

DIALOGUES

SECURITAIRES
DANS L'ESPACE
SAHELO - SAHARIEN

SECURITY CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN THE SAHELO-SAHARAN REGION

THE ALGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

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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-Maghrebian 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.

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INTRODUCTION

The Sahel-Sahara region has long experienced problems involving State protection and individual security, pertaining diversely to the legitimacy crisis affecting government regimes, governance issues, ethnic tensions and poverty, as well as rebellions against the central authorities caused by the marginalization of peripheral regions and the political exclusion of large segments of the population. These crises have been exacerbated with the rise of religious extremism and the appearance of violent terrorist groups claiming to adhere to the Jihadist movement, which have seriously threatened the stability of the whole Sahel-Sahara region.

These threats, and notably the terrorist menace linked to drug smuggling rings, arms trafficking networks and illegal migration networks, transcend State borders in the Maghreb-Sahel region and require, not an individual response from each State, but increased and constant dialogue and coordination of all of the States. In addition to this, there are soft security challenges, such as ecological impacts and new kinds of threats such as cybercrime and religious insecurity.

The aim of the present study is to analyse the principal security issues and challenges facing Algeria, which, in addition to its internal political and socio-economic pressures, is subject to spillover effects from the chronic instability of its neighbours in the Maghreb (Tunisia and Libya) and the Sahel-Sahara (Mali, Niger and Mauritania) on its own security.

The first step is to identify the security threats and challenges presently faced by Algeria, to understand their nature and causes as well as the main actors driving those threats.

Part two focuses on evaluating the resources and capacities to combat the threats.

Part three will attempt to demonstrate that many of the threats facing Algeria are transnational in nature and that combined efforts on the regional scale are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for overcoming these different threats.

Like any regional power, Algeria has interests in the Sahel-Sahara owing to geographical contiguity, strategic depth and historical ties, which will be the focus of part four.

Part five aims to assess the strategies of Algeria's different partners in relation to security threats and challenges, and will also attempt to discern whether the challenges facing the country are taken into account in those strategies.

Finally, a certain number of recommendations will be put forward that could potentially contribute to improving security in Algeria, the Maghreb and the Sahel-Sahara region.

I. SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES IN ALGERIA: CAUSES AND PLAYERS

Our aim is not to establish a factual, chronological or even a thematic inventory of all security threats and challenges facing Algeria, but rather to take a limited and analytical approach to identifying major challenges that can have negative consequences on the country's stability and security.

1. The terrorist menace

According to numerous publications by many Algerian media sources, the 200 or 300 terrorists currently operating in Algeria are the remains of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (*Groupes Salafistes pour le Combat et la Prédication* – GSPC) which arose during the Islamist insurgency in the 1990s¹. Thousands of repentant terrorists have turned themselves in under the protection of the *Rahma* (clemency) law approved by referendum in September 2005; other terrorists, who had laid down their arms and whose hands were not stained with the blood of victims, and who had not committed rapes, massacres or attacks with explosives in public places, were amnestied under the "Civil Concord" law adopted in September 2009. Alongside these measures, the security forces have continued their efforts to eliminate the terrorist groups that are still active, such as *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM) an organization led by Abdelmalek Droukdel, and the "*Those Who Sign in Blood*" battalion led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, which are the principal armed threats within the borders of southern Algeria. Furthermore, *Daesh* or Islamic State (IS) which originated in Iraq and Syria, has begun to move in to Algeria, as witnessed by the murder of French tourist Hervé Gourdel in the Kabylie region in September 2014, by a group known as *Jund Al Khalifa* (soldiers of the Caliphate) which claims allegiance to the aforementioned terrorist organization.

In Algerian political discourse, there is a focus on terrorism, perceived as the most dangerous threat in the light of the painful experience that followed the army insurgency that took place after the cancellation of the legislative elections of January 1991 that the Islamic Front was poised to win. This violent episode lasted more than a decade, causing hundreds of thousands

¹ Religious spaces independent from the official doctrine of the Algerian religious authorities, such as the *Al-Quiyam* association, first appeared in the 1960s in a reaction to the socialist and modernist option chosen by the Algerian regime, which the association's membership felt was not in line with the precepts of Islam or local cultural values. The emergence of religious extremism and the Jihadist movement began after the Islamic revolution in Iran and Algerian youths' participation in the fight against the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979. After their return, many of these "Afghans", who received military training in the camps of Peshawar, joined the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) which was formed in response to a decision by the Algerian authorities to cancel the second round of the legislative elections in 1991, due to violent events occurring at that time and to the belief in secular and modernist circles that the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which was legalized through the introduction of the multiply-party system in Algeria in 1989, would establish an Islamic republic by the use of force.

of deaths², more than 7,000 disappearances³ and more than \$20 billion in material damage which heightened the severe economic crisis suffered by the country due to the drastic drop in the price of oil, a vital resource for the national economy.

According to Algerian rhetoric, terrorism is perceived as a phenomenon that is foreign to the religious and cultural values of society and bears no relation to ancestral Islam. From this standpoint, the causes of terrorism are not endogenous and cannot be attributed to the authoritarian nature of the Algerian regime, youth unemployment, illiteracy or the economic crisis, but rather to ideologies imported from the Middle East, either through the elements that fought in Afghanistan and Iraq or through the preaching of Salafist theologians spread by blogs and satellite television broadcasts originating in Gulf countries. Indeed, the social and economic reasons that usually explain youth radicalization faded with the colossal revenue inflows taken in by Algeria since 1999 thanks to a significant rise in oil prices, which enabled substantial social transfers to be made to the country's youth through employment aid mechanisms, and loans and facilitation for small business creation. It appears that the number of Algerian youths having joined the ranks of Islamist groups fighting in Iraq and Syria since the “Arab Spring” is no more than 100, an insignificant number compared to the young people recruited from Tunisia (7000) and Morocco (1500).

Furthermore, the Algerian leadership lays responsibility for the rise of terrorism at the door of hostile foreign powers who have tempted the country's youth in a bid to destabilize the country, divide society and undermine the unity of the people. The reasons evoked are that Algeria is led by a nationalistic government and that the country is a target of foreign envy due to its geographic position, natural resources and political positions in defence of justice in the world and in opposition to colonialism, Zionism and Western hegemony, in particular. This tendency to raise the spectre of foreign conspiracy was denounced in a mass rally organized in January 2013 by the Labour Party (a Trotskyist party), and the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA), an all-powerful trade union with ties to the government in Algiers.

2. The Salafist movement

The re-Islamization of Algerian society and of certain binationals (Franco-Algerians) mostly living in France, as encouraged by religious ideologies imported from the Middle East in the 1990s, and the religious zeal expressed by certain public and private institutions reflect a new form of practice of Islam. However, these practices are apparently less dangerous than the spread of the *Salafist* ideology, which is an offshoot of *Wahhabism*, a rite initiated by a preacher

² According to Algerian security forces, the number of victims of the national tragedy between 1992 and 2000 is estimated at a little more than 37,000 (*Liberté, L'Actualité* and *El Watan* issues of 27/10/2012, quoted in “*Chronologie d'attentats terroristes en Algérie*”, <http://chekfa.e-monsite.com/pages/chronologie-d-attentats-terroristes-en-algerie.html>). In an interview granted to Le Monde newspaper on 06/04/2012, then Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia stated that: “the figure of 200,000 which has been put forward is doubtless a bit overestimated” (interview by Sylvie Kaufman and Isabelle Mandraud, <http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2012/04/06l-algerie-defend-i-integrite-territoriale-du-mali>)

³ A final report by the legal assistance unit for the implementation of the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation stated that more than 7144 families of missing persons had been counted as at the end of 2014 (S. L, *Victimes de la tragédie nationale: la liste élargie*, Algérie 360, <http://www.algerie.com/algerie/victimes-de-la-tragedie-nationale-la-liste-elargie/>)

from Saudi Arabia that exalts “apparent” adherence to the teachings of the *Salaf* (ancestor) and an ascetic religious practice as a facade.

The methods and contents of the education dispensed in Arabic schools facilitated young Algerians’ access to Salafist literature disseminated on websites and media based in the Middle East. This situation has created a divide with the popular and traditional religious precepts based on the oral tradition, since many Algerians in the older generation are not literate.

