

Algeria and the Sahelian Quandary: The Limits of Containment Security Policy

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Introduction

Various analysts have provided different interpretations as to Algeria's role in the Sahel. For instance, one researcher argues that "Algeria is reluctant or unable to take a leading role in regional security now that its Libyan rival is currently unable to. Suspicion of a hidden Algerian agenda complicates the coordination of an effective response to the conflict" (Boukhars, 2012). Notwithstanding similar criticisms regarding Algeria's role in the Sahel, it is necessary to analyse that role from an objective perspective and attempt to decipher the underpinnings of Algeria's policy in the region. Very often, statements such as the one above reflect the difficulty in understanding Algeria's foreign policy principles; they also ignore how Algerian policy-makers perceive their actions in the Sahel. This chapter will thus analyse some of the fundamentals of Algeria's foreign policy, such as non-interference in others' domestic affairs, non-intervention of the armed forces beyond Algeria's borders, and opposition to foreign intervention in the region, suggesting that regional states are responsible collectively for their regional security. This might elucidate some of the seeming shortcomings of Algeria's policy in its southern neighbourhood.

The Geopolitics of the Sahel

The United States (US), the European Union (EU), Algeria and other states have considered the Sahara-Sahel region¹ as a "security threat" ever since the US invasion of Afghanistan in reprisal for the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001. Indeed, soon after 9/11, in 2002, the US had already anticipated that al-Qaeda's forces, overpowered in Afghanistan, would relocate in the Sahel because this region could offer a "safe haven", a notion that has become prominent in US foreign and defence policy (Lamb, 2008; Walt, 2009). Due to the particularity of the terrain and the fragility of Sahelian states (Cooke & Sanderson, 2016), in 2002 the US launched the Pan-Sahel Initiative and, in 2005, the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) to counter the alleged new menace (Zoubir, 2009). This immense region has porous borders, which tradesmen (from Timbuktu) but also traffickers of all kinds have historically crossed at will. However, it would be erroneous to view this region simply as an area of trafficking and a gate to illegal migration. It is also a zone of interaction between "Arab Africa" and "Black Africa" in which all kinds of human, financial and religious exchanges take place. Yet in recent years there has been greater focus on the insecurity that has characterised the Sahara-Sahel. Since 2007, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (Harmon, 2010; Filiu, 2009) has progressed in the region and established

¹ The Sahel region is an ecoclimate zone located on the southern edge of the Sahara Desert; it is practically a transition zone between the Sahara, the greatest desert in the world where it is hardly possible to cultivate the land, and the savannah, which boasts a rudimentary agriculture because of relatively good rainfall.

ungoverned spaces for violent extremists and traffickers; Algerian security forces' successful counterterrorism policies inside the country drove AQIM (formerly the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat [GSPC]) forces beyond the country's borders, into northern Mali. Later, the spawns of the collapse of the Libyan regime in October 2011 (Zoubir, 2012) and civil war further strengthened AQIM's capabilities due to the dispersion of the weapons appropriated from Libya's stockpiles and the debacle of Gaddafi's troops in 2011. Many of these weapons have fallen into the hands of AQIM and other groups that have consolidated their arsenal with sophisticated weapons, including missiles, thus destabilising even more the already fragile Sahelian states (Carment, 2003). The return of heavily armed Tuareg, who had served alongside Gaddafi's forces, to northern Mali, where they declared the independent state of the Azawad in April 2012, aggravated already complicated conditions, for the persistent crisis in northern Mali is only one of the consequences of the Libyan civil war. For neighbouring Algeria, also a Sahelian state,² this enduring crisis represents the most serious threat to national security, which the authorities have endeavoured to contain to protect the territory and stem the potential influx of violent extremists, the growing inflow of transiting migrants to Europe, the spread of drugs, and human trafficking.

Algerian policy-makers consider the Sahel as Algeria's "soft underbelly" (*ventre mou*), the most perilous for its national security [Interviews].³ The poverty that characterises Sahelian states, except Algeria, constitute another form of security threat to Algeria because of the potential influx of illegal migrants, as has happened in recent years. Sahelian states are the poorest in the world, figuring in the Low Human Development grouping of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). On the UNDP Human Development measure, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger rank 157, 175, 185, 186 and 187, respectively. All the development indicators (literacy, nutrition, health...) are considerably low (UNDP, 2017). This poverty and the dire socioeconomic conditions, such as high unemployment, weak educational and social infrastructures, and precarious agricultural resources, have created a propitious terrain for the expansion of illegal trafficking, such as drugs, irregular migration, cigarettes, petrol, medicines, light weapons, vehicles, automobile spare parts and, more recently, the recruitment of young men by Violent Extremist Organisations (VEOs). The absence of tangible development, bad governance and the persistence of poverty are thus important factors to consider when analysing the security of the Sahel, whether from an international perspective or from Algeria's.

² The United Nations considers Sahelian countries as: northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, central Mali, northern Burkina Faso, the extreme south of Algeria, Niger, the extreme north of Nigeria, central Chad, central and southern Sudan, the extreme north of South Sudan, Eritrea, Cameroon, Central African Republic and the extreme north of Ethiopia. See, for instance, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (31 January 2013). Sahel: \$1.6 billion appeal to address widespread humanitarian crisis. Retrieved from <http://www.unocha.org/country/top-stories/all-stories/sahel-16-billion-appeal-address-widespread-humanitarian-crisis>

³ The author conducted interviews with Algerian diplomats and security officials, who speak on condition of anonymity with regard to place and date. The author conducted the interviews in Algeria and abroad.

