

## THE ALGERIAN SECURITY APPROACH TOWARDS THE SAHEL REGION: CASE OF MALI

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### ABSTRACT

The Sahel security issues in Africa and the Malian crisis in particular have brought the region to the center of the Algerian foreign policy concerns. Algiers has been an indispensable provider of stability in the African Sahel. In recent years, weak governances, political instability and fragile security have become common features of the Sahelian states. The large quantity of natural resources of the Sahel has paved a road for foreign intervention and increasing rivalry among the world economic powers across the region. In order to safeguard the long-term security in its backyard, in many times the Algerian leaderships have promoted state-building and dialogue as the best ways to lift states of the Sahel out of crisis. Neighboring countries like Mali are looking to Algiers to play an effective role in leading conflict management efforts in the region.

**Keywords:** Africa, Algeria, Mali, Security, The Sahel Region.

### SAHİL BÖLGESİNDE CEZAYİR'İN GÜVENLİK YAKLAŞIMI: MALİ ÖRNEĞİ

#### ÖZ

Afrika'daki Sahil (Sahel) bölgesinin güvenlik sorunları ve özellikle Mali krizi, bu bölgeyi Cezayir'in dış politikadaki endişelerinin merkezine oturttu. Uzun yıllar boyunca Sahil bölgesinde istikrarlı ve güvenli bir ortam kurmak için çaba gösteren Cezayir, çok önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Son yıllarda zayıf merkezi yönetimler, siyasi istikrarsızlık ve kırılgan güvenlik yapısı, bu bölgenin en önemli vasıflarından biri haline gelmiştir. Ayrıca Afrika'daki Sahil bölgesi, doğal kaynaklar açısından zengin bir bölge olması nedeniyle dünyanın ekonomik güçleri arasındaki mücadelede ve uluslararası rekabette giderek ön plana çıkmaktadır. Dolayısıyla böyle durumlarda, bu bölgede var olan devletlerin krizden kurtulabilmesi için Cezayir'in kullandığı en iyi araç olan diyalog, güçlü merkezi hükümetler kurmak noktasında teşvik edici olmaktadır. Bu sebeple, Mali gibi komşu ülkeler, bu bölgedeki siyasi krizlerin ve güvenlik problemlerinin çözümünde Cezayir'in kilit bir rol üstlenmesini önemsemektedirler.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Afrika, Cezayir, Mali, Güvenlik, Sahil Bölgesi.

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## **Introduction**

Over the past decades, Algeria has been increasingly focusing on the African Sahel' security issues under the fear that the region could become a safe place for armed terrorist groups. The Sahelian countries - which share long borders with Algeria- have witnessed insecurity situation because of the instability in their political systems, the current situation in the Sahel came as result of a political instability affected mainly by different crisis that many countries in the region like Mali have been dealing with. Such kind of a weak political situation is obviously demonstrated by the theory of Domino. The collapse of one state could provide a domino effect that might destabilize the whole area.

The security status have been very fragile, organized crimes, terrorist groups, arms trafficking, food insecurity, fragile governance malnutrition, and other problems have been big challenges for the efforts of building Stability in this area. The security situation in the Sahel remains precarious, the deterioration of the politico-ecurity situation of Libya after the collapse of the old order, the political dilemma and persisting security challenges in northern part of Mali, the increasing number of terrorist activities throughout the region, particularly, those carried out by armed extremist groups including kidnappings for ransom, continue to have negative effects on local people. All of these problems - the Malian case in particular - represent big challenges to Algeria as a regional power. This paper aims to clarify the Algerian security approach towards the Sahel region, and figure out the strategy that is mobilized by the Algerian government to counter all of those problems that are facing the country and to protect its national security. This paper will then focus on state of Mali that represents the case of study. It tries to give an overview on the Algerian dealing with the political and security instability in this country, and also discuss the proposals which were given by Algiers to find a solution for the Malian crisis.

## **The Sahel Region: A General Vision**

The Sahel Region in Africa has become one of the most significant and complicated security regions in the world. In fact, several reasons have contributed to the importance of this area. Most importantly, because of the widespread of number of transboundary threats such as terrorist groups and organized crime, the Sahel region has been seen by its neighboring countries as a source of security threats. Other reasons to argue the importance of the Sahel is the energy resources that were discovered lately in the region and the increase in rivalry among the world major powers (US, France, China) over the natural reserves of the region. All these reasons have brought the Sahel to the centre of international attention.

The "Sahel" (Maslouh 2014: 7-12) in Arabic language means الساحل "shore". Geographically, the Sahel stretches almost 4,800 miles from the Horn of Africa to Senegal, at its broadest, it is about 400 miles wide, at its narrowest point, it is less than 100 miles deep. The Sahel covers more than one million square miles of barren or semi-barren grasslands. To the south, it turns slowly into a lush, green savanna, to the north, the Sahara (desert) is an endless sea of sand. The Sahel is a part of sub-Saharan in the African continent<sup>2</sup> that has been facing big problems in many aspects (Potts and others 2013: 7).

**Map 1. Sahel Region** (Tchadinfos.com, 2016).



Thus, The Sahel region covers basically the expanse stretching from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, encompassing parts of Eritrea Sudan Chad Nigeria Niger Burkina Faso Mauritania and Senegal, more than 80 percent of which is comprised of desert lands. This large land links between three seas and two oceans. The Sahel as semi-barren land corridor, it functions as a giant dry river that traverses from coast to coast through central-north of the African continent, demarcating the transition between the Sahara desert and savanna. (Lacoste 2011: 12). Over the last decades, The Sahel region has been witnessing many crises in different aspects; the following part highlights the major problems of this area.