The Salafist danger does not lie in the radicalization of Salafi militants as such, but rather in the risk that that ideology tends to spread intolerance, cultural regression and ignorance that could undermine the foundations of Algerian Islam based on the Malikite rite, which is viewed as moderate and open.⁴ This type of obscurantism can be illustrated by the findings of an opinion poll conducted by the *Baromètre Arabe* agency. 60% of the people surveyed were in favour of implementing *Sharia* (Islamic law) and 55% disapproved of the appointment of a woman to the positions of President or Prime Minister⁵. On the other hand, specific legislation criminalizing violence against women, which had been blocked for several months following its adoption by Parliament, was passed by the Senate (upper chamber) in December 2016. The legislation notably provides for prison sentences but also life in prison “where deliberate battery or injury committed intentionally but without intent to cause death nonetheless causes death”. It also provides for harsh punishment of street harassment “a common practice in Algerian cities”⁶.

The environment abroad has also promoted the radicalization of youth in Algeria with the rise of Islamophobia in the West (i.e. Charlie Hebdo, the American interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, support for Israel’s policy – considered as aggressive – against the Palestinians of Gaza and NATO air raids in Libya).

3. Smuggling rings

Although, generally, smuggling rings transporting food products and even soft drugs are a well-established phenomenon and part of cross-border relations, it appears that arms trafficking and trafficking in human beings are increasingly linked to terrorist groups: traffickers know the lay of the land and have local accomplices, while terrorist groups have arms and money, notably from ransom received in exchange for the release of European hostages.

Smuggling rings of all kinds threaten law and order in the border regions in the East (Tunisia and Libya), the West (Morocco) and on the Saharan boundaries (Mauritania, Mali and Niger), and disrupt the economy to the extent that the basic necessities and staple goods that are smuggled out of the Algerian territory (milk, flour, semolina, oil and fuel) are subsidized by the government. For example, the quantities of diesel fuel transferred to Morocco and Tunisia by

⁴ The debate that was supposed to be held on the law on violence against women in the Senate on 23 March 2015, was deferred indefinitely, probably due to pressures exerted by the conservative Islamist movement to stop the vote on the bill (*El Watan*, 30/03/2015, p. 4). The newspaper notably reported that certain deputies had proclaimed their opposition to the legislation on grounds that “it is women’s own fault if they are attacked in the streets” and that they “cannot criminalize a man for being aroused by a woman” and also that “women’s clothing that is not permissible under *Sharia* is responsible for violence against women”.

⁵ *El Watan*, 17/01/2012, pp. 2-3.

⁶ Hadjar Guenanfa, Violences contre les femmes : la nouvelle loi est entrée en vigueur, TSA, 31/01/2016, <http://www.tsa-algerie.com>

smugglers in 2015 represented a loss to the public treasury estimated at more than 1 billion US dollars.

Illegal arms sales also represent a threat to law and order to the extent that the arms are used by terrorist groups and traffickers. Although this is a global phenomenon to the extent that there are 875 million small arms in circulation around the world, including 100 million in Africa, it remains that the phenomenon has grown substantially in the Sahel-Sahara region since the crisis in Libya, which has become a tremendous open-air arsenal used by militias and terrorist groups⁷. No less than 20 million small arms are in circulation in the Sahel, such as Kalashnikovs, but there are also heavy machine guns, rocket launchers and surface-to-air missiles (SAM)⁸. In Libya alone, 800,000 to a million small arms are thought to be circulating freely, as well as 80,000 Kalashnikovs⁹ and in addition there are 100 militias comprising 125,000 combatants¹⁰.

Many of the arms from the Libyan military arsenal have ended up in the hands of terrorist groups operating in the Maghreb and Sahel region and the Algerian press has reported numerous weapons seizures by government security forces following the discovery of terrorist arms caches, notably on the Saharan borders.

4. Political and social situation

The Arab Spring, which profoundly shook many North African countries, did not have a significant impact on Algeria, contrary to the analyses put forward by Western journalists and experts. The latter thought that the mass protest movement would be more disruptive in Algeria than elsewhere. The movement was quite strong in light of the number of incidents in the public space: civil service and students' strikes, marches by the unemployed and riots. However, these demonstrations were more of a reflection of the need for better access to oil revenues and social transfers granted by the State (free public housing, employment opportunities, credit subsidies and tax exemptions for business start-ups, and public land purchases for industrial projects at substantially reduced prices) than of political demands for a change of government. To appease this sporadic social discontent, the government has implemented two distinct programmes, one of which was political, the other social. The first valence of the strategy consisted of putting in place a "far-reaching political reform". In the space of a few years, several organic laws pertaining to the media, political parties, NGOs and elections were published. A constitutional revision limiting the number of presidential terms to two was also adopted.

In social terms, the government allocated a significant share of oil revenues, which had increased substantially during the first decade of the 2000s, to the construction of major infrastructure and social transfers. Virtually all categories of professionals received significant salary increases. Social peace, to the detriment of financial and economic rationality, was viewed as a solution to economic and social problems.

All of a sudden, oil revenues dropped drastically beginning in 2014. As a solution to the oil counter-shock, the government has made deep cuts in social and cultural programmes while

⁷ Ibrahim Souleymane, le trafic d'armes en Afrique, Points Chauds, 23/03/2013, www.pointschauds.info

⁸ Luc Mathieu, La Libye, dépôt d'armes jihadistes, 16/01/2013, www.liberation.fr

⁹ Yassine Boukhedouni, Les effets de la crise en Libye sur le trafic d'armes légères et lourdes dans la région du Sahel-Maghreb, www.erta-tcsr.org/analyses/libye-armes.html.

¹⁰ Enquête sur les transferts d'armes transfrontaliers dans le Sahel, Novembre 2016, Conflict Armaments Research, London, www.investigating/libye-Cross-border-Weapon-Transfers-to-the-sahel-french-pdf

maintaining military and security spending due to the instability in neighbouring countries and the growing terrorist threat in the Maghreb-Sahel region. The security menace in the Sahel-Sahara region is still perceived as a hard threat that destabilizes the whole region.

5. Drug trafficking

Soft drugs are a scourge that causes definite damage to the health of young Algerians, to the economy of the country and to law and order. According to a statement by Algeria's Minister of Justice during an international conference on the "impact of the scourge of drugs at local, regional and international levels and mechanisms to combat it" held in Tlemcen in March 2016, drugs represent "a true social phenomenon that remains a major concern for governments, including the government of Algeria, which suffers the negative consequences of tonnes of drugs pouring into its territory, threatening its stability, its security and the health of its population, and first and foremost of its youth"¹¹.

Most of the drug trafficking affecting Algeria comes from Morocco, which is considered the biggest exporter of soft drugs according to the annual report published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in June 2016¹².

157 tonnes of cannabis, or 12.37% of the total captured in the world, were seized by Algerian security forces in 2012, and 173 tonnes of cannabis and more than one million psychotropic drugs were seized in the first eleven months of 2014¹³.

While Algeria is still not a consumer of hard drugs, it remains that it is a hub for cocaine transiting from Latin America to the Gulf of Guinea on its way to the markets of Europe.

6. Illegal migration

While previously, small-scope migrations from the Sub-Saharan region, notably Niger, due to poverty and drought used Algeria as a transit point in their exodus towards Europe, many hundreds of thousands of migrants flowing into the country in recent years due to insecurity in northern Mali and Syria tend to stay in the country due to difficulty of reaching the European "Eldorado" and also due to the relatively comfortable economic situation in Algeria¹⁴. Clandestine migrants help make up for the shortage of unskilled labour, and young people's refusal to work in certain sectors such as public works and farming.

However, migratory flows to Algeria have given rise to social tensions in the country, increased insecurity, particularly in border areas, and accentuated crime and various forms of contraband. In addition to clashes between locals-particularly in Tamanrasset, a city close to the border with Niger-and clandestine migrants due to acts of delinquency attributed to migrant elements, many

¹¹ B. Abdelmajid, La culture marocaine du cannabis à l'index, *Liberté*, 20/03/2016, p 6.