Algeria's Perception of the Sahel: "The Corridor of All Dangers"

The quagmire in the Sahara-Sahel has confronted Algeria with challenges the country has not experienced since the war in the Western Sahara in 1975-1991 and the quasi-civil war in the 1990s, which almost brought down the regime and destroyed the state. It would be a fallacy to think that this concern is a recent development. In fact, the Sahel has always been an area of concern for Algeria's policy-makers, who have sought to mediate between the Malian state and the recurrent Tuareg insurgencies since the 1960s; that is, soon after Algeria's independence in 1962. The various illegal activities previously mentioned as well as the weakening of the bordering states and the dire socioeconomic conditions, pose serious challenges to the state. However, the conditions of the last decade have raised much more serious security concerns for the country, which shares thousands of kilometres of borders not only with Sahelian states, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, but also with Libya and Tunisia. The upheavals in Tunisia and Libya that broke out in late 2010 and rippled throughout the region in 2011 have resulted in destabilisation, which poses a threat to Algeria. Algeria also shares a border with Morocco, its traditional rival in the region,⁴ and the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Except for Algeria, the other Sahelian states are "fragile states" or even "failed states," (Cooke & Sanderson, 2016), which cannot control the entirety of their territories, thus allowing the emergence of sanctuaries for VEOs to conduct their activities. The fall of the Gaddafi regime, following the questionable intervention by North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which Algeria totally opposed,⁵ destabilised the Maghreb-Sahel region significantly. While the Libyan civil war that ensued after the fall of the Libyan regime is not responsible for the conditions in Mali or Niger, it has undoubtedly exacerbated already intricate circumstances.

In an interview, a senior Algerian official once told the author that the Sahel is "*le couloir de tous les dangers*" (the corridor of all dangers), with serious risks particularly for Algeria. While there are many definitions of the Sahel, Algerian security officials see the Sahelian corridor as the strip crossing Ethiopia, Sudan, Chad, Libya, Mali, Niger, extreme southern Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Senegal and Nigeria.

From a security perspective, Algerian defence officials see the field of operations as extending over a desert strip of a length of 1,956 km and a depth of 933 km. Since the 1990s and early 2000s, when violent extremist groups began settling in northern Mali, their conviction was that the "Corridor of all dangers" has become the Achilles' heel of Algeria's security (Y. Zoubir, personal communication, 5 September 2011). Having

4 The two countries fought a short war in 1963 and have been in a cold war since the 1970s following the breakout of the war in Western Sahara. Until the last decade or so, most of Algeria's troops were stationed along the border with Morocco. See Zoubir, Y., & Dris-Ait-Hamadouche, L. (2013). *The Maghreb: Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia*. Global Security Watch. Praeger.

5 Author's interviews with senior officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, Algiers, May 2011. Many foreign officials, including high-level US diplomats, told the author subsequently that Algerian policy-makers were correct about their prediction as to the consequences of the intervention.

defeated the armed groups inside the country, pushing the most important, the GSPC beyond Algeria's borders, mostly into Mali, security officials endeavoured to gradually safeguard Algeria's borders with its Sahelian neighbours and, later, with Libya and Tunisia.

In the early 2000s, the region witnessed the multiplication of kidnappings; while Westerners were the main target of Jihadists and narco-traffickers, Algerians were also the victims of abductions that aimed to collect funds to purchase weapons and other lethal equipment, and perhaps to dissuade Algeria from supporting the Malian government in its fight against the groups. In April 2012, for instance, the Movement of Unicity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)⁶ militants kidnapped seven Algerian diplomats, including the general consul, in Gao, northern Mali. They released three of them in July but two remained in captivity until August 2014; the kidnappers executed one of the hostages because Algerians still refused to pay the ransom, while another one died from illness. The refusal to pay ransoms to kidnappers has been an official *sine qua non* of Algeria's antiterrorist principles.

Insecurity in the Sahel has been such that the area has been dubbed "Sahelistan" (Laurent, 2013), a far-fetched appellation given the geopolitical differences between Afghanistan and the Sahel. What is true, however, is that because of the difficulty of completely controlling the Sahelian region, VEOs, including the Nigerian Boko Haram, can train and prepare operations against governments regionally and internationally.

The fight against extremism and illegal activities is not the only issue that Algeria has faced. The question of the Tuareg, the minority populations in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, and Niger, has also been of salient importance to Algeria's security priorities.

Algeria and the Tuareg Question

In recent years, Algeria has been quite concerned about the turn of events regarding the Tuareg issue. This is not new but the question has grown more complicated since the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA)'s proclamation of independence in 2012. Colonial France's redrawing of African borders resulted in the dispersal of the Tuareg population throughout the Maghreb and Sahel regions (Raffray, 2013). However, as scattered as they are, the Tuareg have been able to maintain some links across borders owing to the seasonal movements (transhumance) in the region. The Algerian government was resentful of Gaddafi's support for the creation of training

⁶ The MUJAO is an offshoot of AQIM; Mauritians and other sub-Saharan Africans constitute the bulk of the organisation.

camps and encouragement of the emergence of a Tuareg independence movement and even the establishment of an independent Tuareg state as a way of exerting leverage over rival actors in the region, especially Algeria. One of the major consequences of the civil strife in Libya was the massive return of the well-equipped and highly experienced Libya-based Tuareg to Mali and Niger after the collapse of the Libyan state. Algiers has always opposed Tuareg aspiration for statehood in its neighbourhood. While Algerian policy-makers empathise with Malian Tuareg and are fully aware of the way General Charles de Gaulle dealt with the question (Oulmont & Vaïsse, 2014), they generally view Tuareg claims for autonomy and irredentism suspiciously. Ever since its independence, Algeria has remained attached to the inviolability of the borders inherited from colonialism; this, in fact, is one of the sacrosanct principles of its foreign policy, which Algeria has strongly supported at the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)/African Union (AU) (Zoubir, 2015). Unsurprisingly, regardless of this empathy for the Malian Tuareg, they reacted negatively in April 2012 to the proclamation of the MNLA of an independent state in northern Mali. This attitude is consistent with Algeria's policy principle against secessionist movements and any political, social or ethnic categories that could threaten the internationally recognised national unity and territorial integrity of a state. Policy-makers in Algiers perceive any secessionist desires in Africa, in general, and in the Sahel, in particular, as a threat to Algeria's own national security and territorial integrity. Therefore, they have consistently mediated between the Tuareg in northern Mali and the central government in Bamako in 1990, 2006 and since 2012.

After Gaddafi's seizure of power in 1969, Algerians worried about Gaddafi's manipulation of the Tuareg question (Dris, 2009).⁷ However, they have been as fearful that France could someday, should the opportunity arise, provide backing to ethnic minorities (Tuareg, Mouzabite...) seeking autonomy in Algeria to weaken Algiers' control over the vast, rich territory, particularly the Sahara (Y. Zoubir, personal communication, 14 January 2016). Colonial France's struggle to keep the Algerian Sahara as part of France during the 1961 Evian negotiations remains anchored in the Algerian collective memory.

