della città di Agadez si è quindi cercato di spiegare come l'intervento europeo su un territorio fragile e in balia delle dinamiche di patronage abbia portato ad un acuirsi delle cause di conflitto anzi che rallentare il flusso di migranti.

A riguardo del terrorismo di matrice islamica, si è descritta la sua evoluzione e il suo coinvolgimento nelle dinamiche locali, andando poi a descrivere come questo abbia svolto un ruolo chiave nello scoppio della crisi maliana.

successivamente, si è descritto come le forze francesi siano state coinvolte nel conflitto; prima con operazione Serval, una missione altamente cinetica e di attrito, dove i francesi hanno dimostrato grandi capacità e chiare intenzioni strategiche e politiche; successivamente con operazione Barkhane, la quale però presentava un più vago obbiettivo antiterroristico e un finale, descritto nella letteratura come "*open ended*", che però si è conclusa con l'abbandono del Mali già ad agosto 2022.

In fine si è descritto il ruolo italiano nel teatro saheliano, dove l'Italia ha partecipato a diversi frameworks internazionali quali le missioni Eucap Shael e MINUSMA, ma soprattutto Task Force Takuba, missione promossa e guidata dalla Francia; ma anche tramite un'iniziativa bilaterale con il Niger, ovvero l'operazione MISIN, che vede le nostre forze impegnate

nell'addestramento dell'esercito e gendarmeria locali, al fine di svolgere attività di controllo delle frontiere, soprattutto in un'ottica anti migrazione.

Si conclude quindi spiegando come l'approccio altamente securitario adottato dagli attori Europei non solo non sia stato efficace, ma abbia anche aggravato le fragilità che mirava a contrastare favorendone le dinamiche di patronage, ma che abbia anche eroso i rapporti con gli stati partner Saheliani.

Introduction.

2022 marked the 10th year anniversary from the beginning of what is known as the "Sahelian crisis", and even though the international community with the UN and the European Union, most notably the French, have been involved with numerous programs and missions in the region, aimed at tackling the many challenges that compose this crisis. Challenges such as underdevelopment, Islamic terrorism, and human smuggling.

The ten years crisis has been marked by a constant evolution of these challenges, and the international actors had to adapt their approach in order to successfully impact this evolving scenario. Moreover, in 2022 French President Emanuel Macron announced the retreat of operation Barkhane from Mali due to the rising diplomatic tension between France and the Bamako's government, which, at the moment of writing, is led by a military junta who took control over the country 2021.

Very similarly, two subsequent coups led by the military, brought another junta to take control of the government in Burkina Faso in early September of 2022.

In this context Italy has been more and more active in its contribution in the region; on the one hand by being a reliable allied, taking part not only to UN and European CSDP missions but also to Task Force Takuba, a French led anti-terrorism international coalition; and on the other hand by getting involved in a bilateral mission like MISIN, which is aimed at training Nigerien security forces to control the frontiers of the country and to clamp down irregular migration and human smuggling.

Starting by asking why many European actors, including Italy, are involved in Sahel, with what missions and to what extent these missions are impactful on the Sahelian countries, this thesis has ampliated its range of questions that needed to be answered. Why has France failed in Mali? Why do we talk about Sahel and not just Mali? What were the reasons that brought so much international involvement in these countries and why did the intervention take the form that took in the end? This and many other questions rise in the mind of the one who is approaching the Sahel and its complexity.

By keeping in mind, the core question on what the Italian and European missions in the area were aiming to address, to what extent these were effective and whether they had any unwanted effects, this thesis, through the qualitative analysis of part of the vast literature over the Sahelian

crisis, aims to shed some light over the different layers of complexity that compose the sub-Saharan puzzle.

In its three chapters this thesis aims to explain how the layering of root causes and security challenges brought the European actors to intervene in a certain way.

In the first chapter it has been argued how fragility is the most characterizing aspect of the Sahelian countries and how, with its several dimensions and gaps, it effects the life of the state's institutions and the millions of people living there, giving back a picture of the countries that are mostly involved in the Sahelian crisis narration.

The second chapter explores the two main security challenges as they have been identified by the European actors, and it focuses especially on the so-called Liptako-Gourma or "three frontiers" region. In this chapter it has been tried to explain the relevance of migration in west Africa -especially in the Sahel-, both as a cultural and an economic factor, and how the EU in particular have tried to clamp down the movement of people across the Sahelian borders. Then the role of jihadist terrorism is presented in relation to the beginning, in 2012, of the Malian crisis.

The third chapter describes how the Sahel showed up as a key region on the world stage by becoming the second front of the war on terror and how the French represented the key actor of international interventionism since the beginning of the crisis and how Italy became more and more involved in the theater.

Chapter 1. Sahel, the Region.

The Sahel is a vast portion of Africa, a strip of land stretching from Mauritania on the Atlantic shore to Ethiopia in the East. This region marks the separation between norther-Africa together with the Sahara Desert, and the Sudanese Savannas. The very word Sahel means "coast" or "shore" and well describe the nature of the region as a frontier between the never stopping shifting of the Sahara's dunes in the north and the better geographically delimited south[1].

This rather romantic definition has the precious quality of describing both the geographical nature of the region and anticipating one of the biggest cleavages affecting the socio-cultural and political landscape of the Sahel.

It is possible to understand this land as a barrier, something that divide people and places; or as a sort of ocean, an area that is rather navigable and is used to connect different "worlds" and cultures[2].

This thesis is going to focused on what is known as the Sahel G5, a portion of this region represented by the countries of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.

The Sahel G5 (Groupe des 5 pour le Sahel) is an institutional framework for coordination and regional cooperation, with a deep focus on security and development. The former is the most characterizing interest for the framework, thanks to which the Sahelian countries aim to tackle some of the most relevant issues that destabilize the region.

As a matter of facts this 5 countries are united by the security threats characterized by extreme cross-border mobility; for this reason, the European Union and other external actors such the USA are willing to invest in the framework in order to contrast, international terrorism, drug trafficking and human smuggling.

These Countries, with different degree of attention, are now brought on the world stage for their never-ending status of chaos and persistent suffering of high degrees of fragility and weak state capacity. extreme levels of poverty, food insecurity and violence are exacerbated by climate change that - even though these countries are the lowest contributors to CO_2 world emissions- is going to affect the region in the harshest way. Climate variability impacting rainfall is already causing low flooding of the Niger river and reducing portions of cultivable land leading to food insecurity. If not properly addressed this conundrum of problems would inevitably confirm, and

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[1] OECD/SWAC. 2014. *An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security*, West African Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264222359-en.
[2] Morten Bøås. 2019. *The Sahel Crisis and the Need for International Support*. NAI Policy Dialogue No 15. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

even contribute to a rise in the levels of violence and conflicts between actors, such subsistence farmers and nomadic pastoralist.

This deepening of cleavages different communities violently struggling over what is essential for their lives, has led to the exploitation of the different grievances by several violent Islamic groups fostering insurgencies in different areas such as northern and central Mali and the Liptako-Gourma region, a frontier area between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

Figure 1. G5 Sahel[3]

Sahel is in desperate need of stability and functioning institutions that would allow the collection of taxes and the proper exploitation of international economic support, but the fragmented nature of the society and the deep cleavages present in the region would not allow traditional aid to be effective. According to Morten Bøås, "The only way in which the international community would bring an effective intervention is only through a knowledge-based approach and grounded in the understanding of what these states entities are and how they work"[4].

Before proceeding to summarize the various contexts of each single Sahelian countries, it is important to briefly remind the remarkable characteristic of fragility affecting the Sahelian countries.

Fragility.

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[3] https://eutmmali.eu/g5-sahel-map-1200/

[4] Morten Bøås. 2019. *The Sahel Crisis and the Need for International Support*. NAI Policy Dialogue No 15. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute. p-7.

There are different ways to define fragility; and starting from the definition of Westphalian or Weberian state, some conceptualizations draw an imaginary spectrum, where the more that we get away from a pure definition of Westphalian state the more the country that we take into consideration is to be considered fragile. And so, as Newman stated:

"The phenomenon of weak states refers here to a situation where central government has a poor capacity to control public order within its territory, is unable to consistently control its borders, cannot reliably maintain viable public institutions or services, and is vulnerable to extraconstitutional domestic challenges."[5]

This condition of *negative sovereignty,* as Robert Jackson defines it, is part of the Sahelian countries character since their independence in the 60s[6].

In the postcolonial era the newborn states inherited the colonial centralized government that in most cases, and in the Sahel is much the case, did not took into consideration the different needs of the various populations living the region and for this reason leading to un-representativeness and unbalanced power dynamics.

This distance between the state institution in the center and the chaotic and rebellious peripheries closer to the borders gives back the idea of the incapacity of the incumbent to reach all the territory in its integrity.

It is rather tempting to define these unreached territories as no man lands, places where the absence of the incumbent allows Jihadist groups, rebellious militias and traffickers to impose their rule over the population; but it is, in many cases, true that the local population appeal to jihadist to regulate disputes and to gain some protection.

To better frame the magnitude of fragility in the G5 we could make good use of the frame proposed by C.T. Call.

He proposes to analyze the issue of fragility by identifying the characteristics of fragility itself, and in this case by assessing three different "gaps"; the capacity, security, and legitimacy gap.[7]

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[5] Edward Newman (2009) Failed States and International Order:
Constructing a Post-Westphalian World, Contemporary Security Policy, 30:3, 421-443, DOI: 10.1080/13523260903326479
[6] Robert H. Jackson, Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[7] Charles T. Call. 2010. *Beyond the 'failed state': Toward conceptual alternative.* European Journal of International Relations 2011 17: 303 originally published online

The capacity gad refers to the incapability of the state to deliver "*minimal public goods and services to the population*".[8]

The security gap again refers to the impossibility of the central state to provide "*minimal levels of security in face of organized armed groups*"[9], this also concerns the "*importance to address the concern of armed insurgents*"[10] which includes the demobilization and reintegration of the ex-combatant, an extremely important issue considering the fact that insurgencies usually follow ethnical lines in Sahel.[11]

The legitimacy gap "*exists within a state where a significant portion of its political elites and society reject the rules regulating the exercise of power and the accumulation and distribution of wealth*" [12].

And distribution of wealth and power is yet another important element of fragility within the Sahelian states where the notion of neopatrimonialism well defines the power dynamics of the governments.[13]

As a matter of facts patronage practices, which refers to the redistribution of collective wealth and resources to restricted elites and to ethnic groups, help leaders to strengthen their role and stabilize the incumbent, but at the same time exacerbate fragility by eroding legitimacy of the actors excluded from the redistribution of resources. [14]

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino
[14] Ibid.

Concerning the *security gap,* it is clear that the G5 countries completely lack the capacity to maintain order and even more lack the required monopoly of violence within its territory, a known Weberian criterion to be considered a sovereign state, and do not have any control over their borders and territory.

This is remarkably evident if we look at the "security apparatus" chart built with the data presented by the Fragility States Index of 2022[15]. In the chart (Figure 2)[16] is possible to look at the trends in security apparatus of the Sahelian countries. in blue and green are particularly evident the curve taken by Mali and Burkina Faso respectively.

As it is clear from the chart the Security gap has been growing especially after 2012 and 2015, well describing the two main event that led to the growth of fragility in the area.
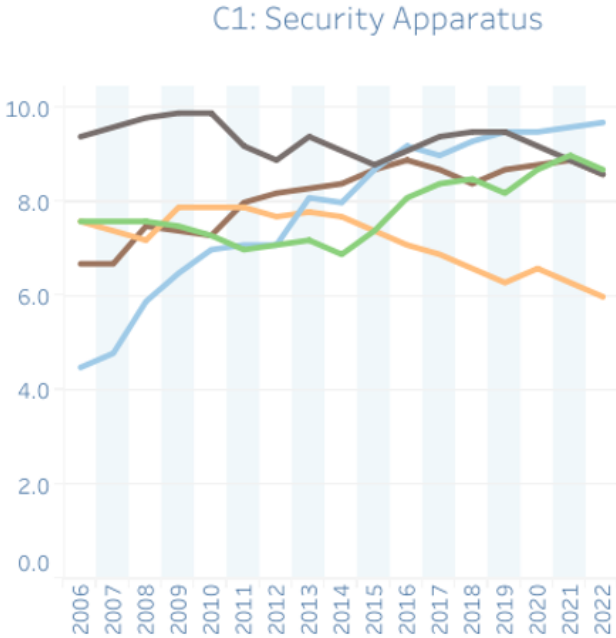

Figure 2 Security Apparatus.

It is evident that, even though the Mali line as had a worsening trend since 2006, but it is none the less clear that in 2012 an event brought an aggravation of the security situation, here in fact is coinciding with the return of several Tuareg militias from Libya to Sahel after the fall of Muhammar Gaddafi. The green line representing Burkina Faso present a steepening in coincidence with spill overs of the insurgency from Mali to Burkina Faso due to their defeat in center of the country thanks to the French intervention.

The G5 countries are in desperate need of help, and donors from the international community have been actively intervening, some of them also by "boots on the ground". Especially the European Union (EU) have been more and more involved in the region with the hope to curb the spiral of failure in which these countries were falling. As a matter of facts, the European Security Strategy of 2003 identified five threats to European security and the fourth was failed states. [17]

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[15] https://fragilestatesindex.org/2022/07/13/fragile-states-index-2022-annual-report/
[16] fsi-2022-country-comparison | Tableau Public Countries colors: Burkina Faso "green", Mauritania "orange", Chad "black", Niger "Brown", Mali "Blue".
[17] Council of the European Union. 2003. European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World.

But if this necessity is indeed clear, the complexity of the context with its several dimensions and factors is presenting the donors with what Bøås defines as the *fragility dilemma*.

Whilst the G5 countries require external intervention, their *capacity gap* is so relevant that their capability to absorb traditional donor's aids might render useless any type of intervention. European actors willing to act in the context are seemingly bound to resort to cooperation with sitting regimes with the risk of exacerbating existing cleavages creating a loop situation in which no solution seems working, and at the same time, according to Bøås, putting these states on a sort of international life support.

In most cases the incumbent regimes are aware of the position occupied by their countries on the European agenda and usually make good use of this position to exploit the persisting flow of aid toward the region. [18]

Mauritania.

Ranking 158th over 191 countries in the UNDP Human Development Report (HDR)[19], it has the smallest population in the Sahel region of just 4,7 million[20] inhabitants, with the capital Nouakchott, head quarter of the Sahel G5, hosting nearly one third of the Mauritanians. Under the geographical point of view is a desertic country with approximately 90% of land mass within the Sahara Desert. Even though under the political point of view the country knew a period of instability between 2005 and 2008 with two coups d'état, it then had a period or relative stability with fairly peaceful elections.

The 2019 elections were defined as the first peaceful transfer of power in the country, with presidency moving from the hands of the incumbent president Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz - who had seized power with the 2008 coup - to the former minister of defense Mohamed Ould el Ghazouani[21].

As far as the macro-economy concerned, Mauritania can exploit its natural resources, such as iron and copper, but also has offshore natural gas deposit, and it is improving its growing oil-production industry.

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[18] Kari M. Osland & Henriette U. Erstad. 2020. *The Fragility Dilemma and Divergent Security Complexes in the Sahel.* The International Spectator VOL. 55, NO. 4, 18–36. Istituto Affari Internazionali

[19] UNDP. 2022. Human Development Report 2021/2022. New York

[20] The World Bank. 2021. Https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ML-BF-NE-TD-MR

[21] https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20190622-first-peaceful-transfer-power-mauritanias-presidential-polls

None the less, large portion of population are suffering high levels of poverty, and the redistribution of wealth and profit from natural resources is usually conducted along the separation lines between urban-rural areas and ethnicities.

With its population nearly 100% Muslim, Mauritania is by the facto divided in three distinct ethnic groups.

The first and dominant group, that covers the majority of leadership roles in the country, is represented by Arab-Berber or Moorish tribes called Bidhan, traditionally following a nomadic lifestyle.

The second group, which is also the biggest one, is the Haratin and is composed by the descendent of black Africans that were enslaved by the Bidhan.

Even though these two groups share the same language and culture, the difficult past and the not entirely solved question of slavery render the relationship between Bidhan and Haratin, as we can imagine, rather complicated.

With the foundation of a political movement called El Hor, meaning "freeman", the Haratin are pursuing their political representation and the fight against the persistence of slavery. The third group is composed by smaller groups that share together the same "black Mauritanian" culture and it is struggling to assert their non-Arabic identity. This division along ethnic lines is exploited by some Islamic Insurgent groups present in the region like *Al-Qaida in Islamic Maghreb* that uses border regions, far from the central power, to rest and get supplied. [22]

The problematic economic situation and high levels of youth unemployment in Mauritania and in the other Sahelian countries is also ideal to create the conditions that help fostering recruitment in these Jihadist groups, and in fact the ranks of Mokhtar Belmokhtar's *al-Mourabitoun* were rather fool of Mauritanian.

Mali.

Ranking 186th in the Human Development Report[23], Mali is probably the most problematic country of all in Sahel at the time of writing. Here is where the problem of fragility has been most evident, and where the State institutions shown their complete incapacity to face external shocks, well representing all Call's gaps.

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[22] Morten Bøås. 2019. *The Sahel Crisis and the Need for International Support.* NAI Policy Dialogue No 15. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.
[23] UNDP. 2022. Human Development Report 2021/2022. New York

State fragility in combination with the rising impact of climate change on agriculture is exacerbating a situation of instability linked to the land-rights disputes that has already taken the form of violent conflict.

What is now to be considered the fulcrum of instability and the first of the Sahelian states revolving back to autocracy and instability, in the 90s used to be considered an example of good governance, peace and a show case of democracy.[24]

But this was more a façade, a misinterpretation of the actual event that marked the 90s, where even if multiparty election were held, the state failed to abandon its neo patrimonial dynamics. Moreover, elections had been marked by really low participation with just the 28.4% of voter's turnout for the presidential elections of 97.

This appearance of state stability was fostered also by the peaceful transition of power occurred between the new elected president Amadou Toumani Touré and former president Alpha Oumar Konaré.[25]

But the apparent felicitous democratization process was flawed by the non-participation of the Tuareg tribes in the norther regions, were the population remained at the margin of the process both figuratively and literally.

Historically seeing themselves as "master of the desert" this ethnicity is as a matter of facts a minority of just 3% of the Malian population. They consider themselves and are considered different from the rest of the population, and ever since Mali gained independence the Tuareg have been rebellious *vis a vis* the central state authority.

This constant state of tension and conflict beneath the ashes led to a new insurgency in 2006, of which proportion remained relatively small until the Libyan Crisis.

With the fall of Muhammar Gaddafi in 2011 heavily armed Tuareg militias came back from Libya bringing an unbalancing of power in the northern regions of Mali.

