

TERRORISM, ETHNICITY AND ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN SAHEL

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Abstract

Terrorism is a threat in the Sahel region, where peoples and rulers seem to be losing control of the situation. Yet, the true origins of the instability are questionable. Ethnic conflicts and the religious differences, especially those related with the spreading of Islamic extremism among the local population, are two of the main reasons. This research paper analyzes different theories so as to attain some answers to these issues.

Keywords:

Terrorism; Sahel; Touareg; AQIM; Boko Haram

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1. Introduction

This research paper focuses on analyzing the context of African Sahel. From a methodological point of view, several hypotheses are studied which we deemed relevant, duly founded in specialized scientific sources.

First, we will discuss whether the growing instability in that strategic region is due to a border issue and, if that is so, what are the grounds for this.

Secondly, we will study whether there are indeed insoluble ethnical conflicts and if these are the main reason for terrorism or if it is more an economic issue related with the lack of resources in Sahel.

Thirdly, if the responsibility should be assigned to religious differences, namely to the leaders of religious extremism in terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, AQIM as regional al-Qaeda cell, or if they are due to the Touareg Islamic extremism or autonomy struggle.

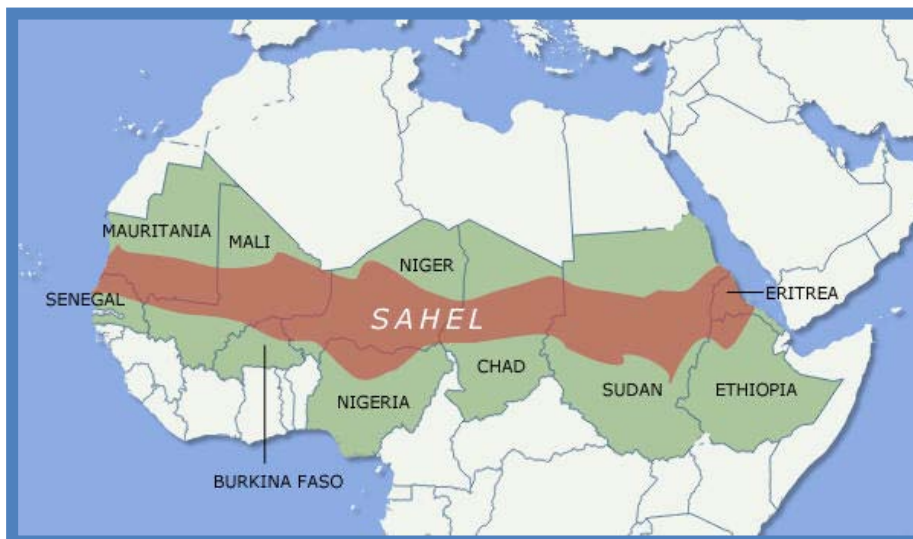
2. Sahel Geopolitics

Sahel is a region which crosses Africa from East to West. South of the Maghreb, it includes countries such as Senegal and Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Chad, Southern Sudan and Northern Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia - as shown in Map 1.

Other countries are related to it, either because of their closeness or of their strong link with Sahel. Somalia, given the porousness of the borders with Ethiopia. States on the coast of Africa between Senegal and Nigeria, i.e., Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Benin. The Maghreb itself, considering the conflict in west Sahara; the fall of the regimes in Egypt and in Tunisia after the "Arab Spring", which influenced mercenary and bomber mobility from North to South; and Algeria, due to its history of violence and terrorism.



MAP 1: Sahel–Geography



Source: Qantara.de (Deutsche Welle)¹

This is a particularly wide area inhabited by different peoples and cultures, making it rather difficult to analyze. There are common features, such as: instability in political borders, significant increase in violence and the fact that national governments seem unable to control the activities of organized crime - either because they are unstable, corrupt or because they are badly prepared to fight terrorism in terms of logistics.

What can account for the situation? This paper aims at providing some explanations. Firstly, the Berlin Conference (1884/85) was a historical milestone in this context because it created a border issue in Africa. The powers which participated in the conference (13 from Europe, plus the USA and Turkey) focused on negotiating a peaceful agreement for the balance of powers at the time. However, it did not take into consideration the political and social reality of each area, leading to nations being separated and rival peoples being united, regardless of the consequences and long-term impact of these decisions², besides the fact that it led to mass exploitation of the peoples living in those areas. Sahel was mainly ruled by Great-Britain (Nigeria, Southern Sudan and Northern Sudan) and France (Mauritania, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad). Italy rather influenced the eastern part of the territory (Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia).

