

TERRORISM AND PRIVATIZATION OF STATE SPACES IN THE SAHEL: CASE OF THE POLISARIO FRONT

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Abstract: *For several decades, the Sahel (Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Nigeria) has been at the heart of global insecurity. Several illicit trafficking activities are taking place there (drug and fuel trafficking, human trafficking, arms sales), encouraged by armed groups. These practices extend to southern Algeria, on the border with Mauritania, where the Polisario Front, an outdated political-military movement desperately trying to create a hypothetical state in southern Morocco, is active. In this way, it is obvious that a link can be established between the terrorist movements and the Polisario Front. This reflection intends to privilege the diachronic approach, by exploiting documentary sources and oral data from interviews in Bamako. At the end of this analysis, it can be affirmed that the Polisario Front participates in hostage-taking, ransom demands, and various illicit trafficking in the Sahel. Likewise, several jihadist movement fighters are recruited into the ranks of the Polisario Front fighters. In view of all this, the Polisario Front can be linked to a terrorist movement.*

Key words: violent extremism; illicit trafficking; terrorism; Polisario; Sahel.

1. Introduction

Sahel is today the subject of national and international political concerns. However, this area inhabited by nomadic populations and living from caravan trade, made the reputation of the Sahel in the Middle Ages. For several decades, the Sahel has thus become a worrying and disturbing subject. This is due to the numerous threats linked to the Sahelian fragility. It is thus a grey, under-administered zone that is beyond the control of the police, customs, army and public services of the countries that claim it. As a result, trafficking of all kinds is developing there: trafficking in drugs, cigarettes and arms, etc. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) had set up cells there with branches in Niger, Mali and northern Nigeria. These served as a tactical withdrawal base, training camps, and logistics supply networks (Pellerin and Trotignon, 2010: 84). The « Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat » (GSPC), a faction that emerged from the GIA in 1998 and became Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in September 2006, controls this space. Many other armed groups swarm the Sahel, including Ansar Dine, the MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad), the Katiba el-Mouwakaoune Bidima, the Mujao (Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa), and Boko Haram. All of them recruit from among the populations present in the area and self-defense militias of Arab or black African origin (notably the Songhai and the Peuls). Finally, they have entered into connection with other armed movements such as the Polisario.

Sahel has been the subject of abundant scientific production, to the point of being called Sahelistan (Laurent, 2013). Similarly, terrorist groups (Masson, 2011; Zanoletti, 2020) and Sahelian security issues (Bonnecase and Brachet, 2013; Ben Taous, 2016; Ould Mohamedou, 2017) have been sufficiently studied. On the other hand, the Polisario, the main provider of in fighting terrorist movements has not yet been thoroughly researched. Likewise, this movement, which is very old (since 1973) and which calls for an imaginary state in southern Morocco, is involved in all illegal and illicit trafficking in the Sahel.

This reflection intends to highlight, beyond the interactions and harmful practices underway in the Sahel, the role of the main actors (armed groups) and the alliances between them. Specifically, the emphasis is placed on the Polisario for three reasons: it is a political-

military movement that enjoys the support of Algeria; it regularly diverts humanitarian aid to refugees in the Tindouf camps; it participates in all trafficking in the Sahel and supplies combatants to other terrorist groups. Given the complexity of the threats to the security of all Sahelian states, it is important to reflect on the following questions: what criminal interactions exist between terrorist groups in the Sahel and the Polisario Front? Otherwise, what similarities are possible at the heart of violent extremism and terrorism in this space? This work intends to focus on the theory of global security given the asymmetry of violence and the stealth of threats in the Sahel. For, it is recommended a holistic security (human, health, economic, political, civil, environmental, national, social and public security). To achieve this, the analyses are essentially based on documentary and oral data (testimonies) collected in Bamako from February 1st to 12th, 2021.