It was at this point the two main insurgent groups already active in the region, i.e. the "*Mouvement national de l'Azawad*" (MNA) and the "*Mouvement touareg du Nord-Mali*" (MTNM), fused together to form the "*Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad*" (MNLA) and declared the independence of the Azawad from the rest of Mali. What was a small insurgency, manageable by the Malian army, now was a proper rebellion. This shock was too strong for the fragile state institutions, and after the mutiny of the national forces the army staged a coup d'état that led to a rather tumultuous transition power.

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[24] Morten Bøås. 2019. *The Sahel Crisis and the Need for International Support.* NAI Policy Dialogue No 15. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

[25] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino

This coup was met by harsh condemnation within the international community, especially in Africa, leading to even the imposition of sanctions by the ECOWAS.

But none the less the new elections were held.

The 2013 election were highly contested, with 27 candidates running for presidency; unfortunately, big portions of the electorate were unable to cast their vote due to the persistence of the violent insurgency in the north[26], yet again demonstrating the deepening of the *security gap.*

The only way in which it was possible to curb the insurgency and allow a minimum of resilience sovereignty for the incumbent, was thanks to the French intervention and the launch of operation Serval by President François Hollande, that posed a limit to the advance of insurgent forces from the North.

None the less on 4th September 2013 Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta former prime minister was elected as the rightful President of Mali, position for which he would run a second time in 2018 in which he would win a second term. But the persistency of government corruption, the poor economy, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic combined with the inefficiency to contrast the insurgency in the North, led to protests in the country.

These grievances paved the way for a new coup d'état that took place on the 18th august 2020.[27]

The coup was revendicated by the *National Committee for the Salvation of the People* (CNSP) a group led by Colonel Assimi Goïta. On the 12 September 2020, former military Bah N'daw was named president of an 18-month transition period that should have led to new election of a civilian ruled government[28]; at the same time Goïta, leader of the putschist junta was appointed to the vice presidency[29].

But only after 9 months from the last coup, Goïta staged a new change of power and on the night of the 24th May 2021 he ordered the capture of the President ad interim N'daw, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence. [30]

On the 28 May Goïta was named president of the transition in the country. This series of military coups was widely condemned by the international community especially by the ECOWAS

[26] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/7/28/voters-defy-threats-as-polls-close-in-mali

[27] https://www.france24.com/en/20200818-ecowas-calls-on-mali-soldiers-to-end-the-mutiny -- https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53833925

[28] https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20200921-mali-junta

[29] https://www.france24.com/en/20200921-ex-defence-minister-appointed-mali-interim-president-junta-leader-named-vp

[30] https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210525-mali-junta-leader-says-transitional-president-pm-have-been-stripped-of-duties

countries, the G5 allied and the French government that since 2013 had been the biggest Malian ally on the ground against the insurgent forces.

The two coups have marked an important deterioration of the relations between France and Mali, with a strong anti-French sentiment on the rise in the Western African states.

Another reason to break ties between the two former allied is the alleged signature of contracts between the Malian government and the Russian military security company Wagner Group.

If confirmed this would mean an enormous change in the asset of alliances chosen by Mali and a disastrous turn of events for the French:

"*If the Malian authorities entered into a contract with Wagner, it would be extremely worrying and contradictory, incoherent with everything that we have done for years and we intend to do to support the countries of the Sahel region,*" [31]

Said French Defence Minister Florence Parly and well describing the desegregating context of the region and foreshadowing later retreat of French forces form Mali.

Burkina Faso.

Together with the other Sahelian states, Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 184th on 191 on the UNDP Human Development Report[32].

Its population is around 21,4 million of inhabitants[33], and almost 80% of them is living on traditional agriculture which also comprehend cotton, the most important cash crop.

Small diversification in productivity is now represented by the mining sector, especially the extraction of gold which represent a small portion of exportation, but mining cannot represent a proper employment solution[34].

As far as the political scenario goes, Burkina Faso has been represented for a short period of time by one of the most iconic African figures, i.e., Thomas Sankara.[35]

[31] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/14/france-warns-mali-against-russian-wagner-mercenary-deal
[32] UNDP. 2022. Human Development Report 2021/2022. New York
[33] Https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ML-BF-NE-TD-MR
[34] Morten Bøås. 2019. *The Sahel Crisis and the Need for International Support.* NAI Policy Dialogue No 15. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.
[35] https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Sankara.

He was a true champion of his people, and inspired by figures like Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and Karl Marx, he changed the name of the country from *Haute-Volta* to Burkina Faso and set the agenda of the Burkinabè government on the line of anti-imperialism and the protection of the local economy.

But it would be in 1987 that, after the assassination of Sankara, Blaise Compaoré would have seized power and held it until 2014 when a new coup led to the subsequent elections in 2015. The election was won by Roch Marc Christian Kaboré who was re-elected in 2020.

2022 was marked by great political instability with two coups d'état within months. Following the fall of Muhammar Gaddafi regime and the intervention of France in Mali against Islamist insurgency in the North of the country, some cells of MUJAO, the *movement for oneness and Jihad in West Africa*, moved to the three-state border region of Liptako-Gourma. If in the initial phase violent insurgency episodes were caused by spill overs from external groups originating in Mali, soon an autochthon group, *Ansarul Islam* was constituted by the Salafist preacher Ibrahim Malam Dicko. The first attack was perpetrated in Nassoumbou in December 2016 and since then more than half of the terrorist attacks perpetrated in Burkina Faso were
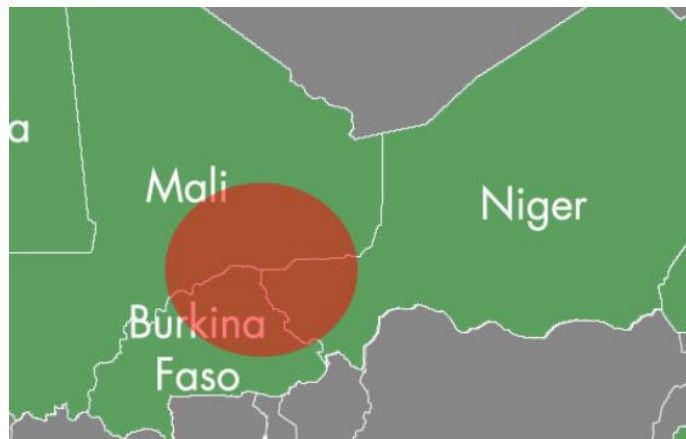

Figure 3 The Liptako-Gourma region

imputed to *Ansarul Islam*.[36] This pressure caused by the insurgencies, and the manifest inability of the Kaboré government in halting the violent attacks led to a coup on 23 January 2022. The coup was led by the lieutenant colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba who also proceeded to suspend the Constitution and dissolved the National Assembly and the Government.

The military junta then reestablished the Constitution and nominated Damiba as president[37]. But the renewed government did not demonstrate itself successful enough in contrasting Islamic insurgency in the north, and accusation of sympathy towards the former president Kaboré by Damiba, led to a new coup d'état on September 30th of 2022 seeing the artillery captain Ibrahim Traoré seizing power and being proclaimed as president of the new transition government that

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[36] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino
[37] https://africa24tv.com/burkina-faso-paul-henri-damiba-officiellement-chef-de-letat-et-des-armees/

is going to bring the country to new election in 2024[38]. It is rather important to notice that Russian flags have been seen displayed during the manifestation accompanying the coup and that there is a suspect of increased presence of the Wagner's mercenaries in the region.

Niger.

Considered to be the most "Sahelian" country in the Sahel, sharing borders with many countries relevant on the world security agenda[39], Niger is now ranking 189th [40] in the Human Development Report and its population is about 25,1 million of people[41].

Represented by relative political instability, due to the alternation between republic and military regimes, Niger is enjoying, since the 2010 adoption of the new constitutions and presidential election, the seventh republic, of which Mahamadou Issoufou was elected as president and won again the 2016elections.

Issoufou remaining in charge until 2020 when, as he promised, stepped back respecting constitutional limits of two mandates.

After the Libyan crisis, international observers were mostly concerned with Niger. Thanks to its history of instability seemed covering the role of weak link within the Sahelian region. Even more if we consider that it shares border with Libya and that should have meant a higher permeability to Tuareg Insurgency.

And even though Niger was thought to be the next to collapse after Mali, with which it shares many similarities under the economic, demographic, and cultural-ethnic perspective, that was

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Mahamadou Danda. 2017. *The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel: A View from Niger.* The Security–Migration– Development Nexus Revised: A Perspective from the Sahel. Istituto Affari Internazionali & Foundation For European Progressive Studies.
[40] UNDP. 2022. Human Development Report 2021/2022. New York
[41] Https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ML-BF-NE-TD-MR

not the case.[42] And the Issoufou presidencies led to the first peaceful and regular transition of power in the country in favors of the former minister of defense Mohamed Bazoum.

Without any doubt Niger seems to be the most resilient country of the three states bordering countries dealing with the epicenter of contemporary Islamist insurgency in the Sahel.[43]

This is imputable to two factors; the first one is the essential difference between the number and the quality of democratization programs and policies implementation efforts occoured by externa actors in Mali and Niger, where the latter was "abandoned" by international democratization development programs after the 1996 coup and the country was let to figure out democracy by itself[44]. The second possible factor is the cooptation strategy of the Tuareg elites adopted by the Nigerien Government, that both in 1997 and 2010 insurgency offered to the insurgent leadership and administrative roles, that the Tuareg exploited to gain more control over illicit trafficking[45].

Chad.

Hoovering from the bottom of the UNDP Human Development Report just by one position, ranking 190th over 191 states[46], Chad is for sure the poorest country in the G5 Sahel. The COVID-19 pandemic had a disrupting force over the slow Chadian economic recovery and the country is currently entering its second consecutive year of recession[47].

The economy is largely based on agriculture and oil extraction, that since 2003 allowed Chad to become an exporter of the fossil fuel. In theory, strong constraints were posed by the World Bank - which financed the development of the industry with 3.5 billion of dollars - in order to oblige the Chadian government to use the incomes deriving from the exportation for development projects. But former president Idriss Déby Itno was able to force this alleged constraint and use good part of the revenues for military expenditures.[48]

Déby Itno obtained power after a Libyan backed coup d'état in 1991 and remained in power until its "battle" death in 2021. despite its longevity, it is not possible to say that this thirty years of Déby's govern have been peaceful nor stable, with even at least two attempted coups in the

[42] Leonardo A. Villalón. 2022. *The Political Roots of Fragility in the G5 Sahel Countries: State Institutions and the Varied Effects of the Politics of Democratisation.* Sahel: 10 Years of Instability. Local, Regional and International Dynamics. ISPI. Milano: Ledizioni LediPublishing.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino
[46] UNDP. 2022. Human Development Report 2021/2022. New York
[47] https://blogs.worldbank.org/africacan/afw-six-charts-understand-chads-food-security-crisis

[48] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino

first two years of its presidency. The last 30 years of Chadian politics have been marked by rentier state economy and patronage dynamics that favored the Zaghawa ethnic group in particular the Bideyat clan, which represent just 1.1% of the population[49]. The security situation in Chad has never been simple, with political and ethnic violence widespread across the country and especially in border regions.

Under the Itno government the country was home to a five year long civil war that involved many different armed groups contesting Déby's constitutional maneuvering in order to maintain power and obtain another mandate as president. Even with the end of the civil war, the security context remained unstable leading to the 2021 offensive by the "*Front pour l'Alternance et la Concorde au Tchad*" (FACT) an armed political movement that established itself between the north of Chad and the Libyan region of Al-Jufra. On the 19th of April of 2021 Déby, who went to cheer up N'Djamena's troops, was mortally wounded by enemy fire.

For the first time in thirty years the departure of the former president marked the creation of a dangerous vacuum of power.[50]

Due to the alleged emergency situation caused by the fighting a provisory military council led by Deby's son, Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, was temporarily put in place. He then became formally president of the transition on 8 October 2022, with the mandate to lead the country till new national elections programmed to be held in 24 months.[51]

[49] https://web.archive.org/web/20190109052252/https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/400.html
[50] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino
[51] https://africa24tv.com/tchad-mahamat-idriss-deby-itno-designe-president-de-la-transition/

Chapter 2. Major security Challenges in Sahel: Migration and terrorism.

Migration in the Sahel.

Migration has always been part of humanity; the movement of persons, and sometimes entire population, has characterized the history of the world since its beginning and Sahel is no exception.

The current migration patterns in the region are indeed based on ancient and historical routes already used by Western Africans in the past.

Economic factors and seasonal flooding were fundamental drivers of this movement together with the profitable trading of goods. As a matter of fact, the scarcity of crops due to the aridity of the soil made, and make even today, trading precious merchandise the most convenient activity.

We have also to kip in mind that in the precolonial period the movement of people in the region was not considered as cross-border, because indeed the region was considered borderless by who was living there.

Only due to the colonization process and the delineation imposed by the Europeans powers, the present division became a reality.

But the imposition of the foreign power not only brought borders, but also technologies such as railways and a new way to exploit natural resources. This new means of travel and the new economic perspectives fostered a change in the intraregional migration flow, now characterized by large-scale, especially male, seasonal migration.

The travel direction between the Northern Sudanese Savanna and the Southern countries, rich of plantations, survived in the post-colonial era and remained rather significant under the economic and migratory point of view.[52]

Many were moving from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to the cocoa plantation in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana for its rising mining sector, but in general many coastal countries became a center of attraction for the Sahelian.

Later on, during the 70s and 80s, the disastrous economic and food conditions of the Sahelian countries fostered a major population flow towards the Maghreb, where oil production allowed

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[52] IMISCOE, 2022, *Migration in West Africa,* Joseph Kof Teye. Springer Nature Switzerland AG. Cham.

for a healthier and stronger economy to flourish. And as been noted by Raineri the "Ethnic and family networks scattered across the region helped consolidate the trans-Saharan infrastructure of migration and mobility"[53].

Mobility has been and is one of the most relevant aspects that characterize West Africa in general, and includes all sorts of migration, such as permanent migration, seasonal migration, and transit migration.

This constant movement of persons is largely favored by the existence of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) that foster this circulation of people, and the *protocol on the free movement of people* established at the end of the 70s[54].

Nowadays, migration within the West African countries is estimated to be around 7.6 million of people (UN DESA 2020)[55].

In West Africa, and especially in the countries members of the G5, migration is considered locally as a normal phenomenon and a source of economic relief.

Even migration toward Europe is not a novelty and always existed although with different proportions and on different routes. In early 2000s migration flows were more salient through Mauritania, Senegal, and Morocco, with Spain and Canary Island as favored destinations. The following decade was characterized by a shift of flow toward another route, the Central
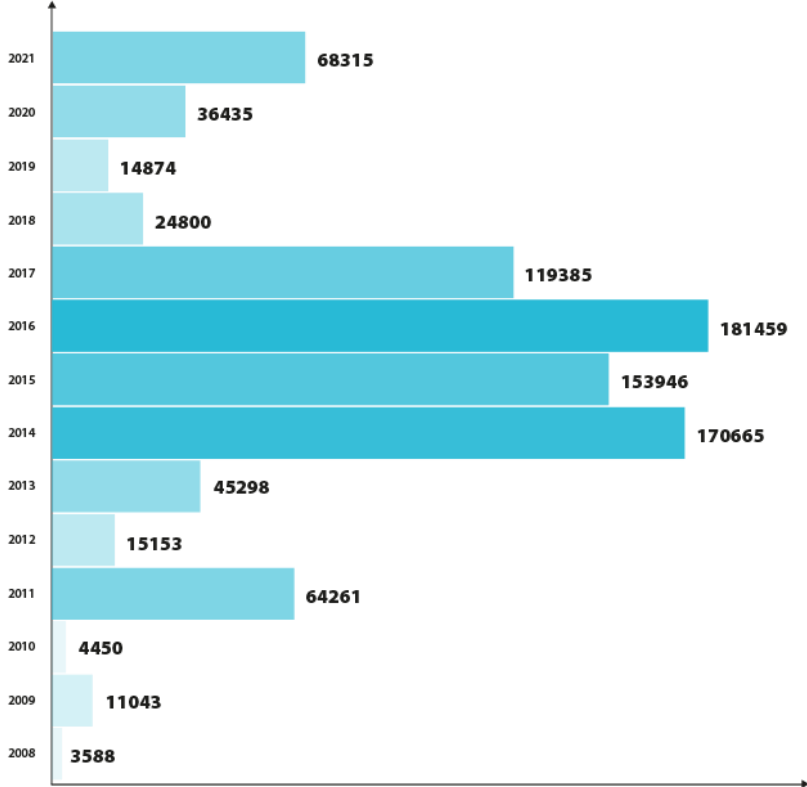
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[53] L.Raineri, 2022, *Sex, Drugs and Rocket Launchers: Traffics and Conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel.* SAHEL: 10 YEARS OF INSTABILITY Local, Regional and International Dynamics. Ledizioni LediPublishing, Milano.

[54] UNHCR. Promoting integration through mobility: Free movement under ECOWAS https://www.unhcr.org/49e479c811.pdf

[55] UNDESA 2020. https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock

Mediterranean Route (CMR), for short CMR, and by contrast there was a stark decrease in the number of people trying to cross the Western Mediterranean Route.

In August 2008 the *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation*, signed between the Berlusconi government and the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, ensured the control of the flow, allegedly reducing the figures of 75% along the CMR[56]. But a relevant event was due to destabilize the – rather

Year	Value
2021	68315
2020	36435
2019	14874
2018	24800
2017	119385
2016	181459
2015	153946
2014	170665
2013	45298
2012	15153
2011	64261
2010	4450
2009	11043
2008	3588

humanitarianly dubious- grip of the Libyan regime over the migration flow.

In fact, the bursting of the Arab Spring brought to the Libyan Crisis and the subsequent fall of Gaddafi in 2011.

Even if there was a transition government in place, a peaceful transition was impossible due to the many different armed groups and factions that run the country, and with time a new civil war erupted in 2014.

With the second Libyan civil war the political and security situation in the country deteriorated, leading to the division in three factions.

After the end of the first Libyan civil war and the defeat of Muhammar Gheddafi's, Libya was a war-torn country that presented on its territory many different factions and armed groups. In July 2012 the *General National Congress* (GNC) was elected with the mandate to lead the country for 18 months. Since then, the Islamist parties took control over the national assembly and elected Nuri Busahmein as president of the GNC, who, in June 2013, pushed a variant of the Sharia law to be I posed on the country and extend its mandate until December of 2014.

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[56] L. Raineri & A.Rossi, 2017, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel: A Reality Check, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel:A Perspective From The Sahel, IAI & FEPS, Milano.