¹ Dorsey, James M (2010). "Islamic Terrorism – Drugs Money Fills al Qaeda Coffers in West Africa". *Qantara.de, Deutsche Welle*, Federal Center for Political Education, January 22, URL: <http://en.qantara.de/Drugs-Money-Fills-al-Qaeda-Coffers-in-West-Africa/6973c7042i1p447/>.

² "Artificial States are those whose political borders do not coincide with the division of nationalities as desired by the populations. Former colonizers or post-war agreements established among winners, not taking this into consideration, created monstrosities in which ethnical or religious or linguistic groups were united or separated without regard for the aspirations of the peoples. 80% of African borders follow latitudinal or longitudinal lines and many scholars believe these artificial divisions (...) are the roots for the African economic tragedy." [Alesina, Alberto *et al.* (2006). "Artificial States". *Harvard University Working Papers*, February, p. 2. URL: http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/alesina/files/artificial_states.pdf].



The powers which obtained international rights over wide territories in Sahel realized that their presence in Africa would be more tolerated if the peoples were not united against them. The objective was divide to rule, so they took advantage of local rivalries and, in some cases, even fostered them. As a consequence, European companies could continue to explore the natural resources crucial to their industrialization without many obstacles.

Secondly, at the end of World War II, Great-Britain, France and Italy were half destroyed and no longer could keep their economic and military power over Sahel. Ethiopia participated in the Bandung Conference in 1955. It wasn't long before the several countries became independent, especially during the 1960s. The *Non-Aligned Movement* developed and held regular meetings. Curiously, a certain consensus was reached to maintain the borders established during the colonial period and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was a great supporter of this strategic decision³.

Thirdly, the new independent States seem to have concentrated their efforts in terms of military and administrative control in the capital cities and left the rest of country in the lurch. This leads to huge migration movements and exodus of people from rural areas, particularly evident in dry and semi-dry regions near the Sahara desert because of the low level of fertility and lack of population⁴.

In any case, it is important to understand why these difficulties continue decades after independence. Though it is acknowledged that there are problems due to external intervention, which is potentially destabilizing, from a theoretical point of view, you would expect these peoples to have had the time to propose or impose adjustments in their areas of influence. Can this be an issue of lack of resources, an economic issue?

Sahel is about 5 million Km². However, if we simply add the area of the ten countries analyzed in Table 1 (Burkina Faso, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sudan⁵), we have about 6.69% of the world's total area. With the exception of more populated countries like Nigeria, with 164.752 million inhabitants, and Ethiopia, with 88.918 million, the majority of States has less than 15 million inhabitants: Eritrea has about 5 million and Mauritania a little over 3 million citizens.

Sahel includes dry and semi-dry regions in the confluence of the Sahara desert. It has gone through regular dry periods, which conditions territories with low agricultural capacity and which have little food for cattle, where peoples' economic activity is pastoralism. This means that the populations' activities are in the primary sector but under precarious conditions; unemployment rates are high and people live in an area in which the population is very sparse (Chad has an average of seven inhabitants per Km² and Mauritania two; in the ten countries the average is 32 inhabitants per Km²).

³ "By keeping the borders and the modern State as their main organizers, the African countries also kept the conditions to consolidate the power conditions from the colonial period. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) endorsed the new countries, emphasized the importance of keeping the borders and rejected any type of self-determination except that of countries still under European control." [Schneider, Luíza G. (2008). "As Causas Políticas do Conflito do Sudão: Determinantes Estruturais e Estratégicos", *WP Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*, Faculdade de Ciências Econômicas; p. 14. URL: <http://www.lume.ufrgs.br/bitstream/handle/10183/16012/000685618.pdf?sequence=1>].

⁴ "(...) these new countries did not have enough state capacity, which led to power being concentrated in the capital cities and economic enclaves, leaving the rest of the country unattended." [ID IBID.].

⁵ Presently, Sudan is divided into two countries (North and South) but statistics in this table use statistical sources, which is why there is reference to "Sudan" in general.