¹² World Drug Report, UNODC, New York, 2016 in <http://www.unodc.org/doc/.pdf>

¹³ Belkacem Fareh, Tarek Ghellab, Les stupéfiants indicateurs de l'invasion, <http://www.dgsn.dz/IMG/pdf>

¹⁴ Although the number of refugees from Syria is negligible, the number of clandestine emigrants is much higher, totalling 20,000 according to Algerian Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal (quoted in Chérif Ali, Revoilà les migrants subsahariens en Algérie! *Le Matin*, 13/04/ 2015, <http://www.le.matindz.net/news/17161-revoila-les-migrants-subsahariens-en-algerie.html>) and 100,000 according to civil society organizations (Charlotte Bozonnet, Les invisibles d'Algérie, *Le Monde.fr*, http://.lemonde.fr/international/visuel/2016/01/immigrés-souvent-clandestins-les-invisibles-d-algerie_4846562_3210.html).

illegal emigrants have been involved in operations led by terrorist groups or smuggling rings (drugs and small arms), according to various statements issued by Algerian security forces.

This situation led the Algerian authorities to carry out repatriations of clandestine migrants in 2015-2016, either jointly with the Sahelian countries where the migrants originated, as was the case with Niger¹⁵, or through forced returns due to the dangers represented by certain clandestine migrants in light of their involvement in organized crime or in networks supporting terrorist groups operating in the areas of Algeria bordering on the Sahara.

It might be more judicious to regularize the status of illegal migrants who demonstrate that they are willing to become integrated into the social and professional life of the country. In return, the local people, particularly those in cities near the Saharan border areas of Algeria which experience substantial influxes of refugees from the Sahel, would do well to treat immigrants with greater respect and deference in the context of community life.

7. Separatist and isolationist temptations and community conflicts

Algerian society is not marked by its ethnic character or multiple religions (minorities) and therefore does not face issues linked to ethnic differences or religious discord, despite the assertions of some French historians who perceive a racial dichotomy between native Algerians (Berbers) and Arabs, the latter being descendants of conquerors from the Arabian peninsula who travelled to the Maghreb in the seventh century to propagate Islam.

The cultural diversity observed in Algeria is not founded on ethnic differences, because the Algerian people, made up of Berbers who are more or less Arabicized linguistically although not racially, is predominantly Muslim. Thus, attempts to generalize Berber language teaching and to institutionalize it as a national language and then as the official language since 2015 correspond more to a need for recognition of the Berber dimension of the Algerian people than a negation of its Arab component.

Challenges against the Arab dimension as a component of Algerian culture essentially stem from a single party, the Movement for the autonomy of Kabylie (MAK), based mainly in Great Kabylie, one of the Berber regions of Algeria. The movement calls for greater autonomy or even the secession of the region from the rest of Algeria¹⁶. It is very difficult to measure the popularity of political parties in countries with more or less totalitarian regimes, where opinion polls and surveys on electoral attitudes and behaviours may not exist. However, legal opposition parties that have long called for the inclusion of the Amazigh cultural dimension in the range of Algerian identities, such as the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) and the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), have lost their influence in Great Kabylie and Little Kabylie in recent years. During major ceremonies, such as on 20 April 2016, these parties were unable to draw large crowds as they used to in the past. On the other hand, although it was formed more recently, the MAK has managed to mobilize Kabyles, especially youth, at events notably held in Tizi Ouzou, although they did not draw large crowds. This movement, whose external sources of financing do not seem to be at risk of disappearance, could be manipulated to destabilize the

¹⁵ L'Algérie a procédé au rapatriement de 3000 clandestins nigériens en Décembre 2014 dans leur pays à la demande des autorités nigériennes et dans de bonnes conditions selon Saida Benhabylès, la présidente du Croissant Rouge Algérien, in Chérif Ali, Revoilà les migrants subsahariens en Algérie! *Le Matin*, 13/04/ 2015, <http://www.lematindz.net/news/17161-revoila-les-migrants-subsahariens-en-algerie.html>.

¹⁶The Movement for the autonomy of Kabylie (MAK), led by Kabyle singer Ferhat Mehenni, is based in France and calls for the independence of Kabylie, a Berber region located not far from Algiers. The movement has set up a government in exile.

country and the soft threat it represents today could become a hard risk in the near future due to hostile foreign interference with Algerian stability.

On the other hand, the intermittent clashes between the small Berber-speaking community that worships according to the Mozabite rite in Ghardaia and the *Chaamba* tribes which claim an Arab origin are actually an expression of differences in social behaviour, electoral choices and economic status. The incidents that took place in Berriane, a Mozabite town, in December 2015 were not simply rooted in a historical conflict grounded on mistrust between sedentary and nomadic peoples, but rather in a local socio-economic climate steeped in corruption and political rivalry¹⁷.

These calls for autonomy and inter-community clashes are not a major threat to the security of Algeria, but could feed into manipulation from abroad to the extent that, according to the Algerian media, the MAK has repeatedly contacted Morocco and “Israel to internationalize its project”¹⁸. According to Algerian security services as reported by Nacereddine Benkharef on the Tout Sur l’Algérie (TSA) website on 13 January 2017, a network of African nationals working for the Israeli secret service (mainly from Liberia, Mali, Ethiopia and other countries) was dismantled in Ghardaia. Without the involvement of external forces, these manifestations of social protest or identity-based movements would remain an internal concern but not a sustainable or decisive threat to national unity.

8. A windfall economy and dependence on the oil industry

The social nature of the Algerian government, marked by a prolonged struggle by the Algerian people against French colonialism and the socialist option pursued from the country’s independence in 1962 up until the end of the 1980s, has promoted the emergence of a windfall economy based on the hydrocarbon sector, due to the country’s substantial oil and gas resources¹⁹.

The hydrocarbon sector has certainly been a boon to Algeria, since it represents 33% of the GDP²⁰ and 94.54% of the total volume of exports.²¹ However, it can also be the country’s Achilles heel when oil prices plummet. Indeed, the drastic drop in oil prices since mid-2014 has highlighted the underlying fragility of the country’s economy.

Although Algeria can deal with low oil prices over the short term, thanks to its ample foreign exchange reserves (\$150 billion in 2015), a hydrocarbon stabilization fund (Fonds de régulation des recettes, or FRR) estimated at \$50 billion during that same year and an insignificant foreign debt, it remains that if the price per barrel stagnates at under \$50 over the medium term, it could

¹⁷ Berriane, hogra and the spread of berbérisme, 24/02/2009, *C:/Documents and Settings:ir/Bureau/Berriane, Hogra and the spread of Berberism”the Moor next door.htm*.

¹⁸ Karim Bouali, Le Maroc reconnaît son soutien direct au MAK et aux agitateurs de Berriane, *Algérie patriotique*, 27/10/2015, <http://www.algeriepatriotique.com>, Rachel Hamdi, Une militante du MAK au Maroc pour semer la discorde entre Algériens, *Echouroukonline*, 28/09/2016, <http://www.echouroukonline.com>, Sihem Sabor, Les amis sionistes de Ferhat Mehenni : Le Maroc et Israël au secours du MAK, *Dernières info d’Algérie*, 03/11/2015, <http://dia-algerie.com/les-amis-sionistes-de-ferhat-mehenni-le-maroc-et-israel-au-secours-du-mak/>

¹⁹ À la fin 2014, l’Algérie dispose des 2èmes réserves prouvées de gaz naturel en Afrique (4500 billions/cm) et les 4èmes réserves prouvées de pétrole du continent (12Billions /barrels). Elle est membre de l’OPEP et produit actuellement 600.000 à 1 million de barils de pétrole/jour.

²⁰ Déclaration du Ministre algérien des Finances lors du 2^{ème} forum algéro-britannique sur l’investissement tenu à Alger en Mai 2016, <http://www.aps.dz/economie>

²¹ Statistiques du Commerce Extérieur de l’Algérie, Direction des Douanes Algériennes, 2015, http://www.douane.gov.dz/pdf/r_periodique/Annee_202015.pdf

cause a serious economic crisis combined with social discontent that could have a destabilizing effect on national security. To that should be added the demographic pressure that is beginning to be felt on the national budget. The population growth rate is rising, and the total population increased by one million in 2016.

