

DIALOGUES

SECURITAIRES
DANS L'ESPACE
SAHELO - SAHARIEN

SECURITY CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN
THE SAHELO-SAHARAN REGION

THE BURKINA FASO PERSPECTIVE

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
INTRODUCTION	5
I. MAJOR SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES	6
II. STRATEGIC SECURITY APPROACH IN BURKINA FASO	12
III. SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES SHARED BY SAHEL-SAHARAN COUNTRIES	14
IV. STRATEGIC INTERESTS OF BURKINA FASO IN THE SAHEL-SAHARA REGION	16
V. EVALUATION OF SUB-REGIONAL AND REGIONAL COOPERATION	18
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	20

FOREWORD

The recent Malian and Libyan crises have exacerbated the multidimensional insecurity (at personal, economic, political, social, environmental, healthcare, etc. levels) that affects the populations living the Sahelo-Saharan region, and have showcased not only the weakness of the States but also the necessity for regional cooperation, especially between the Maghreb and West Africa. Together, they may face up to similar challenges.

The project called "Dialogues about Security in the Sahelo-Saharan Region" stems from this observation. It was initiated by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Office in Mali, in partnership with its counterparts in Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia, in order to underscore the strong interdependences that exist between North and West Africa regarding security matters, and to promote national and sub-regional dialogues about the security challenges and issues that prevail within the States and across borders.

It aims at assessing the overall situation in the region, in light of the concept of human security. This is why country-based studies were conducted in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad and Tunisia. Each country-based study went through a validation process led by a committee of human security specialists from the country in question. Also, each country-based study was discussed by experts during a workshop that was organized for the purpose of not only identifying shared issues, but also agreeing on the top political actions that must be carried out in the Sahelo-Maghreb region.

These country-based studies represent the first phase of an on-going multiyear project. They are also the intellectual basis on which some upcoming activities will be based, such as a regional conference that will focus on the priority issues that the experts have defined during their respective workshops.

The outcomes of the project will be used by all the key players involved in the various aspects of human security across the region. They will also be important sources of information and guidelines for the policy-makers and the members of the civil society, as well as for national and foreign researchers and university staff members.

Bamako, July 2016

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INTRODUCTION

For millennia, the Sahel-Sahara region has been a meeting ground for a variety of civilizations, races and cultures. It is also located on the boundary between the Arab and Berber world and the sub-Saharan world of Black Africa. This hostile region, which is weakly administered and difficult to control, has been the locus of four major events that have profoundly changed its social, political and security environment. These are: the civil war in Algeria, which began in 1991 after the legislative elections were won by Islamists; the Arab Spring in 2010, which rocked the Maghreb and caused the fall of the Ben Ali government in Tunisia; the collapse of the Muammar Gaddafi government in Libya in October 2011, and the Malian crisis, which started on January 17, 2012, with the attacks on Malian army positions and the taking of Aguelhok by Tuareg rebels from the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in the north of the country.

This strip of land has long been a sanctuary for smugglers and criminals of all kinds. Today, the emergence of armed terrorist groups founded on radical Islamist ideology and state collapse due to corruption and collusion of officials with criminal networks,¹ seriously undermine efforts by the region's countries and the international community to promote sustainable human development. Most of the countries in the Sahel-Saharan strip rank among the poorest in the world in terms of sustainable human development. They are therefore in very difficult situations in terms of human security, and even safety. Burkina Faso, a landlocked country in the heart of West Africa, belongs to the region. It covers a surface area of 274,000 square kilometers and occupies a very important geostrategic and security position owing to its central location. The population was estimated at 18,365,123 according to the 2014 census, and is growing at a rate of 6.5% per annum². Burkina Faso is consistently ranked among the world's ten poorest countries in terms of sustainable human development by the United Nations Development Programme³. The country underwent unprecedented political and social instability with the insurrection of October 30-31, 2014, sparked by former President Blaise Compaoré's attempt to revise the constitution by removing the clauses limiting the presidential term of office. The fall of the government led to a political transition, followed by free and transparent elections in November 2015.

This political instability developed against a backdrop of growing impoverishment, chronic youth unemployment, food insecurity⁴, etc. The recent political upheaval in the country further weakened and undermined government institutions, leading to burgeoning insecurity in both urban and rural areas. On January 15, 2016, Burkina experienced the first terrorist attack in its history, culminating in the death of thirty-two (32) people including eighteen (18) foreign nationals. The attack revealed the security forces' struggles to deal with this new threat, both from the standpoint of prevention through effective intelligence capabilities and in terms of their response (intervention units were unprepared and under-equipped).

In rural areas, given the security forces' inability to control organized crime and armed robbery, people formed their own organizations to defend themselves against organized crime, sometimes successfully. However, their methods were criticized, as they often led to serious human rights abuses. These vigilante groups also raised concerns in that there were armed and therefore contributed to the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and also because their actions generated inter-community tensions. Because they were sometimes particularly targeted by vigilante groups, certain ethnic and social groups also organized to defend themselves.

In the face of such major existential challenges, security issues have taken on a new dimension. The goal of this study is to analyse security threats and challenges in Burkina Faso in relation to the Sahel-Sahara sub-regional environment. To that end, it will seek to identify the major security threats and challenges as well as to address the following topics:

- I. Major security threats and challenges in Burkina Faso;
- II. Strategic approach to security in Burkina Faso;
- III. Security threats and challenges shared by countries in the Sahel-Sahara region;
- IV. Strategic interests of Burkina Faso in the Sahel-Sahara region;
- V. Evaluation of sub-regional and regional cooperation;
- VI. Conclusion and recommendations.

¹ Wolfram Lacher, "Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region", The Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment, September 2012

² Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie, 2014

³ 183rd out of 188 countries ranked, according to the UNDP's 2015 Human Development Report

⁴ Burkina Faso experienced so-called hunger demonstrations in 2008.

I. MAJOR SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES

1.1 Clarification of the concepts

In this study, a threat refers to a more or less imminent, clearly identified danger that could compromise the country's internal security or a potential attack against national interests manifested by a will and capacities. Challenges are existing situations or facts that endanger the country's internal security, or the safety of individuals or their property⁵. Burkina Faso's major internal and external security threats and challenges will be addressed in the light of this conceptual clarification.