In Algeria, the Tuareg question remains a complex issue, which emerged soon after the country's independence.⁸ The Tuareg aspiration for statehood has always been of great concern to Algeria as the dissemination of this population throughout the North African and Sahelian countries renders its management quite complicated. Algerian security officials viewed the Tuareg claims suspiciously in 1963-1964, when the first rebellion broke out in Mali. This explains why President Ahmed Ben Bella granted permission to Malian troops to pursue the rebels who had crossed into Algerian territory. This episode

⁷ Gaddafi had encouraged the political and social promotion of the Tuareg as part of his campaign to create a Targui (singular of Tuareg) state, comprised of the Tuareg from Algeria, Mali and Niger under the influence of Libya. To this end, he tolerated the setting-up of training camps and encouraged the emergence of a Tuareg movement as a way of leveraging rival actors, Algeria in particular.

⁸ Even before the country's independence in 1962, there were concerns within the Algerian nationalist movement about the Berber question, which had erupted in 1949.

and others, such as Biafra in the early 1970s, highlights Algerian policy-makers' attitude toward secessionist movements: they mistrust any political, social or ethnic category whose contentions could jeopardise the national unity and territorial integrity of any state and violate the OAU/AU charters on the inviolability of internationally recognised borders. To avoid a similar scenario as had happened in Mali and after many tergiversations, in the late 1960s, under Houari Boumedienne's rule, the government decided to grant rights to the Tuareg (Zoubir & Dris-Aït-Hamadouche, 2013), thus marking a noticeable change in attitude toward them. Not only did the government grant them rights but also incorporated them into the political system through the appointment of some notable Tuareg figures in parliament and in the then single ruling party, National Liberation Front (FLN). The Algerian regime reckoned that the best approach to dissuade the Tuareg from striving for independence rested on their social and political integration. Algerian authorities were, and still are to this date, very cautious about any cross-border solidarity among the Tuareg that might have a negative impact on the efforts made to assimilate the Tuareg living in southern Algeria. To eschew any temptations for self-rule or nationalistic sentiments, like the Kurdish question, Algiers carried out many processes. The authorities have treated the Tuareg community as part of the Berber (Amazigh) national identity, helping the Tuareg settle in Algeria's southern cities and providing them with modern means to improve their basic living conditions. The government has consistently been prompt in brokering peace agreements between the Tuareg rebels and the central governments in Mali and Niger (Iratni, 2008). In 2006, for instance, Algerians brokered an important agreement between the Malian government and the Tuareg. The non-compliance of Malian President Amadou Toumany Touré [aka ATT] not only caused the events of early 2012 but it also prompted a military coup. This kind of occurrence highlights the regional dimension of the Tuareg question; it also shows how difficult it is to contain this problem within a national dimension. The recurrence of the conflict in northern Mali since the 1960s confirms this hypothesis. The issue is very sensitive for Algeria's national security establishment for whom an enduring status quo will render the management and resolution of this conflict quite complicated. Algerian mediation in the 1990s and since 2012 to resolve the Tuareg problem shows how important securing the country's southern borders is for Algeria's national security. Algerian authorities fear that the return to the status quo of the pre-1990s could jeopardise the efforts made since the beginning of the last decade to secure the southern borders. Mediating the conflict opposing the Tuareg rebellion to the Malian government rests on a strategy derived from the necessity to prevent a spill-over effect of this conflict onto Algeria's territory proper. The presence of Tuareg populations in Algerian provinces (Tamanrasset, Illizi, Djanet and In Salah) is one of the key elements

of this equation: Algerians fear that the success of Malian and Nigerien Tuareg to create their own political entity could encourage those living in Algerian provinces to make similar demands for self-rule. Avoiding such a domino effect is thus of paramount strategic importance. The agreement signed in Algiers in 2006 between the Malian government and the Tuareg rebels in northern Mali was conceived in such a way as to thwart any secessionist temptation. It did that by promoting decentralisation as a mode of governance. The Malian government virtually reneged on the measures contained in the agreement. That failure to fulfil the commitment is one of the main reasons why the Tuareg resumed hostilities. Algeria's mediation efforts, which had arranged a meeting in Algiers in February 2011, failed to produce any tangible results. However, what made matters worse in reaching agreement between the contending parties was the military coup in Mali on 22 March 2012 carried out by Captain Amadou Sanogo. Algerians condemned the coup but understood the fact that one of the main reasons for the coup was the Malian government's ineffective fight against AQIM and the mismanagement of the Tuareg question. For Algerian policy-makers, the MNLA's proclamation of the independence of the Azawad was quite a dangerous development; their reaction was to avoid a domino effect that the Azawad's independence in northern Mali could have on the other Tuareg populations scattered in Niger and Algeria.

The political change in Libya had resulted in the extension of the arc of crisis in the region. Sharing 980 kilometres of borders with Libya and more than 1,300 kilometres with Mali, Algeria's capacity to protect itself against the consequences of the instability in Mali and Libya has no doubt represented a challenge. Thousands of Malians, including troops fleeing the slaughter by the better-equipped Tuareg troops, fled to Algeria to escape the fighting and to seek refuge. The capture of three major cities in northern Mali – Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu – by the MNLA, a purportedly secular movement, and Ansar Dine, an Islamist group, and other armed groups, coupled with the severe food crisis, provoked an even greater exodus from Mali to Algeria. Algerians feared that these events would prompt autonomous reflexes among some Algerian Tuareg; they also worried about the proliferation of small arms. The unholy alliances between Tuareg factions and VEOs, like that between Ansar Dine and AQIM, are major destabilising factors in the Sahel, particularly for Algeria. The latter's strategy has consisted not only of deploying forces along the border and increasing surveillance but also of breaking the potential and existing links between the Tuareg and VEOs. Obtaining the Tuareg's support against AQIM, MUJAO and other VEOs, including those affiliated to the organisation of Islamic State (IS), in the region is one of the pillars of Algeria's strategy on its southern border.