### **The Environmental Crisis**

According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the African Sahel has been extremely affected by irregular rainfalls and climatic variations, that causes two main challenges of poverty reduction and food security, many experts say that the situation in the region has gotten worse in the last years. Reports noted that since 1970 until 1993, the Sahel had recorded almost two decades of lack of rain. Over this period floods, and severity of droughts has increased. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reports that almost 80% of the region's land was degraded. Moreover, the Reports say that by 2050, with greenhouse gas emissions rising, temperatures will be warmer by 3/5 degrees Celsius and extreme change climate will become more common. In fact, The environmental crisis in the region has affected by other various factors, during the last decades, UNEP reported that effects of land

degradation and population growth, lack of rain, misplaced development priorities and lack of coherent environmental policies have contributed to transforming a large proportion of the Sahel into barren land, resulting in the deterioration of the soil and water resource (Essoungou 2013).

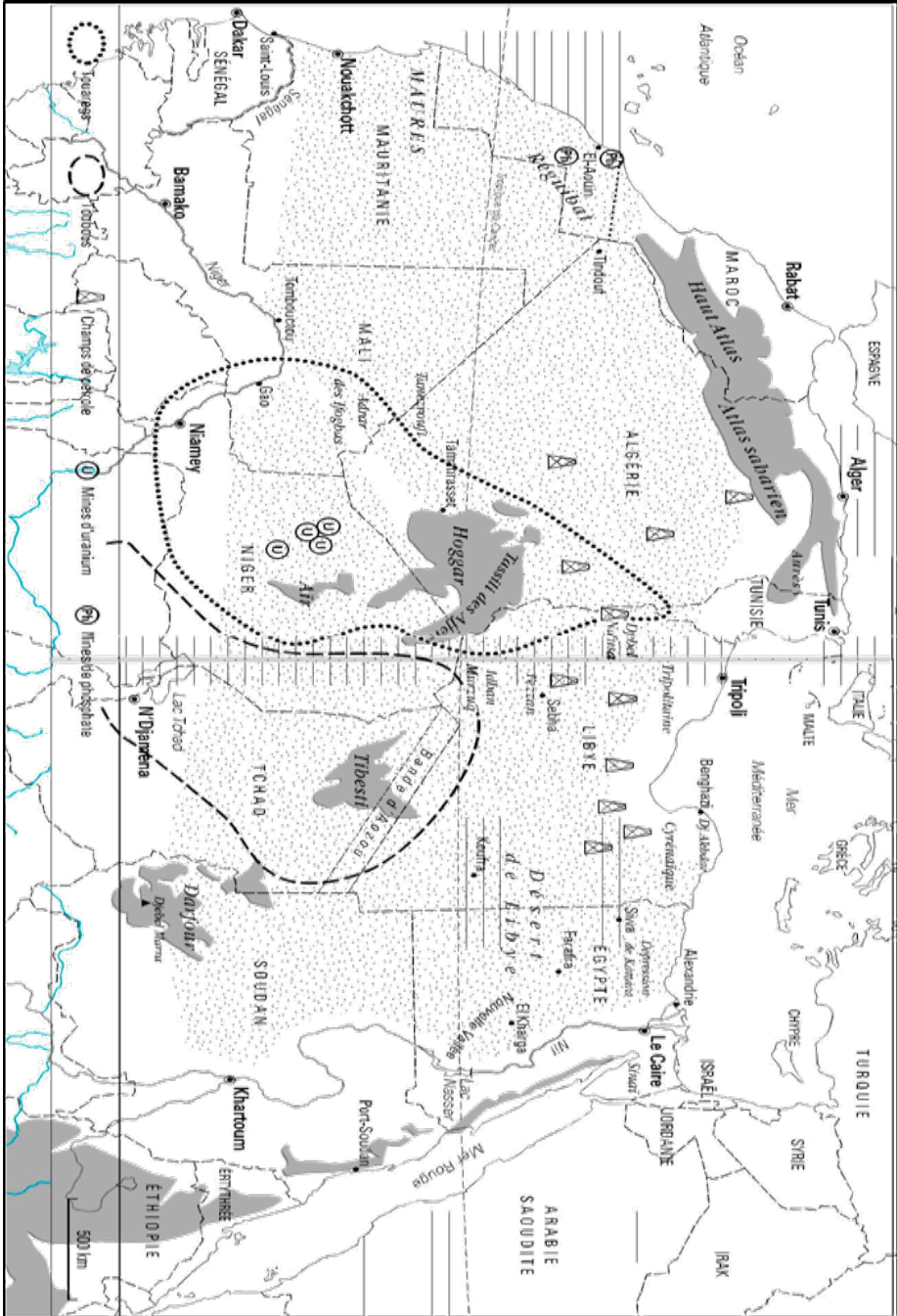
### **Weak Economies**

Economically, the Sahel region represents one of the poorest places in the world. Countries in the region have been characterized by the fragility of their economies affected mainly by the environment and politico-security situation; hence most of Sahel states are currently classified under the category of least developed countries. According to the United Nations conference on Trade and Development's 2009 statistics, the GDP of Chad was estimated at 8.914 million USD, and Sudan at about 68.530 million USD, Mali at about 8.273 million USD, Niger at about 4.905 million USD. In addition, Mauritania was estimated at about 3.201 million USD, Senegal about 13.333 million USD, and Burkina Faso at about 8.431 million USD. Nigeria represents the largest oil exporter in Africa, where high domestic production estimated at 222.867 million US dollars (UNCTAD 2009: 412).