1.2 Internal threats and challenges

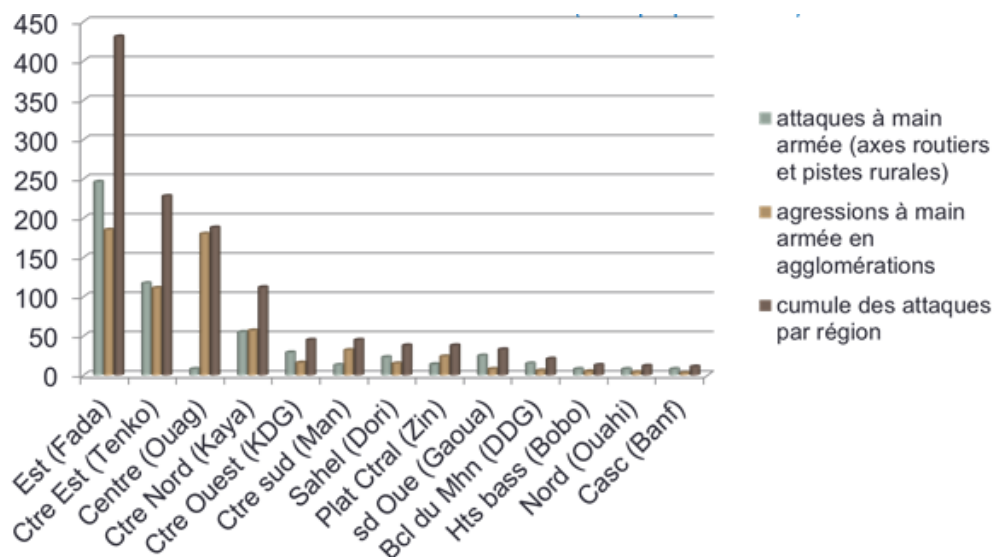
Military mutinies: Burkina Faso has experienced a series of mutinies coming very close together (in 1978, 1999, 2006 and 2011), characterized by violence and questioning of state institutions. The mutiny of 2011 was the largest and most serious on the African continent over the last decade. Non-commissioned members and officers in every garrison in the country instigated turmoil throughout the first half of the year, causing casualties, looting businesses, ransacking homes, and committing rapes and other serious human rights violations⁶. This situation generated unprecedented insecurity and psychosis in the population, further aggravated by a series of crises involving the former Presidential Security Regiment (RSP) during the transition period that followed the insurrection of October 30-31, 2014. The Regiment disrupted the functioning of the state and disturbed the peace of the population up until the coup d'état of September 17, 2015, which was defeated by fierce popular resistance.

⁵ Stratégie Nationale de Sécurité intérieure, 2010.

⁶ Emile Ouédraogo, "Advancing Military Professionalism in Africa", A Research Paper from the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, No. 6, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Washington D.C., July 2014

Armed robbery: Since the early 1990s, Burkina Faso has experienced violent crime, leading to collective psychosis and rebelliousness in the population, both in urban and rural areas. The most common crimes in the country recorded by the security forces turned out to be: armed attacks; burglary, both in private homes and in businesses; and bag-snatching by organized gangs on transit roads, major city thoroughfares, around local markets, etc.⁷ The criminals used either automatic firearms (automatic pistols, submachine guns, hunting rifles or homemade rifles or pistols) or bladed weapons (knives, daggers, machetes, cudgels, etc.). The upswing in armed attacks and burglary was used as a justification for the rapid rise of vigilante groups. The groups are one of today's foremost security challenges, and probably shall remain so for many years.

Armed robbery statistics by region in 2014



Source: National police

[Graphique:] armed robbery (transit roads and rural tracks)

armed assaults in cities

cumulative attacks by region

Terrorism: Burkina Faso is among the West African countries that are permeable to Jihadist-Salafism. Its northern border is adjacent to Mali, which is roiling with Islamist groups and terrorists claiming allegiance to the Jihadist cause, as well as Tuareg movements calling for independence or self-determination for the northern part of the country. Although Burkina Faso used to be a safe haven from terrorist activities, it is now a prime target. The cycle began with the kidnapping, on April 4, 2015, of a Franco-Romanian national in a manganese mine in Tambao in the far north of the country, near the Malian border. Attacks against gendarmerie border posts in Déou, in the north, and Samorogoan, in the south, in May and October 2015, foreshadowed more significant action against Burkina Faso, which would take place on January 15, 2016, on Kwamé N'Krumah Avenue, in the downtown area of the capital city of Ouagadougou. The targets were the Splendide hotel and the Cappuccino café. That same day, an attack on a convoy escorted by the gendarmerie left two dead, including one gendarme. The terrorist action culminated in a total of thirty-two (32) dead and several dozen wounded. In addition to the great difficulty experienced by security forces in trying to deal with an attack of that scope, the situation revealed signs that Burkina Faso was particularly vulnerable to organized crime and terrorism. The terrorist threat is further fueled by factors such as:

- porous land borders that allow the territory to be infiltrated and enable arms trafficking, which has increased in the sub-region due to crises in certain countries;
- a surge in organized crime, notably armed attacks, which can serve as a foundation for the activities of terrorist groups; and
- unemployment, misery and poverty, which predispose the most vulnerable segments of the population to respond favourably to the ideology of terrorist organizations.

⁷ Ministry of Public Security, Directorate of State Security.

In the light of the foregoing, it should be noted that the eradication of the terrorist menace is a security issue on the national, sub-regional and international levels.

Inter- and intra-community conflicts: In Burkina Faso, inter-community conflicts are most commonly observed between farmers and herders, and between natives and non-natives of a region. Intra-community conflicts, which take place within the same community, are very often linked to matters of chiefs' succession, rivalries between individuals or family groups, conflicts over religious or political leadership positions, and so on. In both cases, inter- and intra-community conflicts point to the difficulty of peaceful coexistence between groups of individuals. They are a reflection of intolerance and the failure of mediation and crisis-resolution mechanisms. Today, with the uncontrolled circulation of small arms and light weapons, these conflicts cause significant loss of human lives and numerous injuries. The intra-community conflicts that spread across the national territory during the first municipal elections following the insurrection were potential causes of major public disturbances that could undermine domestic stability.