The government has taken steps to raise the price of basic necessities (diesel, electricity and water), rationalize public spending and promote industry and agriculture, but these measures will remain limited unless efforts to diversify the economy are pursued more vigorously and the transition to a market economy is accelerated.

The dilemma facing the Algerian authorities is that, while these austerity measures are indispensable, it remains difficult to convince substantial segments of the population that have grown accustomed to receiving social transfers estimated at \$10 billion per annum to finance social housing and help the poorest families. Thus, a major challenge faced by the Algerian regime is how to drastically reduce economic dependency on hydrocarbons, cut public spending and fight corruption.²² The situation appears complicated, but it is still manageable if the authorities consolidate political reforms and diversify the economy by promoting private initiatives and investment in human potential based on knowledge and merit.

According to the most reliable estimates, the hydrocarbon stabilization fund will run out in 2019, coinciding with the end of the fourth term in office of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The period after 2019 will be a time of great uncertainty, because the price of the barrel may not increase past 60 dollars according to the calculations of numerous experts.

It is undeniable that Algeria has substantial human and material assets: a very young population (70% of the population is under 30 years old) and significant resources in the sectors of agriculture, tourism and mining, in addition to high solar energy potential and large shale gas and oil reserves.

II. EVALUATION OF RESOURCES AND CAPACITIES TO COMBAT SECURITY THREATS

Throughout the decade following the election, Algeria fought terrorism alone and gained substantial experience in the area, which earned it recognition both from neighbouring countries and Western powers. The Algerian doctrine on counter-terrorism is structured around a certain number of essential benchmarks.

-Military capabilities

In military terms, the terrorist groups operating in the north of the country have been almost completely eradicated through constant vigilance, redeployment of security forces on the ground and procurement of appropriate equipment for anti-guerrilla activities (surveillance radars, satellites, detectors, drones and night observation equipment). The local media regularly

²² Plusieurs affaires de corruption telles celles qui sont liées à Sonatrach, la compagnie pétrolière nationale ainsi qu'à l'autoroute Est-Ouest ont élaboussé le paysage politique et le climat des affaires en Algérie, *El Watan*, 02/02/2011, p. 4.

reports on operations conducted by combined forces that have been able to wipe out terrorists such as the head of a group affiliated with Islamic State in October 2016, dismantle networks of support for terrorists, destroy caches and bunkers and seize significant numbers of arms.

The impact of the security situation in neighbouring countries, both in the Maghreb and the Sahel region, has led law enforcement services to reinforce their mechanism to combat terrorist groups and smuggling rings along the borders, by mobilizing over 40,000 Djounoud (soldiers), deploying drones, setting up checkpoints on land and establishing air surveillance.

-Eliminating sources of support for terrorism

Algerian security forces are fighting against terrorism support networks within the population, particularly those involved in the provision of food items and logistical resources.

Algeria has developed a principle of non-negotiation with these groups in cases of hostage-taking where ransom or exchanges of prisoners are demanded for their liberation. Accordingly, Algerian armed forces launched a decisive attack on terrorists who had taken some thirty foreign workers hostage in a raid on the Tiguentourine natural gas processing complex, and the government refused to pay 15 million euros for the release of diplomats kidnapped by the MUJWA in Gao, in northern Mali, or to exchange them for the liberation of terrorist leaders imprisoned by security forces²³. These examples illustrate the efforts made by Algeria to ensure the legal enshrinement of the principle of non-payment of ransoms by international organizations.

Algeria also responded decisively when the Malian authorities released four activists at the request of AQIM in exchange for French hostage Pierre Camatte in February 2010, and called back its ambassador in Bamako in protest.

In the diplomatic sphere, Algeria took firm action for the condemnation and banning of the payment of ransoms by international bodies such as the UN and the African Union in exchange for the liberation of hostages. However, some European countries have paid ransoms for the liberation of their nationals who had been taken hostage, for reasons linked to domestic politics, neglecting their commitments to uphold non-payment of ransoms.

-The impact of the law on reconciliation

In addition, some terrorist have turned themselves in to the authorities in order to benefit from the terms of the law on reconciliation or civil concord; the Charter, which became a law after its approval in Parliament and the people's vote by referendum in September 2005, was based on the *Rahma* (clemency) provisions and granted broad amnesties to terrorists who had laid down their arms and "whose hands were not stained with the blood of victims, and who had not committed rapes, massacres or attacks with explosives in public places". Repentant terrorists received social insertion and other financial benefits, whilst the victims of the "national tragedy": the families of terrorists and victims of terrorism, as well as those who laid claim as beneficiaries of people who had disappeared during the "black decade" also received benefits.

²³ W. Moncef: "Le Mujao renoue le contact avec Alger, "in *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, Juin-25, 2013, p. 3. Ces diplomates ont été finalement libérés le 30 Aout 2014.

On the domestic front, not all of the victims' families accepted the pardons granted to repentant terrorists, and the Collective of Families of the Disappeared in Algeria (CFDA) prepared over 8000 missing persons files and continues to call for the truth about the fate of their loved ones. The CFDA still organizes sit-ins and protests in public places to this day.

However, the national reconciliation legislation had a positive impact on the international front, to the extent that many countries faced by a terrorist threat have expressed an interest in the Algerian experience with regard to internal conflict resolution. To take one example, the former Secretary General of the United Nations Ban-Ki Moon stated during a visit to Algeria in March 2016, "I have been impressed by what I have learned about the *Rahma* policy. Rather than allowing itself to be divided by terrorists, Algeria has found a pathway to solidarity."

-A policy of deradicalization

In the light of their statements, the Algerian authorities seem determined to combat religious extremism. Thus, the former Minister of Religious Affairs, Bouabdallah Ghlamallah, declared that "Shiism and Salafism are banned from school curricula and Algeria is neither Shiite nor Salafi." He considered the rally organized at Oum Al Bouaghi, which was attended by hundreds of young Salafis who had come from all corners of the country to hear the sermon of Sheikh Haytem Sahran, a theologian from the Mosque of Medina and Mufti at the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be an "isolated case"²⁴. Shiism is a religious schism that appeared in Saudi Arabia after the secession of the followers of Caliph Ali, the nephew and brother-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad.

In Algeria, both Salafism and Shiism are viewed as imported ideologies and their propagation is forbidden. Their followers are seen as activists who use violence to impose their teachings, precepts and social and moral behaviours, which differ from the religious beliefs of the majority of the Algerian people, who are mostly Sunnis and observers of the Malikite rite, which advocates a tolerant form of Islam steeped in the values of the maraboutic sects, the *zawiya*²⁵.

The current Minister of Religious Affairs in Algeria pursues the same policy as his predecessor, also attacking sects that were previously unknown in Algeria, such as the "Satanists" or the members of the *Al Ahmadiya* cult, whose guru, Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1835-1908), from Punjab, India, claimed to be the Messiah, come to unite all monotheistic religions under the banner of Islam.

While Shiite beliefs and practices are forbidden in Algeria, it seems however, that the policy of the authorities, viewed as soft on Salafists who consider disobedience to government to be a form of apostasy, may be ineffective over the long term, to the extent that the goal of the Salafists is to indoctrinate the people through sometimes violent moralization of civic life and to enlarge their activist base to form a force that could threaten the country's political stability.

²⁴ H.H. Ghlamallah, "L'algérien n'est ni Salafiste ni chiite", *Liberté*, 0/06/ 2012, p. 2. <http://www.liberte-algerie.com/actualite>

²⁵Malikism is a doctrine influenced by imam Malik Ibn Anas (796 CE) based on the Muslim law in force in Medina in the days of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAWS). It grants considerable importance to personal opinion. This rite is mostly propagated in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Algerian government seems able to eradicate the terrorist phenomenon within the country, as demonstrated by the quelling of the Islamist insurgency through the military might of the Algerian army, the policy of national reconciliation, deradicalization initiatives, the inclusion of former activists in highly lucrative importation networks, measures aimed at employing youth in development projects as well as the inclusion of numerous Islamist activists in legal opposition parties.