1.The Sahel today: a context marked by violent extremism and terrorism

The topicality of socio-political processes in the Sahel, particularly in Mali and Niger, epicenters of the Sahel, offers an opportunity to question the definition of diverse identities, and the geographical, political and moral configurations that are ideologized in this space. This requires a contextualization of the plural conflicts in the Sahel, which overdetermine a divisive political offer and a persistent socio-economic abduction.

1.1. Sociogenesis of uncivil practices and the context of conflict emergence

Sahel is a region of West Africa and a semi-desert zone that gives directly into sub-Saharan Africa. It covers an area of about 5 million km² with a population of about 90 million people (Bassou, 2017: 7). Sahelian societies have aroused renewed interest in recent years. This resurgence can be explained by the major risks that abound in this space and by the forms of violence that are developing there. As for the forms of violence affecting this area, they are both internal and external and have led to changes in the ways in which groups interact and define their respective identities. The effects of the current political and security instability in the Sahel are rooted in the depths of interactions between state-building processes, capitalism, migration, ineffective security systems, politicization of ethnicity (Hausa, Tuareg, Dogon, Songhai, etc.), the complexity of nomadism and pastoralism, economic production and ever-changing identities, etc. The effects of the current political and security instability in the Sahel are also rooted in the depths of interactions between state-building processes, capitalism, migration, ineffective security systems, politicization of ethnicity (Hausa, Tuareg, Dogon, Songhai, etc.), the complexity of nomadism and pastoralism, economic production and ever-changing identities, etc.

In recent years, some Sahelian countries have suffered coups d'état (Mauritania, Niger and Mali), to which have been added more or less scattered rebellions, resulting in the de jure or de facto partition of the constituted territories (Bonnetcase and Brachet, 2013 :5). All these political and military unrest, of increasing magnitude, occurred in a context marked by social tensions linked to economic difficulties, risk and food crises, including famine in 2010 and 2012 (Janin, 2006: 355). In addition, the activities of armed groups and criminality make the Sahelian space a high-risk zone.

However, the complexity of the security situation in the Sahel is a consequence of the Tuareg question and the Libyan crisis, which resulted in the assassination of Muammar Gaddafi on 20th October 2011, followed by the dumping of arms in the Sahel. The main actors of the conflict dynamics are known (Luntumbue, 2012). These are Aqmi (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), Ansar Dine, MLNA (Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad), katiba el-Mouwakaoune Bidima, Mujao (Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest), and Boko Haram. The advent of Boko Haram in the Sahel (particularly in Nigeria, Chad, CAR and Cameroon) has made it possible, according to the African Research Center for Peace and Sustainable Development (CARPADD), to highlight three categories of countries: the epicenter

countries (Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Nigeria and Burkina-Faso); collateral countries (Senegal, Cameroon and Chad) and countries at risk (Algeria and CAR). These countries "were among the countries most exposed to violent extremism in terms of the number of terrorist attacks recorded by the UNDP between 2006 and 2015. Thus, according to data provided by Afrobarometer, in 2014 alone, Boko Haram had 453 incidents (compared to 1,071 for Daesh); 1,742 injured (compared to 5,799 for Daesh) and 6,644 dead (compared to 6,073 for Daesh)" (Buchanan-Clarke and Lekalake, 2016: 9-10), making Boko Haram the most dangerous and deadliest terrorist group in the world.

Despite the mobilization of international (UN, EU, World Bank, etc.), African, and regional (African Union and ECOWAS, etc.) organizations and the support of bilateral partners (France, Germany, Belgium, Canada, United States, etc.), violence and insecurity seem to have reached high levels in the region. Thus, between January 2018 and May 2019, the number of incidents in the region was two to four times higher than in 2013, at the height of the Malian crisis.

The acuity of cross-border migratory movements and the intensity of widespread illegal trafficking as well as the regional humanitarian and security challenges in the Sahel call for several international actions (military cooperation, technical assistance, project financing, humanitarian assistance, etc.). These, requiring greater coherence and proactivity, are carried out at the regional (with the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS), continental (with the African Union) and international (with the United Nations and bilateral partners such as France) levels.