TABLE 1

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Population (in millions) 2012</i>	<i>Area (% World)</i>	<i>Population density (2012) inhabitants/Km2</i>	<i>GDP PPP per capita (dollars) 2012</i>	<i>Failed States index (2012)</i>
Burkina Faso	15,379	0,18	48	1524,063	41
Chad	10,740	0,86	7	1969,907	4
Eritrea	5,659	0,08	39	776,978	23
Ethiopia	88,918	0,74	68	1135,157	17
Mali	16,345	0,83	11	1173,635	79
Mauritania	3,334	0,69	2	2268,692	38
Niger	15,553	0,85	10	863,457	18
Nigeria	164,752	0,62	147	2722,250	14
Senegal	13,766	0,13	59	1921,495	71
Sudan	33,510	1,7	14	2495,902	3
Total Sahel	367,956	6,69	32	16851,536	--

Source: FMI (2012)⁶, Nations Online (1998-2011)⁷ e Fundo para a Paz (2012)⁸

Therefore, the region includes wide spaces with sparse population, where it is possible to circulate without much state supervision, providing an opportunity for terrorism and international networks of organized crime.

On the one hand, Sahel includes very poor States such as Eritrea, whose GDP PPP *per capita* is only 776.978 dollars, and Niger, whose GDP PPP is 863.457 dollars. The highest numbers are found in Nigeria and Sudan, but still there are not high; they are due to the high revenue of the oil sector, which is badly distributed among the population.

On the other hand, these States are at the top (especially Chad and Sudan) of the Failed States Index for the African Peace Facility (2012)⁹. Bad governance and corruption prevent economic development and, consequently, the implementation of measures to efficiently fight terrorism.

⁶ INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (2012). "Report for Selected Countries and Subjects". *World Economic Outlook Database*, Data and Statistics, April. URL: <http://www.imf.org/>.

⁷ NATIONS ONLINE (1998-2011). "Countries by Area". *The Nations Online Project*, Earth/Continents, URL: http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/countries_by_area.htm.

⁸ THE FOUND FOR PEACE (2012). "The Failed States Index 2012". *FFP on-line*, Washington D.C. URL: <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=fsi2012>.

⁹ The name "failed State" is controversial. According to Rotberg (2002), Failed States are tense, confrontational and dangerous. Criminal and political violence has increased in those countries; there is loss of border control; ethnical, religious, linguistic and cultural hostilities have risen; there is civil war; terror is used against their citizens; their institutions are fragile; their infrastructures have deteriorated or are insufficient; taxes cannot be collected without coercion; there is much corruption; their health system has collapsed; child mortality rate has gone up and average life expectancy rate has gone down; there are no regular school activities; GDP rates *per capita* are decreasing; inflation is galloping; foreign currency is generally preferred; there is lack of staple goods, which leads to hunger; attacks to fundamental legitimacy have increased; leaders focus on their own interests; *lobbies* show less and less loyalty to the State; citizens feel marginalized and that they do not belong to the political community; the relation between the population and the State has collapsed; animosity is visible on a daily basis. [Rotberg, Robert I. (2002). "Failed States in a World of Terror". *Foreign Affairs*, July-August, V. 81, N.4, p. 132].



But are there ethnical conflicts in Sahel? The borders are violently disputed because the limits are non consensual and the established *lobbies* fiercely fight for the control of natural resources. But is the basis for the fight ethnical or is this a subsequent problem? This is not an easy question. First, we must analyze if, in each particular case, there are two or more ethnical groups (or if the populations are just angry at one another) and, if there are, whether they are in conflict.

In Nigeria, the ethnical issue is rather politicized. Each group fights for stronger representation of their interests in key or government positions and claims a bigger slice in the distribution of national resources. This means that the ethnical issue is, at this point, insurmountable in a country practically divided in two, the north and the south, in parallel with the religious divide (in the north, Islamism is prominent). The Niger Delta has been particularly affected by terrorist attacks.

In Mauritania there are members of the Wolof ethnical group who are Islamic but the country is mainly populated by Berbers, subdivided into two categories: the "white Moors" and the "black Moors"¹⁰, who are mostly Muslims. Is there an ethnical issue here? The problem in Mauritania is that the anti-slave laws are not complied to in certain areas of the country because skin colour discrimination is very deeply rooted in the population's frame of mind¹¹. Thus, the issue is more political and social than ethnical.