The major threat for Algeria remains the security situation in surrounding or neighbouring countries such as Tunisia, Libya and Mali. Although Algeria has successfully thwarted terrorist incursions from its immediate surroundings, long-term instability in its geographic space could amount to a war of attrition for the country, in light of the increased mobilization of human and material resources entailed, which, over the long term, could prove extremely demanding and costly.

III. THE TRANSNATIONAL NATURE OF THE THREATS AND THE NEED FOR A UNITED RESPONSE

1- The Sahel, Algeria's "ring of fire"

The Sahel region has become a sanctuary for terrorist groups after the failures experienced in Algeria by the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which founded an organization known as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)²⁶. The operations of the latter extend over a vast territory ranging from the southern borders of Algeria throughout the Sahel-Saharan strip. The fall of the Libyan regime provided these terrorist groups with a rear base, logistic support, and supplies of weapons of all kinds, including rocket launchers. According to the President of Chad, Idriss Deby, "radical Islamists are present in Libya. Yesterday, they had no land, but now they do: the whole of Libya. Yesterday, they had no weapons, now they have them all"²⁷. Other groups have appeared, such as "Those Who Sign in Blood", founded by former GSPC leader Belmokhtar, *Ansar Eddine* founded by a former leader of the Malian Tuareg rebellion, Ayad Ag Ghali, in 2012²⁸, and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (*MUJWA*)²⁹. These groups were further reinforced after the dismantling of terrorist cells in Europe and the return of the Jihadists from Iraq and Afghanistan.

While AQIM and its affiliates claim to be working towards the establishment of theocratic government in the Sahel and even in the Maghreb and seem to have ties with organizations operating in other regions, such as *Boko Haram* (Nigeria), *Al-Shabab* (Somalia), *Al-Qaeda* in

²⁶ The organization, led by Abdelmalek Droukdel, pledged allegiance to AQIM in 2007, with a view to benefiting from the media impact and baseline support of Al-Qaeda, as well as Bin Laden's prestige among young Muslims and Arabs who identified with radical Islam or the Jihadist movement.

²⁷ Interview du président tchadien Idriss Deby accordée au quotidien français, *Le Figaro*, citée par *Liberté*, 13/08/2013, p. 2.

²⁸ *Ansar Eddine* was founded in March 2012, and has between 3000 and 5000 members operating mainly in Timbuktu and Kidal.

²⁹ The group was founded by Ahmed Ould Amer and Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou of the Jihadist movement. It included approximately 700 permanent elements and a number of subcontractors.

the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and, more recently, Islamic State, it remains that these groups have failed to bring down the government in any country in the Sahel or represent a serious threat to them or to the West.

All of these groups have carried out military operations, either in Mali, Niger or Mauritania. They have benefited from an influx of young recruits from countries in the Sahel and the Sub-Saharan region due to unemployment, drought, social dislocation, poor governance, social injustice, and religious indoctrination and financial support provided by smuggling rings and traffickers in drugs, arms and human beings.

2- Evaluation of anti-terrorist coordination at regional and sub-regional levels

The Joint Military Staff Committee (CEMOC) set in place in 2011 by Algeria in conjunction with Mali, Mauritania and Niger to coordinate the fight against terrorism, which is headquartered in Tamanrasset, and the Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL) bringing together representatives from the Algerian security forces and their partners from the Sahel-Saharan region to share intelligence on terrorist groups have not had a decisive impact on the fight against terrorism, essentially due to weaknesses in logistics and training in the armies of Sahelian countries and their inability to effectively combat terrorist groups, which are mobile, powerfully armed, and benefit from local support and permeable borders.

Because of this situation, Algeria is once again obliged to uphold its national security commitments alone, due, above all, to Mauritania's and Mali's failure to uphold the principles of anti-terrorist coordination on the regional scale. Thus, Algeria must deal with activism by terrorist groups along its borders with Tunisia and Libya, but also along its Saharan borders following the massive exodus of Jihadists from Adrar les Foggaras in northern Mali, to its southern borders due to the damage they experienced at the hands of the French intervention in northern Mali (Operation Serval). "Those Who Sign in Blood", backed by Libyan and Malian elements, conducted suicide attacks in Tamanrasset in January 2012, as well as an attack against the Tiguentourine complex near Ain Amenas, which represents 10% of total production of natural gas in Algeria.

Although regional and subregional cooperation in the fight against security threats is a necessity, it remains that Algeria is determined to rely solely on its own strengths in developing a domestic political consensus and mobilizing its military and human resources without disregarding the contributions of the other countries in the Sahel region and foreign powers, which, however, should be viewed as an adjunct to and not a replacement for the efforts of the Maghreb and Sahel countries in their common fight against the threats and menaces they face. In 2014, Algeria earmarked nearly \$10 billion for military spending aimed at renovating its military arsenal and reinforcing its military capabilities³⁰.

³⁰ Nadjia Bouaricha, Dépenses militaires : l'Algérie dans le top 20 mondial, *El Watan*, 14/12/2016 <http://www.djazairess.com/fr/elwatan>

IV. STRATEGIC INTERESTS OF ALGERIA IN THE SAHEL-SAHARA REGION

A. Strategic importance of the Sahel in relation to Algeria

Algeria's approach to the Sahel is neither partial nor cyclical, to the extent that the ties between the country and the Sub-Saharan region are longstanding and multifaceted and are closely linked to the overall vision of the Algerian leadership, both in terms of the regional geostrategic space and the nature of international affairs and their developments which are rapid and sometimes unpredictable.

1- Geographical contiguity

The Sahel is a natural extension of the Saharan borderlands of Algeria to the extent that the country shares a very long border with two countries in the Sahel region: Mali (1300 km) and Niger (1200 km). Like the northern part of these countries, the south of Algeria is made up of vast ergs and immense sand dunes studded with oases inhabited by sedentary populations, while the transhumance areas are travelled by nomad populations essentially living off an agro-pastoral economy.

2- Identity and cultural substrate

The Tuareg living in the southern parts of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso are descendants of the Berber peoples of the central Maghreb and, to this day, ties remain between these people and the Tuareg populations living in southern Algeria and Libya. Other tribes inhabiting the Sahel, such as the Toubou people and the Moors, lay claim to an Arab heritage. All Tuareg people are Sunni Muslims worshipping according to the Malikite rite combining the customs of the local brotherhoods.

3- Historical and political sediment

The roots of Algeria's Africity are ancient and deep, dating back to the times when its Berber inhabitants (or Numidians, in the parlance of the day) fought against domination by the Roman Empire, beginning in the 10th century BCE. One of the Berber kings, "an ally of Rome, but not its vassal, Massinissa managed to contain the imperialistic aims of his allies through the famous slogan *Africa for Africans*"³¹. Later, the *Sanhaja* Arab-Berber tribes of the central Maghreb spread out through the Sub-Saharan region and, by 734 CE, they dominated the Ghana Empire, which was founded in the 3rd century by the Soninke tribes that still populate certain regions of northern Mali and Niger³². Furthermore, the *Tijaniya* and *Qadiriya* brotherhoods, which originated in Algeria, contributed to the propagation of the Malikite maraboutic rite in the Sahel region beginning in the 20th century.

Algeria's ties of solidarity with the Sahel and hence with the rest of Africa continued throughout French colonization with the liberation struggle engaged in the country in November 1954 and which hastened independence in Sub-Saharan African countries beginning in 1960. In turn,

³¹ Massinissa, roi berbère (238-148 avant l'ère chrétienne) réussit à unifier tout le Maghreb numide, pour une courte période, cependant, Karim YOUNES: *De la Numidie à l'Algérie : Grandeurs et Ruptures* (Casbah Editions, Alger, 2011) p. 50.

³² The Empire reigned from the year 300 to 1240 and included parts of present-day Mali and Mauritania.

these countries provided diplomatic and logistical assistance to the Algerian cause, one notable example being Mali³³.

Following its independence, which was won in 1962, Algeria supported the political, cultural and economic emancipation of the countries of the Sahel by joining the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 as one of its founding members, as well as through the regional integration project in the Sahel area initiated in 1976, which was undermined by the drought that hit the Sahel region hard during that same year.