At this point, a tear within the Libyan forces was inevitable, and in February 2014, General Khalifa Haftar – who served under Gheddafi – threw an attack to the islamist militias, and then on the 18th May took control over Tripolis parliament. Libya was now divided in two major factions; *the House of Representatives* together with the *Libyan National Army* led by General Haftar, opposed to the *New General National congress* supported by the international community.[57]

The upsurge of violence and division within the country brought a total fragmentation of the few surviving security forces border control had practically completely vanished.

At this point the Southern Libyan border was completely uncontrolled and extremely porous to irregular crossings.[58]

This led to an astonishing picking in the number of migrants using the CMR, and for four subsequent years the figures well exceeded the hundred thousand.[59]

In 2014 the flow quadruplicate the previous year number of 45 thousand, reaching 170 thousand migrants landing in Lampedusa[60], with an absolute peak in 2016 of 181 thousand.

By looking at the data collected from 2014 until 2021, by the Italian Ministry of Interior, we can notice that the composition of migration flow is made up by a big variety of nationalities.[61]

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[57] https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seconda_guerra_civile_in_Libia#Effetti_della_guerra

[58] https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-routes/central-mediterranean-route/

[59] L. Raineri & A.Rossi, 2017, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel: A Reality Check, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel:A Perspective From The Sahel, IAI & FEPS, Milano.

[60] https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-routes/central-mediterranean-route/

[61] http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/cruscotto-statistico-giornaliero

		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
1°		Syria	42.000	Eritrea	39.000	Nigeria	37.000	Nigeria	18.000	Tunisia	5.000	Tunisia	2.000	Tunisia	12.000	Tunisia	15.000
2°		Eritrea	34.000	Nigeria	20.000	Eritrea	20.000	Guinea	10.000	Eritrea	3.000	Pakistan	1.000	Bangla-desh	4.000	Egitto	8.000
3°		Mali	10.000	Somalia	12.000	Guinea	13.000	Ivory Coast	10.000	Iraq	1.700	Ivory Coast	1.000	Ivory Coast	2.000	Bangla-desh	7.000
4°		Nigeria	9.000	Sudan	9.000	Ivory Coast	12.000	Bangla-desh	9.000	Sudan	1.600	Algeria	1.000	Algeria	1.000	Iran	3.000
5°		Gambia	8.000	Gambia	8.000	Gambia	11.000	Mali	7.000	Pakistan	1.500	Iraq	972	Pakistan	1.000	Ivory Coast	3.000
Total		170.000		153.000		181.000		119.000		24.000		14.000		36.000		68.000	

[62] *Figure 2 Italian Ministry of the Interior; all figures are approximated.*

In Figure2 we can look at the top 5 countries of origins of the migrants arriving in Lampedusa. This shows how the Sahelian states do not usually represent top countries of origin and are present in the top 5 just in 2014 and 2017 with Mali.

It is clear by now that West Africa and Sahel are regions characterized by a high degree of mobility, and almost 72% of the people moving around those territories are to be considered intra-regional Migrants, with just a small percentage of people choosing to leave the region.[63]

The majority of those who decide to leave West Africa prefer to move to other African sub regions, especially the oil-rich countries of the Central African Region, especially Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.[64]

Outside of Africa, Europe is the most chosen destination for migrants, and it is not a new phenomenon, but actually one that has deep historical routes.[65]

Four different *Factors* or *Drivers* of migration have been identified by Van Hear (2012)[66].

Predisposing or underlying drivers "contribute to the creation of an unfavorable socio-economic context in which out-migration is likely"[67]These are all those factors that are found deep in historical routes, such as colonization -that put in place the apparatus and the pattern for North-south migration within the region-, but also globalization that imposed unequal trade opportunities for the weaker countries.[68]

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[62] Ibid

[63] IMISCOE, 2022*, Migration in West Africa,* Joseph Kof Teye. Springer Nature Switzerland AG. Cham.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] N.Van Hear, 2012. *Forcing the issue: Migration crises and the uneasy dialogue between refugee research and policy*. Journal of Refugee Studies, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
[67] IMISCOE, 2022*, Migration in West Africa,* Joseph Kof Teye. Springer Nature Switzerland AG. Cham.
[68] Ibid

Proximate drivers, these factors are usually produced by the working out of the predisposing drivers, such as macro-economics of the sending country, security problems and climate change.[69]

Precipitating drivers, which are those factors that actually trigger the migration at the individual level; drivers such as, unemployment, low income and poverty. But also, education, poor health conditions and the prices of agricultural products and access to cultivable soil.[70]

In countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the conundrum of violence created by a contraposition of different forces like Insurgent militias, Jihadist groups and the state armed forces, are to be considered a precipitating factor.

And then, all the factors that can facilitate migration are to be considered *mediating drivers of migration,* this are all the apparatuses that are put in place to enable the migration flow, a quite evolved structure of services that make possible, for example, for thousands of people to reach the Northern border of Sahel and even travers the Sahara.

But an unwise reading of the literature should not induce us to think that poverty is a major driver for irregular migration toward Europe. As a matter of fact, migratory flows are context-specific and while poverty is a precipitating driver, so are social transformation. The irregular migrants who decide to take the dangerous CMR are not the poorest, as many economic resources are required to cross both the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean.[71] By looking at figure2 it is possible to notice that the majority of the top sending countries are those who are doing - a little- better in human development rankings, and so the single person has more means to start the dangerous travel across the CRM. It is clear how Sahelian countries - Usually at the bottom of development rankings -, apart from the two Malian exceptions, are never on the top 5 nationalities taking the CMR.[72]

Even countries that are experiencing an important climate change induced poverty and are located on the route towards Europe don't even appear among the top 10 countries of origin. [73]

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[69] N.Van Hear, 2012. *Forcing the issue: Migration crises and the uneasy dialogue between refugee research and policy.* Journal of Refugee Studies, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

[70] IMISCOE, 2022*, Migration in West Africa,* Joseph Kof Teye. Springer Nature Switzerland AG. Cham.

[71] Ibid.

[72]http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/cruscotto-statistico-giornaliero

[73] IMISCOE e IOM IOM, 2020. Irregular migration routes to Europe: West and Central Africa. https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/IOM%20-

There is a widespread assumption that higher levels of development and better economic conditions would enable reduction in migration flows, and especially towards Europe. Instead, the very opposite Is true.

It has been demonstrated that the poorest countries are generally not the source of large migration flows to Europe. The reason behind this is that in order to migrate economic resources are essential, so more developed countries are more prone to enable migration due to better economic conditions; for this reason, it is possible to affirm that development has an inverted U-curve effect over migration.[74]

But this is not the only relation between development and migration.

It is clear now that the widespread assumption that migration is only fostered by under-development is misleading. The literature agrees on the existence of the *migration-development nexus*, a notion first theorized by Sørensen et al[75], that conceptualize migration not as the product of underdevelopment and critical economic condition, but instead as a possible "tool" to foster development:

"[Migration] is no longer simply seen as a failure of development but increasingly as an integral part of the whole process of development with a potentially important role to play in the alleviation of poverty" (Department for International Development & World Bank 2003, p. 11)[76]

This is possible thanks to the role played by remittances from migrated family members towards their households, acting as sort of micro-finance mechanism[77], contributing to the inflation of

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%20Mediterranenean%20Developments%20-%20 Flows%20from%20WCA%20-%20June%202020%20-%20EN%20-%20VF_0.pdf?fle=1&ty pe=node&id=9342. Accessed on 02/05/2021.

[74]L. Raineri & A.Rossi, 2017, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel: A Reality Check, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel:A Perspective From The Sahel, IAI & FEPS, Milano.

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[75] N.N. Sørensen et all, 2002, *The migration–development nexus: evidence and policy options*, International Migration, IOM, Geneva.

[76] Department for International Development & World Bank, 2006, INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT.

[77] S. Lavexen & R Kunz, 2008, *The Migration–Development Nexus in EU External Relations*, Journal of European Integration. Routledge, London.

relevant portions of many African countries GDP. For example, this is the case of Nigeria, where remittances from migrated citizens reach 8% of the GDP, nearly 20 billion dollars per year. [78]

It is clear by now that migration at regional level is not seen as something problematic. Patterns of regional migration have been essential in the past and still are essential today to cope with flooding of the Niger River and dry seasons, but also for the exploitation of plantations in the southern states.

Migration and smuggling, with its complex apparatus of *passeurs* and services provided for the migrants, is rather seen as an economic opportunity and not a security concern by the people living in the region. this has been accompanied, since the beginning of the 2000s, with the inauguration of the *Dialogue for Migration in West Africa*, promoted by the ECOWAS in collaboration with the IOM, a forum intended to unleash the potential of regular migration within the region[79], marking the beginning of a process aimed at removing the obstacles to free movement[80].

Essential external stakeholders like the EU tried to adopt a comprehensive approach to the external dimension of migration in relation to development.[81]

Two important steps took in 2011 with the *Global Approach to Migration and Mobility* (GAMM), and in 2015 with the *Agenda for Migration*,[82] recognized that "regional labor mobility schemes encouraging South-South mobility can bring an important contribution to local development"[83], so aiming at unleashing the potential of regular migration, while at the same time halting irregular migration.

This is also part of the cooperation between the EU and the AU, with the 2006 Rabat Process and the 2014 Khartoum Process, meant to control irregular migration and foster development in the country of origin.

Nonetheless, the *Valletta political declaration and Action Plan* of 2015 marked a relevant change of direction. While recognizing the relevance of the comprehensive approach, it also

[78] L. Raineri & A.Rossi, 2017, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel: A Reality Check, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel:A Perspective From The Sahel, IAI & FEPS, Milano.

[79] https://www.iom.int/migration-dialogue-west-africa-midwa

[80]L. Raineri & A.Rossi, 2017, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel: A Reality Check, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel:A Perspective From The Sahel, IAI & FEPS, Milano.

[81] Ibid.

[82] European Commission, 2015, A European Union Agenda on Migration. EU, Brussels.

[83] Ibid.

stated how it aspired to "address the root causes of irregular migration", by also "reducing poverty" and "supporting inclusive economic growth through investment opportunities and the creation of decent jobs".[84] During the Valletta summit was also launched the *EU trust Fund for Africa*, amounting up to 2.8 billion euros. This fostered even more the general idea that "the more development aid, the less migration"[85].

But the manifest gap between these declarations and the actual implementation of policies raised several questions over the effectiveness of European activism in Sahel. Raineri and Rossi (2017) recognized how on the one hand, the flow of aid seems to be diverted towards immediate security questions, and especially border controls, while the underlined root causes of underdevelopment seem to be left in the background, receiving marginal attention.

On the other hand, the focus on limiting migration and fostering border control, especially by enhancing local security capabilities, might curb and reduce the positive impact that mobility has on the local economy, eliminating the developmental aspiration of European intervention.[86]

The Sahel is also the first region in which the EU intervened by following a strategy driven by the *EU Global Strategy* (EUGS), and this meant following 4 lines of actions; political, security, development, and military. Moreover, in April 2015 the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted the *Sahel Regional Action Plan,* (RAP) that posed, yet again, 4 priorities; to prevent and counter radicalization; create appropriate conditions for youth; migration and mobility; and then border management and the fight against illicit trafficking and organized crime.

Both "structures" present direct reference or indirect reference to thematics such as development and security (especially *vis-a-vis* countering terrorism).

In general, all these strategies, frameworks, and programs, aim to create those preconditions necessary to enable development in many different aspects of the life of the Sahelian, and to foster security to allow some basic human security aspects. All of this in the total interest of the EU.[87]

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[84] Council of the European Union, Political Declaration - Valletta Summit, 11-12 November 2015, p. 2, http://europa.eu/!dG66Dd.

[85] L. Raineri & A.Rossi, 2017, *The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel: A Reality Check*, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel:A Perspective From The Sahel, IAI & FEPS, Milano.

[86] Ibid.

[87] B. Venturi, 2017, *The Eu and the Sahel: A Laboratory of experimentation for the security-migration development Nexus*, The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel:A Perspective From The Sahel, IAI & FEPS, Milano.

But according to Venturi (2017), there has been a progressive focus over the security and military aspects of the European intervention.

Migration transformed from one of the focuses of European action in the Sahel, to a proper obsession for the European MS and its public opinion, and as a consequence, became the most vital reason for activism in the Sahel.

"The EU's migratory policies with respect to the Sahel seem mainly intended to serve the Union's internal objective of curbing migration flows: the EU is taking a "whatever works approach" to stopping the flow of migrants from Africa. This factor could weaken its relations with African partners because the latter feel that money has been spent on securing borders rather than, as promised, on migration's root causes."[88]

More and more attention is diverted towards border control and as it ones might understand military presence in the area is very high, comprising 12.000 UN troops, 4.000 French, 5.000 Sahel G5 forces, plus all the bilateral presences in the Sahel.

This attention towards border control indeed does have effects on local economies, but also on the social fabric composing the northern parts of the Sahelian states.

A key case, that has become a sort of thermometer, useful to describe the overall relation between, economic development and migration, but also between this nexus and securitization and European activism, is the role of migration in Northern Niger, in particular the city of Agadez.

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[88] Ibid.

Due to its geographic position Niger is the Sahelian doorway to Libya, sharing with it 342 km of border and the fall of Gaddafi brought two major factors that enabled the evolution of Niger as the key hub for migration in the region. [89]
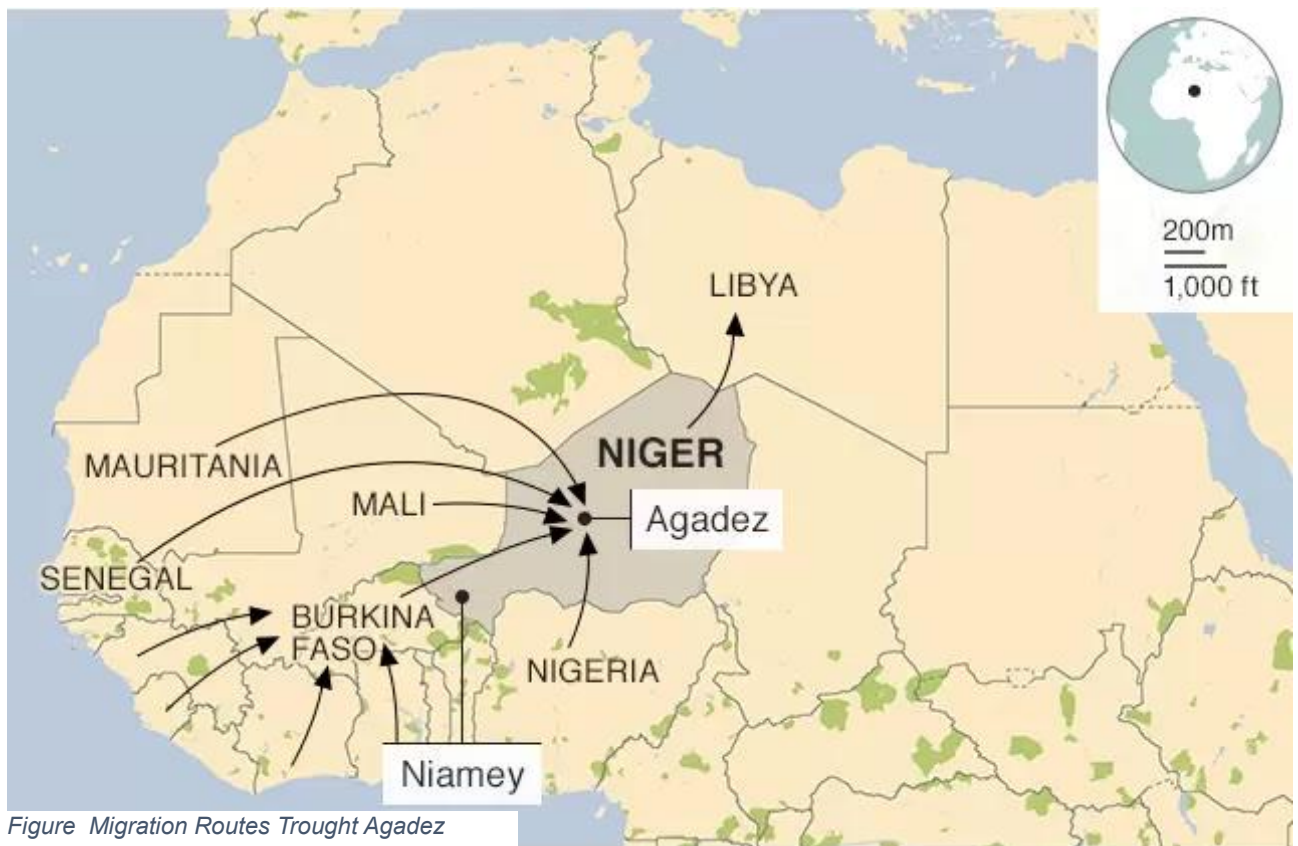

Figure Migration Routes Trought Agadez

First of all, the return of heavily armed Tuareg militias from Libya to Northern Mali brought the beginning of the violent insurgency, making the traverse of the Gao and Kidal regions extremely dangerous for the migrants. Moreover, the disintegration of the Libyan security and border control forces, enabled the movement of thousands of people across the border.[90]

After 2012, two major migration axis are identifiable in Niger; the first one pointing "south-west-north" especially used by west Africans like Senegalese, Gambians, Ivorians and Malians; the second is the "south-north" used especially by migrants from central Africa, in particular from Chad, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Both streams are passing through the city of Agadez.[91]

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[89] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46802548

[90] Mahamadou Danda. 2017. *The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel: A View from Niger.* The Security–Migration– Development Nexus Revised: A Perspective from the Sahel. Istituto Affari Internazionali & Foundation For European Progressive Studies.

[91] Ibid.

As it has already been managed to be pointed out, migration is the recipient for different conceptualization. So if it is true that in the European political debates, It covers the role of a security concern and something that need to be curbed and pinned down in countries of origin and transit, it is also true that for the people living in Sahel, and specifically in Niger, not only does not represent a security concern, but a proper economic sector helping the local population to find much needed relief from poverty.

And nothing was worth the pressures by the EU to the Nigerien Government to adopt the *law 36/2015* meant to criminalize human smuggling and subsequently put a halt to this activity.[92]

According to Raineri (2018)[93] in Agadez the migratory flow, harnessed by the local population as an opportunity to receive earnings, acquired the shape of a *state-sponsored protection racket,[94]* actively colluding the state authorities to the smuggling activities.

In this case the state acts as a "regulator and an enforcer, thereby reducing the need and the opportunity for criminal actors to resort to violence and engage in an arms race to protect their businesses"[95].

In this framework the local authorities are able to use their power to enforce law 36/2015 as a leverage to foster their interest. it is the case here, where the local political elite, represented by the Tuareg – coopted by Niamey to maintain political stability - enforced law 36/2015 in order to confiscate vehicles and proceed with the arrest of many Tebus[96], a local minority deeply involved in the activity of human smuggling.

it is clear that human smuggling in the region of Agadez has been not only socially legitimated and of economic significance for the local population, but it has been also abided by Niamey in

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[92] L. Raineri, 2018, *Human smuggling across Niger: state-sponsored protection rackets and contradictory security imperatives,* journal of modern African studies. Cambridge University press. Cambridge.