Algeria's Mediation in the Tuareg Conflict and the Algiers Peace and Reconciliation Agreement

After many attempts and mediations, in May 2015, the warring parties finally signed the agreement that resulted from the mediation that Algerians had led between the Malian government and several armed Tuareg factions in northern Mali. The “Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, resulting from the Algiers Process” (the “Bamako Agreement”) [Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Mali Issu du Processus d’Alger, 2015] aimed at ending the conflict in northern Mali, a conflict that continues to destabilise the entire region and had resulted in France’s military intervention Operation Serval in Mali, which Algeria supported,⁹ to stop the advance southward of Ansar Dine Tuareg forces together with AQIM and MUJAO fighters. This Agreement, which suggested a kind of federalism, granted the Tuareg their recognition by the Malian state of their identity and the Azawad as a “sociocultural reality” and “human reality”.¹⁰ As lead-mediators, one of the principal points that Algerians succeeded in obtaining was the “respect for the national unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the State of Mali, as well as its republican form and secular character,” issues dear to the authorities in Algiers. The eventual formulation of a Charter for Peace, Unity and National Reconciliation contained in the text was a reflection of Algeria’s experience, namely the initiation of major measures taken in 1994 (*Rahma*), 1999 (Civil Concord) (Zoubir & Dris-Aït-Hamadouche, 2004) and 2005 (National Reconciliation). All these policies had aimed at ending the gory conflict that had opposed Algerian security forces with armed militants. Algeria has sought to promote this model as one of the most successful approaches to ending conflicts and has thus pushed for its implementation in its neighbourhood, namely, in Libya and Mali. The other objective in executing such a model is also to prevent foreign intervention in conflict zones in the region.

The Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Mali contained important elements, such as the creation of local assemblies with very broad powers and greater representation of the populations of the north within national institutions, and the integration of ex-rebels into the Malian army. Even though it was probably only minimal (International Crisis Group, 2015), this agreement considered several acceptable claims by the parties involved in this process.¹¹ By stabilising the security situation in the region, the underlying idea was to cut off local populations from Jihadist groups and to integrate the armed

9 This is one of the few instances in which Algeria supported a foreign intervention. From Algeria's perspective, this was legitimate because the Malian legal authorities requested it to save the country. Thus, Algerians opened their airspace to French warplanes, closed the border with Mali, and provided fuel to French forces.

10 The text stipulates that “the Azawad denomination refers to a socio-cultural reality, both commemorative and symbolic, shared by the different populations of northern Mali, which are constituent components of the national community. The necessary consensus shall be based on a common understanding of this denomination, which reflects a human reality, while respecting the unitary character of the Malian state and its territorial integrity.”

11 For instance, the agreement projected the creation of a Regional Assembly elected by direct universal suffrage, to which a large number of competences shall be transferred, as well as resources and appropriate judicial, administrative and financial powers. The Malian populations “particularly those of the Northern Regions shall manage their own affairs.” At the national level, the agreement envisaged the setting up of a second chamber of Parliament.

factions into a political process, thus establishing legitimate institutions that, in the end, could lead the fight against Jihadist movements. In addition, although this agreement was not inked by all the factions, including the MNLA, it was nevertheless perceived, overall, as the beginning of a stabilisation process. Unfortunately, the agreement has not put an end to the conflict in Mali; witness the attack in Bamako itself in June 2017 or against United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) personnel in October 2017, or the attacks in Niger and Burkina Faso over the past three years (Boutellis & Zahar, 2017). Neither France's 4,000-strong Operation Barkhane counterterrorism force, established in August 2014 as a sequel to Operation Serval, nor the 10,000-strong MINUSMA, have been able to reduce the instability prevalent in the Sahel. The French Operation Serval killed 600-armed Jihadists, including several important leaders, like Abu Zeid, who commanded one of AQIM's main phalanges and Operation Barkhane neutralised dozens of Jihadist leaders, including Omar Ould Hamaha, the right arm of notorious Mokhtar Belmokhtar, Abu Bakr Al Nasr and Ahmed al-Tilemsi, the military leader of the MUJAO. However, these two forces failed to eradicate VEOs in the region. The EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM), the EU Capacity-Building Mission (EUCAP) present in Niger, and the United States' Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara (OEF-TS) in place since in 2007 have not changed the reality on the ground. In addition to AQIM, MUJAO, Al-Mourabitoune, other extremist organisations, such as *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims), or Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, who killed four US servicemen in an ambush in Niger (with the complicity of the local population), continue to emerge. In sum, these military operations have not resulted in the establishment of a strong state, extending the Malian state's sovereignty to the north or solving the persistent socioeconomic problems. Clearly, although the activity of the armed groups has weakened, it is far from having disappeared. The redeployment of AQIM and other groups led Yahia Abu Hammam el-Maghribi, head of AQIM in the Sahel, to declare in January 2016, during an interview with the Mauritanian news agency *Al-Akhbar*, that "French operations in Mali had failed and that today we are present from the borders of Mauritania to the west to Burkina Faso to the east, from Algeria to the north and from Mali to the south" ("Interview de Yahia Abou Hamam", 2016). Furthermore, trafficking in arms, drugs and human beings persists, creating a prosperous criminal economy.

The Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Mali is still in place but it has yet to be implemented.¹² It has not collapsed because, as Boutellis and Zahar (2017) put it, "there

12 The Tuareg are worried that once they lay down their arms like they did under previous agreements, they will be slaughtered by the Malian army, as happened before. A Targui pointed out that "The Tuareg do not intend to lay down their arms [this time], not in the current conditions because it is the only pressure they have to enforce the peace agreement, especially with regard to the political points that the Malian government or the mediation refuse to address". In Africa, where the culture of a democratic dialogue does not exist, the Tuareg are not yet ready to take this risk because the experiences of the previous agreements which never succeeded (national pact of 1992, agreement of 2006 and last in June 2015) are sobering. The presence of the international community, which does not play its full role, is not a sufficient guarantee "to stay naked and then be massacred by the Malian army and the terrorists," as some Tuareg officers assert. Posted by Hama Ag Sid'Ahmed on Facebook on 18 January 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=hama%20ag%20sid'ahmed>

