

# The Foreign Security Policy in Africa: France in Sahel Region

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## Abstract

The security issue has taken another dimension in Africa. Setting apart the input of different conflicts and civil wars to its downfall, terrorism and extremists' activities in the continent have made its security issue out of control of its political elites. The evolution of the international security paradigm generated by the 9/11 terrorist attacks has led to the involvement of new international actors in the continent, in particular the Sahel region. France, one of these actors, has contributed greatly in saving, rebuilding and reshaping the security in the continent. What is its security policy in the G5 Sahel region? The present paper analyses, through the qualitative research methods, the France security policy in G5 Sahel. The work points out that, despite, the good intention behind this policy, it does not guarantee full security autonomy to the African regional armed forces and recommend few alternative ways African can employ to regain the total security control in the region.

**Keywords:** Africa; France; G5 Sahel; Security; and Terrorism.

## 1. Introduction

At the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, following unnumbered other terrorist attacks in Western and African countries, the Sahel has become a focal point of interest in the terms of international security [1]. During that period, international community developed several security programs, supporting them with allocation of hundreds of million of dollars to fight against terrorism, and these programs hosted different strategies such as: special forces, setting up military bases, deploying intelligence, military training or equipment etc.

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Following several security measures initiated by the United States (Pan-Sahel Initiative launched in 2002 to address security and terrorist issues in the Sahel and help countries (Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad) to ensure their own stability which later expanded and become the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) in 2004 and then to Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) in 2005), France also enter into the fight in 2008 with the launch of its “Plan Sahel” in Mali, Niger and Mauritania, to fight terrorism and bring its assistance to the table for local development programs. With the allocation of 58 million Euros, the program extended to others countries in Sahel, which gave birth to the G5 Sahel (Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Chad). The program was accompanied with Special forces (Operation Sabre; Barkhane), which were assisted by permanent military bases in Dakar (Senegal), Libreville (Gabon) and lately in Gao (Mali). Our point of interest here is, despite all these programs, which were set in the first place in order to assist the locals find the solution to their security issues by themselves, we are still living in a situation whereby the local troops are still serving as an assistance to the foreign military bases in the fight against the terrorism and rebuilding the security system in Sahel: that is case Barkhane special forces and the G5 Sahel local troops. G5 Sahel could be more than just an assistant in building and maintaining the security in Sahel if only there has been an adequate policy that is governing the whole different security measures initiated by international community, particularly by France.