[93] Ibid.

[94] The notion has been defined by Richard Snyder and Angelica Duran-Martinez in their paper from 2009 *"Does illegality breed violence? Drug trafficking and statesponsored protection rackets', Crime Law and Social Change",* and defines it as "informal institutions through which public officials refrain from enforcing the law or, alternatively, enforce it selectively against the rivals of a criminal organization, in exchange for a share of the profits generated by the organization"

[95] L. Raineri, 2018, *Human smuggling across Niger: state-sponsored protection rackets and contradictory security imperatives,* journal of modern African studies. Cambridge University press. Cambridge.

[96] "Tebu (also spelled Toubou or Tubu) are traditionally nomadic, black tribes found in Libya, Chad, Sudan, and Niger. There are at least 12,000-15,000 Tebu in Libya, though community representatives claim their numbers could be much higher, up to several hundred thousand"; https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b9fb6ae7.html#:~:text=Tebu%20(also%20spelled%20Toubou%20or,up%20to%20several%20hundred%20thousand.

order to maintain the fragile political balance between the central government and the Tuareg elites that now are covering prominent administrative roles in the region.

As it has already been mentioned, the EU is to be considered the major external actor collaborating with the Sahelian governments.

The above-mentioned *European Union Trust Fund for Africa* is not the only initiative conducted within the region; other such the *EUCAP Sahel* missions (EU Capacity Building mission), declined in Mali and Niger, and *EUTM Mali* (EU training Mission) follow the same idea of securitization of the migration flow.

The porosity of the Sahelian borders is perceived by the EU as the key aspect to control in order to contrast irregular migration, and for this reason much of the efforts are now being diverted toward this end.

it is the case, for example, of different EUTF programs, such as *PARSEC* (*Programme d'Appui au reforcement de la Sécurité*), a program funded by the EU and actualized by Expertise France, a French public agency, aimed to train the local forces to better control borders and to provide them with the proper technologies to do so. [97]

Yet another example is the *Groupes d'Action Rapides- Surveillance et Intervention au Sahel,* Gar-SI for short.

This is a regional program organized with the G5-Sahel states, and does not have an explicitly border control aspiration, but it is rather aimed to train counter terrorist units that would be firstly involved also in stopping transnational organized crime.

However, this units are not only mobile, flexible and autonomous, but are even free to arbitrarily put-up check points on the Malian-Burkinabè border, and even if this might be seen -from the European point of view- as a feasible solution, it is seen by the local population as yet another way to make their life difficult. We must remember that for the locals, mobility is an essential part of their life and a means to survive.

According to Bøås (2021)[98] the fact that these units would not be under much surveillance, due to their mobile and special nature, meaning that they would be easily corruptible.

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[97] M. Bøås, 2020, *EU migration management in the Sahel: unintended consequences on the ground in Niger?,* Third World Qaurterly. Tylor & Francis group.
[98] Ibid.

This calls into question whose security and interests are taken into consideration, and if what works for the European agenda might also work for the local security and stability. [99]

In the same guise were built or rearranged both EUCAP Sahel missions and EUTM.

For former, active in Niger since 2012, the aim has always been to strengthen the security capacities of the armed and police forces along the local gendarmerie. But this has been increasingly turned over border control capabilities since 2016,[100] this has been done with the intention to foster counter terrorism capabilities and to control the flow of irregular migrants, especially in the region of Agadez.

Similarly, the more recent EUCAP Sahel Mali was established in 2015 with the intention to restore state authority in Mali after the 2012 crisis escalation.[101] In order to do so EUCAP has been able to train more than 3400 officers. But, yet again the multidimensional crisis concerning Mali has been reduced to the European interest of border control.

But the destiny of these missions is now uncertain, as it is the case with EUTM.

Now at its 5th mandate, EUTM is now shrinking its efforts and activities, following a decision taken by the EU Political Security Council (PSC) on the 5th of April 2022.[102] The recent coups d'état in Mali and Burkina Faso are now curbing the enthusiasm and efforts by the EU member states vis a vis European involvement in these two states.

[99] Bøås, Morten, and Pernille Rieker. 2019. EUNPACK Executive Summary of the Final Report & Selected Policy Recommendations. Brussels: EUNPACK.

[100] EUCAP Sahel Niger. 2019. Partnership for Security in the Sahel. Brussels: European Union External Action.

[101] EUCAP. 2018. "EUCAP Sahel Mali: Mandate." http://eucap-sahel-mali.eu/about_en.html.

[102] https://eutmmali.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/20221107_Fact-Sheet-EUTM-Mali.pdf

European operations in the Sahel

National military contingent
CSDP mission
G5 Sahel member

EUCAP = European Union Capacity Building Mission
EUTM = European Union Training Mission
EUBAM = European Union Border Assistance Mission

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As we have seen, Migration in West Africa, and of course in Sahel, is a complex reality and exists thanks to many factors and drivers which are impossible to reduce just to a specific cause. Much of the academic, policy but also public debate here in Europe and in those African states directly involved in it, is on what is the perception of Migration.

It is clear that a huge gap exists between what EU institutions and governments think of migration and what on the other side is thought by the Sahelian governments and people. the Agadez's case is a perfect example of this cleavage; migration allowed Agadez to experience a proper economic boom, drawing people and resources toward this center, bringing relief to the extreme poverty and unemployment lived by the locals. it also represents a political asset for the Nigerien government, which was able to use it as a leverage to co-opt the Tuareg elite in the area.

From the EU point of view, Migration and cross-border mobility is perceived as a security threat, but as Morten Bøås (2021) asks; "whose security the EU really is concerned with: those

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https://ecfr.eu/publication/halting_ambition_eu_migration_and_security_policy_in_the_sahel/

who live in the border regions, or the security of liberal European regimes that came under pressure from right-wing parties due to the inability of European governments to manage the refugees and migrants that poured into Europe in 2014 and 2015?"[104].

Jihadist terrorism in Sahel

The roots of Salafism in Sahel: the case of Mali.

As it has already been explained in the first chapter, one of the most characterizing aspects of the Sahelian states is that they are marked by extreme fragility, and patronage dynamics; on one hand fragility and the non-slavishly Westphalian way of controlling the territory rendered some areas more permeable to the physical occupation by shady actors; on the other hand the existence of patronage dynamics and the extreme corruptibility of local institutions and of the security forces, allowed the emergence of many grievances easily appropriated by the said shady actors, which in this case are Jihadist terrorist.

For these reasons the existence of Jihadism in Sahel is the product of a convergence of factors and drivers, such as the presence of relevant social and economic cleavages, that favored the eradication of terrorist groups of the Salafist-Jihadist type. The grounding process of the Salafism- Also known as Wahhabism- [105] have long roots that goes back in time of almost one hundred years and are accompanied by the progressive perceived degeneration of the Sufism[106].

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[104] M. Bøås, 2020, *EU migration management in the Sahel: unintended consequences on the ground in Niger?,* Third World Qaurterly. Tylor & Francis group.

[105] "Salafi movement, also called Salafiyyah, broad set of Islamic movements that strive to emulate the practices of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* ("the pious predecessors"), the early generations of Muslims during and after the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad.

Salafis (followers of the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) are characterized by the prioritization of the Qurʾān and the Sunnah as the fundamental *uṣūl al-fiqh*, or sources of Islamic law."

Also known as Wahhabism.

https://www.britannica.com/topic/Salafi-movement.

[106]"Sufism, mystical Islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God. It consists of a variety of mystical paths that are designed to ascertain the nature of humanity and of God and to facilitate the experience of the presence of divine love and wisdom in the world."

The Sahelian States, with varying percentage, are predominantly Islamic, and historically characterized by Sufis confraternities; the emergence of Salafist Islam started in the 30s especially within the young students.

During the 50s the improvement of airplane travel allowed easier pilgrimage to the Mecca, and progressively, more and more Sahelian entered in contact with the Wahhabis Ideology. In a short time the majority of the middle class, especially composed by merchants accustomed to travel, decided to convert from Sufism to the "new" confession.

Wahhabism had a big impact on the social structure in Sahel; as a matter of facts allowed the new middle class to not recognize the Sufi authorities and to emancipate from the traditional religious leadership, that tended to be oppressive towards the new emerging middle class.

But Wahhabism was not only a tool to subvert traditional chains of leadership. During the 60s and 70s became a way to express anti-colonial and anti-French spirit.[107]

At the beginning of the republican history of Mali, in 1961 the first Malian president Modibo Keïta decided to give a strong secular imprinting to the country and the constitution, for this reason the decision to limit all kind of religious authorities was took, and also to relegate Wahhabism to the private sphere. This pushed the Malian Salafist to be first hour volunteers in the groups of resistance against the regime. [108]

The strong opposition to Keïta in Mali was not only coming from religious grievances, but also from big parts of the state authorities that were not convinced by His economic politics.

For these reasons he was overthrown by Moussa Traoré in 1968, who became president ad interim of Mali.[109]

He then decided to allow a slow but progressive emancipation of Wahhabism leading to the recognition in 1980 of the AMUPI, *Association Malienne pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam*, the only Muslim organization recognized by the Malian state.[110]

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https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sufism.

[107]Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino.

[108] Ibid.

[109]https://web.archive.org/web/20120210201448/http://www.memorialmodibokeita.org/article.php3?id_article=4

[110] https://fr-academic.com/dic.nsf/frwiki/145987

The Salafi ideology with the rigorous and literal interpretation of the Qur'an became more and more prominent in the public debate, with AMUPI and other public figures fostering a way of life and laws based on the principles of the origins of Islam rather than on a secular constitution. But the Salafi commitment was not relegated just to the theological and jurisprudential sphere. As a matter of facts, at the beginning of the 2000s, the disengagement of the government and its manifest fragility in the peripheral areas of the country pushed an overlapping, if not a complete substitution, of the state's authority with Islamic ONG in the supply of many basic services, such as education and welfare programs in general.[111] As it is the case for example with Islamic Relief, a muslim driven ONG active in Mali since 1997.

Especially in the northern area of Mali, also known as Azawad, the new role of Salafism took an ethnic tribal connotation, allowing minorities subordinate to the Arab and Tuareg leadership to challenge the traditional religious establishment. After 2001 the western understanding of these Salafist movements became one of dangerous associations that might become in a short time the perfect nest for terrorist organizations. Nonetheless these movements kept on appropriating the several grievances and necessities of the population, becoming not only the most vocal expression of discontent and protest toward the state and traditional leadership, but also increasingly expressing it through armed violence.[112]

Lines of violence: from AQMI to Al-Qaeda in the Sahel.

The long journey that brought Jihadist terrorism and Al-Qaeda in Sahel and in North Africa started in the 90s Algeria.

Here the socio-political landscape was characterized by a strong tension between the postcolonial elites and the Islamic educated youth.

Again, the Islamic ideal was used by bridge and to exploit the existing cleavage dictated by the economic turmoil in which the country found itself. During the 80s the cutting of the state budget dictated by the contraction on the prices of oil brought a crisis in the job market, and a literate and educated youth was doomed to be unable to find occupation.

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[111] https://islamic-relief.org/where_we_work/mali/
[112] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino.

The political vacuum and the growing anger and social tension was cleverly channeled by Islamic actors, fostering their political program based on the moralization of the customs and the imposition of the Shariʿah.[113]

On this basis the FIS, *Front Islamique du Salut*, was constituted, becoming the political expression of Islam in Algeria. A series of political successes brought the movement to take part in 1992 elections where it won at the first electoral round.

This result of the elections did not meet the will of the old post-colonial political class, that with a military intervention deposed the elected government and dissolved the FIS. [114]

After this event a new Islamic group was created with the intention to use violence against the old class, the GIA, the *Groupe Islamique Armé*.

As target the GIA did not have just the Military, but all the state institutions that were understood as corrupted and vicious. For this reason, the GIA decided to use violence as a form of emancipatory tool to subvert the Algerian ruling class.

But the indiscriminate use of violence against civilians and Muslims alike brought stark contrast within the movement, and most importantly a strong loss of popular consensus.

For this reason, shortly after the movement was split in two, with the creation of a new movement called *Groupe Salafite pour la Predication et le Combat*, GSPC, meant to recreate the popular support and network that the GIA had lost.[115]

Taking Salafism as its prominent ideology, the new movement transformed the fight in a proper insurgency at low intensity.

After the Twin towers attack in 2001 the GSCP was identified by the US Department of State as a Terrorist organization.[116]

At this point a new figure was due to emerge; ʿAbd al-Malik Drukdal was self-proclaimed head of the GSPC in 2004, following a strong acceleration toward the adhesion of the Algerian movement to Al-Qaeda, of which became part in 2006. [117]

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[113] Kepel, 2006, *jihad. The trial of political Islam*. London, Tauris.

[114] Ibid

[115] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino

[116] https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/.

[117] L. Jacinto, *Key figures in al Qaeda's North African branch*. France 24.

To mark the new affiliation, the GSPC changed its name in *Al-Qa'ida au Magreb Islamique* (AQMI) and decided to declare war on Mauritania.

This state inhabited almost by its entirety by Muslims, was accused by the Salafi Movement of apostasy[118]. This accusation was mainly based on the fact that Mauritania was openly supportive of American interventionism, becoming a hub for the US forces in the region, and also recognized Israel.[119]

In this phase the Algerian government launched a strategy of "double containment" with the collaboration of the Malian armed forces.

In the North the Algerian army pushed the AQMI forces to the south, but also made efforts to interrupt every possible connection with other Qaedist cells and clamp down every possible support and supplies from them.

On the border between Mali and Algeria, Malian forces contributed to control and put an alt to the movement of Jihadist across the border.[120]

Despite the efforts to control this frontier area its natural porosity makes it the perfect place for the AQMI forces to establish and use it as a base from which attack Algeria in the North, Mali in the South and continue the attacks to the West against Mauritania.

Rightfully the USA decided to carry on the effort in the Sahel, understanding the region as the epicenter of the next Jihadist terrorism explosion.

Even though the decision took by the American government was dictated by common sense and the will to conduct the *war on terror* on every possible ground, the effort had the collateral effect to give to AQMI the possibility to radicalize the local movements in an anti-western

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https://web.archive.org/web/20131214025331/https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/medbasin/Documents/North%20Africa/Security/Key%20figures%20in%20al%20Qaeda%20North%20Africa.pdf.

[118] the term originate in the Christian theological sphere, and means the rejection of the religion, and its principles. In this case is referred to the Islam and especially the refusal to follow the Shariʿah.

[119]Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino.

[120] D.Lounnas, 2013, *la stratégie algérienne face à AQMI*, Institut français des relations internationales.

guise; the very war on terror was now perceived by the local population, and especially by the new radicalized movements, as a war between Islam and the West.[121]

In this dynamic the deep fragility of the Malian state was for AQMI an important chance to exploit, especially thanks to the corruptibility of the security forces present in the area.

The relationship with the local population was established through the co-optation of the traditional religious and tribal leadership, and the imposition of a sort of Islamic "welfare" helped to gain the support of the local population.[122]

It was clear at this point that the circumstances have pushed the core of AQMI southward and after a long period of adaptation, through which a process of co-optation of the local authorities took place, the Sahelian component of the organization slowly became the real neuralgic center of it.

This shift was the product of the geostrategic evolution in the region and the reduced possibilities of action in Algeria. But this shift also presented some opportunities under the "business" point of view.[123]

The new territory under the control of AQMI presented the chance to conduct many lucrative activities, allowing the emergence of two figures much different from each other.

AQMI was divided into different *Katibas* -battalions- and two of them were particularly active in the area between Sahara and Sahel.

On one side there were the *Katiba al-Mulathamun* -veiled men-, under the leadership of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, nicknamed "mr. Marlboro". This Katiba was active between Mali and Mauritania and was skilled in collecting important revenues from the smuggling of different goods.

On the other side there was the *Katiba Tariq Ibn Ziyad*, led by Al-Hamid Abu Zayd, a ruthless and violent commander. Especially active between Algeria and Northern Mali, was able to extort revenues through the kidnapping of westerners.[124]

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[121] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino

[122] Jihadism in the Sahel: Exploiting Local Disorders. https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Jihadism-in-the-Sahel-Exploiting-Local-Disorders.pdf

[123] https://www.refworld.org/docid/591577334.html.

[124] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino

The Sahelian Katibas represented an important asset for AQMI and also an example of success for al-Qaeda at large, giving to the organization the possibility to finance itself and promote its "welfare" system to the local population, enabling it to gain even more popularity.

But the different ways of colleting resources of the two Katibas, brought strong contrast within AQMI.

The entrepreneurial manner of conducting its traffic business brought onto Belmokhtar many criticisms from Abu Zayd, who thought that trafficking was a rather against the teachings of the pure Islam. On the other side Mr. Marlboro did whatever he could to protect its business, which was built on a complex network of smugglers and co-opted local authorities and was especially exploiting the Tuareg's expertise.

Belmokhtar had much different opinions on smuggling and, on the contrary from Abu Zayd, thought that kidnapping activities were dangerous and brought the attention of international actors over the region, and could, in the end, have a bad impact on the trafficking.

The division between Belmokhtar on one side, and Abu Zayd and Drukdal on the other, brought to the banning, in 2008, of smuggling activities as a "legal" revenue for members of AQMI.

But Katiba al-Mulathamun did not stop the trafficking and tried to establish a direct connection with Al-Qaeda.

At this point the break up with Drukdal organization, was inevitable and Belmokhtar's group demerged from AQMI taking the name of *Katiba al-Muwaqi'un Bil Dima* -those who sign with blood-.[125]

This is not the only case in which it is possible to record a splitting process; the Jihadist universe in Sahel is characterized by many aggregation and disaggregation phenomena.

It is the case of the elite battalion created by Belmokhtar, but it is also the case for another movement born from the demerging of Katiba al-Furqan from AQMI. This splitting was based along ethnic lines, as the Peul criticized the prominent role given by AQMI to the Tuaregs but was also fostered by Belmokhtar who saw in the demerging a way to weaken AQMI and to preserve its Smuggling interests.