is realisation among southern Malians that there is no military solution to the crisis in the north and that the agreement is still the best chance to stabilise that part of the country.” However, there have been unfounded fears that Algeria may not continue to support the peace process. Perhaps this explains why during his visit to Algiers on 13 January 2018, the new Malian Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga stated that the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement is “la pierre angulaire” (the foundation) (“Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga à Alger”, 2018) of Mali’s domestic policy and that his visit confirmed Algeria’s availability in supporting the 2015 agreement. Such continued support is consistent with Algerian foreign policy because a negotiated political solution is preferable to foreign intervention. Algeria’s opposition to foreign intervention¹³ derives from the position of its foreign policy as well as fears that intervention may strengthen not only Jihadist ideology but might also consolidate secessionist sentiments. Algeria is wary of interventions similar to the one in Libya, which could result in the collapse of the states in its neighbourhood. The ideal scenario for Algerians is a political solution based on separating the Tuareg groups from AQIM, the MUJAO and other VEOs. The rationale is that the distinction would be twice as effective as addressing the Tuareg demands and would help in the fight against the terrorist groups, possibly with Tuareg assistance. Furthermore, foreign intervention has the potential of destabilising an already volatile region astride Algeria’s southern borders. One of the premises of the state’s policy toward the Tuareg is that governments in the region should address the socioeconomic, political and cultural demands of their respective Tuareg minorities. In fact, Algerian officials argue off-the-record that former Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré’s largely non-compliance with the Algiers-brokered agreements between the Tuareg and the Malian government were some of the factors that led to the events of 2012, which resulted in the debacle of the Malian army in northern Mali and the military coup that overthrew the president. Certainly, the coup that plunged Mali into a political crisis compelled Algeria to reassess the management of its security along its southern borders, deploying tens of thousands of troops, and to seek a political resolution to the conflict. The priority was essentially to contain the effect of the Azawad’s search for independence on other Tuareg populations in the region, including Algeria. In addition, there is fear that foreign intervention could lead to yet another influx of Malian refugees into Algeria, which already hosts thousands of Malian refugees that have escaped the conflict.

Ever since France decided that military intervention was necessary to preserve its presence in the Sahel region (Lasserre & Oberlé, 2013; Galy, 2013) and to preserve its economic interests (Rigouste, 2017), Algeria has sought to convince its African partners to re-establish Mali’s territorial integrity through dialogue with the Tuareg. Assisting France to rescue the Malian regime is one thing; however, having France play a dominant

¹³ Algeria is not always opposed to foreign intervention. For instance, it supported France’s intervention in Mali in 2013 or Russia’s intervention in Syria because the governments in place called on their friends to intervene to save their states.

role in the Sahel near the Algerian Sahara, is another matter. Algerian policy-makers are quite suspicious about France's role in the Sahel and are convinced that a weakening of Algeria will provide the excuse for France to intervene in the Algerian Sahara. Furthermore, they fear that France's presence and actions in Mali, which have caused collateral damage to civilian populations, will increase the population's support for VEOs.

Fighting Terrorism in the Sahel under Algeria's Leadership

While Algerian authorities recognise the paramount necessity of resolving the Tuareg conflict, they have also taken into consideration the development of VEOs and other illicit activities in the region. The activities of AQIM, MUJAO, which has launched attacks in southern Algeria, and the organisation of IS, which is seeking a solid presence in the Sahel, is a matter of high concern. The attack, in January 2013, against the gas plant in Tinguentourine in Algeria's deep south has had serious repercussions on Algeria's national security policy and doctrine (Lounnas, 2017). Algerian policy-makers recognise that the terrorist threat is exaggerated but, at the same time, they insist that it is nonetheless a reality that the country cannot elude, particularly with the emergence of new transnational actors (narco-traffickers and VEOs) and the ties between some of them.

The national security establishment believes that the Sahel is now the paramount concern for the country's national security; Algerian officials also believe that Algeria is the natural leader in the region, a status recognised by regional actors, albeit resentful of Algeria's power and over-bearing, whose armed forces and wealth cannot compare to that of Algeria. External powers, such as the EU and the US, largely acknowledge this status.

International and Regional Cooperation

The preference for Algerians is to handle national security on their own. As a Maj.-Gen. in the national security establishment told the author, "we prefer to fight our own fights without external interference. And, we don't wish to be part of any coalition against anyone" (Y. Zoubir, personal communication, 2012). In addition, evidence shows that Algeria has cooperated quite closely with other states as well as regionally and internationally. Unlike what is often erroneously argued, US officials, who have collaborated with Algerian security forces in antiterrorism, argue on the contrary that "Algeria has been a critical security partner in countering regional violent extremist organisations... its long history combating domestic terrorism and violent extremism

makes Algeria a linchpin in the struggle against AQIM and its affiliates and bringing stability to the region” (United States Committee on Foreign Relations, 2013). The US government considers Algeria a “key partner” in the global fight against terrorism. For instance, the US Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 (US Department of State, 2016) provides an extensive list of the actions that the Algerian authorities have taken to fight terrorism. US officials have virtually not missed any opportunity since 9/11 to praise Algeria for its efforts in combating terrorism and trafficking in the Sahel. They have also urged Algeria to share its counterterrorism experience with other countries (“US Seeks Algeria’s Help”, 2017). In his testimony on 6 March 2018 before the House Armed Services Committee, Marine Corps Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser, Commander of AFRICOM, declared that “Algeria is another highly capable partner in North Africa, which continues to implement an effective counterterrorism program against local extremist groups. Further, U.S. Africa Command and the Algerian People’s National Armed Forces hold regular dialogues to advance cooperation on shared security interests” (United States Africa Command, 2018).

Both the government and the people in Algeria remain resentful of the attitudes of the outside world during the 1990s, feeling that they fought terrorism without external support. The common expressions are: “we fought terrorism alone,”¹⁴ “where was the rest of the world when we were being slaughtered by terrorists” and “it’s only when the United States was attacked and when terrorism spread to other places that they realised what terrorism really is and they came to us for advice.” Soon after 9/11, Algerian authorities shared critical information with the US regarding terrorist groups on the loose (Zoubir, 2002). In many ways, Algerians felt vindicated with respect to the bloody 1990s; they endeavoured to dispel the accusations that it was not the Jihadists but the security forces that were behind the atrocities. After 9/11, the government offered to help under Algeria’s own terms and philosophy. To fight terrorism, Algeria took important decisions regarding the Sahel. Primarily, the authorities consolidated the long borders with the neighbouring states, especially Libya, Mali and Tunisia, three countries where VEOs are very active and threaten Algeria’s security. In this regard, they engaged in international and regional cooperation to thwart the threats on its southern borders.