But what about the ethnical conflicts with the Touareg? First of all, the terrorist attacks are perpetrated by religious extremists, so they should be viewed accordingly. In general, they are a mild people of Berber origin and nomadic life who keep their ancestral lifestyle and who are mostly Muslim.

The problem is that the Touareg (whose Arabic name means "abandoned by the gods") were victims of the Berlin Conference (they are still today scattered throughout the Sahara desert in countries such as Algeria, Mali, Libya, Niger and Burkina Faso). When the Touareg are in conflict with neighbouring peoples because of independence or as a consequence of their guerrilla activity, is that an ethnical conflict? Yes, it is, but one which could have been prevented if a State had been created that institutionalized them and allowed them a peaceful coexistence in the area they live in. However, as they live in at least five States, this would demand strong national cohesion among the Touareg and a multilateral negotiation with the countries involved and international organizations such as the African Union or the UN.

The Touareg are influential in the routes through the desert of Libya, namely in the southwest, and there were members of this ethnic group among the revolutionaries

¹⁰ "The complex racial issue in Mauritania also affects the areas where the Islamic population lives. Mauritania has three main racial groups: the *Bidan* or "White Moors", who speak Arabic; the *Haratin* or "Black Moors", who also speak Arabic; and the black populations who do not speak Arabic, including ethnical groups such as the Wolof and the Soninke." [Thurston, Alex (2012). "Mauritania's Islamists". *The Carnegie Papers*, Middle East, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March, Washington DC, p. 6]».

¹¹ "The White Moors descend from slave traders and have been at the top of the political and social hierarchy in Mauritania for a long time. Slavery of non-white moors has continued up to the present despite the laws forbidding it. Since the 1970s, non-white moors have become more and more vocal in their fight against slavery, demanding a more prominent role in political power. Islamic leaders and activists have been essentially White Moors. However, as the *Haratin* have become more influential and taken on leadership roles, not only in politics but also as Imams and Muslim scholars, Islamists, who seem interested in using Islam as a pan-racial political rallying platform, may now be able to attract new groups." [Thurston, Alex (2012), *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7].



against the dictatorship. The changes in the geopolitical chess game after the "Arab Spring" have led to political and social instability, to the lack of government and to greater freedom of action for organized crime in Sahel and Maghreb, especially after the fall of Muamar Kadafi, who had controlled the rivalries among tribal leaders with an iron fist.

Libya is now in a climate of uncertainty as to the future of its new democracy, yet unable to establish social order and peace. The country is on the verge of generalized chaos after the breaking up of local alliances to overthrow Kadafi; militias now defend the interests of the regions they belong to. Tribal leaders take advantage of the lack of power to invest in terrorist attacks and in organized crime (and its huge profits), including in drug trafficking, whose main international routes are through Sahel - from Latin America, especially from the Andes and from Colombia, in the case of cocaine, towards Europe and the Middle East (where powers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran are probable receivers of drug trafficking and financiers of terrorism).

3. Terrorism in Sahel - AQIM and BOKO HARAM

The penetration of Islamist fundamentalism in Sahel is the result of decade-long historical development. Associated to arms and drug trafficking, money laundering and strategic support of religious, humanitarian and cultural local non-profit organizations (NGOs), it is carried out by different dissident groups. These NGOs appear under the guise of charities who care for those in need as well as *protect the Muslim from their enemies* as well as spread the faith and raise funds (the sources are countries in Sahel such as Sudan or the Arab Peninsula) which are then used to finance logistics in terrorist organizations. These NGOs even have subsidiaries in Europe and the USA, which help to globalize extremist activities and rhetoric among immigrant communities (often marginalized in the host countries, which adds to the vicious cycle).

In the Sahel region, two terrorist groups are relevant: AQIM and Boko Haram (in Nigeria).

AQIM (Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb) has been based in Algeria since the civil war (1991/1992), considering that some its leaders were radicals from the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF). The strategy of Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (SGPC) which was the predecessor of AQIM, founded in 2007, is to create a network that spreads extremist rhetoric at local as well as global level¹². AQIM operation centre has, however, been transferred to the north of Mali, where its recruitment and training camps are located.

We cannot rule out the chance of AQIM being involved with Touareg in smuggling and arms and drug trafficking across Mali, specifically in the region of Katibat al-Mulathamine. Even when authors like Black (2009) state that "there is no clear evidence of the relation" between the Touareg and members of AQIM¹³ due to lack of common ideological agenda and to foreigners rather than Mali dissidents being the main smugglers in the region.