1.2. The Current Political Context

More than a century after independence, the countries of the Sahel are struggling to experience a negotiated transition to a peaceful and homogenous democracy. Each country thus presents a particular regime with regard to cultural and social specificities and historical trajectory, although there are real similarities. In Niger, for example, the semi-presidential (or semi-parliamentary) regime imported and transposed by the Sovereign National Conference of July 1991 is no less ambiguous with regard to the evolution of the institutions put in place and the balance of power between political actors and institutional bodies (Narey, 2016). According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), there are 123 political parties, 40 of which constitute the basis of the presidential majority and fewer than 10 are represented in the National Assembly. In Mali, after the succession of political-military regimes that severely undermined the country's stability, constitutional order returned with the election, by direct universal suffrage, of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita on 7th August 2013 by 77.61% of the votes cast. He was re-elected on 12th August 2018 with 67.17% of the votes for a second five-year term. On 18th August 2020, he was ousted from power in a military coup.

In Mauritania, the exercise of power is subject to the control of resources and above all to family, clan and ethnic considerations. A one-party state with authoritarian presidential rule since independence in 1960, Mauritania also experienced several decades of military rule until the election of Mohamed Ould Ghazouani on June 23th, 2019. The latter, who received 52.01% of the vote, inherited a country with a drained economy and huge security challenges. Burkina Faso has had four republics with four regimes: 1960-1973; 1974-1980; 1980-1991; 1991-2014. After Blaise Compaoré resigned from power on October 31, 2014 following a popular uprising, Burkina Faso experienced several transitions: a military transition with Lieutenant-Colonel Yacouba Isaac Zida; an evanescent military regime with General Gilbert Diendéré, President of the Council of the Republic, and a military regime with the President of the National Council for Democracy (September 17-23, 2015) and a civil transition with Michel Kafando. The election of Roch Marc Christian Kaboré on December 29, 2015 marked the return to constitutional order. Chad has a full presidential regime with a strong propensity for presidentialism. Idriss Déby Itno, who has been in power since December 1990, holds most of the power after the abolition

of the post of prime minister and the extension of his powers, contained in the current constitution, promulgated on May 4th, 2018.

In the current political context, destabilizing dynamics are taking hold to make the responses to be made irreversible. Indeed, the proliferation of criminal activities and violent jihadism led by armed groups and Boko Haram and the risk of a conflagration in the region (or even an extension to other regions of Africa), constitute urgent security challenges. Holistic responses to these challenges are first political, then security and finally economic. At the political level, the establishment of the rule of law and good governance are some of the prerequisites that can guarantee inclusive dialogue, which is the only guarantee of political discussion, crisis prevention, recovery and management. On the security front, terrorist groups are a target. To achieve this, the restructuring of the national armies of Sahelian countries is timely, in order to increase their predictive and operational effectiveness. The French operations Serval (January 2013-July 2014) and Barkhane (since 2014), supported by the United Kingdom, Denmark (equipment) and the United States (intelligence), as well as MINUSMA (United Nations Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali). The objective being the gradual takeover of the security situation by the national armies, the creation of the G5 Sahel is part of this process. It is a force created in February 2014 with the aim of "bringing the five states to achieve coordination of their development and security policies in a context of widespread vulnerability, growing terrorism and a fairly visible infrastructure deficit" (Nwatchock A Birema, 2018).