B. Doctrinal foundations of the Algerian strategy in the Sahel

In the Sahel, Algeria set in place a similar strategy that ensued from its own doctrine. This doctrine was inspired by the experience of the Algerian leadership, which prioritized a determination to rely on the resources of their own people, as they had done during the war of liberation against French colonialism, as well as on the preservation of independent decision making, as was the practice following the independence of the country.

Thus defined, the doctrine was structured around four essential parameters in practice.

1- Territorial integrity of the States

This principle reflects the experience of the Algerian leadership to the extent that they managed to preserve the unity of their people and the territorial integrity of their country during the war of liberation against French colonialism. It was therefore logical that Algeria, which became independent in 1962, adhered strictly to the principle of the inviolability of the borders inherited from colonialism, which was endorsed by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on its creation in 1963. This concern was obviously a reaction to the efforts made by Morocco to coerce the Algerian government to open talks on the revision of the border on grounds that a substantial portion of the Moroccan territory had been arbitrarily granted to Algeria during the French colonization of the Maghreb. Since the war declared on Algeria by Morocco in March 1963 on the subject of the borders, Morocco's territorial irredentism has not faded, at least in statements by the media and political party leaders, particularly after Algeria granted its support for the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination in the framework of the United Nations decolonization process.

The separatist temptations sporadically expressed by Tuareg groups in Niger and Mali are received by the Algerian government not only as a violation of the principle of the inviolability of borders, but also as a risk of national fragmentation that could lead to narrow religious or nationalistic conflicts and the destabilization of the whole Sahel-Saharan region. Ahmed Ouyahia, Director of the Cabinet of the Presidency of the Algerian Republic stated that: "Algeria will never allow the territorial integrity of Mali to be challenged"³⁴.

Algeria's attachment to the inviolability of borders explains its past opposition to attempts at secession, as was the case in Biafra, Nigeria, in 1967-1970 and in Shaba, formerly Katanga, Congo, in 1978. In the light of its ideological positions, it must have also been disappointed by

³³ The Algerian National Liberation Army (ALN) had rear bases in northern Mali. Thus, current President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was known by his nom de guerre, Commander "Abdelkader Al Mali" when he was operating in the border area between Algeria and Mali.

³⁴ H. Raoui, 'Ouyahia : l'Algérie n'acceptera jamais une remise en cause de l'intégrité territoriale du Mali, <http://www.algerie-focus.com>

the division of Sudan in July 2011, and is likely apprehensive about the potential fragmentation of nations such as Iraq, Syria and Libya.

2- The fight against terrorism: 'constant vigilance'

The fight against terrorism must be implacable and no concessions must be made to groups involved in attacks or murder on either members of the military or civilians or the destruction of public property unless they agree to lay down their arms. The former Algerian Prime Minister and current head of the cabinet of the presidency, Ahmed Ouyahia, described this 'anti-terrorist doctrine' as: "Treatment by eliminating popular support. A relentless fight by the State, with the full force of the law and all its might. This is what allows us to occasionally lay our hands on a terrorist group and take out those who refuse to turn themselves in. Constant vigilance"³⁵.

Based on its own experience in the fight against terrorism, Algeria has developed a principle of non-negotiation with terrorist groups in cases of hostage-taking where ransom or exchanges of prisoners are demanded for their liberation.

3- A policy of self-reliance

The fight against terrorism in the Sahel must be led first and foremost by the affected countries themselves, without interference by foreign countries, and the joint approach proposed by Algeria is inspired by the doctrine enshrined in its legislation in terms of the development and implementation of foreign policy promoting non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries. This attitude implicitly emanates from a fear of foreign interference in domestic affairs and the erosion of the national sovereignty which was so hard won by Algeria's leaders in the fight for freedom from French colonialism. The quest for solidarity and support from other powers should be seen solely as a contribution to the policy of cooperation and coordination set in place by Algeria and its partners in the Sahel region and not as a replacement for this cooperation.

4- Political conflict resolution and inclusive dialogue

"We know how wars start, however, we do not know how they end". This observation steeped in political realism has been made by Abdelkader Messahel on numerous occasions³⁶. The disastrous consequences of the NATO military intervention in Libya certainly bore this out. To avoid the uncertainties of a military intervention and an exclusive focus on security, the Algerian leadership argues that a political solution based on inclusive dialogue and national reconciliation remains the best ways of resolving conflicts fairly and sustainably.

C. Implementation of the Algerian strategy in the Sahel

Measuring the gravity of the situation in the Sahel and the dangers that could arise from its repercussions on national security and stability and continuing the fight against "residual terrorism" on the Algerian territory, Algeria has worked with its partners in the Sahel region to implement a joint, bilateral strategy based on concertation and cooperation between the various

³⁵ Interview accordée au journal Le Monde en avril 2012, l'Algérie défend l'intégrité du Mali, <http://afrique.blog.lemonde.fr/2012/04/06/la-rebellion-touareg-proclame-la-secession-au-nord-mali>

³⁶ Notably during a meeting held in Alger on 8 September 2015 between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a group of teachers from the Faculty of Political Science, including the author, at Algiers 3 University.

army and security services corps, and to take on a mediation role in facilitating conflict settlement in the Sahel in the sub-regional framework.

1- Reinforcing security mechanisms between Algeria and the countries of the Sahel region

In bilateral terms, Algeria has reactivated the border committee with Niger to ensure that the border area was secured and ensure coordination between both countries' security services in the framework of the cooperation mechanism established by an MOU signed in Algiers on 30 October 1997. It has also resumed the sittings of the Algerian-Malian joint commission which took place in Algiers in March 2014 and culminated in the signing of a cooperation agreement in the area of defence. It also hosted the 2nd meeting of the bilateral Algerian-Malian committee on the situation in northern Mali in April 2014, which was attended by Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso.

At the regional level, Algeria set up a cooperation mechanism with its partners in the Sahel on the fight against terrorism through the creation of CEMOC and the UFL, as mentioned above. Several meetings were held between the Ministers of Defence of Algeria and other Sahelian countries and several others took place between their heads of national security³⁷. This coordination allowed them to carry out joint operations in the Algerian-Malian-Mauritanian border triangle.

2- A role as a crisis-resolution mediator or facilitator in a difficult context

Contrary to what has been suggested by a certain analyst of Algeria's policy in the Sahel³⁸, Algeria's efforts to mediate the conflicts between the Tuareg and the central authorities, in Niger or Mali where an Azawad state was proclaimed in the north of the country in 2012, did not follow a rationale of temporary good offices and were not tainted by narrow interests, private greed or a temptation to seek regional hegemony.

The mediation role that Algeria has always played ensues from its position as a stakeholder in security matters³⁹ and has been saluted by all of the protagonists in the Malian conflict, although elements belonging to the *MNLA* occasionally tried to involve other powers from outside the Sahel region in mediation with the Malian authorities. However, due to the confidence of the international community in the impartiality, discernment and perspicacity demonstrated by Algerian diplomacy, Algeria eventually took the lead in international mediation in the Malian conflict⁴⁰.

The efforts undertaken by Algeria to create a rapprochement between the two parties to the conflict in Mali culminated in the signing of a peace agreement in Algiers on 15 May and in Bamako on 20 June 2015, during a ceremony attended by Algerian officials.

³⁷ The last meeting of the heads of the intelligence services had taken place in Ouagadougou in May 2014.

³⁸ L. Aida Ammour, 'Regional Security Cooperation in the Maghreb and the Sahel: Algeria's pivotal Ambivalence', *Africa Security Brief*, no 18, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, National Defence University, Washington, February 2012 and L. Aida Ammour, 'Is a Renewed Algerian Diplomacy Emerging?', 05 March 2015 <http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/Blogs/Sahel-Watch-a-living-analysis-of-the-conflict-in-Mali/Is-a-renewed-Algerian-regional-diplomacy-emerging>

³⁹ Y. Ait Akdim, "Que cherche le Maroc en Afrique? ", *Jeune Afrique*, No 2731 du 12 au 18 Mai 2013, pp. 22-27.

⁴⁰ The mediation process initiated by Algeria in 2014 was joined by the United Nations, the African Union, the Community of West African States, the Islamic cooperation organization, the European Union, Mauritania, Niger and Chad.