¹² See Marret, Jean-Luc (2008). "Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb: A «Glocal» Organization". *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 31, N.º 6, June, pp. 541-552.

¹³ See Black, Andrew (2009). "Mokhtar Belmokhtar: The Algerian Jihad's Southern Amir". *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. VII, Issue 12, May 8, p. 2.



AQIM is becoming famous and, consequently, popular in Sahel¹⁴. Lohmann (2011)¹⁵ admits that the terrorist organization was initially overlooked because it was considered weak and isolated. Yet, it has become stronger in the last decade due to successful integration strategies in the region and to leaders' activities (who are highly competitive among themselves, which may contribute to internal disintegration of the organization's command structure). Also because of its link to Al-Qaeda, which has spread from the Middle East.

When Al-Qaeda is discussed, the attacks to the Twin Towers and to the Pentagon are mentioned. Haim Malka (2010) even contends that the terrorism in Northern Africa was localized and controlled before the international anti-terrorist campaign after the attacks on September 11, 2001, in the USA and that after that everything changed¹⁶.

To confirm this idea, see Map 2, in which it is visible the significant increase in the number of terrorist attacks in Northern Africa since the historical date of September 11, 2001; from 21 (in 2001) to 44 (2004), 104 (2005) and 204 (2009); there was a slight decrease in 2010, when the number of terrorist attacks did not reach 200 (178, to be precise).

It is admitted that AQIM is adopting measures similar to those of 19th century colonizers Who divided to rule. A strategy that is still successful. If, for some reason, it is difficult to control wider spaces, where there are too many groups fighting for them (some of which not Muslim or which do not identify with extremist practices used by Al-Qaeda or by AQIM), separatism and nationalism are fostered, popular in this area of intervention, and integration of terrorist cells are facilitated in a highly profitable strategic scenario.

AQIM focuses especially on kidnapping (usually of foreigners) with high ransom requests. This terrorist group is also an intermediary in different trafficking, including drugs, counterfeit medicines, human, organs, which generate high revenue and others' greed. Whenever AQIM sells arms to local insurgents for their military campaigns, it maintains its control over leaders who own it money. It manipulates the rivalries among leaders and peoples so that they not unite against AQIM or its main sources of financing from the Middle East.

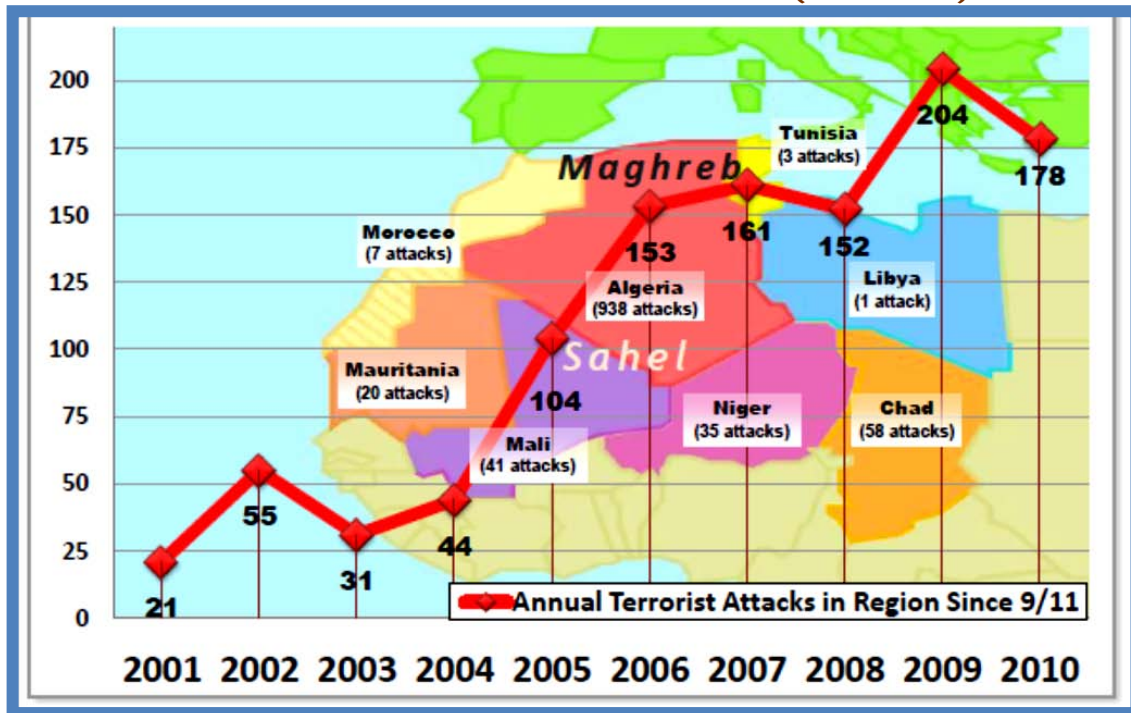
¹⁴ "Any violent insurgent in the Muslim world, whether a politician or a common citizen, and regardless of their motives, will easily understand they must publicly act in the name of Al-Qaeda if they wish to be taken seriously, if they aim to act and be acknowledged by others and if they want to draw international attention to their activities." [Taje, Mehdi (2010). "Vulnerabilities and Factors of Insecurity in the SAHEL". *Sahel and West Africa Club (Swac/OECD)*, West African Challenges, N.º 1, August, p. 6].