Drug trafficking: Owing to its position as a crossroads in West Africa, Burkina Faso is also a trafficking and transit area for drugs, mostly coming from neighbouring countries and other countries in the sub-region (Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea Conakry, Guinea-Bissau and Mali). However, in recent years, cannabis-growing operations have been seen in southern border regions. Drugs in circulation in Burkina Faso include: cannabis; amphetamines; solvents and small quantities of cocaine and heroin. These drugs are brought into the country by "mules" and other smugglers recruited by local networks in the sub-region. They transit through Burkina on their way to Europe, by land or by air⁸.

Uncontrolled use of explosives and cyanide

Uncontrolled use of explosives and cyanide on mining sites in Burkina Faso is a security challenge that needs to be addressed by the country's leadership. Mismanagement of licences for the importation and manufacture of explosives and chemicals used in mining, mainly for gold, is currently the cause of numerous deaths on mine sites, pollutes the environment, and exposes the population to terrorist attacks, since bomb attacks are the preferred mode of action among Jihadists. On July 15, 2014, the detonation of a stockpile of explosives belonging to a private citizen, in the working-class neighborhood of Larlé, in the heart of Ouagadougou, left two dead and some forty wounded, and did considerable material damage. As for cyanide, this highly toxic chemical is commonly used in traditional gold mining. The harmful consequences for the health of the miners, as well as the pollution of the soil and groundwater are major challenges to sustainable development in Burkina Faso. This state of affairs is due to inadequacies in the legislation on explosives and chemicals. There is a visible lack of coordination between the ministries involved, namely the ministries of: "the Environment, the Green Economy and Climate Change", "Industry, Trade and Crafts", "the Economy, Finance and Development", "Transportation, Urban Mobility and Road Safety", and "Territorial Administration and Internal Security". This weakness works to the advantage of smugglers, who have very active networks extending from Ghana, through Burkina Faso to Mali.

Trafficking and sale of adulterated liquor

The sale of liquor of dubious quality, commonly known locally as "frelaté" or "frelon", is undeniably a flourishing business at the present time in Burkina Faso. Whereas they used to be imported, these alcoholic beverages are now smuggled across borders or produced locally under very obscure conditions. Clandestine manufacturing units flood the cities and countryside with huge quantities of alcohol that has never been subjected to quality control or inspection of any kind⁹. However, to this day, the government continues to display a worryingly lenient attitude towards the unbridled proliferation of the liquor, which is dangerous to the health and to the community as a whole. Individual consumers are at risk for cancer and attacks on their nervous system due to extremely harmful substances, such as methanol, contained in improperly distilled spirits. In social and economic terms, this scourge affects individuals' ability to work. On the national scale, it has an impact on farmers' productivity in the countryside and negatively affects food security in the country as a whole.

Migratory flows: Burkina Faso experiences both internal and external migratory flows, as both a country of origin and a destination. Internally, many people from rural areas migrate to the larger urban centers, mainly Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso, to seek employment. The country also experiences rural exodus due to climate change and environmental damage, causing some to migrate to fields and farms in more prosperous regions in the South, as well as to mine sites.

Where external migrations are concerned, Burkina Faso receives migrants from neighboring countries, but its population also looks for work abroad. In terms of the latter movement, African destinations chiefly include Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. Migration to Western countries focuses on Italy, Spain and, more recently, North America. In recent years, flows have also turned towards certain countries in the Arabian Peninsula. The main causes of these migrations are essentially linked to existential hardships (poverty, hunger, disease and unemployment) and catastrophes of various kinds.

⁸Tabyam, Le Burkina Faso, Plaque tournante du Trafic de Drogue, Agora Vox, May 2008

⁹Yacouba Ladji Bama, "Santé Publique : Le péril des alcools frelatés", Le Reporter, 19 Juin 2012

Antisocial conduct: The establishment of democracy may sometimes have negative side effects in relation to the enjoyment of certain rights. This includes all freedoms whose enjoyment can lead to abuses. In Burkina Faso, a growing number of antisocial and uncivil acts have been observed, taking the form of destruction of property, challenges to public authority, etc. These side effects of the entrenchment of democracy and the rule of law, which may be due to ignorance, illiteracy, or a lack of democratic and civic culture, are significant obstacles to sustainable internal stability.

Religious extremism: The progressive radicalization of religious society in Burkina Faso can be observed through the discourse in the country's mosques and churches and on certain denominational radio stations, as well as through social behaviors such as inter-community religious intolerance and assertion of overtly sectarian attitudes. Furthermore, the existence of a high number of religious non-profit or charity associations and organizations, including several foreign associations using funds raised abroad whose origins are hard to track, can doubtless serve as a channel for money-laundering and financing of terrorism.

Corruption: In Burkina Faso, corruption is a real phenomenon, even though the situation may seem less critical compared to that in other countries. In 2014, with a score of 3.5, it ranked 80th out of 180 countries, making it the 3rd least corrupt country in the West African sub-region (after Cape Verde and Ghana), and 9th in the whole of Africa, tied with Morocco¹⁰. Without providing a complete list of the causes of the phenomenon, which may be social or economic, or due to ignorance or illiteracy, or the loss of cultural identity or the erosion of moral and social values, corruption appears to be a far-ranging ill. The sectors believed to be the most corrupt include: the government procurement sector; customs, the police and the gendarmerie; finance (taxes); justice, town halls, healthcare, etc. Because it undermines development by creating dysfunctions in various sectors of activity, corruption is a serious governance and national security issue for which appropriate solutions need to be sought¹¹.

Youth unemployment and poverty: A landlocked country without significant natural resources or a solid industrial base, Burkina Faso faces chronic unemployment, particularly among the younger segment of its population. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)¹², approximately 45% of the population lives with an income below the poverty line set by the World Bank. The unemployment rate is highest in the 18-25-year-old age range. In security terms, this situation is analogous to a ticking time-bomb.