## 2. The State of Security in the Region (Sahel)

### TRANS-SAHARA TRAFFICKING

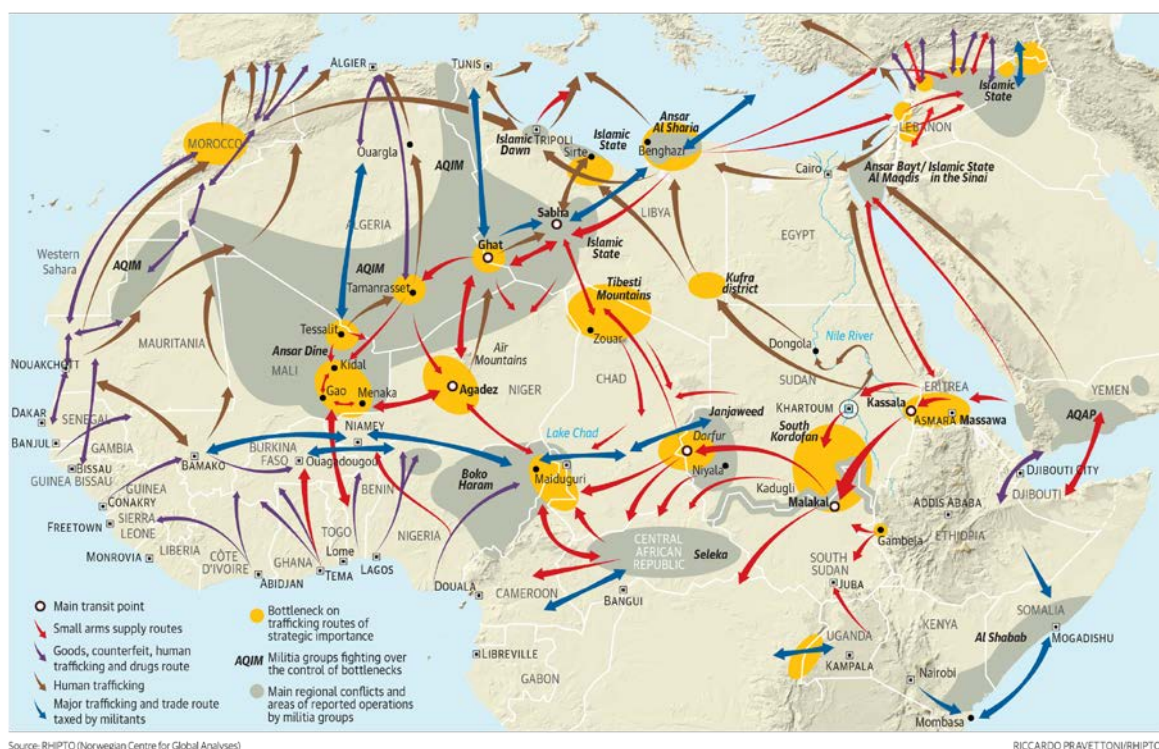


Figure 1: by Norwegian Center for Global Analyses

Let’s consider this map designed by [2] to break into pieces the state of security in Sahel. It is not too exaggerating to qualify Sahel as one of the region with the weakest security in the continent after observing in

the last decades the rate and the list of unadmittable events it has been subjected to: conflicts, terrorism, trafficking (human, drugs, illegal weapons) fueled by the lack of adequate security system and assisted by the weak border controls across the states in the region. Analysis of the social and spatial dynamics of conflicts reveals that the uniqueness of the current period is that it combines three types of organized violence in a globalized setting: armed struggles for political power, criminal activities for personal gain and human rights violation to create homogenous ethnic and religious areas [3]. In the last decades, Sahel had experienced this combination of violence with different conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, in the northern Mali and Darfur [4]. Our point of focus here is not to enter into the details of every conflict that occurred in Sahel, but to relate how these different conflicts have negatively impacted the security of the region. Setting aside the different coups d'état that; Mali, Niger, Chad and Libya have hosted in the region, the sovereignty and the security of the states have been challenged by inter-states rivalries and military juntas, as well as, by high numbers of non-state actors with self-government, pro-independence or religious claims. These conflicts affected the internal political balance of Sahel states differently. Except in Niger, where we observe the decrease in tensions when the central government decided to integrate the former rebels into the national army and decentralized local authorities [5]. The Mali case was totals the opposite. We observe the withdrawal of state institutions, the proliferation of trans-Saharan trafficking and the arrival of the extremist groups as of the middle of the 2000s when President Amadou Toumani Touré (2002-12) initiated the policy to govern the north through allied Touareg tribes. It is also important to highlight that the overthrow of Colonel Gaddafi in 2011 in the Libyan Civil War play a valuable role in the downfall of the security in Sahel as many Touareg mercenaries in the Libyan army returning to Mali, eagerly took part in the new uprising and created a route for increased trafficking of small arms from Libyan stockpiles [6]. Another crucial variable we should also consider in assessing the security issue in Sahel is the rise of the terrorism in the region. Without forgetting that the history of terrorism start in Africa back in 1990s when the al-Qaeda established a base in Sudan, where a military-Islamist regime had taken power in 1989, its widespread and rise of affiliations to the group was favored by instability created by different conflicts across the continent and porous borders within the states [7]. The internal fighting assisted by corruption and weak border control facilitate the ability of Mujahidin to move, plan, and organize. These conditions provide a golden opportunity for al-Qaeda fighters to move easily between various African countries without any surveillance and to obtain huge amount of weapons and military equipment easily, and in most cases, more cheaply than other regions [8]. Sahel with its history of different conflicts and abandoned desert with almost no attention from the implicated central governments, has become a host for terrorist organizations, thence, become a challenge to peace and security in the region. Of course, a place where security is down, there is no doubt that trafficking will certainly reach its pick, and that is the situation we experienced and we are currently living in Sahel region. The numbers are high in the terms of illegal weapons, drugs and human trafficking. It is clear the West Africa's geographical location between Latin America and Europe made it an ideal transit zone for exploitation by powerful drug cartels and terrorist organizations much as the Caribbean and Central America had long suffered for being placed between South America's cocaine producers and North America's cocaine users [9]. According to [10], West Africa's primary operational allure to traffickers is not actually geography, however, but rather its low standards of security and governance, low levels of law enforcement capacity, and high rates of corruption. Latin American traffickers recently relocated a share of their wholesale distribution from the Western Hemisphere to West Africa, with the sub region moving from being merely a short-term