To implement the measures established in Algiers during negotiations between the parties to the conflict in Mali, an international monitoring committee on the Peace and Reconciliation agreement was set up in Bamako on 21 June 2015 under Algerian chairmanship. Since then, the committee has met to implement the peace process launched in Algiers, but is constantly faced with divergences and conflicts of interests expressed by the signatories of the Algiers Agreement.

3- Use of non-military methods

The fight against religious extremism, which is viewed by Algerians as fertile ground for terrorism, hinges on a policy aimed at re-establishing ancestral values, and notably the image of a tolerant and open form of Islam. This seems to have been put into practice recently in the education system and the mosques. The stated aim is to effectively counter imported ideologies and proselytism that are contrary to the Malikite rite, which is predominant not only in the Maghreb, but also in the Sahel-Saharan region.

Algeria has launched religious training for students from Sahel countries at the University of Adrar and in the Islamic Institute of Tamanrasset in the southern region of Algeria. It has also called for coordination between Sahelian countries against violent religious extremism. To this end, Algeria hosted the constituent congress of the league of ulamas, preachers and imams of Algeria and Sahelian countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) in January 2013. Two further meetings were held in the Algerian capital in April 2013 and November 2015. During the latter conference, the chairman of the league, Cheikh Daouda Abdou Boureima of Niger, recalled that the fight against terrorist groups "cannot be conducted through military might alone, but by cultivating the values of tolerance and the basic tenets of Islam" and that the religious extremism raging through their societies was "everyone's responsibility"⁴¹.

4- Insufficient synergy for the Algerian strategy in the Maghreb and Sahel regions

While Algeria's strategy in the Sahel region was met with positive reactions and served the countries' own national interests, it has become apparent that certain specific considerations of the other Sahelian countries do not fit with the interests of Algeria in relation to security and stability in the Maghreb and in the Sahel-Saharan region. These considerations can be summed up as follows:

-The fact that Mali, apparently in the name of the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS), resorted to French intervention in northern Mali (Operation Serval) following the rebellion led by Tuareg separatist groups and the emergence of Jihadist groups. In the name of the principle of non-interference in states' domestic affairs, Algeria has always been opposed to foreign intervention in internal conflict settlement, both in Africa (Mali and Libya) and in the Arab world (Iraq and Syria).

-The creation of a security mechanism in the Sahel region known as G5, comprising Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad. Algeria perceived this initiative as an attempt to remove those countries from the reach of its uncontested role in the common fight against terrorism. One analyst of African political affairs views the creation of this new cooperation framework

⁴¹ *Algérie Presse Service*, 3 Novembre 2015.

as a "diplomatic and military alliance" with a military command unique in the Sahel-Saharan strip, including 3000 "prepositioned" men and a string of French military bases that will "ring the southern borders of Algeria and Libya"⁴².

-Weak coordination of the fight against terrorism in the Maghreb due to a lack of mutual confidence among the countries of the region. Indeed, a policy of "every man for himself" seems to predominate, which would explain the failings of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) since the 2000s.⁴³ However, a positive relationship seems to exist between Algeria and Tunisia in the fight against terrorist groups, particularly those operating in the Chaambi Mountains near the Algerian border. With Libya, on the other hand, Algeria lacks a reliable partner in the light of the fragmentation of power in the country and the importance of the Jihadist factions linked to Islamic State (IS) in Libya's political landscape. Despite the deterioration of the political and security situation in Libya, Algeria pursues its efforts to find a political solution to the crisis experienced by its neighbour to the East based on inclusive national dialogue, without foreign interference in Libyan affairs or military intervention by foreign powers.

Due to disrupted relations between Algeria and Morocco, chiefly due to disagreements over the future of the Western Sahara⁴⁴, it has not been possible to establish collective security mechanisms at the level of the Maghreb. The two countries therefore lead individual strategies in the fight against terrorism and affiliated smuggling rings in the Maghreb and the Sahel-Saharan region. In the Sahel, Algeria is fully engaged in joint mechanisms to fight terrorism in conjunction with other Sahelian countries, notably through the foundation of CEMOC in April 2012 with Mali, Niger and Mauritania, as well as through its mediation efforts in the conflicts in Mali and Libya; while Morocco has attempted, albeit with no tangible success, to set up a framework for security coordination with other African countries on the Atlantic coast as well as to revive the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), which has languished since the death of Colonel Gaddafi, who founded and funded the organization.

Morocco joined the African Union (AU) in January 2017, which could disrupt the operation of the continental organization due to the opposing positions that will inevitably be displayed by advocates of the principle that the Sahrawi people have the right to self-determination and those in favour of maintaining the Western Sahara under Moroccan occupation.

⁴² Jean-Pierre Sereni, Coordination militaire discrète entre l'Algérie et la France dans le Sahel. Un tournant dans les relations algéro-françaises? 15/05/2014, <http://orientxxi.info>

⁴³ The AMU was founded in Marrakesh in 1989 to initiate the process of regional political and economic integration between Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania.

⁴⁴ Algeria supports the people's right to self-determination in compliance with the UN resolutions, while Morocco claims what it views as its "historic rights" over this territory.

V. SECURITY STRATEGIES OF ALGERIA'S OTHER PARTNERS IN THE SAHEL-SAHARAN REGION

1- Support for international assistance and resistance against foreign interference in the Sahel

In keeping with its constitution, Algeria has not engaged in military operations against terrorism beyond its borders and has remained firmly opposed to all foreign interventions in Libya or the Sahel and Mali in particular. According to the Algerian leadership, the complex realities of this country cannot be resolved through a purely military intervention and its political stability requires an overarching political solution. Despite their ability to cause harm, terrorist groups are unable to create a "Sahelistan" due to the fact that large segments of the Tuareg population do not uphold Salafist ideology and do not support the creation of a theocratic state. Furthermore, neither Algeria nor Libya nor the other countries will accept the fragmentation of Mali, which could endanger the stability of the Sahel region as a whole. On the other hand, there is a risk of a far-reaching explosion due to an increase in foreign military intervention beyond the levels represented by the contingents of the armed forces, despite the fact that the United Nations has set up a Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). This possibility could lead to a "Pakistani scenario" on the southern borders of Algeria, according to statements made by former Algerian diplomats⁴⁵.

2- Adjusting the strategies of foreign powers to the Algerian approach in the Sahel

Western countries seem to have endorsed the idea that Algeria is a pivotal country in the fight against transnational terrorism and that it is vital to efforts to maintain stability in the Sahel. During a visit to Algiers in June 2013, the Secretary General of NATO declared that Algeria remained "active in military cooperation, the fight against terrorism, defence policy and strategy, civil emergency planning, scientific cooperation, crisis management and non-proliferation"⁴⁶.

Algeria has also succeeded in gaining the support of the European Union for its approach as demonstrated by the visits made to Algiers by Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in November 2012, as well as those of Michel Reyverand de Menthon, the special representative for the Sahel region, and Gilles Kerchoue, the EU counter-terrorism coordinator, in January 2014.

The USA also agrees with Algeria's position to the extent that its proposal to Algeria to "engage in operations both domestically and, perhaps, in a limited manner, outside of its borders, after the attack on the Tiguentourine gas complex"⁴⁷ allowed Washington to recognize the complexity of the situation in Algeria, following flare-ups in neighbouring countries (Tunisia, Libya and Mali) due to activism by terrorist groups. In a message to Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, US President Barack Obama "commended Algeria for its role in global counter-terrorism". He also told the Algerian government that "We are acutely aware of the dangers of extremism in your country and in the region, and the American people are by your side as you confront this menace"⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ *El Watan*, Octobre 11, 2012, p. 2.

⁴⁶ *Liberté*, Mai-25, 2013, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *New York Times*, Février 26- 2013 in *Le Quotidien d'Algérie*, Février-28, 2013 p. 2.

⁴⁸ M.B, Obama-Bouteflika: only antiterrorism, *Liberté*, 20/02/2017, <http://www.liberte-algerie.com>

Having no vital strategic interests in Africa and even less in Mali⁴⁹, and being bogged down in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Americans seemed to favour strong military assistance for Sahelian countries to counter terrorism and did not seem to want to set up a permanent base in the Sahel for the headquarters of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM)⁵⁰.