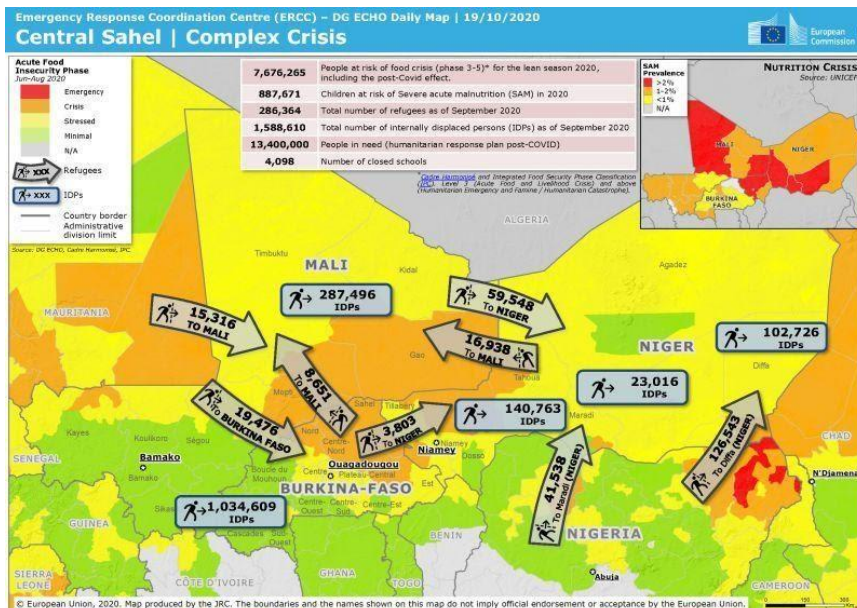
1.3. Precariousness in a context of socio-economic kidnapping

Sahel is a vast area that presents many paradoxes at the socio-economic level. The Human Development Index (HDI) remains highly contrasted. In 2018, only Algeria, ranked 3rd in Africa (and 85th in the world), has a high FDI. For the same year, Nigeria, ranked 24th in Africa (and 157th in the world), Mauritania (24th in Africa and 159th in the world), Mali (46th in Africa and 182nd in the world), Burkina Faso (47th in Africa and 183rd in the world), Chad (50th in Africa and 186th in the world) and Niger (53rd in Africa and lastly, 189th in the world) have a reliable FDI. In the Sahel, the soil is very poor and natural resources are scarce and fragile. Agriculture is the main means of subsistence and employed 60% of the working population in 2013 and accounted for 35% of GDP for all countries in the region. Similarly, 80% of the total population is directly dependent on both agricultural activities (livestock, fishing and farming) and natural resources (Abdulai, Nelson, Thomas, Zougmore and Roy-Macauley, 2013). The Human Development Index (HDI) of the Sahelian countries, according to an OXFAM Report published in July 2019, is among the lowest in the world. This is explained by inequalities in income and wealth, which have a significant impact on access to healthcare and education. According to the same Report, nearly 40% of the inhabitants of the Sahel live below the poverty line and more than half do not have access to drinking water. As a result, 2.5 millions school-age children do not attend school.

Economically, Sahel is less representative in terms of available data. Indeed, the GDP of the Sahel as a whole represented 0.18% of world GDP for 2% of the world population in 2014. Agriculture is the main economic activity. In Burkina Faso, it accounts for 30% of GDP and 80% of employment and remains dependent on rainfall. Gold and cotton generate 95% of the country's export revenues and Switzerland and South Africa are the main destination countries for these exports. In November 2018, the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) published the Global Terrorism Index, a research and ranking of target countries. It found that Nigeria (3rd worldwide) is presented as having a very high impact of terrorism. Mali (22nd in the world) and Niger (23rd in the world) are presented as countries with a high impact of terrorism. Burkina Faso (37th in the world) and Chad (38th in the world) are intermediate impact countries. Algeria (54th in the world) and Côte d'Ivoire (63rd in the world) are low impact countries, while Mauritania (149th in the world) is very low impact (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018).

The gender approach seems to be less rooted in habits in this zone, since men still dominate political and social management, to the detriment of women. Because of discriminatory social norms (beliefs, attitudes, practices and other laws), women and girls in the Sahel have very limited access to decision-making spaces and life resources; this increases their differentiated inequalities and vulnerability. Since women's status within the household and family is governed by social institutions, this leads to inconveniences (early marriage and pregnancy, strong parental authority, lack of inheritance rights, etc.) correlated with economic inequalities and social practices that are very unfavorable to women. Similarly, although education is a major concern in the five Sahelian countries covered by this study, nearly 80% of women were illiterate in some regions of Mali in 2015 (Affa'a-Mindzie, 2015: 6). These patriarchal traditions and misogynistic interpretations thrive in an environment dominated by the Muslim religion, which limits women's public participation. In the same wake, politics is perceived as a male universe and women are not yet engaged in it's masse, despite some normative reforms. This is the example of Senegal with the law on gender parity adopted in 2010.