This new movement, *named Mouvement pour l'Unicité et le Jihad en l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO) was following the strict Salafist ideology, but with the addition of historical figures of the Islam in Africa.
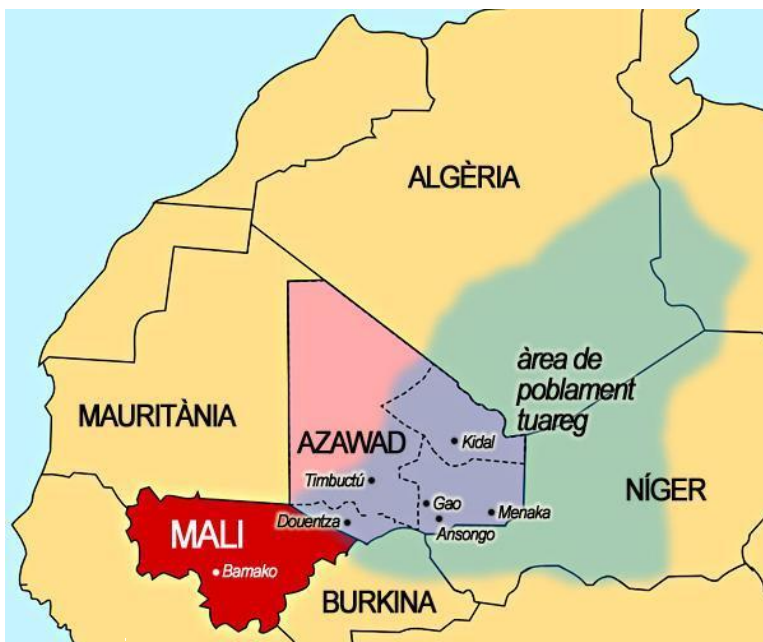
[125] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino

Another extremely important Jihadist actor that emerged in the period preceding the Malian crisis was also following the ethnical division, it is the case of Ansar al-Din lead by Iyad Ag Ghali, a Tuareg fighter that in 2011, after not being able to overtake the *aménkal[126]*, founded this new Jihadist group entirely composed by Tuareg Ifoghas. Quickly after its foundation Ansar al-Din became an ally with AQMI.

The center of the crisis: from Northern Mali to Liptako-Gourma.

The roots of the current crisis that is still raging today in Sahel is to be found in a convergence of causes. One of them is the presence of Jihadist movements, especially Ansar al-Din, in the north that, as it has already been discussed, were able to address the various local grievances, getting a good degree of popular consensus. The other is the presence, already before 2012, of local independentist militias, usually based on the irredentist aspiration of the Tuaregs of the north.

In this case this presence was represented by the MNA, the *Mouvement National de l'Azawad.* When the Libyan crisis in 2011 culminated with the fall of Muhammar Qaddafi, several thousands of [127]Tuaregs, formerly part of the Qaddafi's Islamic Militias, came back from the Sahara, bringing with them vehicles and heavy weaponry. [128]

From the merge of the MNA and these militias a new actor was created; the Muvement National de Liberation de l'Azawad.

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[126] "Amenukal (Berber: ⵍ:ⵏ, ⵯⵍ:ⵌⵐ) is a title for the highest Tuareg traditional chiefs; the paramount confederation leader." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amenukal

[127]https://www.nationalia.info/new/10484/azawadi-groups-seek-to-improve-algerian-proposed-peace-deal-by-securing-further-autonomy

[128] Morten Bøås. 2019. *The Sahel Crisis and the Need for International Support.* NAI Policy Dialogue No 15. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

Even though this movement was aspiring to build an independent state and "free" the population from what was perceived as a corrupt state, it did not collect the support of the population, which on the contrary saw the new actor as oppressive and problematic. On the contrary the Jihadist groups present in the North were perceived as a possible solution to the lack of order in the region. the Qaedist provided a basic welfare service, wealth redistribution and most importantly acted as judiciary power through the Sha'ria and protected the locals from the abuses of MNLA.

The ideological divergences were surpassed by the Jihadist and the independentist militia in order to ally and start the insurgency.

The attack began on the 17 January 2012[129] with a strike on the city of Ménaka (see figure 1) on the border with Niger, and contemporarily a big offensive from the northern region of Kidal pushed back the Malian armed forces to the south.

The rapid military defeat led to the mutiny of the army, and subsequently a group of Officers led a coup d'état on the 21 March thanks to which President Touré was destitute.

Now a *National Committee for Recovering Democracy and Restoring the State* (CNRDRE) was put in place, led by Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo.[130]

Between March and April 2012 Mail lost the regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuctu, amounting to almost two thirds of its territory. Shortly after on the 6th of April the independence of the Azawad was declared.

This did not mean that the Tuareg independentist goal had been achieved.

On the contrary there was the affirmation of the Jihadist rule over the newly conquered territory. While Ansar al-Din Network was already extremely capillary on the territory, the declaration of independence was also followed by the growing presence of AQMI'S and MUJAO's Mujahidin.

The existing alliance between MNLA and the Jihadist groups was quickly put aside, and the latter easily pushed the members of the MNLA out of the occupied territories.[131]

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[129]   https://www.jeuneafrique.com/177674/politique/nord-mali-les-attaques-de-rebelles-touaregs-se-poursuivent-l-arm-e-r-agit/

[130] Morten Bøås. 2019. *The Sahel Crisis and the Need for International Support.* NAI Policy Dialogue No 15. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

[131] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino

At this point the only way in which the Malian State was able to cope with the security situation was through the request of intervention to the French government.

In August 2013 a further push to the south triggered the military intervention of the French army marking the beginning of Operation Serval. With the collaboration of the Chadian army and Malian units, the French were able to defeat the Islamist and push them to the north, attempting to regain control of the region.

But the situation remained unstable, with the persisting presence of the Jihadist all through the following years. [132]

The Algieri Peace treaty.

After the French intervention on the [133] ground and the success following it, the way of peace was taken, and a political negotiation was open between the parts involved in the fight.

Two major coalitions were meant to meet under the supervision of Algeria, with the help of international actors such as the AU, EU, the ECOWAS and the USA.

On the one side the *Coalition des Mouvement de l'Azawad* (CMA), collected all the "bad guys", the MNLA and the Jihadist. On the other side the *Plateforme,* collecting all the statal and non statal actors that took part to the fight.[134]

The long confrontation reached an agreement in June 2015 and, even though it did not recognize the independence of the Azawad, recognized it as a "sociocultural reality, memorial and
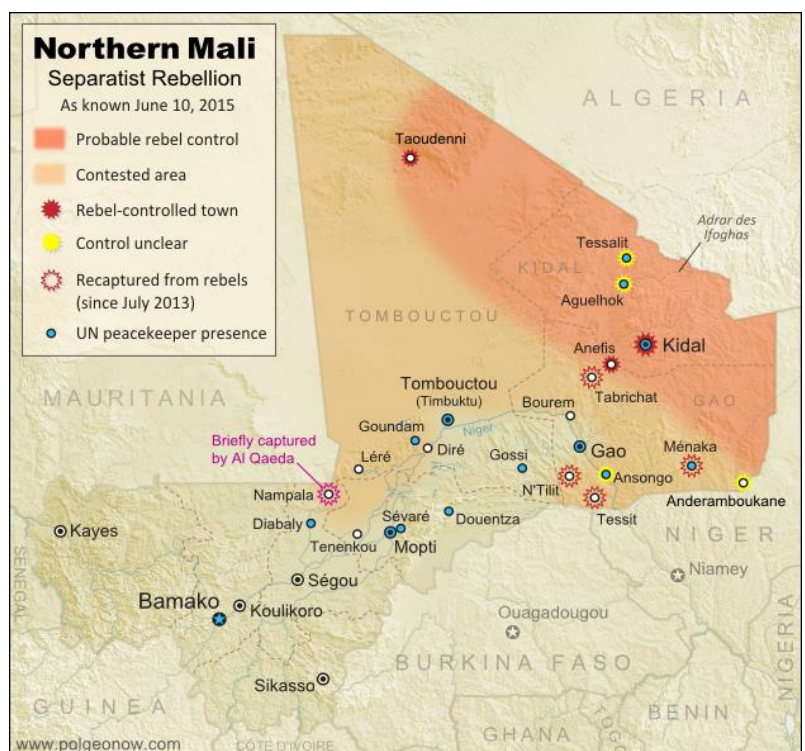
[132] Morten Bøås. 2019. *The Sahel Crisis and the Need for International Support.* NAI Policy Dialogue No 15. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

[133] https://www.polgeonow.com/2015/06/map-of-rebel-control-in-mali-june-2015.html

[134] https://www.internazionale.it/notizie/2015/06/23/mali-accordo-pace-governo-ribelli-tuareg

symbolic, shared by the different populations that constitutes the national community in Northern Mali."[135]

The Malian government was meant to give more attention to the needs of the northern population and recognize them more space in the political debate.[136]

Development programs in the region should have started shortly after and a mechanism to reintegrate the former fighter should have created more job opportunities and facilitate the pacification of the area.[137]

Unfortunately, the planned reintegration of the ex-combatant and the coming back of the Malian army in the north was not successful. Just a small percentage of the insurgent fighters abandoned their weapons, while the majority of them decided not to trust the Malian government and kept the tension high, creating a situation of *no peace, no war.*[138]

After 2017 there was the recomposition of the Jihadist forces under the leadership of Iyad Ag Ghali, taking the name of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM).

The jihad moving to Burkina Faso: Ansarul Islam.

Since 2015 Burkina Faso became more and more the victim of several terrorist attacks. Initially caused by the spillover effect of the violence in Mali -progressively pushed away by the French offensive- it then led to the creation of a local organization.

This was led by Ibrahim Malam Dicko, a Salafist preacher of Peul Origin, who skillfully exploited his preaching capabilities and the radio broadcasting to throw an invective against the Burkinabè's establishment. [139]

He, as the Salafist had already done in the past, promoted the subversion of the religious and political establishment in favor of the more marginal ones.

Inspired by the Jihadist movements in Mali, he started to radicalize his messages and sermons.

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[135]*Accord pour la paix et la réconciliation au Mali issu du processus d'Alger, 2015, p.4.*

[136] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino.

[137] Ibid.

[138] D.Lounnas, *jihadist groups in North Africa and the Sahel: Between Disintegration, Reconfiguration and Resilience,* MENARA, Working Paper, n16, October 2018, p.13

[139] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino

The inauguration of Ansarul Isalm was celebrated with the first terrorist attack attributed to the new jihadist group; on 6 December 2016 twelve Burkinabè soldiers were killed near Nassoumbou.

Taking as a target state articulation, security forces and administrative bureaus, half of the violent attacks in Burkina Faso conducted between between 2016 and 2018 were imputable to Ansarul Islam.

Dicko Died during a French air strike during operation Bayard and was then substituted by his brother Jafar Dicko. [140]

Many Ansarul Islam militants decided to move to the ranks of JNIM, as the new leadership was lacking the skills of the predecessor. Shortly after the entirety of Ansarul Islam was absorbed by JNMI and all its activities are reconducted to the Jihadist group nowadays. [141]

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[140] https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/455496/politique/burkina-faso-derniers-jours-dibrahim-malam-dicko/

[141] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino

Chapter 3. International Interventionism in Sahel: From "War on Terror" to Task Force Takuba.

The Sahel, The New Frontier of The Global War on Terror: International Involvement Before 2012.

On the 17 January 2012 with a strike to the city of Ménaka the Malian Crisis Began. The MNLA allied with AQMI, MUJAO and Ansar al-Dine declared war on the state order in Mali, destabilizing the central Sahelian area.

This event represents a watershed in the counter terrorism narrative in the Sahel and marks a change of involvement and activism for all the international actors willing to securitize the area, in first place France covering the leading role in the intervention -with operation Serval and then Barkhane-, but also the European Union with different CSDP mission -EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUTM Mali- and United Nation Peacekeeping Missions such as MINUSMA.

But the interest of international actors in Sahel finds its origins far back at the beginning of the 2000s when the Department of Defense of the USA (DoD) identified the region as a possible space of interest for the rooting of Jihadist terrorism.

After the events of 9/11 the USA embarked in a Global War on Terror and identified as one of the major causes of existence of the various Jihadist groups the inability of some states to actively control and exercise state authority on their territory, allowing for the creation "ungoverned spaces"[142] that would be easily appropriated by this armed groups.

Due to the existence of deep grievances and the manifest extreme fragility of the Sahelian countries, the DoD had all the interests to declare the region as the second front line against international Islamic terrorism. On 7 November 2002 the US Office of Counterterrorism announced that a new program named *Pan Sahelian Initiative* (PSI) had been launched.[143]

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[142]Taylor, Andrew J. *Thoughts on the Nature and Consequences of Ungoverned Spaces*. The SAIS Review of International Affairs, vol. 36, no. 1, 2016, pp. 5–15. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27001413. Accessed 18 Jan. 2023.

[143] E. Baldaro & L. Raineri. *Jihad in Africa: Terrorismo e Controterrorismo nel Sahel*. 2022. Il Mulino. Bologna

"PSI is a program designed to protect borders, track movement of people, combat terrorism, and enhance regional cooperation and stability. PSI is a State-led effort to assist Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania in detecting and responding to suspicious movement of people and goods across and within their borders through training, equipment, and cooperation. Its goals support two U.S. national security interests in Africa: waging the war on terrorism and enhancing regional peace and security."[144]

It is clear by this brief communication that the US objective in Sahel was twofold; first and most important to pursue the war on terror in the area with all necessary means, but also to strengthen peace and security by training and equipping the national forces of the Sahelian state involved in the PSI.

This will coincide with the trend taking over at the beginning of the 2000s identified by Call, were peacekeeping and state building were meant to be overlapping in an intervention: new tasks were assigned to the missions, such as the extension of state authority, security and justice sector reforms – denoting strong normative imprinting - but also natural resources administration, and electoral assistance.[145]

This new way of conceptualizing intervention brought closer the idea of a fragile or failed state and the need to fight the war on terror, transforming all the countries that were underdeveloped or not able to properly exercise their sovereignty within their territory as a possible theater of intervention.

At this point, missions are no longer limited to the technical military aspect, becoming more ambitious and aiming to strengthen state institutions and leave a normative imprint in the country. It is in this time that democratization and openness to the free market became a mandatory aspect of the collaboration between country partners.[146]

Following this, the USA had all the interest to intervene in the region; the Sahelian countries involved are ranked at the bottom of all the development rankings, but more importantly the

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[144] https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/14987.htm

[145] Charles T. Call. *The Evolution of Peacebuilding: Improved Ideas and Institutions*?. United Nations University Centre for Policy Research. 2015.

[146] E. Baldaro & L. Raineri. *Jihad in Africa: Terrorismo e Controterrorismo nel Sahel*. 2022. Il Mulino. Bologna

presence – reported by the Algerian intelligence - of the GSPC[147] in Southern Algeria, and Northern Mali and Mauritania.[148]

After 2005 the PSI evolved in a more complex framework, were the Department of Defense, Department of State and USAID, would have worked in synergy, following what the Bush administration identified as the *3D Approach* (development, defense and diplomacy) and the Obama administration identified as the *Whole Government Approach*, a conceptualization aimed at tackling both immediate security threat and the more deep root causes of grievances and fragility of the country involved in the intervention.

This new framework named *Trans-Saharan Counter-Counter Terrorism Initiative* (TSCTI) expanded the range of action from the initial four countries involved in the PSI, to the whole of North-Western of Africa.

The new initiative was aimed at training the local security forces and providing them with the necessary means to contrast armed groups on their territory, but also to spread a positive image of the United States among the local population. [149]

A key example is the one of Mali. that for many years since the 90s was undergoing a long process of apparent democratization and development.

Due to its appearance of stability within the Sahelian region, Mali used to be considered a champion of democracy and the best partner of the western powers in the war against terrorism.[150] Thanks to its special position, money and resources started to flow towards its reserves even from countries other than the USA, such as the EU, France and other European MS.

According to Powell[151] and Wing[152], the very dynamics causing fragility and instability, such as patronage dynamics, extreme corruption, and limited access to the democratic processes,

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[147] Groupe Salafist pour la Predication et le Combat, the group originally involved in the Algerian civil war that then became the AQMI.

https://italiawiki.com/pages/storia-dell-algeria/guerra-civile-algerina.html

[148] E. Baldaro & L. Raineri. *Jihad in Africa: Terrorismo e Controterrorismo nel Sahel*. 2022. Il Mulino. Bologna

[149] Ibid.

[150] Bingen, R. James, David Robinson, and John M. Staatz, eds. *Democracy and Development in Mali*. Michigan State University Press, 2000.
http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/j.ctt15hvwv2.
[151] Powell, N. 2017. Battling instability? The recurring logic of French military interventions in Africa. African Security 19 (1): 47–72.
[152] Wing, S. 2017. Mali's enduring crisis. Current History 116 (790): 189–193.

combined with the unwillingness by the French and the UN to intervene in the Sahelian political complexity,[153]caused a "perversion" of the funds given to the Malian state authorities, and helped fostering and deepening the already existing grievances. [154]

Moreover, the need to control the northern areas and the abiding to use force to nip in the bud every possible Jihadist group, allowed the former president Amadou Toumani Touré to use violence against the already dissident Tuaregs in the North instead of reaching out for a peaceful solution. [155]

Bamako's behavior pushed forward the division between the central government and the groups willing to fight for Azawad's independence, resulting in the armed insurgency of 2012, and as it has already argued, this year represents the watershed that would bring a new and different involvement of France and her European partners.

In this chapter the path that led to the Italian involvement in Mali and Niger is unfolded; starting from the bursting out of the Malian crisis and the French intervention with operation Serval, through the stabilization of the French and international forces, to then leading to a brief analysis of the the "Western failure" in the Sahel. In the end the structure and the reasons behind the Italian involvement are going to be described.

The beginning of the Malian Crisis.

Due to its colonial heritage and due to its history of interventionism, France has always had an important role on the world stage and especially in Africa.[156]

And the role of France was especially relevant in Sahel, but a more progressive and less interventionist approach was starting to get prominence in the Hexagone foreign policy approach that also was willing to share activism with and within international frameworks. This tendency manifested itself in 2012 -before the Malian crisis- with the new presidency of François Hollande who was promoting an agenda aimed at withdrawing forces from the African

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[153] Olsen, G.R. When '"limited statehood' becomes an asset. Fighting terrorism, migration and the consequences of 'Western' economic and military support to the Sahel. *Acta Polit* (2022). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-022-00278-z

[154] https://www.politico.eu/article/mali-france-emmanuel-macron-burkina-faso/

[155] E. Baldaro & L. Raineri. *Jihad in Africa: Terrorismo e Controterrorismo nel Sahel*. 2022. Il Mulino. Bologna

[156] S. Gregory. 2000. *The French Military in Africa: Past and Present.* African Affairs , Jul., 2000, Vol. 99, No. 396. pp. 435-448 Oxford Journals. Oxford University Press.

continent, and fostered instead empowerment of international frameworks, especially European ones, to continue fighting against terrorism and carry-on efforts to help the Sahelian states to win against extreme fragility. [157]

As a matter of fact, the EU was seemingly building up a system that should have enabled the union to successfully tackle these kinds of global challenges. These very challenges were identified in 2003 with the *European Security Strategy* (ESS) and aimed to achieve a secure Europe.