International Cooperation

To argue that Algeria does not cooperate with external powers is fallacious. Undeniably, Algerian policy-makers have reservations regarding security relations with the former colonial power or with the US. This derives from historical, psychological and ideological reasons. These two powers’ privileged relations with Morocco, its major rival in the region, often to the detriment of Algeria’s perceived national interests, partly explain Algerians’

¹⁴ An article in the Algerian magazine of the armed forces highlighted this point: “The international community misunderstood the scope of the problem [terrorism] and left Algeria to fight alone against terrorism during the black decade [1990s]. Algeria was under a very hard international embargo at the political, economic and military levels. Despite this, it has taken up the challenge of protecting its territory that spans more than 2 million square kilometres for a population estimated at 34 million. She kept the pressure on the terrorist horde and she will keep it until the total eradication of this scourge” (Goubi, 2011).

reluctance to engage more decidedly with them. This attitude also applies to alliances; indeed, Algerian nationalists, under the wartime FLN leadership, have subscribed to non-alignment since 1955 and have never strayed away from it. Therefore, regardless of their determined fight against terrorism, they refuse to join the Saudi-led coalition against IS, which Algerians are convinced targets Iran. Nevertheless, as the US State Department (2016) put it, “Algeria is not a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS; however, Algeria actively supported the effort to defeat ISIS in other ways, such as counter-messaging, capacity-building programs with neighboring states, and co-chairing the Sahel Region Capacity-Building Working Group (SWG) of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF).” Indeed, Algerians have cooperated at the multilateral level against violent extremism. For instance, Algeria lobbied intensely against the funding of terrorism through the payment to free hostages detained by terrorists; Algeria has pursued a strict “no concessions” policy, which it also applies domestically. In September 2010, its role in obtaining the adoption of UN Resolution 1904, which criminalises such payments to terrorists, was indisputable. It might be useful to list a few aspects of international cooperation in which Algeria has taken part, by no means an exhaustive list that the US published in 2016.

- Algeria is an active member and participant in the AU, the GCTF, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and the Arab League;
- Algeria participated in counterterrorism-related projects implemented by the UN Office on Drug and Crime's Terrorism Prevention Branch;
- Algeria also provides significant funding to the AU's Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa;
- Algeria sits on the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre's Advisory Board and hosts the headquarters of the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL), a pan-African organisation to foster police training and cooperation. As a founding member of the GCTF, Algeria served as co-chair of the SWG, which promotes regional and international cooperation and provides a venue for experts to discuss capacity-building gaps specific to the Sahel region and identify solutions;
- Algeria chaired the implementation committee for the peace accord in Mali. Algeria continued to press publicly and privately for groups and stakeholders to support the UN political process in Libya. Algeria also participated in various Sahel-Saharan fora to discuss development and security policies, the evolution of regional terrorism, and donor coordination;
- Algeria is an active member of the TSCTP, a US multi-year interagency regional programme aimed at building the capacity of governments in the Maghreb and Sahel to confront threats posed by violent extremists (US Department of State, 2016).

Despite all this involvement, Algeria is not part of the recent France-led security architecture, nor part of the UN, which regroups Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger, known as the G5. However, before explaining the reasons for such disinclination to join the G5, it is necessary to look into the initiatives that Algeria has undertaken at the regional level.

Regional Cooperation

In March 2010, Algeria organised a ministerial coordination conference of Sahelian countries. In April 2010, the Common Operational Joint-Chiefs of Staff Committee (CEMOC) and its intelligence arm, the Union of Fusion and Liaison (UFL) became the essential part of a regional architecture. The Countries of the Field Initiative (Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) aimed to coordinate security efforts to fight violent extremism and organised crime. This was the first regional security architecture in the Sahel with an operational dimension, including the CEMOC with headquarters in Tamanrasset and an intelligence-sharing mechanism. The UFL has its headquarters in Algiers, in the same building as the African Center for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), which serves as the think tank for the CEMOC and the AU. The UFL now includes eight countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Chad. The doctrine of the Countries of the Field, as Algerian authorities conceive it, consists of the development of the capacities of the states involved to manage the region's security challenges without recourse to external actors. This does not preclude cooperation with the US and the EU, but the role of the latter must be limited to specific aid (training, logistical support and intelligence). The problem, though, is that this doctrine stumbles on the divergence between the Countries of the Field about the role and the question of the intervention of extra-regional actors. Algerians are cognisant of the fact that most of the Countries of the Field rely on external powers' assistance and have thus accepted that their partners seek such assistance, while insisting that they should find endogenous solutions for Sahelian affairs. Furthermore, Algerians believe that a resolute fight against terrorism requires structured regional and operational cooperation as well as a shared political will to succeed in defeating terrorism. During the rule of ATT in Mali, Algerians were quite annoyed with his inertia in northern Mali, where AQIM and other groups had established sanctuary (Y. Zoubir, personal communication, 10 June 2012). The CEMOC command rotates operational Joint-Chiefs with land and air forces in alphabetical order. The Joint-Chiefs has four cells (operations, intelligence, logistics and communications). The four cells had definite missions. For instance, the operation cell's mission is the planning of combat operations. The CEMOC also has a civilian dimension; the intelligence cell is responsible not only for collecting information on the activities of the VEOs but also for sensitising the populations of the Countries of the Field about the

misdeeds of violent extremism. Despite its shortcomings, and to fight terrorism more effectively, the CEMOC did envisage tackling the question of development. Algerian authorities promoted the notion of local micro-projects to benefit the local populations to fight poverty and to set up major structuring projects (*Grands projets structurants*) for development, whose lack thereof, they believe, is one of the root causes of violent extremism.