transit point to becoming a storage and staging area for wholesale repacking, re-routing and sometimes re-sale of drugs. There is also increasingly strong evidence linking terrorist organizations state sponsors of terrorism to the West Africa drug trade, including Colombia's Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Hezbollah (allied with elements in the Lebanese diaspora), Venezuela, and Iran. The link to AQIM takes on particular significance in the light of this terrorist organization's recent takeover of a vast sector of ungoverned space in Northern Mali, along with Touareg allies [11]. The human trafficking has received a grate attention lately after the discovery of the modern slavery of black Africans who are trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe in Libya. The operating center for this activity (human trafficking) is based in West Africa region especially in Agadez according to many reports and findings. Today, Agadez has become a major trading post for arms, drugs and, above all, humans. After the fall of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, long-locked smuggling routes between Niger and Libya suddenly reopened, and the small desert town of roughly 120,000 inhabitants became the de facto smuggling capital of the sub-Saharan region. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 170,000 migrants have passed through the town the year 2016. More than 6,000 newcomers arrive every week, staying several days before moving on. And as the flow of migrants picked up, many turned to smuggling. Improving national security is, of course, crucial, said a European diplomat in Niamey. Tightening border security and fighting human smuggling in Niger would also reduce the number of boats arriving on the shores of "Fortress Europe" — a continent increasingly divided by the issue of migration.

### **3. Terror Activities in the Sahel**

Over the past years, terrorism has become the important obstacle to peace, security and development in Africa. The terror activities have grown exponentially in the continent, and the particularity of Sahel in this storm of horror is not only in the increased proliferation of terrorist groups in the region, but also the numbers of terrorist attacks it has hosted. The terror activities in Sahel first gained the world's attention when Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) known later as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghred (AQIM) kidnapped thirty Western tourists in Algeria and took shelter in the northern Mali in 2003. This event gives way to many more extremists' activities between 2007 and 2015, which mostly were not part of the head news due to the reduced operational capacity of the group (AQIM) challenged by Algerian and French counter-terrorism operations [12]. AQIM went on offensive at the end of 2015 and early in 2016 with: Radisson Blu Hotel attack in Bamako, Mali, in November 2015; followed by an attack on the Cappuccino Café and Splendid Hotel in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in January 2016. Few months later, in March 2016, the group claimed responsibility for an attack that killed 19 people in Grand Bassam, a well-known seaside town in Cote-d'Ivoire.

The sudden appearance of Boko Haram (Western Education is sin) in 2009 has added more to the list. The group had emerged as one of the world's deadliest terrorist organization by 2014 with the group's records in, the 20.000 live it has taken, the displaced 2.6 million people, 75.000 orphans it has created on top of the nine billion dollars worth of damage in the northern Nigeria [13]. With the affiliation to ISIS through the leadership of Abubakar Shekau (Boko Haram) and Abu Musab al-Barnawi (ISIS), the situation has become more complex and we could observe the expansion of its operations in the neighboring countries such as Cameroon, Niger and Chad [14].

This ecosystem created by civil wars, terrorism and trafficking in (humans, drugs and illegal weapons) in the region, which has become a threat to the international security has definitely drawn the attention of the international community. The attempts to preserve the international security, with the importance that the United States and its strategic coalition partners, particularly the United Kingdom and France, attach to the security challenges posed by terrorism, state collapse, insurgencies and other threats to stability in the Sahel region is manifested in their military presence and security cooperation programs with the regional states: France and the G5 Sahel states [15].

#### **4. France's Security Policy in the Region**

Security on its own is a broad social norm that encompasses other aspects without which it cannot be functional or exist. By the end of 1990s, critics were arguing that "Security" needed to extend beyond its political and military meanings to encompass other form of security, such as the satisfaction of basic needs, the right to a sustainable environment, and protection of cultural and religious identity, and so on. When we consider those critics as a lens to look at France's security policy in Sahel, we can clearly notice that, it is solely military-oriented security policy, which is developed in different means that we can classify in four main categories: Military bases, bilateral cooperation with local militaries, special forces and financial aid.