The Agriculture sector of the Sahelian countries employs majority of the region's work force, it contributes heavily to their GDP and plays a big role in food security. The Agriculture sector of the Sahel remains highly underdeveloped and characterized by low use of external inputs such as seeds and fertilizers as well as by an almost total dependency on few months of rainfall per year, the absence of good mechanization and weak ties to international markets. UNEP reported that massive losses of agricultural sector and livestock, loss of human lives to hunger, as well as shattered economies of the region's countries were extremely affected by the droughts that the region has witnessed for years. Climate changes still have negative effects on agricultural production and food security. Actually, this area still performs poorly on UNDP's Human Development Index, a measurement of a state's social and economic well-being (Essoungou 2013).

In spite of this fragile economic situation, the Sahel region has become economically important region in terms of energy resources in the last years. Experts say that the last discoveries show that the region's countries have important mineral resources such as uranium, phosphate, and actually, the oil as well as the gold and the aforementioned sources are considered as charming elements by the world economic powers. For example, Chad has become an important oil exporter since 2003; nowadays it exports approximately 200 thousand barrels per day. In addition, Mali has become the third African gold producer after South Africa and Ghana. Niger is the third exporter of uranium in the world after Australia and Canada. Nigeria is the largest oil exporter; the size of her daily production is about 27 million barrels and has reserves of 36 billion barrels (Abu-eyen 2007: 114-116). All of these statistics emphasize the importance of this region as a source of energy in the early twenty-first century.

Map 2: Sahara: Geopolitical Perspectives and Illusions (Lacoste 2011: 14).



### **Fragile Security and Political Instability**

Indeed, the countries of the Sahel have been facing many security and political challenges for long years. Fragile governance and its negative effects on different institutions of the region's States, including inability to control their borders, have heavily diminished the capacity of those countries to provide main needs, promote broad based political participation and protect human rights. The inability of countries to deliver basic services like health care, education and access to water, coupled with Widespread corruption, have created a big widening of gap in relations among the region's governments and their societies. In addition, persistent security and political instabilities, such as ethnic conflicts and violent electoral processes and evident in recurrent unconstitutional changes of governments, , are direct results of the weak parliaments, lack of institutionalized political dialogue, and fragile judicial systems (Security Council, United Nations 2013: 2-3). By the way, we should not forget that colonial and neo-colonial movements from which all the countries still suffer are the certain reasons behind the weak governance and the political instabilities.

The current situation has left the region's countries increasingly vulnerable to insecurity that caused by violent ethnic conflicts, activities of extremist groups and related organized crime. Indeed, all of Sahelian states are concerned by the apparent ties among terrorist groups active in the region as well as criminal organizations involved in human and drug trafficking. All of the Sahel region 's countries then are threaten by the activities of terrorist groups , such as the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, Boko Haram, and Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, as well as other transnational criminal organizations. They have committed acts of terrorism and threaten the regional security, they have also increased the expansion of arms over the Sahel and engaged in drug and human trafficking and other illegal activities, while eroding country authority in many important sectors of state in the region countries, in doing so, they have restricted opportunities for development. (Security Council, United Nations 2013: 3).

### **The Importance of the Sahel Region in the Algerian Security Approach**

Since the beginning of 1990s, Algeria has been dealing with new changes in the Sahel region, especially with the threats of rebel movements in the northern Mali and Niger, the reasons that pushed the Algerian government to use all of its diplomatic means in order to find a solution for those problems and avoid any kind of foreign intervention in its southern borders. In the last decades, a series of new security problems has risen in the Algerian backyard such as terrorism, drugs trafficking, and organized crime. All of those problems brought the Sahel to the center of the Algerian foreign policy concerns. Therefore, the focus of the Algerian security approach has concentrated on the threats coming from the Sahel region countries, which are considered as threats and terrorism exporting states.

In order to clarify the Algerian security approach it is very important to understand firstly the main principles on which the Algerian foreign policy is based, this part highlights then the main principles that guide the Algerian diplomacy, and shape its national security doctrine.

### **The Principles of the Algerian Foreign Policy as a base of building a security approach towards the Sahel Region**

A state 'foreign policy' has defined in many ways. G. Modelski had defined it as, "The system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment" (Modelski 1962: 6-7), in his definition, Modelski emphasized only the aspects of policy, that aim at the change in the existing behaviour of countries, as the primary objectives of foreign policy. Another famous definition of foreign policy is given by Bruce Russett, he sees that foreign policy of state is the output of the states into the global politics. It is a set of decisions or program that acts as a guide to foreign policy, which is a link between activities inside a state and the world environment outside it (Russett and Starr 2013: 99). A state Foreign policy is defined by K. J. Hoslti as a behavioral pattern of state adopted to respond the international environment in which a state exists (Holsti 1995: 84).

The Algerian foreign policy has been based on a series of principles Enshrined in part one of Chapter VII of the Algerian constitution. Those principles have embraced the principles contained in the charters of the United Nations and the African Union, which emphasize the importance of good relations among the state members, and generally, there five major principles the Algerian foreign policy had been based on:

#### **Determining the Borders with neighboring countries according to the rule of borders inherited from colonization**

Algeria finds this principle as a guarantee to consolidate the principle of good neighborliness. Therefore, it sought to define its borders with neighboring countries since the first border problem with Morocco, which happened few months after Algeria got its independence in 1962. In order to avoid any other future border problems, Algiers then had signed agreements with all of its neighboring countries. Except The Libyan-Algerian borders that were determined by the Libyan French agreement in 1956, Algiers signed with Morocco Ifrane Agreement in 1969, Tlemcen agreement in 1970, and Rabat Agreement in 1972. After that, it signed two other agreements with Tunisia in 1970, and 1983. Finally, two other agreements were also signed with Mauritania in 1983 and with Mali and Niger in 1983 (El-Ayeb 2013: 29).