Climate change: In recent years, many regions of the world have faced catastrophes whose causes were more or less directly linked to climate change. In the West African sub-region and in Burkina Faso, floods, droughts and other catastrophes recorded in the relatively recent past have contributed to environmental damage and fluctuations in seasonal rhythms. The repercussions of these climate changes can be felt and will continue to be felt mainly in areas that include the management and use of water resources, arable land, food resources and energy resources. According to many analysts, depletion of resources will be a factor in rising tensions both between states within the same region and within certain states themselves. In Burkina Faso, recurring conflicts oppose farmers and herders, on the one hand, and farmers amongst themselves, more or less directly due to resource depletion.

1.3. Causes and origins of security threats and challenges

The causes of insecurity are numerous and include the following:

- Economic issues: When people are unable to meet their basic needs or obtain what they want from the government, they generally resort to either peaceful means such as mass protests, or illegal or criminal practices or to unbridled violence that can lead to public unrest and instability;
- Weakness of the justice system: The sudden rise of vigilante groups in Burkina Faso seems to be one of the consequences of this weakness. The prison system releases highway robbers who continue to commit crimes with impunity. The lack of equity and justice, the corruption of justice departments, and inefficient justice procedures ill-suited to our socio-cultural realities are all factors that have contributed to creating a lack of faith in the justice system. People tend to take justice into their own hands in total disregard of the existing rules;
- A weak governance system: This leads to chronic instability, in which the state is unable to protect its citizens and their property, control its borders and the whole of its territory, satisfy the people's basic needs, and create an environment that promotes diversity and cohabitation. The state is then unable to fight against injustice and corruption, uphold human rights or establish sustainable democratic institutions;

¹⁰ Autorité supérieure du contrôle d'Etat (A.S.C.E.), Paper presented during awareness-raising sessions in ministerial departments, 2009.

¹¹ REN-LAC, Rapport sur l'état de la corruption au Burkina Faso, 2016

¹² UNDP, 2015 Human Development Report

- A security system focusing on the state and government: This system favors enforcement over prevention. It creates a climate where political clout is dominated by revenge, fear and terror, predominated by a lack of institutional and human security, and characterized by serious human rights abuses.

These are the main causes that very often underlie the insecurity experienced by Burkina Faso. In other words, the way economic, social, legal and political governance is exercised, along with external threats and challenges, has a significant impact on security and development.

1.4. External threats and challenges

Cross-border crime: Globalization, information and communication technology, permeable borders and weaknesses in actual cooperation mechanisms between security forces are among the factors that have promoted skyrocketing cross-border crime in Burkina Faso. A rapid rise has been seen in activities such as trafficking in human beings and organs, smuggling of drugs, firearms, stolen vehicles, natural resources, cultural artefacts, hazardous waste, substances that deplete the ozone layer, and endangered animal and plant species. Furthermore, abductions for ransom are increasingly popular among criminal gangs.

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons: There have been more than 3,000,000 victims of small arms in West Africa since 1990, due to a series of conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and, more recently, in Mali¹³. The flow of arms into various hotbeds of tension is facilitated by permeable borders and huge stretches of territory that are difficult for states to control. In Burkina Faso, although no reliable statistics are available on the number of weapons in circulation, it is believed that the situation is quite worrisome. The impact of the circulation of small arms has been felt in terms of the overall level of insecurity, which has been rising sharply for more than a decade. The proliferation of small arms promotes organized crime and urban crime, which have grown exponentially. It is also reflected in the growing feeling of insecurity among the population, many of whom react by seeking to procure their own arms, whatever the means. In addition to the foregoing, small arms proliferation also has economic and social consequences, so that, when all is said and done, the phenomenon appears to be a serious threat to the internal security of Burkina Faso.

Border disputes: The arbitrary borders inherited from colonization do not recognize the political entities that existed prior to the colonial period. Certain kingdoms and ethnic groups were divided among several nation-states, creating artificial separations in these entities. As a result, these borders are quite often challenged by the population, and sometimes even by the states. The village of Koualou is currently the focus of a border dispute between Burkina Faso and Benin. Talks are underway with a view to seeking a legal settlement of the dispute, as was done by Niger and Mali, which called upon the International Court of Justice for arbitration of their border disputes with Burkina Faso. In the case of Mali, the two countries unfortunately experienced armed conflicts in 1974 and 1985 before turning to international justice to arbitrate the case. However, both countries accepted the verdict of the court and, since then, they have coexisted in perfect harmony.

The impact of sub-regional conflicts: In West Africa, conflicts in Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire have had serious repercussions on the security climate in Burkina Faso. In the space of a few years, the rise of insecurity has been reflected in an intensification of drug smuggling that has turned the sub-region into one of the prime operating areas for traffickers. Arms trafficking, which has also developed, has provided weapons for organized crime networks, whose operations have experienced significant growth. Due to its geographic location, Burkina Faso is negatively affected by the adverse security environment in this part of the continent and, for more than a decade, has been facing rising internal insecurity of all kinds, which can easily be linked to the sub-regional environment.

The proliferation of Jihadist and Salafist movements: Northern Mali is still swarming with the remains of armed terrorist groups, although they have been considerably weakened and disorganized following the military intervention by France, Chad and ECOWAS. An evaluation of the security situation in the region, conducted on April 9, 2014, by the military chiefs of staff of the countries concerned, revealed that they were reorganizing and attempting to regain ground, exert pressure on the population and harass the international forces engaged in securing the area¹⁴. A new, more radical and better organized group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's Islamic State, is challenging the hegemony of AQIM in the area. Many fighters from the Katiba of Abou Zeid, who was killed in strikes by the French armed forces in the early days of Operation Serval, have joined Jund al-Khalifa (the soldiers of the caliphate). They have sworn allegiance to both Boko Haram and Islamic State.

¹³ Chabi Dramane Bouko, La circulation des armes légères et de petit calibre en Afrique de l'Ouest : Contribution à une étude au programme de désarmement, online thesis, Université d'Abomey Calavi, 2004.

¹⁴ CRIC working papers, April 2014.