¹⁵ "AQIM was considered weak and isolated but it managed to integrate with local communities and establish a cooperation with government authorities and those responsible for security, as well as with regional drug traffickers and other criminal organizations. Therefore, it aims to destabilize the whole region so as to promote its economic and political interests through raising insecurity" [Lohmann, Annette (2011). "Qui sont les Maîtres du Sahara? – Vieux Conflits, Nouvelles Menaces: Le Mali et le Sahara Central entre les Touaregs, Al Qaeda et le Crime Organisé". *Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung*, FES Peace and Security Series, N.º 5, June, p. 9].

¹⁶ See Malka, Haim (2010). "The Dynamics of North African Terrorism". CSIS – Center for Strategic & International Studies, Conference Report, Middle East Program, March, Washington DC, pp. 1-8.



MAP 2: Terrorist Attacks in Northern Africa (2001/2010)



Source: Yonah Alexander (2010)¹⁷

AQIM has benefitted from the flow of arms and militia from Libya after the fall of the regime as a consequence of the "Arab Spring". Arms are getting into Mali, an already vulnerable country, brought by Touareg extremists. This somewhat undermines the anti-terrorist cooperation effort which was being established among Algeria, Mali and Mauritania.

Thus, social and political rivalries and religious alliances are managed according to conveniences and used to control the situation from a wider perspective. Instability mainly results from terrorist groups' manipulation of internal conflicts. These groups are often financed and controlled from abroad. Both civilians and guerrilla fighters are highly manipulated by malicious criminals who only apparently care with poverty or justice of independence claims but are rather more interested in using them for their own interests, often economic.

The issue is also eminently economic in Nigeria, a country rich in natural resources, including oil and natural gas. This is the area of Boko Haram, an Islamic fundamentalist organization which advocates the application of *Sharia* laws and takes advantage of the high levels of government corruption to act with impunity¹⁸.

¹⁷ Yonah Alexander (2010) "Maghreb & Sahel Terrorism: Addressing the Rising threat from al-Qaeda and other Terrorists in North and West/Central Africa". *International Center for Terrorism Studies*, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, January, p. 4.

¹⁸ "The government of Nigeria has tried to efficiently deal with the complaints and sources of tension in the country and there is widespread belief among northern Nigerians that the government continues to fail in terms of the needs of those aiming for a better future for the country. Though resources are limited, the distribution of those resources is unbalanced and the well-known levels of corruption among the elites prejudice the government's efficiency. On the other hand, corruption and general perception that government officials application of the law is unworthy further undermine the government's capacity



Boko Haram received media coverage in December 2003, when it drew world attention. However, its origins may be the Maitatsine movement¹⁹ (name of a series of rebellions started by a martyr from the northeast of Nigeria, Mohamed Marwa or Maitatsine, especially dangerous in the 1970s and whose steps were followed in the 1980s by another Mujahidin rebellion leader, Yan Tatsine).

The intensity (and number) of more recent activities of Boko Haram is considered "highly concerning" by authors such as Pham (2012)²⁰.