#### **The Cooperation with Neighboring Countries**

The strengthening of international cooperation and the development of friendly relations among states based on equality and mutual interest have been one of the major principles of the Algerian foreign policy. Since getting its independence, Algiers sought to build good relations in its neighborhood, and in order to promote this principle it signed a series of cooperation agreements with all neighboring countries, those agreements were in the form of bilateral cooperation and in framework of regional cooperation like the African Union.

#### **Non-interference in the Internal Affairs of States**

Nonintervention in the internal affairs of other states has been a basic principle of the Algerian foreign policy. The sovereignty principle underlined among the

principles that considered by the classical international law as basis of relations among states. At the same time, the sovereignty has been considered as one of the essential and fundamental characteristics of the nation state. Although it has undergone great changes in view of the contents and scope, it is still one of the principles that has been preserved by the international law as well as the international organizations (Milojević 2000: 429). According to the international law, no state has the right to intervene directly or indirectly for any reason in the internal affairs of another state, including the prohibition of the threat or use of force against its political, economic or cultural institutions. Therefore, this question has been seen by Algeria as a basic principle, which promotes the respect of the sovereignty of states (El-Ayeb 2013: 34).

### **The Principle of Resolving Conflicts among states through peaceful means**

Algeria as a regional power has been always renouncing the use of military power in international relation, and instead calls for cooperation and resolving conflicts between states through peaceful means whether in direct negotiations or in framework of the regional and international organizations. Historically, the Algerian diplomacy contributed in finding solutions for many conflicts, like The Iranian-Iraq War in 1970, and Algiers still believes strongly in this principle that it is seen as the best way to find solutions for the regional conflicts, like the Western Sahara one in which it emphasized the role of the United Nations and the African Union for resolving this problem by the peaceful means..

### **The Algerian National Security Doctrine**

National security doctrine of a country refers to the totality of military, diplomatic, social and economic policies, which are explicitly aim to promote protection of national security interests of a state. (Rodman 2001: 72). Including external threats, national security policy of a state is determined also by other important factors such as: economic needs, geography, military capabilities political culture, popular and elite opinion as well as the perceptions of decision makers on the national interest of the state. This conceptual framework manifests itself as national security doctrine, that plays a decisive role in terms of guiding leaders and helping them to conduct the state's foreign policy.

In fact, there are many factors shaped the Algerian security doctrine. Most importantly, the historical factor, in particular the Algerian revolution against the French colonization played a big role in shaping the country's security doctrine. After getting its independence, Algiers had been seen as leader of Liberation movements in Africa, so the regional role of Algeria came basically from the historical aspect. This revolutionary legitimacy that has been always used by the Algerian leaderships in the internal affairs as well as in the foreign policy of the country, can be an explanatory element of why Algeria has been always supporting the just causes like the Western Sahara one.

In addition, The geographic factor had a big impact in shaping the country's security doctrine. Algeria occupies a multi-dimensional strategic location (the Maghreb dimension - the Mediterranean dimension and the African dimension), and all of those deferent dimensions -where different kind of soft and hard threats exist



such as: terrorism, organized crime - has shaped the country's security perception (Ziyani 2010: 290-91). Other factors like the economic and the military ones have also affected the Algerian security doctrine in terms of the country's responsibilities towards its region, especially; that Algiers represents the second military might and the fourth economic power in Africa.

Broadly, the Algerian security approach is based on the main principles of its foreign policy, and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States is still a fixed central principle in its national security doctrine. Thus, the Algerian government always emphasizes that all diplomatic or military actions should respect the principles of the international law and the international organizations, so Algiers sees that the collective action in framework of the African union is the effective way to counter the common problems that are facing the African continent away from any foreign interventions.

### **The Sahel Region as a source of security threats to Algeria**

Algeria shares about 6280 km of borders with the Sahel countries. This large space of desert that has been a transit area between the north and South African continent for years, represents a big challenge to control it. In the last decades, the Sahel has become a source of security threats to Algeria, and the Algerian leaderships realizes that their country actually is located in a region where many other countries are witnessing deep internal crises such as Growing ethnic conflicts, weak economies and fragile governance, affecting negatively the security situation in the region. Moreover, the Sahel has become a safe heaven for terrorists and organized crime groups as referred in UN's reports, where 30 to 40% of drug trafficking in the world pass through this region (Bouhania 2012: 3). The Sahel today is the second biggest black market for arms trafficking; also, it is considered a preferred place for terrorist groups like al-Qaida and Boko Haram. Thus, this fragile security situation pushed the Algerian government to build a general security approach towards this region to counter all kind of security threats may threaten its national security.

According to the Algerian leaders' perception, there are five main security threats to the Algerian national security (Bouhania 2012: 4):

- The challenge of Tuareg issue, Algeria worries about the rise of some extremist groups in Tuareg ethnicity who may call for separation.
- The rise of organized crime such drug trafficking, arms trafficking and illegal immigration.
- The foreign intervention under the reason of humanitarian reasons.
- The rivalry among the world major powers on the natural resources of the Sahel such petrol, gas and uranium.
- The military projects proposed in the African continent to build a military bases like AFRICOM that proposed by US<sup>3</sup>. The idea that has been refused by many Sahelian countries.

All of those issues cited above represent soft and hard threats to security of Algeria<sup>4</sup>, so that the Algerian security approach tries to combine the security and the political solution to counter those problems. In other words, this approach does not focus just on the military choices to face the security threats in the region, but also it takes in consideration the diplomatic and other peaceful means such as : promoting dialogue, negotiations and states-building process.