The remains of the MUJWA¹⁵, on the outskirts of the areas held by Jund, which were partially inherited from the katiba of Timbuktu, merged with Mokhtar Belmokhtar's al-Muwaq'`un Bil-Dima (Those Who Sign in Blood) to form Al Mourabitoun, which formerly controlled Gao, but is now scattered along the border between Mali, Burkina and Niger. In all likelihood, elements from this terrorist group were responsible for the abduction of the Franco-Romanian national from the Tambao mine, in April 2015¹⁶. Further south in the Sahel-Sahara region, mostly in northern Nigeria, 150 km from the Burkina border as the crow flies, a very famous and deadly terrorist group formed and developed. Known as Boko Haram, and led by Abubacar Shekau, the group has distinguished itself by carrying out indiscriminate attacks on the people of Nigeria, as well as neighboring Cameroon, Chad and Niger, and may extend its operations into Burkina Faso.

Cybercrime: Although information and communication technologies have made things easier and enabled millions of people to gain access to an endless source of information, their development has also given rise to a new form of crime: cybercrime. According to the European Commission, cybercrime includes three categories of criminal activities: traditional forms of crime such as computer forgery and fraud (scams, fake payment cards, fake diplomas, etc.); dissemination of illicit contents by electronic means (such as contents involving sexual violence against children or incitement of racial hatred); and offenses pertaining to electronic networks, i.e. attacks on information systems and piracy.

The common features of these different categories of offenses reside in the fact that they can be committed on a wide scale and that the perpetrators may be separated from their victims by significant geographic distances. Economic actors are choice targets for cybercrime, although public administrations and ordinary citizens are also vulnerable.

In Burkina Faso, although it is still emergent, cybercrime is growing with the increasing spread of computer networks, the proliferation of cybercafés, and a growing popular interest in computers. The cross-border nature of these new types of criminal activities calls for greater international cooperation through an effective, holistic strategic security approach.

¹⁵ Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa

¹⁶ Benjamin Roger, "Burkina Faso : Que sait-on de l'enlèvement d'un Roumain par Al-Mourabitoun", Jeune Afrique, 19 Mai 2015.

II. STRATEGIC SECURITY APPROACH IN BURKINA FASO

2.1. A conceptual approach to internal security

The orientation given to internal security by Burkina Faso's national internal security strategy (Stratégie Nationale de Sécurité Intérieure – SNSI) takes account of the need for a strong state, the need for prevention and the need to protect fundamental individual rights; in short: the need for rule of law. Burkina Faso's vision of internal security strikes a central stance between, on the one hand, the concept of state-centric security that confines the state to its governing functions as a guarantor of security and, on the other hand, a focus on human security promoting individual fulfilment¹⁷.

2.2. Strategic focuses of internal security

The strategic focuses defined to enable Burkina Faso to address its security challenges and threats revolve around the following six orientations:

- Organizational and operational capacity building for internal security forces;
- Reinforcement of the intelligence function;
- Community participation;
- Reinforcement of communication;
- Reinforcement of prevention and enforcement mechanisms;
- Reinforcement of international and regional cooperation;

2.3. Strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths of the security system: The development of a national internal security strategy (Stratégie Nationale de Sécurité Intérieure) has been a key asset to security policy implementation in Burkina Faso. It has made it possible to clearly identify threats and challenges and has put forward strategic guidelines to deal with them.

The weaknesses of the system reside in the fact that the national internal security strategy has not been effectively implemented, despite having been adopted by decree. This is a serious handicap that has negatively impacted on the quality of security expected by both the government and the people. Weaknesses can notably be found in the coordination of operations and in human and material resource management, namely:

- ❖ In terms of operational coordination, weaknesses include scattering of internal security forces, inadequate prevention and enforcement, issues with the implementation of community participation and insufficient communication, as well as weaknesses in sub-regional cooperation.
- ❖ In terms of resource management, insufficient material and financial resources, insufficient human resources and a lack of continuous training are the main weaknesses of the security system.

The consequences of the abovementioned weaknesses in the security system include conflicts of jurisdiction and lack of professionalism in security forces and personnel. At the institutional level, the absence of a cooperative framework with neighboring countries with respect to the fight against cross-border and transnational crime compromises the effectiveness of all of their security systems. At the level of the state, extra costs and wastage of meagre government resources are often observed, as well as resorting to concession contracts with the private sector and self-defense groups to meet security challenges.

2.4. Security stakeholders

Under the terms of Act No. 032-2003/AN of May 14, 2003, on internal security, the security forces of Burkina Faso include:

- All police, gendarmerie, fire brigade and other paramilitary bodies (i.e. prison security, customs, water and forest rangers, etc.) involved in internal security on a permanent basis;

¹⁷ Stratégie Nationale de Sécurité Intérieure, ibid.

- Other military forces (the mobile gendarmerie mobile as a second-category force and all national armed forces other than the gendarmerie, as third-category forces) which may be requisitioned exceptionally, on a one-off basis;
- Local enforcement authorities (municipal police) and private companies (with public service concessions) operating in the field of security.

Although under the terms of the decree on the powers of the members of the government internal security falls within the remit of the minister in charge of Security, as defined above, the internal security forces are distributed between the ministry of Security and other ministerial departments and public and private organizations.

2.5 Community policing

Community policing (or community participation in prevention of insecurity) and a community-focused security policy in Burkina Faso were designed to be among the key responses to the objective limitations of the security forces. This security policy was tested during the 2005-2009 five-year plan, beginning a process of earning ownership and support in Burkinabe society which continues to this day. Well before the policy decision was made, certain communities had had positive experiences with endogenous initiatives aimed at preventing insecurity, with remarkable results that were recognized by the population and institutional stakeholders, including security and even diplomatic officials. The most illustrative examples were the Koglwéogo associations in Yatenga (on the northern border with Mali). The performances of these so-called local security initiatives were used as a foundation for the reorganization of community policing in a subsequent five-year plan (2011-2015). This reorganization revolved around inclusion of communities' socio-cultural references and local realities. The experiences of the Koglwéogo associations, which worked in partnership with security forces, prompted study missions from other African countries such as Guinea Conakry and Burundi. Their actions, based on awareness raising, denunciation, and arrests (in cases of flagrante delicto), have significantly reduced crime and anti-social conduct. The implementation of the second plan was supposed to be a widespread, adapted replication of the experience in a number of other communities. However, due to organizational issues, it was not possible to carry out this crucial phase despite apparently high expectations on the part of the communities. Their patience exhausted by rising insecurity, ordinary citizens decided to set up "self-defense groups" that went by the name of Koglwéogo associations, like the ones in Yatenga. These alternative Koglwéogo associations spread across the territory, sometimes committing acts that were not in line with the rule of law. However, the results they achieved were widely lauded by the rural population. Their methods of action, which include physical violence and fines, have been questioned by the public authorities and human rights organizations. The ministry in charge of Internal Security, which holds consultations with the groups and other institutional stakeholders such as the ministry of Justice, is attempting to better organize them through official recognition and guidance from the security forces. The goal is to achieve better results while upholding the laws of the Republic. Local security initiatives as a model for security management could doubtless play a major role in the prevention of terrorism and insecurity in Burkina Faso and even in other countries in the Sahel-Sahara region.

III. SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES SHARED BY SAHEL-SAHARAN COUNTRIES

The security challenges shared by countries in the Sahel-Sahara region result from the emergence of terrorist threats and the development of criminal networks and extremist groups, which are sometimes separatist and very often have ties to radical Islamism. The unprecedented development of criminal activities in the region has endangered the security of persons and property but also resulted in a sizeable risk of destabilization of the states in the region. These threats and menaces have been the focus of numerous studies and reports by international organizations. In 2012, Wolfram Lacher published "Organized crime and conflict in the Sahel-Sahara", breaking them down into three essential points:

- Illicit trafficking and criminal networks;
- Armed terrorist groups and Islamic militancy; and
- Weak governance, which leads to corruption and collusion of officials with criminal networks.¹⁸

The ongoing environmental crisis and money laundering should also be added to this list.

3.1 Illicit trafficking and criminal networks

Several observers feel that illicit trafficking lays the foundation for the development of criminal networks and, indirectly, the threats hanging over the region. Contraband cigarettes, in particular, have largely contributed to the emergence of practices and networks that have enabled the development of drug trafficking. Cigarette smuggling in the area, aimed at the North African market, began in the 1980s, transiting through Mauritania to inundate the Moroccan and Algerian markets. Another, more southerly route passed through Benin and Togo, supplying markets in Burkina Faso, Niger and even Libya. In 2009, the UNODC estimated the value of this parallel trade at 60% of the Libyan cigarette market, or approximately 240 million US dollars and 18% of the Algerian market or approximately 228 million US dollars.¹⁹

This profitable underground trade enabled the development of drug trafficking over the last decade. Trafficking of cocaine headed for Europe from Latin America transits through West Africa, most of it through the Sahel-Sahara region. Illicit drug trafficking routes leading to Europe have eventually reached the Sahel-Sahara by using small aircraft that unload drugs from the coastal regions of West Africa (Guinea-Bissau and Guinea, but also Togo, Benin, Ghana and Mauritania). Smugglers use specially built landing strips in low-surveillance areas.

In addition to these two major forms of trafficking, arms trafficking should also be noted. This criminal activity is not merely a spillover from the war in Libya as one might think. As Laurent Touchard pointed out in his article "Crise malienne, d'où viennent les armes des djihadistes?" (Malian crisis, where do the Jihadists' arms come from?)²⁰, arms trafficking has been common in the region since the 2000s. The small arms and light weapons that abound there mostly come from Sierra Leone and Liberia, where the end of the wars made substantial numbers of arms available. The fall of the Gaddafi regime accentuated the traffic and promoted the emergence of powerful armed groups in the area.

Other forms of trafficking that also contribute to the illegal parallel economy in the zone include "human trafficking" and smuggling of stolen vehicles. Where human trafficking is concerned, the trade mostly centers on the organization of clandestine migration between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe, transiting through the Maghreb. A major transportation network specializing in that business has developed between the Sahel countries and the Maghreb. 4X4 vehicles are also stolen and resold, often the property of international organizations and NGOs operating in the region. These vehicles are highly prized by the criminals and other armed groups that roam the area

3.2. Emergence of armed terrorist groups and Islamic militancy

The rise of the abovementioned criminal economy promoted the emergence of armed terrorist groups. The extent of the phenomenon of armed groups and movements in the Sahel-Sahara was revealed to the world by the Malian crisis. However, it should not be forgotten that such groups flourished in the Algerian desert in the 1990s, seriously undermining national security.

¹⁸ Wolfram Lacher, *ibid.*

¹⁹ 2009 UNODC REPORT

²⁰ Laurent Touchard, "Crise Malienne : D'où viennent les armes des Djihadistes", *Jeune Afrique*, 08 novembre 2012

Today, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb remains an emblematic figure among armed terrorist groups in the northern part of the Sahel-Sahara zone. The war in Mali, which was chiefly fought against that terrorist group, required an intervention by the French army, the Chadian army and the forces of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to support the Malian forces. Following the intervention of international forces and the Malian army aimed at its destruction, the terrorist group was considerably weakened and remains so to this day.

In addition to AQIM, other, smaller groups were formed and remain active. These chiefly included Ansar Dine, Al-Mourabitoun and the Macina Liberation Front. Their terrorist activities have taken the form of suicide attacks against Western interests in the zone, but also against the national forces of some countries in the region, and against international forces involved in securing the zone. Recently, their operations have targeted the capital cities of West African countries.

Further south in the Sahel-Sahara region, chiefly in northeastern Nigeria, the terrorist group “Boko Haram” was formed and developed, eventually becoming Islamic State in West Africa. This group, whose attacks are particularly deadly, is a major concern for the whole of the West African region.

3.3. Weak governance

The threat of terrorist networks is not the only danger to the region. Indeed, the numerous traffics in the area have led to a significant development of corruption and collusion between state representatives and criminal groups. Indeed, the various forms of trafficking and even hostage-taking for ransom could not have developed without the complicity of notables and local government representatives in the countries of the zone. Collusion and corruption in the security system makes it impossible for the leadership of the countries involved to effectively counter the phenomenon. There is a considerable risk of state collapse, which would lead to an inability to deal with the threats of terrorist groups due to corruption on the part of notables and state representatives and their collusion with these groups.