Sahel is also marked by agropastoral decolonization (bringing together Peule, Mossi and Gourmantché communities) and is characterized by recurrent episodes of food deficit (Janin, 2006: 358) and humanitarian crisis. According to data provided by the World Bank and taken up by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the growing conflict in parts of Burkina Faso, Mali and western Niger "threatens lives and livelihoods, exacerbates food insecurity and malnutrition, and jeopardizes peace and social cohesion" (OCHA, 2019). As a result, 1.8 million people face critical food insecurity in these regions, and 400,000 children suffer from severe acute malnutrition. With more than seven million food insecure people, five million children at risk of malnutrition, 4,000 schools closed and nearly 900,000 students affected by the various crises, the region is highly vulnerable. The map below shows the threshold of humanitarian emergencies in the Central Sahel.



Source : European Union/Emergency Response Coordination, « Central Sahel : Complex Crisis », DG ECHO daily Map, 19th October 2020.

Thus, the humanitarian drama is perceived through the waves of refugees and internally displaced persons. In May 2019, there were approximately 100,000 internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso, 100,000 in Mali and nearly 70,000 in two regions of Niger,

namely Tillaberi and Tahoua. In addition to these, Chad and Niger hold the record for the number of refugees: 392,000 refugees hosted in Chad (including 310,000 Sudanese, 73,000 Central Africans and about 9,000 Nigeriens) and 166,093 in Niger (World Bank, 2017: 5). It is better to conclude that the above data, which are more or less worrying, "are the result of long-standing criminal practices that have been consolidated at the common borders of these countries, including: religious fundamentalism, the emergence of new acute religiosities, religious intolerance, imperfect local and territorial governance, massive circulation of adulterated fuel; trafficking in livestock, human beings and identity documents; illicit financial flows, prostitution of young girls and land pressure, etc." (World Bank, 2017: 5). It is in this context that the Polisario carries out an illicit activity marked by a discourse of violence, youth extremism, smuggling and the provision of combatants to terrorist groups.

2. The Polisario from yesterday to today: between destatization, smuggling and terrorism in the Sahel

Several researches made in the Sahel allow to highlight the nuisance of Polisario. This pro-independence movement is today implicated in terrorist acts and the various traffics in the Sahel. Consequently, it contributes to the threat to regional and international peace and security.

2.1. The Polisario: Genesis and modus operandi of a splinter movement

The Polisario Front or Polisario is an abbreviated form of the Spanish Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro. It means Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguía el Hamra and Río de Oro, two provinces of the AMroc, located in the southern part. The Polisario is a student movement at first, then political and finally armed, born in the Moroccan Sahara on May 10th, 1973. Initially, this clandestine movement inspired by the Cuban revolutionary theses of Ernesto Che Guevara, made up of about fifty activists, fought the Spanish occupier under the name of the Sahara Liberation Movement (MLS). Mohamed Sidi Brahim Bassiri, a young Sahrawi who studied in Cairo and then Damascus and made contact with the Muslim brothers in Egypt, was the founder and leader of the movement. Disappeared after his arrest by the Spanish colonizer, some Sahrawi students at the Moroccan university chose a new leader. El Ouali Mustapha Sayed, a young medical student in Rabat of Sahrawi origin, is thus chosen. These developments took place in a context of psychosis and East-West tension very marked by the declining figurehead of Francisco Franco Bahamonde, the ecclesiastical and charismatic dictator, a fervent defender of the socialist theses of the Axis powers.