### **The Crisis in Mali: Timeline, Reasons and Effects**

Mali has been a country of armed conflicts; Waged mainly by the Malian Tuareg movements against the central government of Mali. Those conflicts that have been always under political and economic reasons, arrived to level of Separatist demands in some Tuareg groups. The Malian crisis in 2012 was different from the previous ones, when many extremist armed groups engaged in it by making alliances with the Malian Tuareg separatist movements. This notably change pushed France and The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to intervene military in 2013 beside the Malian army in order to eliminate the rebel groups that had held on northern Mali. This part will give an overview on the Malian crisis in 2012 by commenting on its reasons and evolution. Furthermore, it will talk about the rationale behind French military intervention and its effect. Also, the situation after regaining control of the country will be discussed.

### **The Crisis Timeline**

In 2012, an assortment of extremist armed groups, including militants who link to Al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), seized control of northern Mali, from January to April 2012; this assortments began by attacking strategic army places and advanced towards the main Malian cities. By the end of July 2012, some reports showed that the terrorist armed groups were controlled by (AQIM), making al-Qaeda's biggest advances toward constructing an Islamic state. Al-Qaeda combined with the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) and the group of Ansar al-Din (انيدلا راصنا ةعامج or Ansaru), managed to take out the secular National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) and secure a safe territory in the northern country . The alliances of armed groups succeed to take control of this large area for few months. In January 2013, those groups commenced initiating attack into central Mali and were poised to seize the army barracks at Sévaré - the last major installation before the Malian capital. In response to this Fragile situation, Paris, in collaboration with Malian army and some other African forces, launched in 2013 a military operation Serval, that effectively helped in halting the terrorists' southern advance and liberated northern country's major cities in quick succession (Lyammouri 2013: 14).<sup>5</sup>

### **Causes of the Malian crisis**

The security instability and the rebel movements have been a permanent features of Mali for decades. At the same time, the political situation has been characterized by the strength for power among the country's deferent political forces (three coups in 1968, 1991 and 2012) under a fragile economic situation affected mainly by the envirentemal crisis that has been witnessed by Mali as well as the Sahel region

countries for years. One of the main reasons of the Malian crisis is the socio-economic disparities between the country's regions. Since getting its independence in 1964, the economic and social maps of Mali have been dividing the country into two deferent parts. The first one is the northern part, which is the least developed one affected by successive droughts, where Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal represent its main cities. The second part is the southern part of Mali where the capital Bamako is located; this part has had historically the basic economic activities of the country.

Indeed, there are other factors have been direct reasons of the successive crises in Mali. One of them is the ethnical factor, the Malian state that has almost 14.5 inhabitants is very diverse ethnically (Pezard and Shurkin 2015: 7). This ethnic variety is a result of the borders set within the French division process of its eight colonies in West Africa in 1895, that division based mainly on natural resources possessed by each colony, and the French control over its various regions, without giving any important to factor of ethnic Homogeneity between the residents of those colonies (Bouhania 2012: 3-4).

Since getting its independence, Mali had witnessed many rebellions Led by Tuareg, movements against the central government (1963-1964, 1990-1996, and 2006-2009) that had caused the rise of three main peace accords:

- the Tamanrasset Accord 1991
- the National Pact 1992
- Algiers Accords of 2006

Experts claimed that there were two main factors had provoked the last political and security instability in Mali. First, the socio-economic disparities between the main country's regions (north and south), that created the anger feeling of northern region's inhabitants towards the central government which has been accused by the injustice in terms of distributing the economic developments projects by just focusing on the northern of country (Boukhars 2012: 5). The second factor is the ethnic diversity and the dominance of one ethnic on the reins of Malian government for decades, the question that strengthened among the Tuareg ethnicities the sense of non-belonging to the Malian state that has been dominated by the Bambara ethnic group since 1960 (Bourgeot 1990: 146). These reasons have been main rationales behind the last rebel movement that led by Tuareg.<sup>6</sup>

The period that followed the last peace accord in 2006 had been relatively stable, until the outbreak of a new rebellion in January 2012. The revolt came not only as a result of the failure of Malian state in achieving balanced economic development among the country's regions, but also because of the failure of Malian state to integrate its different ethnicities within a single identity framework based on citizenship.

The rebellion in 2012 differs from the previous ones in many ways. First, this rebellion came as result of an alliance between Tuareg national movements and some extremist groups from different nationalities (Mali, Nigeria, Mauritania and Libya), that have been active in the Tuareg regions since the past few years. Those armed groups were stronger than before, especially that they benefited from the big weapons stock, which were arrived to Mali by the Libyan Tuareg Brigades after the fall of

Gaddafi's regime in 2011. Second, this armed rebellion took place at a time when the Malian government was in weaker situation. In march 2012, there were manifestations against the central government guided by some officers of the Malian military, On 22 March coup d'état overthrew the president Amadou Toumani Touré under the reason of incapacity of his government to fight against the terrorists who held on the northern part of Mali. Consequently, fragile security and the political instability have become the major features of the Malian capital, where there was a political struggle under a fragile balance of power between political elites and soldiers who held on the reins of government.

**Map 3. The Paranoid Neighbor: Algeria and the Conflict in Mali (Boukhars 2012).**



### **The French Military Operation in Mali**

By the beginning of 2013, Paris launched an armed intervention in Mali, includes air strikes and ground operations<sup>7</sup> against the rebel movement in the north after extremist armed groups fighters suddenly moved on to the south part of country and defeated the forces of Malian army in the city of Konna. The United Kingdom and other European states were providing support as well as The United States that was sharing information with Paris and ready to provide logistics and surveillance, some reports referred . France had claimed that the military operation based on the Malian state's request for assistance, portraying operation Serval as indispensable step to prevent the capital from falling into armed groups' hands, and additional deployments of French army in Mali as helping to provide protection and secure almost six thousands of French citizens living there. The French deployments in Mali aimed also at deterring actors who might try to attack or further destabilize the interim government of Bamako (Arieff 2013: 1).