3.4. Massive return of nationals

The Diaspora originating from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger is the largest among the coastal countries of West Africa. With approximately six million Burkinabe living outside the country (particularly in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana), who make a non-negligible contribution to national wealth (substantial financial transfers, investments in real estate), a massive return of nationals would bring about a considerable risk of internal destabilization in the country. This was the case in Côte d’Ivoire in 2000, with the concept of “Ivoirité”, which was particularly oriented against people of Burkinabe and Sahelian origin living in the country. Burkina Faso has had to deal with an influx of returning nationals estimated at 365,967 people²¹. The establishment of a reception and socio-economic reinsertion mechanism known “Bayiri”, which means “motherland” in the Mooré national language, has been a heavy burden for the national budget. It is in the strategic interest of Sahelian countries for there to be peace and hospitality in the countries hosting the greatest number of their nationals. These chiefly include Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Gabon, Congo Brazzaville, and Equatorial Guinea.

3.5. Environmental crisis

The Sahel-Sahara region is a band of arid desert land suffering from a continuous environmental crisis. The region has always been ecologically fragile and vulnerable to periods of drought and famine. Recent factors such as climate change, population growth and resource depletion have heightened that vulnerability.

3.6. Money laundering

Money laundering is a form of financial crime consisting of hiding dirty money and reinvesting it in legal activities so that criminals can use their illegal income while remaining undetected. It distorts the normal functioning of the economy by creating unfair competition and undermines the credibility of the banking system. As a result, it constitutes a threat to public order.

²¹ Internal document of the ministry of Social Action on operation Bayiri, 2002

In the West African sub-region, although the money-laundering phenomenon is not highly visible, there is no proof it does not exist. Quite the contrary, it would be a logical consequence of the numerous forms of trafficking known to exist in the area.

IV. STRATEGIC INTERESTS OF BURKINA FASO IN THE SAHEL-SAHARA REGION

4.1. Vulnerability of mine sites in the north (triangular border between Burkina, Mali and Niger)

Burkina Faso is becoming a mining country. Mining brought more than 168 (one hundred and sixty-eight) billion CFA francs in tax revenues into the state coffers in 2015, overtaking cotton as the country's number one source of export revenue, and making Burkina Faso the fourth-ranking gold producer in Africa. The great majority of operating mining sites are located in the Sahel zone, along the border between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, which are rife with armed bands and terrorist groups such as Ansar Dine and its main ally, Ahmadou Kouffa, whose latest claim to fame has been his attacks on the Mopti area, as well as the Macina Liberation Front and Al-Mourabitoun, further south on the borderlands with Côte d'Ivoire and Mali. In addition, mining sites are beset with crime and organized crime, not to mention conflicts between neighboring populations and mining companies.

In order to deal with these security challenges that could call into question the strategic importance of the mining sector in Burkina Faso, the government has taken security initiatives aimed at protecting these spots, viewed as sensitive areas. In addition to deploying defense and security forces, it created the Office National de la Sécurisation des Sites Miniers (ONASSIM, national office for securing mining sites), whose chief mission is to:

- Ensure the protection of mining sites, and especially persons and their property, as well as mining infrastructure, throughout the national territory;
- Ensure the security of transfers of mining products, funds and personnel from operating mine sites;
- Ensure security patrols and escorts within mining perimeters and along transit roads in surrounding areas;
- Ensure the prevention of insecurity, specifically through awareness and consultation activities with mining sector actors;
- Ensure, where applicable, in situ customs clearance of equipment and materials belonging to mining companies;
- Fight against all forms of crime on mining sites;
- Fight against customs fraud on mining sites;
- Carry out judicial police duties within the perimeters of the mining sites;
- Protect the environment within the perimeters and in the areas surrounding the mining sites²².

Despite the existence of this prevention and enforcement mechanism, the limitations of ONASSIM were revealed by its inability to address the multiple crises that occurred on mining sites following the popular insurrection of October 30-31, 2014. In order to remedy these insufficiencies, the office opted for awareness, dialogue and enhanced preventive measures.

4.2. Slowdown of pastoral activities in the Sahel

Herding comprises a very substantial portion of the agricultural sector in Burkina Faso. The cattle population in Burkina Faso ranks second largest of all West African states' after Mali's, and forms the country's third largest export, after gold and cotton. Based on traditional pastoralism, with open spaces and no borders, herding, the main industry of the Sahelian area along the border with Mali and Niger, is currently facing enormous difficulties due to the combined impact of terrorism and a surge in organized crime. Armed groups make frequent incursions on border villages, where they commit murder and steal cattle. Furthermore, collusion between the armed groups, smugglers and robbers that roam the area constitutes a threat to the security of the population and the strategic interests of Burkina Faso.

Despite the manifest political will of both countries' leadership to find a peaceful solution and consultations on disputes over certain portions of the boundary between Burkina and Niger, security issues occur on a daily basis and disturb the peace of the population.

²² Decree No. 2013- 1309/Pres/PM/MEF/MATS/ MEF of December 31, 2013 on the creation of the Office National de Sécurité des Sites Miniers (ONASSIM)

4.3. Burkina Faso's participation in MINUSMA

Burkina Faso makes an enormous contribution to the implementation of various anti-terrorism measures in the sub-region. Its participation in military action conducted in northern Mali under the aegis of the international community could spark a violent reaction from Jihadist groups. The persistent crisis in Mali, exacerbated by the armed conflict in Libya which resulted in the uncontrolled spread of firearms in the Sahel-Saharan strip, is a major source of vulnerability and therefore a strategic factor for the country's internal security. On March 10, 2010, Sheikh Abu Obeida Youssef Al-Annabi²³ warned the people and leaders of Senegal and Burkina Faso against possible retaliation if they collaborated with those he deemed apostates or foreign powers. The multiple attacks against the Burkinabe military contingent deployed in Mali, as well as the attacks on the Splendid Hotel and the Cappuccino Café, may also form part of such retaliation.

²³ Presented as the chief adviser to the notables of AQIM.

V. EVALUATION OF SUB-REGIONAL AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

At the regional level, **the first cooperation initiative** arose from the memorandum of cooperation and coordination in the fight against terrorism and crime concluded and signed between Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger in Tamanrasset, Algeria, on August 13, 2009. This MOU is also known as the “initiative des pays du champ” (countries of the field initiative). The initiative created a joint military staff committee (CEMOC), based in Tamanrasset, and a fusion and liaison unit (UFL), which is a permanent consultation body between the armies and intelligence services in all four countries. The aim was to create a joint intervention force that could range from 25,000 to 150,000 men, who could be mobilized according to the size of the joint operations.²⁴ However, the initiative revealed its limitations during the Jihadist offensive in Mali, when the country was unable to stop the progress of terrorist movements and groups towards Bamako.