The Polisario seems to defend an unrealistic hypothesis, that of the creation of an independent republic in the south of Morocco: the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). This idea, the expression of a distant imagination, without being accepted by the UN, had been approved minimally by the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Algeria, a neighboring country to Morocco and the main declared support of the Polisario thinks it will find a geostrategic breath that will allow it to ensure regional leadership and access to the Atlantic Ocean. The SADR is an emanation of the imagination of certain political operators, without socio-political and territorial reality. For, neither the southern regions of Morocco (the region of Dakhla Oued-Eddahab and the region of Laâyoune-Sakia el Hamra), nor the ten other regions of Morocco know other visible attributes of sovereignty than those internationally recognized in the Cherifian Kingdom. It is indeed a "Republic of the selfies", ghostly in essence, having known an evanescent glory to the benefit of the Cold War and ideological contrarities.

The Cuban spy, Juan Vivès, witness and leading actor of the project of the globalization of the Cuban revolution in the Maghreb under Ernesto Che Guevara, in several testimonies, describes the role of Cuba and Algeria in the installation of training and indoctrination camps for the self-proclaimed revolutionaries of southern Morocco, the first recruits of the Polisario

Front. Che Guevara's revolutionary logorrhea thus inspired some political entrepreneurs and laid the foundations for the SADR's state surrealism. With the Cold War, political and geostrategic issues often rationalized irrational diplomatic ties, with recognition of state fictions. This is the case for the fictitious mobile republic (SADR), self-proclaimed in 1976 at the instigation of Algeria, devoid of attributes of sovereignty and status, never recognized by the permanent members of the UN Security Council, the European Union and several international organizations around the world. The U.S. Executive Order 2020, recognizing the Sahara as Moroccan territory, is a decisive step towards ending this imaginary conflict of several decades. Long before, since 2016, more than 50 countries have withdrawn their recognition to the SADR. Indeed, the Polisario finds itself politically isolated. The only way out it has left is to over-collect in the Sahel, supplying terrorist groups and participating in the illicit trafficking that takes place there.

2.2. The Sahel as a space for Polisario levies

The Sahel, a zone of diverse trafficking and rebellions, is undergoing two major geopolitical shifts: the change of routes in the routing of cocaine from Latin America to the Middle East, and the change in the distribution of cocaine from Latin America to Europe and the rise of terrorism from Mali. Jihadist-oriented organized crime in the Sahel benefits from large areas marked by porous borders and the lack of cooperation between the states of the region; hence the profitability of this economy of crime. Serigne Bamba Gaye described their *modus operandi* and the source of income of these armed groups in the following terms:

Several kidnappings of Westerners were carried out by the terrorist organization between 2004 and 2016 in Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Algeria. In most of these kidnappings, the release of the hostages was accompanied by a ransom. Between 2006 and 2012 alone, AQIM received 60 million euros in ransoms paid by the countries of origin of the hostages. AQMI will be emulated by the MUJAO, Ansar Dine, Al Mourabitoune, jihadist groups operating in northern Mali since 2012, will follow in its footsteps. A hostage "kidnapping industry" was born in the Sahel. It will be the main source of funding for jihadist groups (...). Another source of income for jihadist groups comes from the money they get from protecting convoys that cross the areas they control. Shipments of illicit products (drugs, cigarettes, SALW, etc.) are secured by elements of jihadist groups over specified distances in the Sahel-Saharan strip and in return the traffickers pay a percentage of the value of the goods transported. The collusion between terrorism and organized crime is very clear. It shows the links and connections between these two types of criminal actors (Bamba Gaye, 2017: 15-16).