French government stated on January 2013 that the period of the military operation would be a question of few weeks. However, some experts referred that the rebel groups were better equipped and trained than French army forces expected, the question that would make the French mission more complicated. Given that Malian army was internally divided, lacks the ability to effectively project force, has been implicated in human rights abuses, and is very small, it was uncertain whether the Malian military would be capable to follow up on French military strikes effectively by taking control of liberated region and providing security. (Erlanger 2013). Prior to French armed intervention, leaders of regional countries as well as the international community had warned of a rising threat to international security associated with an widespread influence of extremist groups and scope of operations in Mali, a possible expansion of violent extremist ideology, and state fragmentation. The major armed groups in northern Mali, Al Quaida, Ansar al-Din and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa coordinated their attacks and shared militants. Reports of foreign jihadists from many African countries and beyond have raised worries, as had reported ties among the terrorist groups and transnational smuggling networks, including arms and drug traffickers (Arieff 2013: 2).

Indeed, there were many other rationales behind the French military intervention away from the ones given by Paris. Firstly, France has been present as main player in the region for decades, and it is well known that Africa has been a zone of French influence since long years (Bach 1995: 127). Paris still keeps stronger economic and politico-military relations with the regimes of its former colonies in framework of what has been known as *Françafrique* (Verschave 1998). Moreover, the French operation in Mali in 2013 was one of many previous ones that Paris had done in Africa in order to protect its national interests in the Continent over the past decades.

Secondly, French economic interests in the West Africa represent another explanatory element of its armed intervention in Mali. In spite of the limited French economic interests in Mali compared with other African countries, the country is located in a vital region to the French economic interests (Adam 2013: 10). Thus, the fragile governance and security instability in Mali threaten directly the security stability of the neighboring countries like Niger and Burkina Faso, where there a big

number of French economic investments exist , especially that Nigerian uranium mines which are located near the Malian borders provide the major needs of the French nuclear power stations (Maslouh 2014: 282).

In addition, the French armed intervention in Mali should be read in context of the French offensive policy that has been followed by Paris in Africa during the last years, as a response to the rivalry in Africa among the world major economic power (US and China) (Harmon 2015: 227-248). The French influence in Africa had been at risk of decline over the years of George W. Bush's administration that pursued interventionist policy in Africa<sup>8</sup> In framework of the global war on terror (GWOT) that was just the sort of opportunity that the Project for the New American Century sought, some analysis said. In fact, the global war on terror provided an ideological pretext to secure the militarization of many regions like the African continent that has become very important to national interests of US. The American administration at that time had already defined oil of Africa as a strategic national interest, and an energy resource that US might choose the hard power to control. It was the reason why Ed Royce, the chairman of the US Congress African sub-committee, called in January 2002 for African oil to be treated as a priority for US national security post 9/11. And, as US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, Michael Westphal, explained in a Pentagon press briefing in April 2002, why the African continent matters to the Washington. Westphal reiterated the point two months later, stressing that Africa was already supplying 14 per cent of US oil imports, and had the potential to increase that amount substantially over the next years. In June, with the Afghanistan 'victory' over his shoulder, and the war on terror on its way to Africa, US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Walter Kansteiner told his audience in Nigeria that 'African oil is strategic national interest to us' and that 'it will increase and become very important as we go forward' (Keenan 2009: 168-69). So, behind the purpose of bolstering of US political and military influence in the African continent, George W. Bush's administration aimed included the diversification of US sources of energy and also the protection of maritime energy transit routes which pass by the African coastline. Therefore, all those reasons cited above can give explanations of the motivations of the French operation in Mali, and why it has become necessary for Paris to protect its interests in the Sahel.

The armed intervention in Mali that launched by Paris on January 2013, had effectively succeeded in scattering, and severely weakening, the rebel movements that had taken control of the north for few months. The French intervention helped then to bring most of the liberated areas back under at least nominal central government control. Serval operation ended officially on 15 July 2014, and was replaced by Operation Barkhane, that launched by Paris again on 1 August 2014 to fight extremist groups in the region (Barluet 2014).

### **The Algerian Vision into Mali Crisis**

The Algerian state has been the principal mediator and guarantor of previous peace accords in northern Mali for years, the region where is considered as part of its sphere of influence. The country interests include regulating the activity of terrorist groups, and preventing the world rival powers from gaining influence in the Sahel

under Humanitarian and security reasons. The Algerian government also has interests in the trans-Sahel trafficking activities that is facilitated by the fragile situation of Mali, and the country's incapacity to control its northern regions and border crossings.