##### **4.1 Military Bases**

According to a report from the, *Africa and Foreign Military Bases*, military bases are often promoted by military strategists as reducing the 'tyranny of distance', forward deployment bases allow the forward deployment of both troops and equipment, allowing quicker response times, and a shortening of distance, especially in the terms of the need to refuel. This strategy had initially been the forte of US military – especially after the European war of the mid-twenty century. France also believes in the same strategy when it comes to its security policy in Sahel. It is important to note that this military bases' strategy is favored by its history of colonialism in Africa. Currently, France has over 3,000 troops spread across five countries in Africa –Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad as part of Operation Barkhane in Sahel [16]. Different military bases support these troops across the region – Dakar (Senegal), Gao (Mali), Niamey (Niger), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), N'Djamena (Chad), Bagui (Central African Republic), Libreville (Gabon), Djibouti (Djibouti) and Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) [17].

##### **4.2 Bilateral Cooperation With Local Militaries**

Although, in the era of globalization, where most cooperation are moving toward multilateralism, France is still faithful to its traditional, bilateral structure. France conducts joint maneuvers and peacekeeping training through the Reinforcement of African Peacekeeping Capacities (Renforcement des Capacités de Maintien de la Paix – RECAMP) program and its Peacekeeping school (Ecole de Maintien de la Paix – EMP) in Mali, which has trained over 800 African officers [18]. According to the [19], *Backgrounder: The French Military in Africa* – the institutions intended to support the African Standing Force, a 20,000 strong rapid-response peacekeeping force projected to be ready by 2010. The official Document of RECAMP program highlights three principal

domains of operation such as: cooperation, training and engagement, but in the last two decades after the foundation of the program, what we observe is totally the opposite – the cooperation is one-side oriented, where most decisions about regional security are taken by France and its allies, and the regional states abide to it. The G5 Sahel initiative, (The cooperation of five regional states; Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad, to combat terrorism in Sahel and maintain peace and security in the region) that France mainly orchestrated. Paris greatly influenced the formation, structure and objectives of the force.

The military trainings offered by France are still following the principles of the old style of foreign donors in Africa, where schools and wells are built but mostly failed to produce the anticipated benefits because they lack supporting infrastructure – for instance clinics are build without proper logistical or professional health support [20]. France, in the same manner, is offering military training to the regional troops without adequate supporting infrastructure. The attack on the Malian military camp that left 14 Malian soldiers and 18 others wounded in Timbuktu region's Soumpi, the one of the camp of the United Nations Mission in Mali (Minusma) and that of French force Barkhane, in Timbuktu, are just few out of many cases to justify the regional troops' poor self-defense capacity generated by the lack of adequate military logistics and infrastructure. In the terms of engagement in the fight against terrorists and protecting the security in Sahel region, none of the local troops have been successful in that without the intervention of France, since most of the offensives are carried out by French troops most of the credits of every won battle against terrorists in the region go to French Special Forces. As matter of fact, during his speech in Ouagadougou, November 26, 2017, Emmanuel Macron urges the G5 to win their "first victories".

### **4.3 Special Forces**

Special forces will remain the prominent tactic of security measures of International community in Africa. France's history in African, in the term of its security policy, has always set a place for Special Forces. Like Licorne Forces, which were prepared for a military operation in southern Ivory Cost April 11, 2011, in order to take President Laurent Gbagbo who refused to hand over the power to the democratically elected successor Alaskan Ouattara, 'Operation Serval' was also lunched on the January 11, 2013, as airstrikes against jihadist positions in the northern Mali following the power vacuum created by the military coup and the take over of the vast stretches of Mali by armed groups linked to al Qaeda. These special forces, not only do they undermine the domestic and continental sovereignty, they also lack appropriate security initiatives in order to hand over the security issue to the regional troops and this results in the permanent present of military bases in the scope of preserving the security in the continent – the Operation Serval which ended in 2014, involving 4,000 French soldiers was followed by Operation Barkhane, a task force of 3,000 French soldiers dedicated to tracking Islamist rebels against the wider sub-Saharan area [21]. France is also reinforcing its base at Abidjan, since it is projected as an entry point onto the continent and a logistical support post in the future.

### **4.4 Financial Aid**

According to a report entitled '*Regulation of Foreign Aid: France*' [22], Senior Foreign Law Specialist, France concentrates its aid on two priority regions: sub-Saharan Africa and Mediterranean Basin. In 2010, sub Saharan

Africa received US\$ 3.08 billion of aid. The point where this policy of financial support by France failed is, France has not done enough to tackle the lack of accountability of the regional executive branches. The lack of adequate plan to support this financial aid against corruption, which has rooted in most if the African System of Governance, has turned most of these financial supports to a fruitless initiative. For instance, in 2010, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria halted funding to Mali amid allegations of fraud and mismanagement and the Minister of Health was forced to resign.

