



NATO Foundation
Defense College

Africa December 2017

The problems of Sahel region

In the Sahel region, extreme poverty, armed conflict, climate change (the desertification) and insecurity continue to jeopardise millions of people that living on the leeway. These interdependent factors are behind the remarkable levels of structural and acute vulnerability present in the region. Extreme poverty, the persistent food insecurity, malnutrition and disease, making the Sahel one of the poorest in the world and it is below the Sub-Sahara African poverty average. Regarding climate change, this region is in grave danger. Water scarcity and droughts, land degradation undermine the livelihoods of a population in which the majority counts on agriculture for survival. Experts identify the Sahel as a region at “extreme climate risk” because the seasonal cycle is broken, extreme weather events such as floods are more frequent and the drought periods are longer than before, as well as overall average temperatures have risen. According to the experts, if the trends do not change, Africa will only be able to meet 13 % of its food needs by 2050.

So, the lack of economic opportunities, particularly for youth, increasing violence, armed conflicts over the past decades have destroyed livelihoods and driven people out their homes. Profound instability in Libya, in northern Mali and the violence of Boko Haram's power, have had a devastating impact. Especially in the desert expanses of north-western Mali where have been home to a multitude of different armed groups, including jihadists, nationalists and criminals, most of them rooted in local Tuareg and Arab ethnic networks. Due to of all that, across the Sahel there are more of 5 million displaced people, refugees and returnees are affected by displacement and political instability accentuating already weak humanitarian situation.

The Sahel is furthermore instrumentalized by criminal and trafficking networks, for instance the ancient trade and migration routes are often used by smugglers to traffic drugs, humans and illicit products filling the space left by conflicts, fragile governance and lack of international cooperation.

Whereas the lack of education, unemployment, social exclusion make fruitful ground for radicalization, extremism and grievance, obviously this means that the perception of neglect can lead youths to extremist groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) or the Mouvement pour l'Unité du Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO) and the others jihadist or nationalist groups. In many instances, jihadist groups fill an existing vacuum and its proposed alternatives to the governance and security model, including provision of essential services and for access to natural resources and, for these reasons, the population feels protected by extremist groups and they begin to think that the jihadism is the very answer to the problems. Considering that the jihadism and nationalist groups are infiltrated in the society for a long time as an answer to problems of the poor population, it will be very difficult understand, for the international cooperation, how normalize this situation and how normalize the people that doesn't understand what is the normal and what is the “right” or “wrong”.

We must also consider that the Sahel has had a long history of migration flows and it is a migration hub of Africa, in fact, this region is simultaneously a departure point and the important corridor for the migration routes. On the so-called “back way” to Europe, almost all other African migrants cross through the Sahel desert generally to get at Libya and thereafter they try to cross the Mediterranean sea with small boats managed by smugglers. The data relating to migration flows observe that approximately 300000 people have transited through the Sahel. In addition, we need to consider also that the migration has become an important economic factor for the smugglers and for the population that takes advantage of migrant flow. It is very important to understand that the migration flow has generated a parallel economy because some people live with the money brought by them and for this reason, the international cooperation should take account of these aspects.

In conclusion, if the interconnected root causes of the crises in the Sahel are not faced, challenges will grow up. Alongside humanitarian action, reinforced and joined up the action by political, development and security actors is required to stabilize the region, and create conditions for people to survive and prosper in their home.

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