Historically, Algiers has long positioned itself as a traditional mediator of conflicts in Mali since 1991, when the Algerian mediation succeeded in bringing the opposition forces of the People's Movement of Azawad and the Arabic Islamic Front of Azawad (FIAA) to agree to the Tamanrasset Accord with the Malian government. However, the lack of respect of the peace agreements by the Malian conflict parties, and the starting of new rebellion in 2006 necessitated Algeria to intervene itself again as central mediator to help finding solutions for this conflict that represents a big threat to the security and political stability of Mali as well as the Sahel region. In the same year, the Algerian diplomacy succeed to convince all parties of conflict to enter into negotiations which was held in the capital of the country and ended by signing Algiers peace accord in 2006.<sup>9</sup>

### **Algeria and the Malian Crisis in 2012**

Experts claimed that none expected that the collapse of the old Malian order would be faster as it was in 2012. In a sudden change, and almost three months after the expansion of crisis in the country, the Malian military forces that tried to counter the rebel movement in the north, were defeated and driven back by groups of armed terrorist. On 22 March coup d'état overthrew the president Amadou Toumani Touré under the claim of his incapacity to fight against the rebel groups. This fragile situation has created big challenges for the Algerian government. Given its status as the first economic and military might in the region, its long experience and its good knowledge of the dynamics of crisis that Mali has been witnessing since 1991, Algiers was expected to play an effective role in terms of solving this crisis. However, the Algerian government was preoccupied with the internal political transitions and fearful of blowback from armed operation in the region, Algiers had been more, ambivalent and hesitant, than the region states as well as the west wanted it to be. This position was also attributed to the strict principle of non-intervention that has shaped the country's security doctrine (Boukhars <sup>2012</sup>: 27).

For years, the Algerian approaches towards the Sahel region have been based on the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States, and preferred always encouraging the political solutions instead of the military ones by rejecting strongly any kind of foreign-armed intervention in the region. Since the last crisis began in 2012, Algeria sought to find a political solution between the parties of Malian conflict, so that the Algerian approach emphasized the role of Malian parties in finding a solution for their country. In order to achieve this purpose, the Algiers succeed to create a framework of convergence of views between Ansar al-Din and National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad groups, the two main Tuareg parties in the North, who agreed to signed an accord in Algiers on December 21/2012 (Aljazeera 2012). This agreement was considered by Algiers as very important step that would help to find a comprehensive political solution between the Malian government and the Rebel groups. In addition, the Algerian government said that for finding a better solution for this crisis United Nations should define a clear strategy, which respects three essential points

(Elbilad 2016). First, the Malian parties should be the pivotal element in building peace process in their country. Second, the international society should provide supports to the Malian state, taking in consideration the responsibilities of the ECOWAS and the African Union in terms of Maintaining peace and security in the region as well as the rights of neighboring countries (Algeria, Niger and Mauritania) to protect their national security interests. The third point that was proposed by Algiers emphasized the peaceful means based on negotiations that should start in the nearest time.

### **The French Intervention in the Algerian view**

Since the beginning of Malian crisis in 2012, the Algerian government had resisted against all calls for armed intervention, by urging patience and providing supports for the central government in Bamako, at the same time, it warned about the negative consequences of an ill-conceived military intervention in Mali. The country political elites wanted to remind the region's states as well as the west that had the international society heeded their warnings about an armed operation during the Libyan crisis in 2011, the crisis in the Malian state would not have raised. Algiers rightly faults the west for halting weapons flow into the Sahelian region and failing to control them within Libya. Algiers believed that the humanitarian calculus behind the intervention was bogus and feared the dangerous precedent that the enforcement of the doctrine of the "responsibility to protect" against the depredations of authoritarian regimes sets. In spite of the role of the Military operation in stopping a bloodbath and ridding Tripoli of Kaddafi's order, the Algerian government maintain that NATO's lack of foresight has opened a Pandora's box of far-reaching effects. To Algeria, the supporters of armed intervention in Mali, particularly, Paris, therefore need to understand that their quick resort to Military operation only worsened the risks of terrorism' expansion in the whole region (Boukhars 2012: 20-21).

In unexpected change in its position that has refused the foreign Military intervention in the region, Algiers accepted finally in 2013 the formation of international military forces waged by France to intervene in Mali in order to counter the extremist armed groups that held on the northern part of the country. Official Algerian sources referred that Chiefs of Military forces of the region's countries, which includes Niger, Mauritania, Mali and Burkina Faso and Algeria, gave official orders for "hot pursuit of terrorist groups cross-border" in reference to the armed groups that seized control of northern Mali (Al Arabiya 2012). Algeria with this historical decision towards the Sahel region bucked its traditional policy, which has been always based on the principle of nonintervention in the internal affairs of states. As was explained by the ex-diplomat and Minister of Communication Abdelaziz Rahabi (Echorouk 2012), Algeria has realized that its position could not stand up against the dominant powers in the Security Council of United Nations (United States, France, Russia and China), that were supporting the armed intervention in Mali. This international consensus among the international community on the Military solution in Mali pushed then the Algerian leaderships to review their position and accepted the military intervention in Mali as long as it comes in framework of the international legitimacy. Algeria did not participate with military forces in this international armed intervention, because the Algerian constitution does not allow the army to take part in operations outside



the country. However, it opened its airspace for the French aircrafts and supported logistically the central government of Bamako.

### **The Algerian Peace accord 2015**

Following the international military intervention in Mali, extremist armed groups started maneuvering. Alliances shifted and splinter groups were created and re-aligned. Some claimed that, the different groups aimed to strategically position their own agenda at the table of the peace negotiations. However, this process continued and the number of major armed groups associated with the peace process rose from two (the MNLA and the High Council for the Unity of Azawad and HCUA) in 2012, when the crisis started, to eight by the signing of the Algiers agreement in 2015. The push-back against the jihadist groups allowed the MNLA to make a comeback (Wiklund and Nilsson, 2016: 13).