## **5. Recommendation**

The particularity of Sahel is the number of different security programs it is hosting: French Plan Sahel, US Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Program, the EU strategy and the multilateral program (such as UN or World Bank global strategies). The reason behind the continuous degradation of security in the region can also be the result of the lack of coordination among these programs. Instead of competing against each other in this battle against terrorism, they should gather under the same roof (UN) and develop in synergy a better security plan that does not necessary depend on the external deployments, but the security plan that can be operational under the autonomy of regional armed forces without a heavy intervention from outside.

While, it is unquestionable that the security situation in Sahel region needs the intervention of international community, it is also important to be conscious of the fact that, the exclusive military-oriented security policy will not totally guarantee security in the region. French Government and other international actors in the region need to shift from their traditional security policy to a broad dimension of security that takes into account, an easy access to basic social services and infrastructure development programs because the key factors behind the proliferation of extremist are favored by poverty and social needs that are prevalent in most African countries, becoming an open access for mujahidin to provide some financing and welfare benefits in order to post some influential operatives.

More need to be done in the military perspectives; the different security measures should safeguard the security autonomy of the regional armed forces, in a way that, they can operationally be capable of defending their national territory and maintaining domestic order without external support. For instance, despite France's RECAMP program and its Peacekeeping Schools, 15 000 soldiers from United Nations mission and France were sent to cover up the incapacity of Malian armed forces to protect their national territory. Moreover, French government must put the security of the region in the first plan instead of using the fight against terrorism as a guise to server its own national interest – France's bases in Niger are more attempted to protect France's interests around Niger's vast uranium resources.

France's G5 Sahel initiative that excluded Nigeria in the combat against terrorism in the region raises a doubt about the effectiveness of the initiative. This cooperation must effectively be a continental cooperation, not just the combination of France's old colonies in Africa. Nigeria has suffered greatly from Boko Haram terrorist attacks, and excluding Nigeria from the initiative will create a free zone and safe place for the al Qaeda affiliated groups to reorganize for future attacks.

African Union, the continental organization, which has as mission not only to coordinate the economy and the politic of its composing nations but also to safeguard their security, has failed in its mission [23]. It failed because its security measure was interfered with the influences of western powers that are seeking to reconfigure (in collaboration as well as competition) the security concepts and architectures of the continent thus living AU with only one choice: compromising its functioning autonomy, which results in its full dependence on external actors in order to shape its regional security interests [24]. It is urgent for AU to increase and strengthen its capacity to have a strong focus on preventing the foreign exploitation and different conflicts in the region.

## **6. Constraints of the Study**

The paper does not take into account, the current reforms and regulations about the security issue of Sahel at regional and continental level. It is important to note while African Union is constantly developing new strategies to tackle the security issue of the continent with different measures, regional states are also developing their own policy regarding their national and regional security. President Idriss DEBY of Chad Republic, on the 15 January 2018, refused to renew the contract with France regarding its military base on Chad territory. This action can impact France's security policy in the region and open a debate about a possible security measures without the participation of external actors. Meanwhile, Mali, Niger and Burkina-Faso are also forming a corridor partnership "Liptako-Gourma" without a formal involvement of France. This partnership aims at strengthening the border security rather than dealing with domestic state politics. These are few limitations of the research and they can lead us to a new research question such as "Can African States Sustain in Building the Regional Security without External Forces?"

## **7. Conclusion**

It is not enough to say the international community will solely solve the security issue in Sahel. France's security policy in the region is just one-angled security program, military-oriented security program. While it is urgent to expand its security policy beyond military means, it is also important to give the controlling pad to the regional armed forces in order to guarantee their autonomic security operation in the region. France's security policy has failed in giving a major role to the regional executive branches in G5 Sahel initiative, thus creating a vacuum of security incapacity that can only be filled by its permanent military bases in the continent. The way to step beyond these unbalanced measures is for the continental organization (African Union) to reclaim its sovereignty by depending less on external aids in tackling the security issue in the continent. Its Plan of Action on Prevention and Combating Terrorism in 2002 needs to be allocated enough financial support in order to more operational.

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