Among the first major actions of the CEMOC, one can cite the joint exercise on 2 June 2011 between Algerian, Malian and Mauritanian forces near their common borders. The risks spilling over from Libya were at the origin of this first action on the ground. Six months later, Algeria sent military instructors to northern Mali. While the authorities have not announced it, Algeria had in fact supplied two Malian brigades with military gear. In November 2017, Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia disclosed during the EU-Africa Summit in Abidjan that “over seven or eight years, Algeria has spent more than \$100 million in aid to five countries (Chad, Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Libya) in the Sahel sub-region to train dozens of special forces brigades, providing them with a huge amount of equipment”¹⁵ (“Lutte antiterroriste”, 2017).

In the field of development, Algeria forgave the debt of several Sahelian and sub-Saharan African countries and provided development aid to Mali. Algeria has also developed strong bilateral relationships with Mali and Niger, where it has considerably improved surveillance of the border between the two countries. The military have established close cooperation, through bilateral border committees, to disrupt the flow of fighters, drug traffickers and migrants in Niger's northernmost areas (Cooke & Sanderson, 2016). It has offered to do the same with Libya. In October 2017, the government reiterated its “availability” to strengthen its border and police cooperation with all countries in the region (“Terrorisme: l'Algérie maintient un haut niveau de vigilance”, 2017). In this regard, the UFL has been active on the question of borders. In May 2014, for instance, the UFL organised a workshop in partnership with Spain's Guardia Civil for the benefit of 20 officers from UFL member countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Chad), as well as experts and analysts from several regional security mechanisms. Experts from UFL member countries participated in this workshop, as well as representatives of the ACSRT, and the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL), which was replaced by MINUSMA. Representatives of the EU and the US among others also took part in this workshop. Algerians are quite concerned about the permeability of borders, which allows for the circulation of VEOs, drug traffickers and migrants. Algeria increased border security through the closure of military borderline areas, the establishment of new observer posts near the Tunisian and Libyan frontiers,

¹⁵ This was not groundbreaking news, for informed researchers knew about this aid. During interviews with senior Algerian officials, the author was told repeatedly that Algeria was doing just that. When asked why they do not make it public, the quasi unanimous answer was that “it is not part of our culture to brag about what we give to others.” Therefore, one can interpret Ouyahia's declaration in November 2017 as exasperation with accusations that Algeria was not doing enough to help in the Sahel (“Terrorisme: l'Algérie maintient un haut niveau de vigilance”, 2017).

strengthening of the defence of energy facilities, supplementary permanent services for border control management, new aerial based surveillance technologies and upgrades to communication systems. The government disclosed that it had created a modernised database regarding foreign extremist combatants. The database exists at all border stations and Algerian diplomatic missions abroad (US Department of State, 2016).

The failure of the CEMOC deserves serious analysis. The building of a collective security mechanism in the Sahel was an important initiative. However, this initiative faced two serious obstacles. The first one derives from Algeria's principle of non-intervention beyond its borders. This principle is rather outdated and does not allow for an effective collective security strategy. The CEMOC showed its limitations when Algeria refused to intervene directly in Mali to stop Ansar Dine and AQIM's advance into southern Mali in 2013, which resulted in France's intervention. From 2010 until the coup in 2012, ATT had asked Algerians to intervene in northern Mali. However, the security establishment in Algiers refused: "ATT told them, 'please come in and destroy the terrorists in Mali's north. You have carte blanche!' But, Algerians refused to intervene" (Y. Zoubir, personal communication, January 2016). Algerians refused because they worried about "being bogged down in the sands of northern Mali" (Y. Zoubir, personal communication, March 2014). Algerians have been suspicious of Mali, "the weak link" in the security architecture. In 2010-2012, senior Algerian intelligence officers admitted off the record that they could not always trust Malian security officials because of the ties some of them had with AQIM and narco-traffickers and because Malian officers could not be trusted with information provided to them by Algerian intelligence services. Worse still, Malians facilitated the payment of ransoms to terrorist kidnappers, payment that Algerians reject categorically. The fragility of Sahelian states, the unreliability of some Sahelian countries' officers with respect to intelligence sharing, and the closeness of most Sahelian countries to France, which, according to Algerians, thwart Algeria's policy and influence, partly explain the shortcomings of the CEMOC. Furthermore, given the fragility of Sahelian states, which cannot exercise hot pursuits (the right to pursue aggressors beyond one's borders) because of their limited capacities, Algerians are reluctant to do so on their behalf. There is also some misunderstanding regarding Algeria's position, which consists of building regional security architecture to pre-empt foreign interventions, whereas its neighbours still rely more heavily on their former colonial power; Algeria's brand of nationalism and its foreign and defence policy principles have changed little since the country's independence. Another explanation is that Algerians refuse to serve as proxies for Europe or the US to guarantee the security of the Sahel. While they do cooperate with both at many levels, they allege that they do not wish to be their proxies in the Sahel.

The ambitious regional strategy has faced major hurdles among the CEMOC partners, due to the strong relations between countries like Mali, Mauritania and Niger with France, which partly explains the suspicions among the core countries. The reservations and double-dealings that have long characterised Algeria's relations with its weak Sahelian neighbours have prevented the CEMOC from being a more effective collective defence group. The involvement, under France's influence, and war-mongering attitude of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)-alienated Algerians, who nevertheless have accepted the principle of military action in northern Mali as a last resort but not before the separation of the Tuareg from terrorist and narco-trafficking groups. Although Algerian policy-makers have not rejected the principle of wider regional cooperation, they have viewed attempts to bring in Morocco into the CEMOC or other non-Sahelian organisations suspiciously, asserting that Morocco is not a Sahelian state and fearing that recognising Morocco as a Sahelian state would go against Algeria's stance on Western Sahara, which borders the Sahel. Furthermore, Algeria and Morocco compete over regional leadership; their tense relations over a variety of issues, including the question of Western Sahara, hinder close security and military cooperation between them. Nonetheless, Algeria and Morocco collaborate at several levels in the antiterrorist fight, especially in exchange of intelligence.

In sum, to fight violent extremism Algiers undertook several diplomatic and military actions and sought to share expertise in antiterrorism with other nations facing this transnational phenomenon. With respect to the region, the authorities continue to strengthen bilateral and regional cooperation in the areas of security and development. However, Algerian policy-makers believe that the multiplication of security initiatives, especially those led by outsiders, is detrimental to the fight against terrorism, which explains opposition to the G5.