In the ensuing peace process, the international community made a distinction between politico-military groups (like the MNLA and its off-shoots), which would be engaged in negotiations, and rebel groups, which were considered legitimate military targets. The lines of differentiation among the actors were nevertheless blurred. Most notably, many supporters of Ansar al-Din crossed over to join the HCUA (Haut Conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad), which signed the 2015 peace agreement alongside MLNA as part of a coalition of armed groups. Later in the negotiations, two additional groups, the Coordination for Movements and Fronts of Patriotic Resistance (CMFPR) and the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA), became integral parts of the peace process. The establishment of these new movements marked a turning point in the negotiations. Unlike the MNLA and HCUA, which claimed independence for Azawad, the CMFPR and MAA were loyalists, advocating national unity. The CMFPR represented a range of self-defense movements that had been active in reconquering territories which had fallen into the hands of rebel and jihadist groups, and these movements came together primarily to ensure that their communities were not side-lined in the peace negotiations. The transitional government encouraged the inclusion of these loyalist movements in the negotiations as a means of countering the influence of the MNLA and HCUA. Nevertheless all movements except the HCUA experienced fragmentation. By the time the next round of peace negotiations started in Algiers in June 2014, the rather numerous politico-military movements had formed two main coalitions: the Coordination coalition of Azawad movements (CMA), an alliance of the MNLA and HCUA and others, and the Platform Coalition of Armed Groups (the Platform), a coalition of loyalist groups. Both the CMA and the Platform were coalitions of armed groups with multiple and diverging claims on the state of Mali. A distinction between them is that the CMA's constituent movements consistently pursued claims of self-determination for northern Mali, while the movements within the Platform sought to resolve grievances within the unitary state of Mali. However, coalition neither has presented a clear agenda of its claims nor specifically outlined which constituents it represents. It means they presented a clear agenda to find a solution for the Malian problem but this agenda don't represent the real beliefs of those party that the CMA's constituent movements consistently pursued claims of self-determination for northern Mali (Wiklund and Nilsson, 2016: 14-15).

Finally, the Malian parties signed the accord on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process (the Algiers Agreement) in May and June 2015 after seven months of negotiations among the central government and diversity Tuareg movements of the north.<sup>10</sup> The peace process was carried out under the aegis of mediation, led by Algiers and supported by a number of international partners. In addition to the Government of Mali (GoM), the signatories to the Algiers accord were the CMA and the Platform. The Algiers Accord addresses a number of issues determining the future of Mali. Above all, the agreement commits the signatories to a continued unified and secular Malian state, setting aside any previous demands for independence, autonomy or federalism. It also determines a common understanding of the term Azawad, the Tuareg name for Mali's three northern regions. The Algiers Agreement includes an agreement monitoring system and covers four substantive themes on which the principles and foundations of sustainable conflict resolution will be built: Political and Institutional Matters; Defense and Security.

### **Conclusion**

The fragile security situation in the Sahel coupled with political instability, weak governances and new transnational threat (soft and hard threats) are creating a need for adaptation in the Algerian security approach towards the region, including a militarization of borders which is neither expected nor desired. Particularly, the outbreak of crisis in the Malian state in 2012 was unprecedented, involving for the first time not only Tuaregs movements fighting against the Malian government, but also terrorist and trafficker armed groups. New security reality has risen in the Sahel region, creating a new challenge for Algeria.

In the case of Mali, Since the Sahel is considered by Algeria as traditional backyard of its influence; it has participated in all negotiations of the Malian conflicts since the rebellion of 1990s. The Algerian mediation succeeded many time in bringing the opposition forces to agree to the peace accords with the Malian government. However, Algeria should review its security approach towards the Sahel, especially, about the role of Algerian military defined in the Algerian constitution that does not allow the military to participate in armed operations outside Algeria. With the rise of new security challenges in the region (terrorist groups), Algeria should find a new formula that would allow the army to intervene outside the country's borders in framework of Preventive Military operations to counter all kind of threats that might threaten its national security, this formula might help the Algerian security approach towards the Sahel to become more and more effective in terms of fighting terrorism and the other soft and hard security threats in the Sahel region.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In fact, there is a dispute about the African Sahel definition and which states belong to this region, for further information about this dispute see: (Maslouh 2014: 7-12). This study takes the United Nations definition of the Sahel as a way out of this controversy.

<sup>2</sup> About the Sahel definition given by UN, you can see also, United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2011-Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All, viewed 23/01/2016, Available at:

[http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2011\\_EN\\_Complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2011_EN_Complete.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The United States Africa Command was officially created on 1 October 2008; some experts claim that the creation of the US Africa command was much more than a post-cold war rationalization of Washington's global military command structure. Rather it reflected the recognition of Africa's new strategic importance to Washington. For more details about AFRICOM and its goals see: (Keenan 2008: 16-20; Keenan 2013, 121-132).

<sup>4</sup> For more details about the Growing Impact of Organized Crime in the Sahel you can see: (Lacher 2012: 3-9).

<sup>5</sup> For more details about the crisis timeline you can see also: (Boyle 2012: 2-4).

<sup>6</sup> While Tuareg's political, religious, economic and socio-cultural interaction with the local people and the sultanates in Niger Bend had been continuing throughout the historical process for centuries in its natural course, the French settlement in Algeria in 1830 and its spread towards Sahara by setting up a base in this region became the main reason of the problems extending today. This new power representing modern imperial mentality, broke the region off its traditions literally and transformed it into an area of conflict. For further information about the Tuareg ethnicity see: (Tandoğan 2015: 332-344).

<sup>7</sup> For more on the on Operation Serval, see: (Shurkin 2014: 5-24).

<sup>8</sup> About more details about this policy see: (Oyebade 2014).

<sup>9</sup> For more details about the role of Algeria in the Malian peace accords see: (Pezard and Shurkin 2015: 5-22).

<sup>10</sup> For more details about the Algiers agreement see: (Reeve 2015: 1-5).