Of the five possible threats to the Union – terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure and organized crime- three of them were identifiable in the Sahel.

Moreover, one of the key issues described in the ESS was to "Building Security in Our Neighborhood":

"Neighbours who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organised crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe… Our task is to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations."[158]

At the beginning of the Malian crisis in 2012, France became more and more vocal in requiring the EU to concretize European missions in order to help Bamako and the ECOWAS in the effort against the heavily armed groups that were aiming to subvert state authority.

The former Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian was explicitly clear to the European allies that Mali represented a crucial ground to defend to maintain EU security.[159]

At the same time, at the beginning of the crisis, the Hollande administration pursued efforts to ensure African ownership of security in the region, but at the same time presented France as a perfect peace mediator.

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[157] B. Erforth. 2020. *Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the Sahel*, Journal of Strategic Studies, 43:4, 560-582, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2020.1733986

[158] Council of the European Union. 2003. *European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in A Better World*. pg 35. Brussels.

[159] Jean-Yves Le Drian, 'Entretien du Ministre de la Défense, Monsieur Jean-Yves Le Drian, Avec Le Quotidien El Pais', Press release (19 October 2012)

And thanks to French activism in the UN security council, resolution 2056, 2071 and 2085 provided the normative framework on which an African led peacekeeping mission would have been deployed in Mali; AFISMA.[160]

Nonetheless the evolution on the ground required the intervention of an actor that was able to stop the advance of insurgent forces and also push them back to the North. This was not possible for the Malian armed forces alone, which were losing ground and what remained of the support of the northern population.[161]

The collapse of the Malian state institution was then accelerated by an army mutiny. On 22 March 2012 a putschist group took control of different state institutions and led by captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, toppled down president Amadou Toumani Touré and suspended the constitution.[162]

This event did not meet the will of the international community, which pressured the putschist to restore the constitutional democratic order. At this point, under the pressure of the ECOWAS, Dioncounda Traoré was put as the head of the transitional government that would have led the country to new elections at the end of the insurgency.[163] Meanwhile, the latter was raging in the Northern region of the country.

In a short amount of time from its beginning, the rebellion led by the MNLA was able to conquer two thirds of the Malian territory, and on the 6th of April 2012 the independence of the Azawad was declared unilaterally by the MNLA. But the secessionist aspirations of the Tuaregs were quickly pushed aside by their former allies. As a matter of fact, AQMI, MUJAO and Ansar al-Dine were able to successfully double-cross the MNLA and back stab the movement. In fall 2012 the Jihadist took control over the "freed" territory, confining the Tuaregs to more desert and peripheral areas. [164]

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[160] B. Erforth. 2020. *Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the Sahel*, Journal of Strategic Studies, 43:4, 560-582, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2020.1733986

[161] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino.

[162] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2012/3/22/mali-mutiny-topples-president-toure

[163] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2012/4/7/mali-junta-says-power-transfer-within-days

[164] Camillo Casola. 2022. *Sahel conflitti, migrazione e instabilità a sud del Sahara.* Bologna: il Mulino.

"Operation Serval"

The incapability of the Malian army to contrast the rebellion and the desegregation of its state authority, rendered the French intervention a necessity for Paris. In fact, France had many strategic interests in the region, especially economic and security related that it needed to safeguard.

Economically speaking the region represents for France an important reserve of energy resources. The nearby Nigerien uranium mines in Akoka and Arlit. The Nigerien uranium provides 20 percent of the necessary fuel for French nuclear energy production which alone amount to 75 percent of the nation's energy needs.[165] The French were concerned that the uncontrolled insurgency in Mali could render it impossible to use this asset. especially because the area in which this mine is located is very close to the North of Mali, and it was already subject to attacks by the Jihadist.[166] And here more than ever, the need to not allow the creations of terrorist sanctuaries in the regions was of paramount relevance.

Most importantly, the strategic and security interest for France in the region was linked to the necessity to prevent the creation of jihadist safe sanctuaries, and if during the precedent years AQIM and its allies already attacked the French embassy in Mali and kidnapped French[167] citizens for ransom[168]The capacity of these groups to properly control an area nearly as big as two times the territorial extension of Germany, marked a significant change of pace of the threat represented by the Islamist. This, as it has been pointed out by Boeke and Schuurman, represented a fundamental incentive for the French to "break AQMI's back" when they got the chance.[169]

The events that brought France to deploy troops and start operation Serval, were backed by the consciousness that the AFISMA mission could have been deployed too late and could have been ineffective against a push by the jihadist. Moreover, the French intelligence confirmed that the

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[165] Jean-Michel Bezat. 2010. *Areva Et La Bataille Mondiale Pour L'uranium.* Le Monde.

[166]https://www.france24.com/en/20130527-inside-help-behind-niger-terror-attack-uranium-arlit-mine-islamists-al-qaeda
[167] https://www.ctvnews.ca/mali-french-embassy-attack-was-isolated-incident-1.593528

[168] https://www.france24.com/en/20121121-french-citizen-kidnapped-mali-mauritania-

[169] S.Boeke & B.Schuurman. 2015. *Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali*, 2013–2014, Journal of Strategic Studies, 38:6, 801-825, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2015.1045494

jihadist forces were preparing to attack the city of Sévaré, home to an airport that would have been essential to AFISMA deployment. [170]

Between the 9 and 10 of January 2013 the jihadists attacked the city of Konna some 60 km from the strategic Sévaré, catalyzing the international consensus for an extra African intervention, and led to an explicit request by the Malian transitory government of help to the French.[171]

The operation would have been implemented following four clear objectives; first and foremost to stop the Jihadist advance to the south, prevent these groups from further endanger the Malian stability, protect the French and European citizens in Mali, and to restore Malian territorial integrity.[172]

The will of Hollande was to gain back control of the most important cities in the north as quickly as possible, and together with the four manifest objectives this well reflected and underlined the political and strategic interests that France wanted to preserve in the region. Moreover, the mission gained cross-party support in the French parliament, that together with

the international abiding and the formal Malian request, meant that "France was mastering, clear goals, contingency planning, a robust executive and international diplomatic support"[173]. Operation Serval can be divided in 3 major phases: "stopping the jihadist advance, reconquering the north and clearing the terrorist sanctuaries"[174].

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[170] Ibid.

[171]https://www.france24.com/en/20130111-mali-asks-france-military-help-islamists-seize-konna-militants

[172] M.Shurkin. 2014. *France's War in Mali: Lessons for an Expeditionary Army.* Rand Corporation. Santa Monica, California.

[173] S.Boeke & B.Schuurman. 2015. *Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali*, 2013–2014, Journal of Strategic Studies, 38:6, 801-825, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2015.1045494
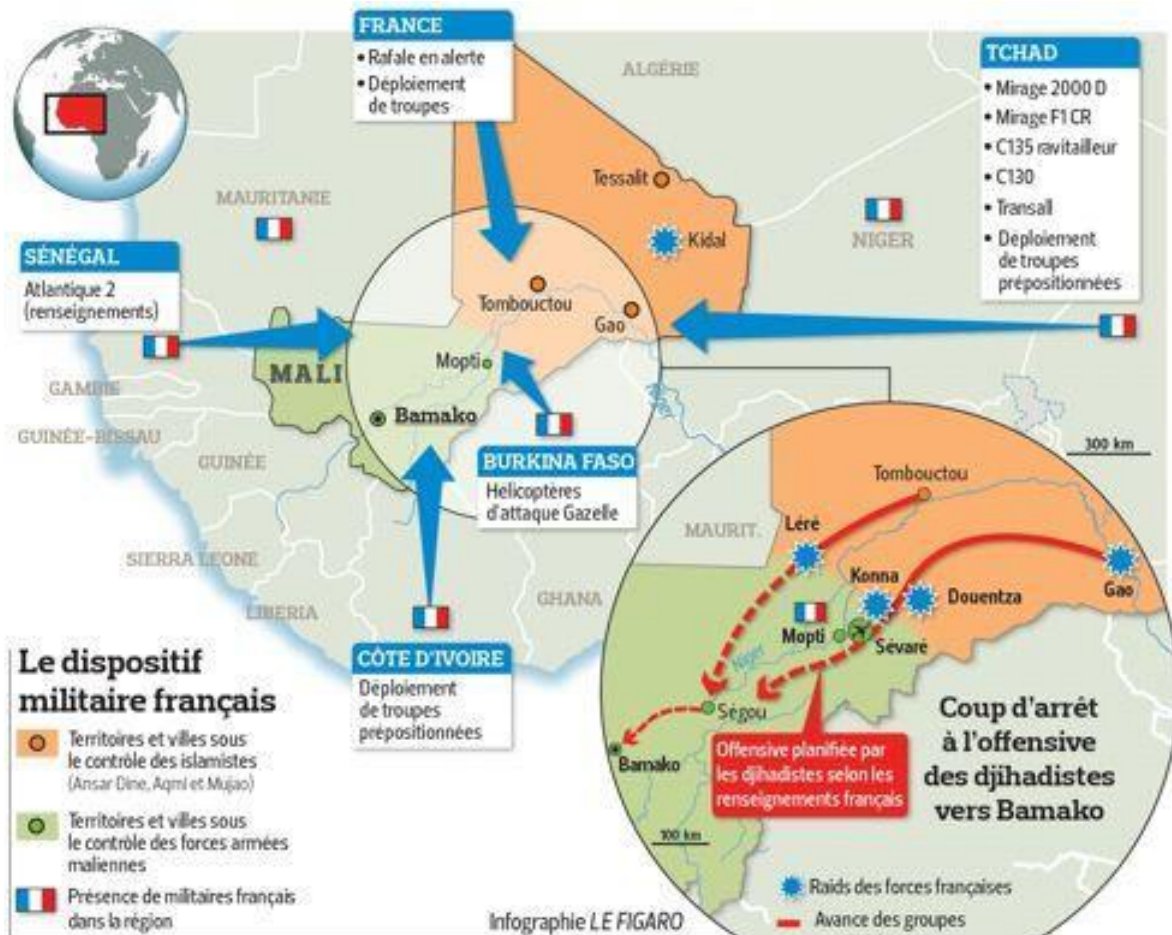
[174] Ibid

Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1 The French Military presence in the neighboring area.

Even though the Malian army had been vital in the first phase, especially by protecting the southern cities form the jihadist push, the bulk of the burden to achieve completion of the second and third phases was taken by the French, backed by Chadian and Malian units.[175]

The first decisive strategic advantage for the French was the fact that they were already present in Africa especially in Burkina Faso and Niger, and operation Epervier had seen French troops present in Chad since 1986[176]. But also troops from Ivory Coast and Senegal assisted the Malian army to halt the jihadist offensive.

Another strategic advantage that marked the quick deployment of troops from France was also the existence of the Guépard alert system. The Guépard is a quick reaction force that provides for an entire brigade to be on alert for six months in order to quickly tackle any kind of threat and capable of being deployed even in far lands. On 13 January, this force was represented by

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[175]http://rpdefense.over-blog.com/article-mali-les-dangers-de-l-operation-serval-114367169.html

[176]http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2194&dat=19860218&id=XDg0AAAAIBAJ&sjid=efUIAAAAIBAJ&pg=1356,3416676

General Barerra's 3rd Mechanized Brigade and was quickly mobilized. When this force joined the special forces on the battlefield the number of French troops peaked at 5000 units present on the ground.

On the 18th of January the second phase of regaining control of the country began. The plan was to take back control of the major cities in the north, starting with the city of Gao on the night of 25 January, where French special forces were able to gain control of the city's runway, while a column of armored vehicles reached the city by road.[177]

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[177] https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/27/world/africa/france-mali-intervention.html

[178] https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/french-operations-mali-look-back

In a similar guise 280 foreign legion paratroopers were dropped near Timbuktu's airport and took control over the structure, they were shortly met by a column of vehicles and engineers that were needed to repair the runway that was damaged by AQMI.[179]

The city of Kidal was taken shortly after with the help of Chadian troops and also with the collaboration of Tuareg fighters allied with the French - This very alliance, as it is later explained, represents a point of contrast between the Malian authority and the French diplomacy.

But the Jihadist fighters would not surrender so easily, and as a matter of fact MUJAO was able to mix its mujahidin within the local population, in many freed cities, and carry-on attacks to government buildings, but also on French and Malian troops.[180]

Nonetheless, the operation entered in the third phase and between February and April the hunt to jihadist in order to push them out of their safe sanctuaries began. Here the Chadian Army and the French special forces were able to take up the fight against AQMI fighters that were cornered in the Ametettai valley in the mountain range of the Adrar des Ifoghas. The fight was conducted cave by cave and supported by airstrikes.

Most notably in this phase, thanks to an air strike the French were able to kill one of the most important commanders for the Jihad in Sahel, Abdelhamid Abou Zeid. [181]

The effectiveness of operation Serval was enabled by different factors: first of all, the French had an obvious air superiority that they were able to exploit to win over the jihadist on the ground. Secondly logistics proved to be an element of success especially if we consider that Paris was able to transport 19.000 tons of equipment and material to Mali in just five weeks, which is a remarkable thing if we consider that Mali is a desert surrounded country. The daily logistics required 10 tons of ammunition, 45.000 liters of water, and more than 200.000 liters

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[179] S.Boeke & B.Schuurman. 2015. *Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali*, 2013–2014, Journal of Strategic Studies, 38:6, 801-825, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2015.10454944

[180] https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Gao%2C+MUJAO&sa.x=0&sa.y=0

[181] https://www.france24.com/en/20140111-france-mali-military-intervention-operation-serval-anniversary-timeline

of kerosene to conduct air operations.[182] But also the limited media coverage of the operation gave France more freedom to maneuver, moreover the limited access to the battle grounds – that were strictly controlled by the French and the Malian armies- gave to the war the appellative of "war without image" because of the lack of video witnesses of collateral damages. The absence of media coverage and images of the war gave the French Government an important advantage at political level especially at home. This absence curbed the usually very vocal French public opinion and allowed the armed forces to act without minding what the population might have thought at home. [183]

At the end of March operation Serval seemed to have been successful; the jihadists were generally tactically defeated, and the control of the country slowly returned under Bamako's rule. The operation can be defined as a real strategic success, and it had effectively carried out its three phases and seemingly accomplished its four objectives. At this point the most important question that needs to be asked is whether or not Serval contributed to long term stability to Mali and the Sahel.

On the pros side one must acknowledge that the French intervention was of paramount importance to enable the deployment of UN peacekeeping mission – initially AFISMA and then MINUSMA- [184]and to renew international community interest in the area.

Furthermore, the apparent renewed stability allowed the elections to be run in summer with a first and second turns, even though in a particular context, and in the end the presidential elections were won by Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.

But the overall situation was not completely returned to normality, and this is clear by the different context in which the National Assembly elections were held.

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[182] S.Boeke & B.Schuurman. 2015. *Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali*, 2013–2014, Journal of Strategic Studies, 38:6, 801-825, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2015.1045494

[183] https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/actualites/article/la-guerre-au-mali-une-guerre-sans-images_14093.html

[184] "Bamako, 01 July 2013*:* In accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2100 (April 2013), the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) today transferred its authority to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), in a colourful ceremony in Bamako, Mali." https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/afisma-transfers-its-authority-to-minusma#

Between the end of summer and the beginning of fall the situation of upsurging violence in the north curbed the affluence to the ballots. [185]

The increasing number of terrorist attacks in Mali in this period -as it is also reported in the work of Yvan Guichaoua *"The Bitter Harvest of French Interventionism in the Sahel"*-[186] bring up different needed considerations; firstly that elections do not ensure long term stability; and second, that the war was not over but it rather changed in nature, from a strategic reconquest – more kinetic and traditional warfare, where the superior French capabilities were no match for the jihadist fighters - to a asymmetric warfare, where terrorist attacks, guerrillas and local insurgencies were mixing into a new dimension that was also becoming increasingly cross-border.

An unintended consequence of operation Serval was also caused by the collaboration of the French – in need of support from locals who were able to navigate the region- with the Tuaregs fighters of the MNLA. These fighters were looking forward to gaining revenge over their former jihadist allies, but the collaboration between them and Paris was not gladly welcomed by Bamako, who carried on considering them as mere rebels.[187]

Nonetheless, the initial victory on the field and the new presidency represented a chance to reconcile the former MNLA militants and Bamako's government.[188] On this basis started the long process of reconciliation that led to the Algieri agreements of 2015.[189]

In the end Serval was to be considered a partial success, especially if we consider it narrow initial strategic objectives. But in the end failed to bring an end to the overall instability in the region and did not address the root causes of conflict that lies on the many local grievances allegedly caused by the structural problems within the Malian state apparatus. According to Boeke and Schuurman: "At most, operation 'Serval' has diminished what was a growing threat to the region and offered a window of opportunity to work on the complex political, social, ethnic and economic issues that continue to plague Mali. From this perspective, …'Serval'

[185] https://www.e-ir.info/2013/12/22/mali-2013-a-year-of-elections-and-further-challenges/

[186] Y. Guichaoua. 2020. *The bitter harvest of French interventionism in the Sahel*. International Affairs. Vol.96, Issue 4. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa094

[187] S.Boeke & B.Schuurman. 2015. *Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali*, 2013–2014, Journal of Strategic Studies, 38:6, 801-825, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2015.1045494

[188] https://www.e-ir.info/2013/12/22/mali-2013-a-year-of-elections-and-further-challenges/

[189] https://www.cartercenter.org/peace/conflict_resolution/mali-io.html

provided a stop-gap solution and restored Mali to the status quo ante before the Tuareg rebellion and coup d'état. What it did not do, however, was address any of the causes that led to both."[190]

Post Serval Sahel and the need for a different engagement: From Barkhane to Takuba.

If Operation Serval represented a relative success, since the French army was fighting the high-pace maneuver war for which it was built for, the later evolution of the context required a change in the way the Sahelian crisis was being handled.

The upsurging number of terrorist attacks signaled the new type of war that France was due to face and marked the new focus of the future mission, fighting the jihadist terrorism in the Sahel. But this new objective was intrinsically less well defined, both strategically and politically if compared to Serval, and on contrary to the multidimensional approach that the French were pursuing just a few years back, it had a strong military focus.[191] Another change that marked an important challenge is the area of action of Barkhane; comprising Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad, the new mission saw the unification of Serval and operation Epervier, a French mission active since 1986 and located in Chad.

France was now embarked in an effort that could be defined as excessively optimistic, its outcome extremely open-ended and of which the objectives were definable as vague when compared to former operations.[192]

The idea was that, in order to allow the Sahelian states to reach stability and "fill" those fragility gaps afflicting the region, the most valuable contribution that France and the EU could give was to actively fight terrorist militias and help Sahelian armed forces to reach the necessary expertise in order to carry-on the war on terror on their own. [193]

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[190] S.Boeke & B.Schuurman. 2015. *Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali*, 2013–2014, Journal of Strategic Studies, 38:6, 801-825, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2015.1045494

[191] Denis M. Tull.2021. *Operation Barkhane and the Future of Intervention in the Sahel The Shape of Things to Come*. Stiftung Wissenshaft und Politic. German Institute for International and Security affairs. Berlin.
[192] Ibid.