The G5: The Reasons for the Absence of a Key Player

Some analysts have correctly pointed out that the Sahel is a “regional security traffic jam” (Cooke & Sanderson, 2016) because of the plethora of security arrangements. While the G5 has been in existence since 2014, more as a development entity, President Emmanuel Macron gave it a military-security dimension. The G5, whose main purpose is to relieve France from its entrapment and financial burden (close to \$1 billion a year) in the Sahel, where it has a 5,000-strong military force, is the new addition to the various security structures in the Sahel. According to the French, this force needs €500 million annually to be effective (Al Mouahidi, 2017). The five members are among the poorest

countries in the world but they must each contribute €10 million. According to news reports, France, half-heartedly, invited Algeria to join but the authorities in Algiers declined. Beyond the question as to whether such a force, which purportedly will be fighting alongside French and other African troops (MINUSMA), will be successful, it is necessary to understand the main reasons why Algeria has rejected the offer to be part of it.

Without a doubt, Algeria's response was to be expected. A specialist of Algeria's security policy pointed out that Algeria's reaction to the G5 "is very negative for two reasons: the first is that the feeling of having been double-crossed by France, especially after having created and financed the CEMOC and certain regional initiatives; the second is that it allows the lasting installation of foreign bases in the Sahel and blurs the cards by mixing up the armies of the region" (Y. Zoubir, personal communication, 25 January 2018). For Algerian policy-makers, not only is France-sponsored G5 a non-African initiative, despite its depiction by international backers, France in particular, but it is also inconceivable that Algeria would join a force "sponsored" [*parrainée*] by a non-African entity, France, Algeria's former colonial power. Algerians are very averse to alliances, especially military ones. While it pursues an incontestable fight against VEOs, Algeria prefers diplomatic action to a political solution to the crisis in the Sahel and to link security issues to development, a lesson that Algerian authorities learned at high cost from their own civil strife in the 1990s. Algiers is averse to the idea of collaborating with foreign troops, especially French, in the fight against Jihadists. This could substantiate Jihadist ideology and propaganda of a war of "infidels" against Muslims and thus embolden the dormant VEOs in Algeria.

Moreover, not only does its unwritten doctrine forbid direct intervention beyond its borders but, in this case, Algeria is concerned that such intervention may inadvertently target Tuareg organisations, resulting in an intensification of the nationalist feelings and solidarity of the Tuareg across the region, thus jeopardising the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Mali. Through the G5, the French give the impression of wanting to double-cross Algeria in the Sahel region and impose France's own rules. With respect to the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Mali, Algerians feel that they are its sponsors and it is not France's role to interfere in the process (Métaoui, 2017). Algerian policy-makers are also concerned that a major French offensive in northern Mali could result in an incursion of terrorist groups into Algeria, compelling Algeria to become militarily involved in the Sahel. There is suspicion that this is perhaps France's main objective to destabilise southern Algeria with all its unpredictable circumstances.¹⁶ A well-informed Algerian journalist on security matters correctly points out that "without

16 In September 2011, during the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) uprisings, a former prime minister asked the author: "don't you think that they will wish to destabilise Algeria, as well"? The feeling among policy-makers that Algeria is targeted by outside powers to destabilise the regime has not dissipated.

Algeria, with its diplomatic, military and political weight in Africa, the G5 Sahel will do nothing.” In his opinion, which reflects the view of some policy-makers in Algiers, “in addition to the permanent security threat, there is the troubled game that Paris plays with which it is now necessary to count as a destabilising factor with a new French president whose vision of international relations is still unclear. Paris seems to embark on a dangerous path by wanting to play the card of one country against another or a political approach against another in a dossier considered very sensitive by the Algerian authorities” (Métaoui, 2017).

In sum, Algiers rejects another structure that ignores the necessary in-depth political treatment of the problems in the region from an Afro-African perspective. The preference would have been simply the integration of the G5 into the 11-nation, Algerian-led (but AU-coordinated) Nouakchott Process. To the policy-makers in Algiers, the G5 is an extra-African grouping, which cannot operate without France or other foreign troops, at Algeria's borders. However, one can surmise that, regardless of Algiers' reservations about the G5, Algerians will cooperate with this organisation through intelligence sharing and logistics, as it has done with Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane. Furthermore, Algeria already has military agreements with three of the five Sahelian states (Mali, Mauritania and Niger) in the G5.

Conclusion

Algerians are concerned about foreign military intervention in Mali because, from their perspective, it would further destabilise the already explosive conditions in the Sahel. To them, separating the VEOs from Tuareg groups, who have legitimate demands, is vital. They also believe that dialogue must exist between all the Tuareg, mainly Ansar Dine and the MNLA, on the one hand, and among central government authorities in Bamako, on the other. In the dominant view in Algiers, this policy will isolate terrorist groups and facilitate the war against narco-trafficking. They insist on Mali's territorial integrity and unity and demand that the authorities in Mali should resolve their internal difficulties through peaceful dialogue. It would be wrong to assume that Algeria is opposed to military intervention or that it is soft on terrorism; quite the contrary. Algerians argue convincingly that they have been the main victims of terrorism for years. However, they prefer political solutions to a war that would destabilise not only Algeria and Sahelian states but also countries like Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, which are undergoing complicated transitions. They also fear that the interests of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, albeit limited to financial support to the G5, adds to the multitude of interferences in the

Sahel region. These foreign interferences intensify the VEOs' ideological justification for the war against Western interests and United Nations peacekeepers of MINUSMA, who have come under regular attacks. The fight against VEOs in the Sahel requires a dual approach; that is, an implacable fight against the VEOs and genuine strategies of development. In northern Mali, VEOs had established a state within the state precisely because they became a substitute for the government authorities in providing a livelihood to the destitute populations. The EU has assisted Sahelian states in many regards. However, what the Sahel needs is genuine sustainable development policies not over-securitisation, which local Sahelian populations perceive as a return of colonialism, a perception that benefits VEOs. About the G5, for instance, one can ask the question: how can France expect the five destitute Sahelian states to provide €10 million each to the G5? Thus, the G5 has little chance of succeeding unless genuine development policies are set in place. The EU, whose security depends on the stability of the Sahel, can and should play a constructive socioeconomic role.

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