In Northern Nigeria, the rules are set by Muslim ethnical groups, the Hausa-Fulani being especially influential, the more so because of their international relations with Muslim brotherhoods from Africa and the Middle East. The headquarters of the terrorist group Boko Haram is in the north, but the group also operated in the south.

In the south of Nigeria, most of the population is Christian or animist. The main ethnical group is Ijaw and the extremists in this group are mostly army dissidents aiming to control local natural resources. The Hausa-Fulani are Islamic and dominate the north of Nigeria. They have strong relations with Muslim brotherhoods in other regions of Africa and even in the Middle East

The instability in the Niger Delta, in the south of Nigeria (which includes States such as Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers), is essentially ethnical and political. Nevertheless, it is the greed to manage local natural resources that is the source of conflict among rival groups in this strategic region.

The Niger Delta is the big source of oil in Nigeria. Several foreign companies operate there, which are accused of exploiting local populations. The populations have a low quality of life and survive in a context of increasing pollution due to the emissions of carbon dioxide, acid rain and *flaring* (gas emissions associated with oil extraction). This is the reason why the populist and inflamed speeches of members of Boko Haram are carefully listened to. The population feels they are poor and wronged and have no means to react to an ongoing situation of social and economic imbalance. They therefore admit resorting to violence to promote, even if through violence, to a greater balance in the distribution of natural wealth.

Yet, the question arises: if since its independence Nigeria had been ruled by credible and incorrupt leaders, if it were a true democratic constitutional State which ensured the fair distribution of resources among the populations in the north and south of the country, would the country today have such a significant ethnical politicization? Would the population be as vulnerable to Boko Haram's extremist ideologies? This is a hard question to answer as it would require field test. Yet perhaps the divide would not be as wide. Confidence and reciprocity are bases for good neighbourhood relations; fair

to influence the behaviour of local community members in the positive, far from the radical ideological temptation of extremists such as Boko Haram." [Forest, James J. (2012). "Confronting the Terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria". *Joint Special Operations University – JSOU Reports*, May, p. 11].

¹⁹ See Isichei, Elizabeth (1987). "The Maitatsine Risings in Nigeria 1980-1985: A Revolt of the Disinherited". *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 17, N.º 3, pp. 194-208.

²⁰ "The re-emergence of the Nigerian Islamic group Boko Haram is reason for great concern. This group has orchestrated, since the end of 2010, a campaign of attacks in the whole of northern Nigeria, against authorities and public institutions and more and more against innocent lives, including children's. In 2011 alone, 550 people died in 115 attacks, a terrifying number which never ceases to increase. Meanwhile, Boko Haram's discourse and tactics show that the organization has spread its influence beyond its original basis - the northeast of Nigeria. In fact, it is becoming an transnational threat, with ramifications in other fundamentalist groups in the north, the west or the east of Africa." [Pham, J. Peter (2012). "A Ameaçã Crescente do Boko Haram". *Centro de Estudos Estratégicos de África*, N.º 20, Abril, p.1].



and integrating, peace-caring and transparent policies lead to peaceful citizens. Otherwise, everything becomes more complex and problematic with time.

In this context of spurious alliances, it is not easy to establish a direct and intense relation between groups such as AQIM and Boko Haram but it is possible they are getting closer in the field. Noteworthy are the recent change in *modus operandi* and in discourse²¹ of members of Boko Haram (who preferred kidnapping of foreigners and now carry out more suicide attacks)²², the fact that members of AQIM have expressed greater availability to train members of Boko Haram²³ and the suspicions among the population.

This means that, regardless of there being ethnical or religious conflicts (or of only apparently being so as a consequence of other variables), the possibility exists of solutions for the region including policies of economic growth that provide work opportunities for populations in need, as well as that an elite rises to power who is less focused on their personal/group interests and more on the real needs of the country and its population.

Within the scope of security, more equipment is obviously necessary in the fight against terrorism. Yet, if the levels of corruption are maintained, the investment will be of little use. It is important to negotiate a better coordination of security services, both at internal and at regional levels, as the effort needs to be coordinated among countries to be successful. With better social cohesion and "everybody pulling together", difficulties may become opportunities to build stronger, more democratic and economically more stable countries which allow their populations to have a more peaceful and safer life, one free of terrorism.