It is indeed in this zone that the Polisario, a group advocating separatist independence, operates, which is traversed by the exasperation of a fight without a future and the psychological exhaustion of the youth base attracted by the profit motive. Since the beginning of this decade, this organization has been very weakened, after the construction of the "wall of defense," completed in 1987 and the cease-fire signed in 1991. The withdrawal of the recognition of the SADR by several countries and the rigidity of its leadership aggravates the Polisario's isolation on the African and international scene. This is why we note a reconversion of combatants and the desertion of hundreds of young people, captive in the Tindouf camps, which today swell the numbers of recruits from smuggling and organized crime in the Sahel. Moreover, a study published in November 2005 by the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (Moniquet, 2005: 5), indicates that 6,000 Polisario combatants, around 60% of the workforce, exasperated by the opulence of the movement's leaders and delays in payment of pay, had withdrawn to Mauritania and converted into businessmen after the ceasefire signed in 1991. Simultaneously with this sclerosis, the Polisario increasingly lost all legitimacy among

the captive population of the camps of Tindouf and the surrounding areas ; hence the emergence of dissident currents, such as the Khat Achahid (martyr's path) movement, created in July 2004, which advocates negotiation to resolve the conflict. It is thus clear from several reports that the Polisario is involved in smuggling and organized crime in the Sahel (Laurent, 2013). On this subject, Mathieu Pellerin and Yves Trotignon state.

In these under-administered zones controlled by trafficking, a multitude of armed struggle movements have swarmed in the Saharo-Sahelian confines over the past three decades, recruiting among the various populations present in the zone: Sahraoui (Polisario Front); Maure (Cavaliers du changement); Touareg (the fifteen or so fronts active in both Mali and Niger during the 1990s, and their current descendants, whether it be the Alliance for Democratic Change in Mali and the Niger Movement for Justice / MNJ in Niger) ; Toubou (in eastern Niger and northern Chad), as well as a multitude of self-defense militias of Arab or black African origin (Pelletin and Trotignon, 2010 : 48).

By being part of the maintenance of smuggling, the Polisario appears to be a criminal movement. For, 'the Sahrawi refugee camps of the Polisario Front in south-west Algeria, southern Libya and northern Mali are also transit zones [for arms smuggling]. Because of its strategic position, the city of Tindouf represents the ideal crossing point between the eastern and western Sahel" (Ammour, 2006). At the same time, the Polisario is regularly blacklisted by reports from international and human rights organizations on the detour of humanitarian aid to the refugees and displaced persons from the Tindouf camps. The 2007 OLAF (European Anti-Fraud Office) report, made public in 2015, denounced the misappropriation of humanitarian aid. These misappropriations involved all or part of an amount of 105 million euros, between 1994 and 2005. Not only was Algeria accused in this report of having illegally levied a 5% tax on the amount of humanitarian aid intended to finance purchases on the spot (i.e. in Algeria), but also the Polisario leaders had stored the diverted aid before redistributing it on sub-Saharan markets, notably in Mauritania. Similarly, some Polisario leaders, guilty of the said detour, were owners of the luxury villas bought in southern Europe. In addition to these misappropriations of humanitarian aid, Algeria was suspected of voluntarily overestimating the number of refugees in the Tindouf camps in order to unfairly obtain substantial aid from humanitarian agencies. This mafia partition is proliferating and could, at least in part, justify the opposition of the Polisario and Algeria to the census of the populations of the Tindouf camps by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

2.3. The threats to regional peace and international security issues

The spread of criminal acts around Tindouf and the Polisario's connections with the myriad terrorist groups in the Sahel is today a challenge to regional, African and international peace and security. All the more so as the Sahel is a land of opportunities and challenges. However, the combination of several endogenous factors of instability (failed states, terrorism, the Tuareg rebellion, various forms of trafficking, etc.) makes it a particular concern and attention. For, despite its inhospitable geography, the Sahel offers a haven for terrorist groups, drug trafficking and illegal immigration networks, and other criminal networks that directly threaten neighboring African regions and Europe. The underlying challenge is economic before it is security and political. Mauritania is, in many respects, a major iron ore deposit, useful for the steel industry in Europe. Niger, the world's fourth largest Producer of uranium and supplier of round 8.7 percent of world production, converts 12 percent of the Eus néés, and has endormons available and inexploité reserves (Grégoire, 2011: 206-225). In addition, European plans for the production of solar energy, through Desertec, are foreseen. Furthermore, the Sahel is the strategic transit area for the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline project (Fabiani, 2009: 9-12) which aims to bring Nigerian gas to Europe.