On the other hand, France, which has significant strategic and economic interests in the Sahel region,⁵¹ did not hesitate to carry out a military intervention in Mali, sending in 4800 soldiers in the framework of Operation Serval. Despite its political history, Algeria agreed to help France by opening up its airspace to flights by military aircraft participating in military operations in northern Mali, following a visit to Algiers by French President François Hollande in December 2012⁵². According to the local media, Algeria may also have helped France by providing intelligence on terrorist groups operating in the Sahel region and by supplying French troops with fuel at the Malian border following a visit by the French Defence Minister in Algiers in May 2014⁵³.

However, there has been no confirmation of any cooperation between the Algerian and French armies in northern Mali, contrary to a statement made by the President of the CAPA Region, Michel Vauzelle, in the regional newspaper "la Provence" in October 2013, nor of any direct military involvement of Algerian security forces in the region.⁵⁴ During his visit to the Algerian capital of Algiers in June 2014, French Minister of Foreign Affairs Laurent Fabius commended Algeria for its role in keeping the peace in Mali and the Sahel.

⁴⁹ Numerous analysts have underscored the United States' desire to get its hands on West Africa's promising oil deposits with a view to reducing its imports from an increasingly unstable and unpredictable Middle East and compete with China, however, it turns out that the US has not only renewed its energy reserves, but that it could even become an exporter of hydrocarbons after extracting shale gas and oil. In fact, trade between the USA and Africa has fallen by 80% over the last decade.

⁵⁰ As early as 2003, the US had set up a "Pan-Sahel Initiative" (PSI) with a view to consolidating the rapid response capabilities of Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Chad and, in 2005, the PSI became the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCP), in which Algeria participated alongside the other Sahelian countries.

⁵¹ France operates the gold mines in Mali (3rd-largest producer of gold ore in Africa) and the uranium deposits in northern Niger not far from northern Mali. It has invested 1.5 million euros in a uranium mine in northern Niger close to the northern Mali region to meet the needs of its nuclear reactors (75% of France's electricity comes from nuclear energy).

⁵² Un accord de coopération dans le domaine de la Défense, a été signé entre l'Algérie et la France en 2012, Zahir Mehdaoui, Coopération militaire: Le chef d'état-major de l'armée française à Alger, <http://www.algeria-watch.org>

⁵³ *El Watan*, Mai-22, 2014, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Lilia Oufella, les armées algérienne et française participent au nord-mali selon un rapport français (Koulouba, 20/10/2013, <http://koulouba.com/crise-malienne/les-armees-algerienne-et-francaise-participent-au-nord-mali-selon-un-rapport-francais-pol/mali/coop-algero-francaise.htm>)

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE MAGHREB AND SAHEL-SAHARAN REGIONS

At the political entity level

- Reinforce the Rule of Law, uphold individual and collective freedoms, ban electoral fraud and effectively fight corruption and red tape.
- Reduce social inequality, fight unemployment and promote regional development.
- Provide an institutional framework for *Fatwas* (religious rulings), training for imams and *murshidat* (women religious leaders who can perform the same tasks as men with the exception of leading prayer), consolidate the role of the *Zawiya* (maraboutic associations) that preach according to the Malikite rite and fight religious extremism through schools, mosques and the media.
- Broadcast quality religious programming that advocates Islam as it has been practiced in the Maghreb and the Sahel for centuries in order to compete with Middle Eastern television stations.
- Eliminate sources of funding for terrorism, provide assistance for Jihadist elements returning from Iraq and Syria and encourage repentance and deradicalization in penitentiary centres.

At the level of the Maghreb

- Reactivate the AMU by reinforcing regional economic integration and promoting market forces and private initiatives.
- Resolve the Western Sahara question in keeping with the UN Resolutions on the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination.
- Need to establish and reinforce security mechanisms as envisaged under the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), such as the Peace and Security Council, the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Peace Fund.
- Set up a joint body to combat drug trafficking and create an observatory on illegal migration.

At the level of the Sahel-Saharan region

- Reinforce the operations of CEMOC and the UFL (between Algeria and Sahelian countries) to ensure the coordination of the fight against crossborder terrorist groups and avoid duplication of counter-terrorism cooperation frameworks, such as G5 Sahel.
- Reinforce the league of Ulama of Sahelian countries.
- Promote exchanges between bordering populations, initiate organizational projects (micro-enterprises, small industries, artisanal manufacturing) for regions on either side of the borders and create training centres with a view to helping young people enter the job market.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to define some of the threats and challenges to security in Algeria in an unstable and sometimes violent context, both in the Maghreb and in the Sahel-Saharan region.

The most significant dangers for Algeria come from terrorist groups operating in the Maghreb (Libya and Tunisia) and the Saharan borderlands (Mali, Niger and Mauritania) as well as from the propagation of Salafist ideology and religious extremism which could undermine the country's social cohesion over the long term.

However, it seems that the most serious short-term threat remains the economic and social situation in the event that the public authorities are unable to reduce the dependency of the Algerian economy on hydrocarbons and should it fail in the urgent efforts it has undertaken to find alternative revenue sources to foot the bill for public spending and satisfy the needs of an increasingly demanding population.

The spectre of the events of October 1988, which reflected a clash between the clans that formed the regime at the time due to the deepening of the economic crisis caused by a drastic drop in oil prices lives on in the memory of many Algerians, although the current leadership remains optimistic regarding a relative increase in oil prices and the success of the reforms they have undertaken to diversify the Algerian economy and promote high added value sectors such as agriculture, petrochemical industries, the automobile industry, tourism, and renewable energy (wind power and solar power).

The questions of how to consolidate the internal front and resolve the issue of peaceful democratic transition and succession, which are particularly urgent at election time, are repeatedly the focus of analysis and study by foreign experts and researchers. To take one example, Vish Sakhivel raised the question of succession in Algeria in an article published in *US Foreign Policy* on 15 December 2015. According to the Algerian media, a report by the Washington Center for Near East Policy in January 2017⁵⁵ and a study by specialist on North Africa Pierre Joffé, published by the NATO Defence College in Rome⁵⁶, seem to predict negative prospects for Algeria's future, although according to our own analysis this does not reflect reality.

⁵⁵ Washington Near East Policy Sees Bleak prospects for Bouteflika's succession, *the north African Post*, 09/02/2017, <http://northafricapost.com>

⁵⁶ Abdou Semmar, Stabilité, l'Algérie "égratignée" dans un rapport de l'OTAN, 12/02/2017, <http://www.algerie-dz.com>. Ayant moi-même bénéficié d'une bourse de recherche octroyée par le Collège de Défense de l'OTAN, je peux avancer que l'étud, élaborée par Pierre Joffé, n'engage la responsabilité que de son auteur et non pas celle de l'Alliance de l'Atlantique Nord.

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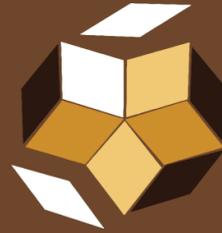
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DIALOGUES

SECURITAIRES
DANS L'ESPACE
SAHELO - SAHARIEN

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Dean of the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Algiers since 2012, Professor Belkacem Iratni holds a PhD in Political Science from Warwick University, UK (1986). CEO of the Algiers Stock Exchange from 1999 to 2003, he was also a member of an expert panel on the establishment of an African Union peace and security liaison office for Regional Economic Communities (RECs) under the auspices of the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) in 2010. Professor Iratni has authored numerous publications and participated in a number of research projects on Algerian foreign policy, relations between the Maghreb and Europe and security aspects in the Mediterranean and the Sahel-Saharan region. He has been awarded a number of academic scholarships, fellowships and distinctions, including: a USAID Fulbright Research Grant from the University of Texas in Austin (2006), a Mediterranean Dialogue Fellowship, NATO Defence College (2007), and American Institute of Maghreb Studies–CEMAT (2009).

Summary

The country-based studies highlight the nature of the State and the key question of governance in the Sahelo-Saharan region. The types of relations that the State maintains with the populations become a crucial issue when one considers the identity/ethnic dimensions of the demands that minority groups often express at the risk of destabilizing the entire region. The issues of violent extremism and of crime organized across borders are also discussed.

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