[193] Ibid.

Operation Barkhane military bases in the Sahel
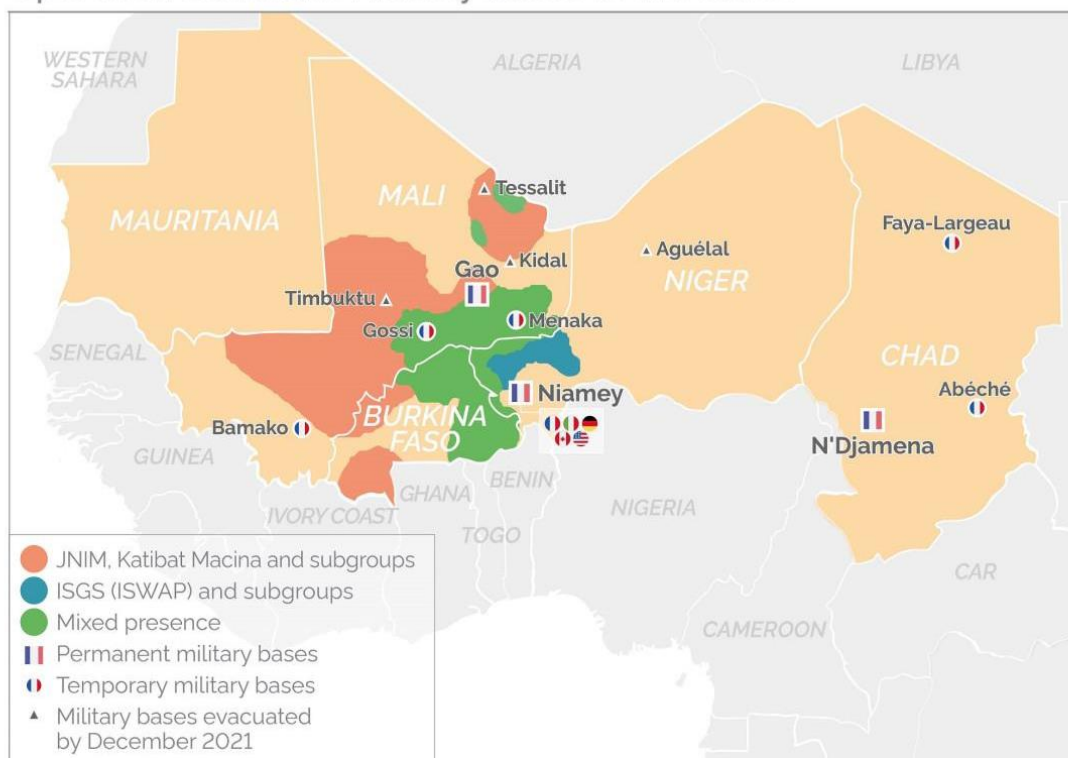
Sources: ACLED; Ministry of Armed Forces (France); France 24

ISPI

From its beginning, Barkhane saw the French troops involved in fighting the different jihadist groups in Mauritania, Mali, and Niger, and later was involved in the fight against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region. The initial deployment of 3.000 troops, had to nearly double this initial figure, and reached quote 5.500 in 2022[195] backed by seven fighter jets, three-armed Reaper drones and twenty-two helicopters.[196]

These forces were – arguably – over-stretched all over the Sahelian territory, and were distributed in in different permanent and temporary bases in; "Atar in Mauritania, Gao and Tessalit in Mali, Niamey in Niger, and also Abéché, Faya-Largeau, and N'Djaména in Chad."[197] This mission involved so little forces spread on this large portion of territory and had a focus that was at the same time narrow, as too focused on security, and vague, as fighting terrorism.

[194] https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/end-barkhane-mali-whats-next-sahel-33685

[195] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63575602

[196] M. Shurkin.2020. *France War in The Sahel and the Evolution of Counter-Insurgency Doctrine*. Texas National Security Review:Vol. 4Issue 1.

[197] M. Shurkin. 2017. *Mali's Next Battle: Improving counter terrorism Capabilities.* RAND Corporation. Santa Monica.

French military expert Michel Goya defined the mission as "minimal" and argued that much more would have been necessary to win the war against terrorism and to tackle the root causes of instability in the region.[198]

When challenged by Shurkin about French ambition in this area and the role of Barkhane in it, a French official answered that the operation contributed to French security and at least, "was better than doing nothing".[199] But if French officers could claim that the operation was contributing to French security, it is not possible to say the same for the security against violent episodes in Sahel.

According to Raleigh et al. the initial upsurge of 2014 was just the beginning of a worse degradation of the security in the region of the three frontiers.

As it is possible to see from the charts reported in their paper, the number of violent events did not decrease after the deployment of Barkhane, but instead saw a surging of events, with a remarkable increase of violence in Burkina Faso during the more recent years.[200]
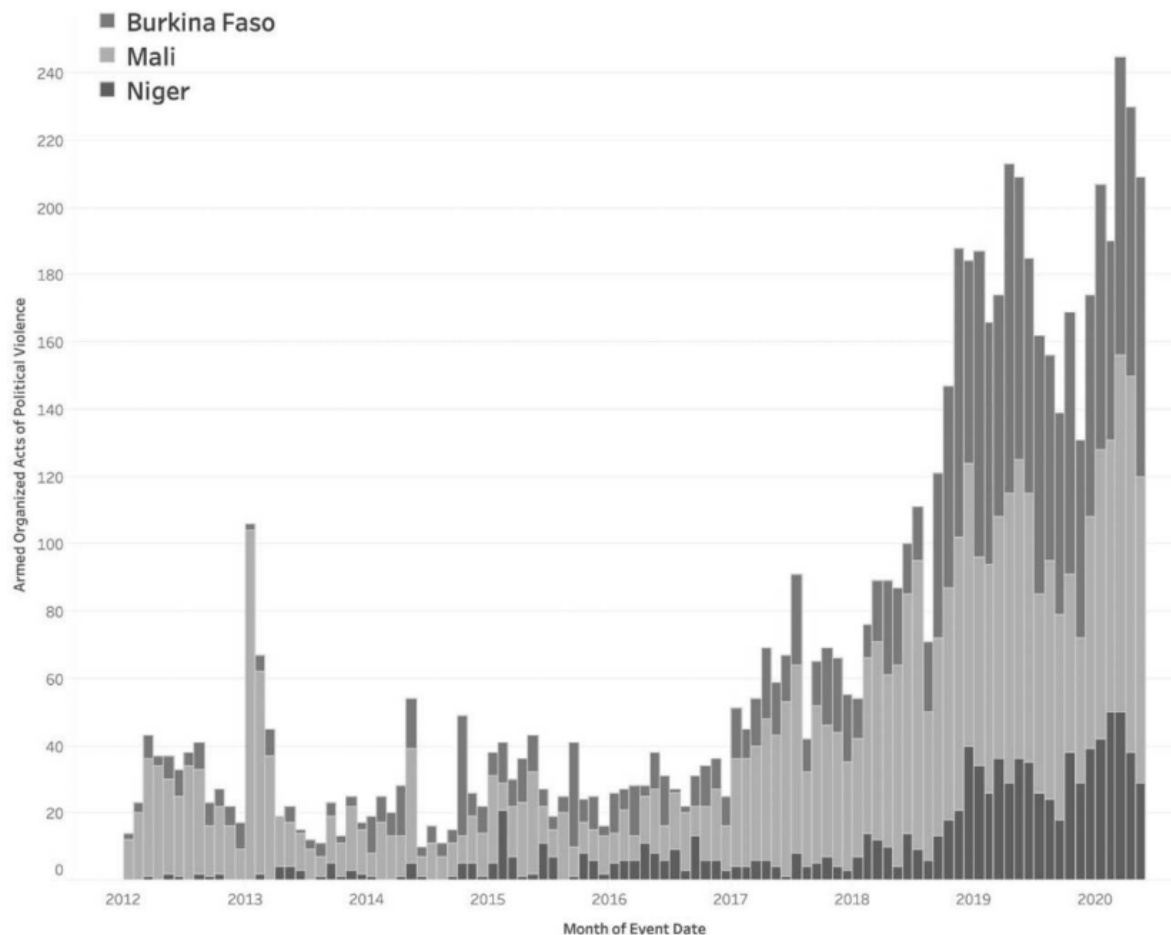
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[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid.

[200] C. Raleigh. 2020. *The Sahel Crisis Since 2012*. African Affairs, 120/478, 123–143. Oxford University Pess.

This escalation of violence in the region happened in face of the many missions and framework built to develop security in the area, especially by turning the direct ownership of sed security to the country's theater of sed violence.

As a matter of fact, the efforts against the many security issues present in Sahel did not pass just through Barkhane and the direct French involvement, but also through many other international frameworks.

Most notably, MINUSMA, a UN mission defined as a stabilization *mission* or *hard peacekeeping mission.* But also, the efforts of the EU missions such as EUTM Mali and the two EUCAP Sahel missions, aimed at training local forces and furnishing them the necessary means to fight against terrorism. Moreover in 2014 the five countries involved in Barkhane came together in a regional security body, the Sahel G5. This new collaboration became in a short

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[201] Ibid.

amount of time the perfect recipient for European donors, eager to find a framework to work with in order to foster security and stability in the area. [202]

Later on, in 2017 the Sahel G5 started a new cooperation called "G5 Sahel Joint force" that was again aimed at contrasting terrorism at regional level. Composed of roughly 5000 men divided in seven battalions active on the borders between Mali and Mauritania, the Liptako-Gourma, and the border between Niger and Chad. The aim of the coalition is to contrast the trans-border smuggling activities and the movement of terrorists between the countries of the area.[203]

Nonetheless, as it has already been argued, the security situation carried on deteriorating and violence spread across the three-frontier region.

France had a central role in the conundrum of foreign interventions, rise of violence and attempts of building up frameworks aimed a tackling terrorism; but even though the "Hexagone" had been protagonist and strong supporter of the creation of all the mechanism above mentioned, its behavior remained ambivalent *vis a vis* the different actors on the Sahelian territory. An example is the behavior that the French held in Mali, where on the one side seemed to back Bamako, at other time seemed to be more concerned with the Algiers Peace Process, and sometimes seems to get closer to local armed factions, and most importantly, flirts with the former components of the MNLA and other local proxies; all of this did not help in maintaining felicitous bilateral relations with the Malian government that felt rather betrayed.[204]

Moreover, a growing anti French sentiment spread all across the Sahelian countries, with the remarkable presence of protests against the presence of France because of its alleged "post-colonial" involvement in the local politics and complacency towards jihadist terrorism.[205]

At the same time, the French got more and more frustrated with the scarcity of military progress and mission contribution by the Malian army and had to step up its participation in direct fighting. [206]

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[202] Y. Guichaoua. 2020. *The bitter harvest of French interventionism in the Sahel*.

International Affairs. Vol.96, Issue 4. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa094

[203] C. Casola. 2019. *G5Sahel: The Joint Struggle for Regional Stability*. ISPI Online.

 https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/g5-sahel-joint-struggle-regional-stability-23858

[204] M. Shurkin.2020. *France War in The Sahel and the Evolution of Counter-Insurgency Doctrine*. Texas National Security Review:Vol. 4Issue 1.
[205] https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-50445482

[206]M. Shurkin.2020. *France War in The Sahel and the Evolution of Counter-Insurgency Doctrine*. Texas National Security Review:Vol. 4Issue 1.

On top of this there were many concerns on French part on how this rising anti French sentiment was handled by the Sahelian governments, especially due to the fact that the behavior of the latter was perceived by France as ambivalent and condescending.

As it was remarked by the French minister of defense, Florence Parly, French institutions needed a clear statement by the Sahelian government over the French presence in the area.[207]

At this point the Pau summit of 13 January 2020 was essential for President Macron to make the Sahelian head of states declare the centrality of the French presence in Sahel as a key partner in the fight against terrorism. In its speech he clearly identified the two-paramount reason of the French presence, and the ultimate end of Barkhane; first, to fight jihadist terrorism and second to help the Sahelian states to have their sovereignty and control of their territory back. In doing so Macron pointed out a double duty; on one side the Sahel G5 countries were required to do something to control the spreading anti-French sentiment in their countries; and on the other hand to the European partners to get more involved in the fight against jihadist terrorism.[208]

The Pau summit concluded with the birth of the *International Coalition for the Sahel* that renewed the effort in the area and the partnership of the Sahelians with France. The new coalition was intended to work for a broader range of objectives not just to the strict security enforcement, even though security remained a central and dominant theme.

The coalition was built to act on four complementary pillars; first to fight armed terrorist groups, and with this remarked the centrality of security; second to build the capacity of the armed forces in the region; third, Supporting the return of the State and administrations in the territory; improving access to basic services; fourth, assisting development, aimed at addressing root causes of "underdevelopment in the region such as, unemployment, poverty, education, healthcare and infrastructures".[209]

Concerning the first pillar the new epicenter of the Sahelian crisis was represented by the Liptako-Gourma region, where the Jihadist groups, now enriched by the presence of the *Islamic State in the Greater Sahara* were now to be tackled. [210]

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[207]https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/sahel-la-francia-rinnova-limpegno-contro-il-terrorismo-24832

[208] Ibid.

[209]https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/africa/the-international-coalition-for-the-sahel/

[210] Ibid.

France's European partners welcomed the request to get more involved in the region in order to grant security for Europe, and a new tool to fight terrorism was put in place; Task Force Takuba. Takuba, meaning "saber" in Tuareg, is a task force composed at large by special forces coming from eleven different European countries; it began deployment in July 2020 and was meant to reach full operational capability in early 2021. [211]

This new task force represented an interesting framework that allowed more than 800 soldiers, coming from France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia and more, to take part to a new kind of initiative that is not directly connected to the UN nor the EU, but instead is entirely part of Barkhane and under French leadership.[212]

To fight the different terrorist groups in the region of Liptako-Gourma, Takuba was initially deployed in three bases in Mali, in Gao, Ansogo and Méneka, and followed the so called 3A strategy, comprising the Accompany, Advise and Assist of the Malian Army in action.

Takuba did not represent an entirely new initiative, but it has been designed as a reshaping of the effort in the region and an attempt to rebuild trust by persevering two objectives.

The first is to carry-on counter terrorism by pursuing a twofold approach, where on one side, smaller and more targeted operations, and on the other the task force is going to fill the manifest capacity gaps within the Malian army.[213]

The second is, yet again, to work on training and capacity building; the French officers lamented on several occasions how the Malian army lacked the required discipline and training in order to properly fight, and this caused continuous instability. [214]

Even though there was already the EU Training Mission tackling this problem, it is common opinion, within the French General official's circles, that the distance of the European mission from the battle fields did not allow to properly address the problem.[215]

Even if new initiatives such as the international coalition for the Sahel and Task Force Takuba had been put in place, the overall situation was due to change under the political point of view.

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[211] https://spectator.clingendael.org/nl/publicatie/takuba-new-coalition-sahel

[212] https://archives.defense.gouv.fr/operations/afrique/bande-sahelo-saharienne/operation-barkhane/dossier-de-reference/operation-barkhane.html

[213] https://spectator.clingendael.org/nl/publicatie/takuba-new-coalition-sahel

[214] Ibid.

[215] https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/01/22/france-reinforce-barkhane-takuba-lecointre/

The anti-French sentiment, linked to the manifest incapability of the said initiatives to put an end to the threat of terrorism in the area, led to disintegration of the diplomatic relationship between the France and the Malian government.
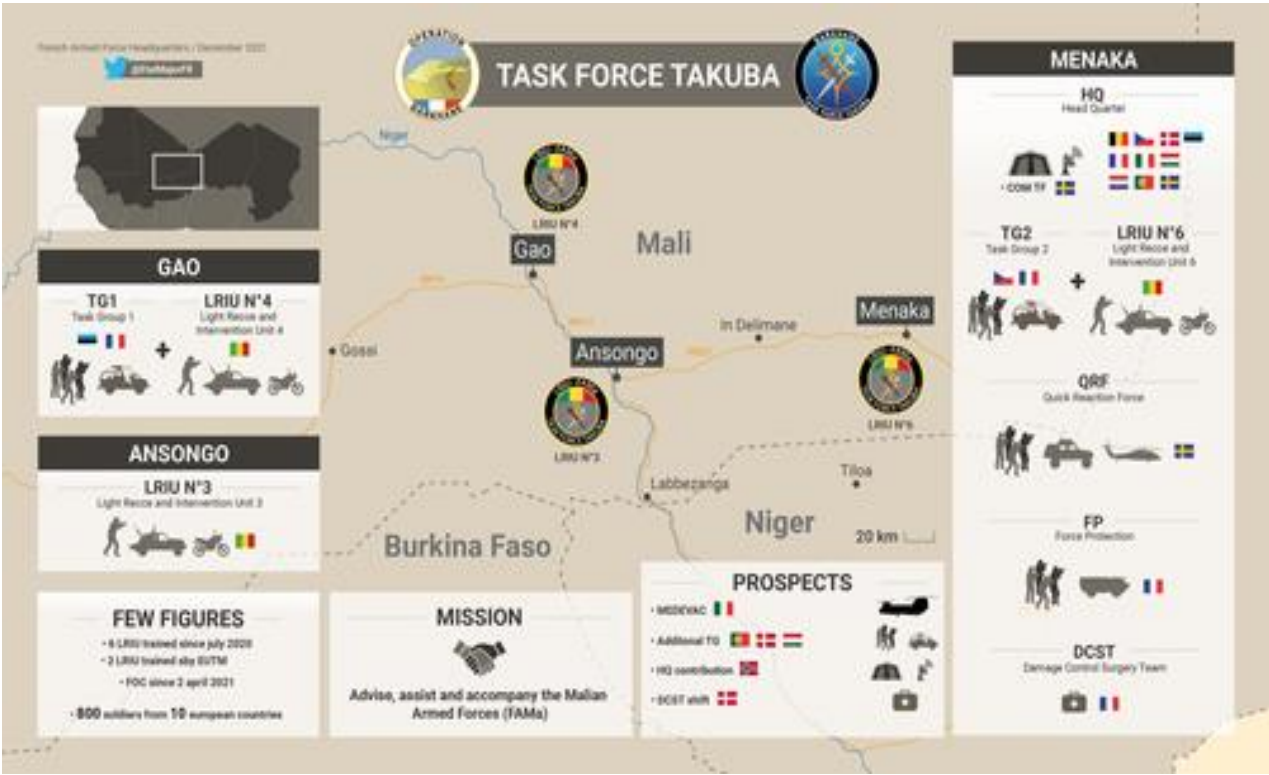
Troops deployment "Task Force Takuba".