In view of this presentation, the Sahel offers strategic depth to North Africa and by extension to West Africa. Indirectly, Central Africa and the Red Sea basin are also connected to it, at their maritime, land and air borders. The geopolitical dynamics prevailing there thus extend to the Mediterranean borders and the European Union (Baghzouz, 2014: 195-207). The existence of mercenaries and other terrorist groups that consider the Sahel as a sanctuary for their activities is thus a threat to peace and collective security. The acuity of cross-border migratory movements and the intensity of widespread illegal trafficking as well as the regional humanitarian and security challenges in the Sahel call for several international actions (military cooperation, technical assistance, project financing, humanitarian assistance, etc.). These, requiring greater coherence and proactivity, are carried out at the regional (with the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS), continental (with the African Union, AU) and international (with the United Nations and bilateral partners such as France).

3. Conclusion

Almost all of the Sahel is beyond the control of politically constituted states. Several private actors and armed groups have for several decades now been engaged in all the reprehensible practices. The Polisario Front is thus implicated in all trafficking and threats in the Sahel. In the current political context, the destabilizing dynamics are becoming entrenched to make the responses to be provided irreversible. Indeed, the proliferation of criminal activities and violent jihadism led by armed groups and terrorists and the risk of a conflagration in the region (or even an extension to other regions of Africa), constitute urgent security challenges. Holistic responses to these challenges are first political, then security, and finally economic (Chegraoui and Benabbad, 2018). At the political level, the establishment of the rule of law and good governance are some of the prerequisites that can guarantee inclusive dialogue, the only guarantee of political discussion, crisis prevention, recovery and management. In terms of security, terrorist groups are a target. To achieve this, the restructuring of the national armies of the Sahelian countries is timely, in order to increase their provisional and operational effectiveness, beyond the achievements of the French operation Serval (January 2013-July 2014), Barkhane (since 2014) and UNMISMA (United Nations Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali). The objective being the gradual takeover of the security situation by the national armies, the creation of the G5 Sahel is part of this process. It is a force created in February 2014 with the aim of "bringing the five states to achieve coordination of their development and security policies in a context of widespread vulnerability, growing terrorism and a fairly visible infrastructure deficit" (Nwatchock A Birema, 2018). At the economic level, it is necessary to address effective responses, build economies and drastically reduce unemployment among young people, the preferred targets of armed groups. Similarly, fundamental economic and social rights (access to school, health services, drinking water, sufficient food, fair distribution of the fruits of growth, etc.) and political rights (electoral transparency, justice, equity, etc.) are of absolute necessity to curb the various threats. In view of all this, it is important, at the heart of the ubiquitous rooting of transnationalized (youth-dominated) violent extremism (Arnaud, 2016) at the borders of the Sahelian countries, to develop a better understanding (including a harmonized struggle) of the process of indoctrination, radicalization and violent extremism. For, it is necessary to : rethink the relationship between states and societies that is at the root of the rise of violent extremism in the Sahelian zone; question/evaluate public policies whose failure has created social injustices between the center and the national peripheries; analyze and improve the (authoritarian) strategies and responses of national authorities, which generally produce contrary effects; identify/categorize the status of extremists (leaders, actors, supporters and sympathizers) for a better adaptation of discourse (political and religious) and political and military responses ; Involve the private sector, religious authorities, women, and youth in preventing and combating

violent extremism in the Sahel; design and implement a transnational strategy to combat violent extremism; develop the best tools for de-radicalization; adapt differentiated African responses based on the European "toolbox" (European security program, etc.); and develop a strategy to combat violent extremism in the Sahel) and the French "toolbox" (e.g. a system for listening to and reporting radicalization, etc.) for combating violent extremism.

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