4. Conclusion

The borders of the countries in Sahel were inherited from colonialism, which defined them arbitrarily. These were kept after the independence but they are mostly artificial borders because they do not take into consideration how the peoples are organized and distributed in the territory. To rule the capital as if it was the whole country has been a recurring mistake made by the governments of these States because it neglects the supervision of wide areas where organized crime often acts freely. It is important to

²¹ "More recently, the Islamic fundamentalist group Boko Haram, from Northern Nigeria, have increased the number of national attacks against civil and governmental targets and has also attacked (the building of) the United Nations in Abuja, announcing they are not only concerned with internal developments but also have a wider and transnational agenda (...) the increase in Islamic extremist activity in Sub-Saharan Africa, and more specifically in Nigeria, is starting to echo as in the Middle East." [Forest, James J. F. and Giroux, Jennifer (2011). "Terrorism and Political Violence in Africa: Contemporary Trends in a Shifting Terrain". *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 5, Issues 3-4, September, p. 10].

²² "Boko Haram's transition to suicide attacks suggests that the group may have relations with other major Salafist Jihadist organizations. The posting of a video of a faith martyr in September 2011, a media event not associated to regional radical Islamic groups, suggests links with AQIM or with Al-Shabab, both of which use this methodology." [Cook, David (2011). "The Rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria". *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point – CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 4, Issue 9, September, p. 5].

²³ "Allegedly, members of Boko Haram have received training in Algeria and in Mauritania (...) two areas where AQIM is the major operator (...) members of Boko Haram have allegedly been trained directly by AQIM in Niger after AQIM opened to the group (...) If Boko Haram will become a franchise of Al-Qaeda is still not certain. There is strong possibility this may occur and, if it does, that will take place in the next one or two years, considering the information available." [Gourley, Sean M. (2012). "Linkages between Boko Haram and Al Qaeda: A potential Deadly Synergy". *Global Security Studies*, Summer, Vol. 3, Issue 3, p. 10].



understand that Sahel is mostly populated in the south; in the north the territory is sparsely populated (in average less than 10 inhabitants per Km²).

To eradicate terrorism in Sahel demands, first and foremost, solutions in terms of defense and security, because if there is no control over the activities carried out by organized crime (trafficking of arms, drugs and counterfeit medicines, of human beings and organs), to maintain the order in these territories will be very difficult. The peoples need to feel safe but also to understand that to commit illegal activities has negative consequences in their lives.

The government of these countries must be able to impose rules that are in accordance with their own actions because, if they are corrupt or do not abide to the rules, the populations will follow their example. This leads us to the second issue, politics. Good governance practices should be fostered in an environment of generalized peace and trust.

Terrorism tends to spread in badly governed, poor and desperate populations in accordance with the difficulties they go through. At the same time, we must not forget that fear is instrumental to control natural resources and their main distribution channels. And if these are oil and natural gas, the revenue is so high that they attract people who are willing to use any means to attain their goals.

Another variable is ethnical, but this is more difficult to establish. Firstly, because there is not always an ethnical division among angry populations. We must then conclude that there is in fact an insoluble conflict due to breaking-off of relations. Whether the instability does not truly represent ethnical conflicts but is a result of contextual upheavals or due to other circumstances.

There is also the religious issue, which is simultaneously cultural. Regardless of what is written in the holy book, there are always religious leaders who give it their own interpretation. If it is an extreme interpretation or if it leads to fanatic behavior among his followers, rivalries and conflicts may arise which may be viewed as religious but which are rather more political and economic or social and cultural, in terms of translating the divine word to secular life. This occurs because religions are different and each people adapts religion to their own cultural roots and typical lifestyles.

Islamic fundamentalist groups as Boko Haram and AQIM aim to implement Sharia, the Islamic laws. Yet, regardless of their religious reading of the sacred texts or the reading of their cultures, we know they manipulate populations to more easily control them; for the populations to follow them.

In this network of contacts there are also Islamic fundamentalists and Touareg dissidents, a nomadic people with desire of independence and which have significant control over the desert routes, through which smuggling and international trafficking of arms, drugs, counterfeit medicines, humans and organs travel freely and with impunity. This trafficking is highly profitable and poses a real threat to physical and moral integrity of the peoples in Sahel.

While this high level of violence, corruption, lack of governance and values coexist with high unemployment rates and an unfair distribution of resources, it will be very difficult for anti-terrorist government measures for national security to be efficient. A change in favor of peace and human rights in the region will be very hard to implement.



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