France Failure in Mali.

On 17 February 2022, the French President Emanuel Macron announced the withdrawal of Barkhane's troops from Mali, and to transfer all forces and vehicles to Niger. Also, the European Task Force Takuba, being part of Barkhane and led by the French, has been transferred to Niger. The already remarked tension between the Malian and French government culminated with an exchange of insults and the expulsion of the French ambassador from Bamako.[216]

Looking back to the almost 10 years of French deployment in the region and particularly in Mali, one must ask what accounts for this retreat and, as matter of fact, this failure?

As it has been argued in this elaborate, the Sahel is home to many local dynamics that in many cases tend to evolve in violent conflicts, this together with the complicated political system, largely corrupted and accustomed to the patronage dynamics. A scarce understanding of these contextual features, together with the jihadist threat in the region as primarily terrorist and not

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[216] https://www.voanews.com/a/mali-orders-expulsion-of-french-ambassador-/6420577.html

as a sociologically complex insurgency, are key features to look at to understand the failure of the French involvement in the region. [217]

Politically speaking, France mistakes were linked to the obstacles posed by the Hexagone to negotiation efforts between the involved actors, exacerbated by the willingness to operatively collaborate with groups, such as the Tuaregs of the MNLA, that undermines Bamako's government and deepen ethnic cleavages.[218]

Another problem is the entirely security and military centric approach undertaken by the French toward the Sahelian Issues, while at the same time leaving the local government to address the underlying drivers of insurgency and conflict.[219]

The understanding of the threat as a pure terrorist menace, and not as an insurgency led by jihadist groups that were able to appropriate the various ethical and local grievances, helped the Malian ruling classes to secure their position, behind the barricade of the fight against terrorism. In this sense Barkhane even helped to worsen the problem rather than to solve it. [220]

Operationally speaking the French made two mistakes that weakened their own political foundation and relation with Bamako.

The first one has its roots back at the first French involvement in Mali in 2013, when they took the decision to ally with the Tuaregs of the MNLA.[221]

It is important to understand that the MNLA is seen by the Malian government as a terrorist organization as much as the Jihadist groups that Barkhane aimed at annihilating. Following this assumption, it is safe to say that in the eyes of Bamako, the French were collaborating with a dangerous terrorist organization. [222]

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[217] https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/why-france-failed-in-mali/

[218] Ibid.

[219] https://tnsr.org/2020/11/frances-war-in-the-sahel-and-the-evolution-of-counter-insurgency-doctrine/

[220] https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/why-france-failed-in-mali/

[221] S.Boeke & B.Schuurman. 2015. *Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali*, 2013–2014, Journal of Strategic Studies, 38:6, 801-825, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2015.1045494

[222] https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/why-france-failed-in-mali/

Moreover, the French chose to collaborate with the Tuaregs, and Daoussahak militias to fight against the Jihadist, but these militias committed atrocities against the Peul, which were stigmatized by the Tuaregs as Jihadist.[223]

The rise of the anti-French sentiment is to be reconducted to all this decision took by the "Elysée", that on one side backed the established but frauded political system, and on the other decided to ally with – as a matter of facts- violent militias that were one of the primary causes of the Malian crisis of 2012.[224]

The political context in Mali then precipitated, and two coups d'état were perpetrated in August 2020 and May 2021; both coups were conducted under the leadership of Colonel Assimi Goïta, who now holds the title of president at interim of the transition.[225]

On Wednesday 9 November 2022 President macron officially declared the end of operation Barkhane in Mali, and the last French soldier left the country and transferred to Niger on the 15 August. After almost ten years of activities and nearly US$ 1.2 billion spent per year, the French left Mali with what can only be described as a "mission failed".[226]

The Italian involvement in Sahel.

The Sahel entered into Italian foreign policy radar with the publication of the 2015 *White Paper for International Security and Defence* published under Minister Roberta Pinotti, in which the area was defined geographically and then described as a:

"zone of limited economic development… were the absence of strong state institutions capable of safeguarding national security, might render possible the projection of this instability towards the Mediterranean area, especially in terms of mass migrations, smuggling and … Islamic terrorism…. The intervention of the international community might… involve Italy in humanitarian missions or to contribute to stability".[227]

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[223] https://africacenter.org/spotlight/understanding-fulani-perspectives-sahel-crisis/

[224] https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/why-france-failed-in-mali/

[225] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57290761

[226] https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/11/09/after-ten-years-france-to-end-military-operation-barkhane-in-sahel_6003575_4.html

[227] Ministero Della Difesa. 2015. *Libro Bianco della difesa 2015*. Roma.

As it is possible to understand from the white book, the Sahel is an area of interest for Italian security, and in 2015 it was already palpable the intention to turn towards what has always been understood as Italy's back yard, the Mediterranean.

According to Felsen, Italian foreign policy is to be considered one of the "three circles". [228] The three circles refer to the three areas of interest and alliances of Italy, i.e. the Atlantic, Europe and the Mediterranean. This latter circle is to be considered the most relevant in order to understand the recent turning to Africa of Italy's international relations. And if in the past decades the Italian involvement in the African continent was rather left to the action of non-state actors, such as missionaries and NGOs, this has rather changed since the beginning of the 2010s. This change was brought by two main events; the first is the 2008 financial crisis, which pushed the Italian's government to establish new diplomatic and economic relations with emerging markets. But more remarkably the *Arab Spring* represented a real turn of events that brought destabilization in North Africa, an area of extreme interest for the Italians. So, for this reason the Three circles were enlarged to reach the dimension of "Three circles and half", an area most commonly referred to as the Enlarged Mediterranean. [229]

The two major manifest security issues that concerned Italy and made this shift necessary were the impressing flow of migrants of the mid 2010s, that peaked in 2015, and the rising of terrorist attacks in the same decade.[230]

As it has been argued by Coticchia and Ceccorulli, the former has been taking the lead as a driver of interventionism and the use of the military is conceived as the proper tool to address instability and irregular migration.[231] In this guise Italy took part in the different frameworks that were activated in the region by the UN and the EU. Concerning the UN Italy is actively

[228] D. Felsen.2018. *Italian foreign policy under the Gentiloni government: Do the 'three circles' hold in 2017?*. Contemporary Italian Politics, vol. 10, no. 4.

[229] C. Casola & E. Baldaro. 2021. *Italy and The Sahel: A New National Projection Towards a Greater Mediterranean.* ISPI Policy Brief. ISPI. Milano.

[230] Ibid.

[231] Michela Ceccorulli & Fabrizio Coticchia (2020) 'I'll take two.' Migration, terrorism, and the Italian military engagement in Niger and Libya, Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 25:2, 174-196, DOI: 10.1080/1354571X.2020.1723291

part of MINUSMA, to which it contributes with 7 troops, stationed in the headquarters in Bamako.[232]

Under the umbrella of the EU, Italy is actively participating in EUCAP Sahel Mali, the mission that contributes to the development of expertise of Malian security forces, Police and Gendaremerié, receiving the contribution of 16 Italian militaries.[233]

The willingness to collaborate with the Sahelian countries grown even more during the Draghi government with the announcement of the opening new embassies in 2021; as it was announced by the minister of foreign affairs Luigi Di Maio, the new embassies were going to be opened in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.[234]

Nonetheless, Italy went even a step forward, deciding to take direct action in the direction of the two major causes of concern for its security in the Sahel, namely the illegal migration and the jihadist terrorism, where the former has been identified in the literature as the strongest driver for the Italian involvement in the area.

In January 2018 it was approved in the Italian parliament as a new military operation in Niger, as an extension of an already present operation in Libya. this mission represented an interesting novelty in the Italian defense and security policy, especially due to the fact that this mission is entirely bilateral and, in a country, not traditionally tied to the Italian sphere of intervention.[235]

The new mission, that is still operative at the date of writing, denominated M.I.S.I.N. have one predominant aim, the defeat of human smuggling in Niger, which is understood as a key crossing area of the Central Mediterranean Root. Following the analysis reported by Coticchia and Ceccorulli in their paper of the "Scheda 2 2018" it is clear that migration is the core interest of the mission while terrorism is covers a less relevant role in the definition of the mission.[236]

To achieve this goal the strategic objective is to develop Nigerien security force's capabilities

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[232]https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/MINUSMA/Pagine/ContributoNazionale.aspx

[233]https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/EUCAP_Sahel_Mali/Pagine/ContributoNazionale.aspx

[234]https://comunicazioneinform.it/di-maio-litalia-aprira-nuove-ambasciate-in-niger-burkina-faso-e-mali/

[235] Michela Ceccorulli & Fabrizio Coticchia (2020) 'I'll take two.' Migration, terrorism, and the Italian military engagement in Niger and Libya, Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 25:2, 174-196, DOI: 10.1080/1354571X.2020.1723291

[236]Ibid.

in contrasting illegal trafficking, enforce border control and territorial surveillance and help to boost air patrol capabilities, this is done in the migration flow management fashion, but is aimed at providing stability to the area.[237]

The primary goal of the mission is to build up Nigerien capabilities, and is in line with many other initiatives in the area, but brings more than 300 troops, 100 terrestrial vehicles, and 6 aerial vehicles to the area, and especially have the important effect to bring Italy closer to the Nigerien government which is probable to become an essential partner in the upcoming years, especially by taking in consideration the political evolution in Mali and Burkina Faso.

The upsurge of violence in Sahel, and the shift of the epicenter of the crisis towards the Liptako-Gourma combined with the French willingness and need to internationalize the effort against jihadist terrorism in the area opened a new opportunity for Italy to get involved in this relevant region.

As it has already been argued, at the beginning of 2020, France decided to establish Task Force Takuba, a totally special forces operation aimed at fighting terrorism in the Malian area neighboring Niger and Burkina Faso.

Italy began deploying troops in July 2021, with initially 200 units then built up this figure to 250 men and women, backed by 20 land vehicles and 6 helicopters.

The contingent is framed with "Task Force Jacana", under the leadership of Col. Andrea Carbonaro.

The Italians are taking part in Takuba by covering the extremely important role of "MEDEVAC", which stands for *medical evacuation*, and it is defined as the "act of taking a sick or injured person to a hospital in a helicopter or plane".[238] For this reason the contingent is equipped with 3 transport helicopters CH 47 "Chinook", of the 1° *Reggimento Antares* of the army aviation, prepared for the MEDEVAC procedures, and 3 combat helicopters AH-129D "Mangusta" of the 5° and 7° regiment of the *Brigata Aereomobile Friuli*.

Jacana is composed of 4 squadrons of "Guardian Angel" of the 66° *Reggimento Fanteria Aeromobile "Trieste"* with the duty to protect the CH 47 in action.[239]

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[237] Ibid.

[238] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/medevac

[239]https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/Mali_Task_Force_Takuba/Pagine/ContributoNazionale.aspx

The Italian component reached full operational capability on 14 January 2022; to celebrate the event one "Chinook" and three "Mangusta" flew over the Meneka's forward operating base while displaying the Italian flag.[240]

But this celebration happened in a very discouraging context. As it has already been argued, the diplomatic relations between France and Mali were rapidly deteriorating at that time, and at the same time the Malians were turning to the infamous mercenaries of the Wagner group. The very same day in which Italy was celebrating its full operativity, Sweden – one of the ten countries taking part in Takuba – announced the withdrawal of its 150 troops from Takuba and the 200 men and women deployed to MINUSMA.[241]

Barkhane officially ended in Mali on the 9th November 2022 and transferred the bulk of its troops to Niger, which authorized a rearticulation of both Barkhane and Takuba on its territory.[242]

As a matter of fact, the Italian government did not manifest any intention to withdraw its troops from Takuba yet.

[240] Ibid.

[241] https://www.ilfoglio.it/esteri/2022/02/03/news/italia-sola-nel-sahel--3641285/

[242]https://www.africarivista.it/niger-via-libera-al-dispiegamento-delle-forze-barkhane-e-takuba/200703/

Conclusions.

> "The only way in which the international community would bring an effective intervention is only through a knowledge-based approach and grounded in the understanding of what these states entities are and how they work." (Morten Bøås, 2019, p.7,)

This statement reported in the first chapter well summarizes why in some way we can assert that the approach carried out by the foreign actors in the Sahel had partially failed.

Since its beginning, the international involvement in the Sahelian region, the idea of a *Global Approach* was widely shared by the actors who were approaching, for a reason or another, the various problematics present in the area.

Since the early 2000s, when the region became of paramount relevance, the fight against terrorism evolved into what the Bush administration defined as the 3D approach, and the Obama administration and the Whole Government Approach; both strategies envisioned, the direct flight and hunting down of terrorist groups and the training of the local armed forces to carry on the fight, but also the development of the local communities in order to address what were understood as the root causes of fragility.

But if it is possible to assert that it is partial true that countries presenting several degrees of fragility in the different gaps identified by Call are prone to become sanctuaries for terrorist groups and international criminals' cartels, it is also true that the actions pursued by the international community were based on wrong assumptions and more importantly without the proper knowledge mentioned by Bøås.

Lacking the understanding of how the Sahelian states worked and what within the Sahelian society was source of grievances, the intervention proposed by the international community fostered a worsening of the crisis rather than solving the problem.

As a matter of facts, the core problem that brought instability and violence is largely linked to the patronage dynamics permeating the Sahelian political systems, that were even more exacerbated by the involvement of international forces in the local power dynamics, and the flow of aids that were supposed to bring a change in the local's lives.

The two major reasons of security concern for the European Union at large, and in particular for MS likes France and Italy, were and are terrorism and migration, and 2012, as it has argued, represent the year where everything had changed, and the situation precipitated.

If one takes into consideration the approach taken by France and the EU since the beginning of the 2010s, development is but a rhetorical addition to the public discourses and of a good intention when it comes to actual planning.

Concerning migration, the European Union manifested some interest and understanding of the existence of the *migration-development* nexus, understanding also that *security* represented a third dimension of this nexus.

First of all, the EU decided to deliberately structure its approach to migration in a way in which, circular and legal migration were not favored, but instead where illegal migration had to be clamped down in the countries of origins and of transit. By doing so the EU fostered - pushed by the public opinion in the MS- the idea that *more development* equals *less migration,* which, to put it mildly is just wrong.

Following this idea of development, the EU focused heavily on the idea that the key to solve Sahel's problems was to develop the security apparatus of the Sahelian countries, which as it is exemplified in the case of what happened in Niger with law 36/2015 usually ends up in fostering causes of attrition between local groups.

This brings into question whose security the EU is concerned about, but also even if the EU was aware of the impact of its actions on the ground.

As a matter of fact, the Sahel, and the Liptako-Gourma in particular, has seen a constant upsurge of violence.

The French intervention represented by operation Serval was meant to be a quick solution to curb a complete precipitation of the situation in Mali and was a real success.

Indeed, AFISMA was meant to start in that very year and the EU was going to be involved with CSDP missions to allow the Sahelian countries to acquire sufficient security knowhow to contrast terrorism and regain territorial sovereignty against it.

Serval was ideal to contrast the high pace attrition offensive brought about by the MNLA and the Jihadist. This success, achieved thanks to the French perfect execution of the three phases operation and the clear strategic and political goal behind it, was then shaded by the reality of the facts; Mali was going to go through a long period marked by widespread violence and jihadist terrorism inspired insurgencies.

And the French found themselves to be involved in the fight against the terrorist, but only to the extent of supporting the FAMa on the ground and actively fighting the terrorist. What was left entirely to the Malian government was the attempt to conquer the heart and mind of the local population, who instead turned to the jihadist which were able to appropriate the local grievances and provide some levels of welfare.

Moreover, the French relied heavily on collaborations with the Tuaregs, who started the crisis in the first place. By doing so they antagonized the Malian government that in the end resorted to turning to other actors from the Europeans, most notably the Russians.

Very similarly this is what happened in Burkina Faso, where, like everywhere else in the Sahel, anti-French sentiment is rising, as it is witnessed by the protests of 20 January 2023 in Ouagadougou, where French flags were burned, and at the core of this protests there is also the thematic of failed security improvement of security in Burkina Faso *vis-a-vis* French presence.[243]

Coming to the Italian involvement in the region, it is a direct consequence of the Italian renewed activism at the international level of the country and the need to address the problems within the enlarged Mediterranean.

Task Force Takuba is yet again an attempt by French part to disengage from the region by sharing the burden of intervention with other European countries, and the Italian contribution is in line with the perceived space of action of the country and gave the opportunity to Italy to get involved in direct action on the ground in Mali to fight terrorism.

On the other hand, MISIN, a an entirely Italian mission, is by de facto established with the intention to train the Nigerien forces to carry on border control activities and clamp down the irregular migration.

The training received by the Nigerien security forces is also applicable in other contexts such as contrasting other trafficking activities and terrorism, but the political reasoning behind it is yet again connected to the main European concern that had characterized the public debate after 2015, irregular migration.

What is clear by the analysis of the literature available on the Sahelian crisis, is that the European and, more largely, Westerner intervention did not carry out its development aspirations as it was promised.

Even though security was and is the most fundamental concern of the various missions and frameworks, it is clear by now that the security of the local population was never the core issue. As a matter of fact, violence and the drivers behind local conflicts were largely favored by the actions of the foreign interventions.

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[243] https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/hundreds-join-anti-france-protest-burkina-faso-capital-2023-01-20/

The future of the region is not clear; the cohesion of the Sahel G5 seems to be dubious, more and more aids, and especially means to fight against terrorism and insurgency are donated by the Kremlin to Bamako.

If the Europeans are willing to get back to Sahel, they should do it by impacting on the actual roots of human insecurity, especially by turning the focus from security back to development if they are willing to solve the gaps that compose Sahelian fragility.

Future research on this topic can be based on the many questions that arise from the context presented in this thesis.

Questions such as why Niger is revealing itself as the most resilient and welcoming country in the region for the Westerns actors?

Now the bulk of Barkhane forces and Takuba have been transferred to this country; what is going to be the evolution of these missions in the region? Are we witnessing the end of European interventionism in Sahel in favor of other actors such as Russia, China, and Turkey?

Since Italy has been present in Niger with a bilateral mission like MISIN, does this mean that Italy is going to cover a prominent role in the future of the CMR and in the region?

The answer to some of these questions is to be found only by waiting and keeping close attention to the evolution of the situation in Sahel.

Nonetheless, what is clear at this point is that the only possible way in which future western intervention could be successful in the region is by posing more attention to the basic local needs and by acting in accordance within a single framework and, most importantly, by defining clear political and strategic goals based on the need of the local population and not just based on European security agenda.

In sum, the best way in which we would reach the European goal of building up a secure circle of stable countries around our frontiers is not by pursuing the development of the security apparatuses of these countries, but rather by ensuring the development of the living conditions of the local population; even thought this would mean an initial increment of those factors that facilitate migration.

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