The second initiative by the countries in the area is the initiative of the group of 5 of the Sahel, also known as G5 Sahel, created on February 16, 2014, in Nouakchott, Mauritania. The aim of this group is to coordinate development and security policies in the political space of the countries. The initiative focuses its actions on democratic anchoring and development in the area, which are seriously affected by the poverty of the population. The originality of this approach resides in the fact that it takes account of the region’s vulnerability factors in developing a global strategy on the fight against terrorism. However, the apparent cohesion of the countries could be undermined by internal rivalries.

The third regional initiative was organized by ECOWAS, with a counter-terrorism strategy and implementation plan, developed and adopted during a meeting of the ministers of Foreign Affairs and the ministers of Defense of ECOWAS states, in January 2013. The goals of this strategy are to:

- Ensure the effectiveness of regional, continental and international counter-terrorism instruments;
- Ensure the operability of West African counter-terrorist instruments;
- Promote and consolidate cooperation, coordination, harmonization and synergy in national counter-terrorism actions;
- Ensure adequate protection of fundamental rights in counter-terrorism activities in the states;
- Enhance the role of ECOWAS in the states and the involvement of media networks and networks of organizations in the prevention of terrorism and the fight against terrorism.

This strategy is upheld by three pillars: prevention (combating religious extremism, enhancing intelligence operations, reinforcing regional cooperation, etc.), criminal prosecution of acts of terrorism and related activities, and reconstruction (protecting victims’ rights, repairing the social contract, etc.). The initiative suffers from a lack of resources for the establishment of various projects and programs.

On the continental scale, Africa equipped itself early on with an instrument on the fight against terrorism, namely the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in 1999. Nevertheless, it remains quite powerless and inoperative against the current development of the phenomenon.

At the international level, the United Nations has adopted an Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (annexed to Resolution S/2013/354 of June 14, 2013). The strategy is aimed at the following three major goals:

1. Reinforcement of effective and inclusive governance throughout the region;
2. Reinforcement of the ability of national and regional mechanisms to deal with cross-border threats; and
3. Integration of humanitarian and development plans and interventions aimed at ensuring long-term resilience.

We can also cite the European Union Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, which revolves around four (04) points:

- Governance, development and conflict settlement;
- Coordination at the regional policy level;
- Security and rule of law; and
- Preventing and combating violent extremism and radicalization.

²⁴ Chérif Ouazzani, “Lutte anti AQMI, les pays du champ en conclave à Bamako”, Jeune Afrique, 21 Mai 2011.

However, all of these initiatives remain insufficient to address security challenges due to governance issues, the lack of collaboration between the states (particularly where intelligence is concerned), the lack of coordination between the partners, and persistent social vulnerability factors (poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, etc.).

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The urgency of the security problem in the Sahel-Sahara region was revealed to the world by the Malian crisis and the disintegration of the Libyan government. Various forms of transnational trafficking and organized crime have progressively led to the formation of criminal networks and armed terrorist groups that are destabilizing this area of the world and imperilling international security. Although there are numerous national, regional and international initiatives, they have produced mixed results owing to the significant political and economic handicaps and challenges inherent in the region.

The transnational nature of the threats and challenges in the Sahel-Sahara region is a clear indication that any potential approach should be aimed first and foremost at enhancing the effectiveness and operability of national response capacities while reinforcing sub-regional and international cooperation.

Burkina Faso, which is the focus of this study, has just found its way out of two consecutive years of political and social crisis and has always faced major security challenges, both internally and across borders. It is important to recall that security cannot be achieved without economic development in the Sahel-Saharan countries. People facing famine and poverty will always be tempted to engage in illicit activities to fulfil their basic needs. They are also vulnerable to the temptation of joining radical armed groups, which use drug money to draw them in.

On the institutional level, effective action against security challenges can only be achieved by improving security sector governance through strong, effective and non-corrupt institutions. Ultimately, success cannot be obtained without genuine regional collaboration between Sahel-Saharan states, with logistic support and assistance from the international community. In order to meet that goal, the following recommendations have been issued:

At national level:

- Reinterpret the national security strategy in the light of the current security situation and effectively implement it;
- Conduct studies on all internal threats and challenges identified in this document with a view to better assessing their impact on national security;
- Include the concept of human security, alongside state security, in national security policy design and development;
- Take account of new transnational threats in security policies and strategies;
- Ensure participation by the population and local communities in security design and management to more accurately discern their security needs;
- Broaden the circle of actors in the security sector to include civil society and the media, which can play a highly decisive role as buffers between citizens and the government;
- Institutionalize effective cross-border cooperation with neighboring states; and
- Set up a coordination structure for partners involved in the security sector to better channel their efforts for more efficient use of aid.

At sub-regional and regional levels:

- Provide capacity building and strengthen mechanisms in the area of cooperation for regional economic communities (AMU, CEN-SAD, ECOWAS and CEMAC);
- Set up a specific coordination organization for the Sahel-Sahara zone between the four abovementioned regional economic communities and international partners;
- Restore confidence between the states of the Sahel-Sahara region by reducing rivalries and conflicts of interest; and
- Finally, develop an integrated strategy for the area's security that is specifically adapted to the realities of the Sahel-Sahara region.



DIALOGUES

SECURITAIRES
DANS L'ESPACE
SAHELO - SAHARIEN

Author's biography

A Doctor of International Relations and a Colonel on leave, Dr. Emile Ouedraogo is also a former minister of Security and a former deputy in the National Assembly of Burkina Faso. He has been a member of the ECOWAS Parliament. Currently active as an independent consultant and researcher in the field of strategic and security studies, Dr. Ouedraogo is a member of the African Security Sector Network and chairman of FOSEC, a foundation for citizens' security.

Summary

Country studies have notably highlighted the key issue of state governance in the Sahel-Sahara region. The relationship of the state with the people has proven to be a critical challenge, given that identity-based claims by minorities can destabilize a whole region. The problems of violent extremism and cross-border crime were also stressed, along with other issues.

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