

SAHEL AND SECURITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Beirut, 26 October 2017

report
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Executive Summary

The Dialogue Workshop “*Sahel and Security in the Mediterranean*” is part of a Working Package, coordinated by Dr Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck, El Erian Fellow at Carnegie Middle East Center. It has been organised under the EuroMeSCO ENI Project, co-funded by the European Union and the European Institute of the Mediterranean, in coordination with the Carnegie Middle East Center (CMEC). The workshop took place in Beirut on 26 October 2017 at the Carnegie offices, welcoming 16 participants from academia, think tanks, civil society and EU Delegation to Lebanon. Dr. Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck, Resident Scholar at CMEC, chaired the event.



The workshop was structured around four sessions corresponding to themes identified for the chapters of the Joint Policy Study, the publication that will be released as a result of the working package. The authors presented their initial findings with the purpose of discussing them in the following Q&A.

In the first session, Dr. Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck (CMEC) presented her findings on violent Islamist militancy and Jihadism in the Sahel with a focus on former Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) renamed *Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin'* (JNIM). The second session with Dr. Yahia Zoubir, Professor of International Studies & International Management, and Director of Research in Geopolitics at KEDGE Business School, analysed the role of Algeria in the Sahel pointing to the limits of its containment policy, and the great dangers of the region, also known as "*le ventre mou de l'Algérie*". The third session with Dr. Giovanni Faleg, Associate Research Fellow at the Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS), represented in absentia by Astrid Viaud, Visiting Researcher at CEPS, examined the role of the international community to tackle the root causes of conflict in the Sahel, its limits and lack of practical coordination. In the fourth and last session, Dr. Raquel Barras Tejudo, Researcher at Complutense University of Madrid, shed light on the security implications of demographic and climate change in the Sahel region.

Note: This Dialogue Workshop report focuses on the debates following the presentations that were based on draft chapters circulated ahead of the meeting. Accordingly, only concise summaries of the presented findings are included in this report.

DETAILS OF THE FOUR SESSIONS

The Rise of Islamist Militancy and Jihadist Movements in the Sahel

In the first presentation, Dr. Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck analysed and mapped the Jihadist violence in the Sahel. She asserted that its evolving, adapting and persistent presence represents an overarching threat to the Sahel, North Africa

and to Europe, by extension. Armed Islamist groups such as JNIM are exploiting the enduring disorder and instability within the Sahel through radicalisation in the perpetration of attacks. This pattern is likely to persist.

Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders

It was agreed that Jihadist groups are taking advantage of the vast plains of the Sahelian topography, as the porousness of the borders enable them to operate freely in the region. Jihadist groups are pragmatic actors. They exploit the region's extreme poverty, lack of education, the political, social and economic marginalisation as well as bad governance and lack of opportunities. Furthermore, the central Sahelian states fail to provide basic needs, security and protection to their impoverished local communities. The disorder and instability in the Sahel are thereby benefiting extremist groups.

The phenomenon of characteristics of youth radicalisation were emphasized. The author and the participants agreed that radicalisation is a process, which differs from village to village, town to town and from individual to individual. As a result, there is no "one-fit for all" strategy to tackle radicalisation in the Sahel. However, factors such as social and economic marginalisation, high level of illiteracy, lack of education, unemployment, lack of access to decision making as well as the indiscriminate violence of the security forces, all need to be addressed.

The group agreed with the author on how support towards AQIM and its affiliate does not stem from an ideological motivation. Rather, it seems to be motivated by economic opportunism and a thirst for material gratification and justice due to poor socio-economic and socio-political conditions. Concrete examples were given such as Mali, where AQIM was able to provide protection to pastoralists and their herds and prevented chiefs and governments from collecting taxes from the populations.

The indiscriminate violence of the security forces and their foreign allies against the local population contributes greatly to radicalisation. There are regions today in Mali such as Kidal, where the influence and support for

jihadist groups such as Ansar Dine is growing because of their aversion for the French Barkhane forces.

Further comments were made about the importance of the influence of Gulf countries in the Sahel and their financing of extremist schools and mosques. A participant insisted on the importance of smuggling networks in financing jihadist groups such as AQIM, while another qualified this, explaining that groups such as AQIM were not involved in narco-terrorism activities beyond protecting and taxing drug convoys.

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

The second contribution by Dr. Yahia Zoubir looked into the role of a pivotal regional actor: Algeria. The chapter tackled the importance of the Sahel to the Algerian state that sees it as "*Le couloir de tous les dangers*". The threats coming from the Sahel are multiple and range from jihadism, kidnappings, smuggling, arms trafficking and illegal migration. The Tuareg question is of great interest for the Algerians, as they have Tuareg populations whom they integrated socially, economically and politically since the country's independence in 1962. Yet, the fear of a contamination is palpable in Algiers. The latter has deployed its diplomatic assets to resolve the Tuareg question in Mali since the 1990s.

Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders

The discussion revolved around Algeria's role in the Sahel since 9/11. Since then the North African power became a pivotal actor in the "fight against terror". The country warned the West about the insurgency of jihadists groups in the 1990s and its call was ignored until the attacks on the twin towers. Since then, Algeria together with the US, engaged in a deep cooperation. US Officials spawned the pan-Sahel initiative in 2002, in which Algeria was considered an important ally in counterterrorism efforts. In 2002, Algeria pushed for the creation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), a structure towards the prevention, management, conflict resolutions and post-conflict reconstruction and development in the African continent. In 2010, the Algerians created the Council of the Chiefs

of Staff of the Joint Operational Army Staffs Committee (CEMOC) to set up a security architecture that included Niger, Libya and Mali to foster intelligence sharing and logistical assistance as well as common protection.

Comments were made on the limits of Algeria's foreign policy. Dr. Zoubir insisted that "Algerians are against foreign intervention but they confuse it with foreign interference". Because of this military doctrine, the CEMOC was bound to fail. Comments were also made on the feud between Morocco and Algeria that is hindering joint efforts in the Sahel in terms of fighting terrorism and violent radicalisation.

Although Algerian policymakers have not rejected the principle of wider cooperation, they have viewed attempts to bring in Morocco into CEMOC or other Sahelian organisations suspiciously, asserting that Morocco is not a Sahelian state. According to Algeria, recognising Morocco as a Sahelian state would be tantamount to recognising Morocco's sovereignty over the 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. Comments were also made on the G5 Sahel and how the Algerian non-participation is due to Algiers' expectations for the failure of the initiative.

A participant insisted on the need to think of Algeria as a pivotal actor in the Sahel. The country is not as active as it could be due to partners such as France not treating it as a full-fledged partner, but more like a peace subcontractor.

Another comment highlighted the need to finalise the chapter and mature several points that appear in the structure but lack content.

Fragile States and the Issue of Foreign Interventions

This presentation looked at the issue of foreign interventions in the Sahel, and the gap between conceptualisation and implementation of the security-development nexus, and on how it affects the region's pathways for peace. The

two authors decided to tackle six different countries, namely: Mali, Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania. After listing thoroughly the country profiles, the draft chapter highlights the different foreign organisms that have been intervening in the region.

Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders

All participants agreed that the chapter includes a great amount of valuable information, however its analytical part should be further developed, including critical assessment of the foreign intervention in the six countries.

For instance, the participants suggested to examine the gap between the strategies presented by foreign interventions and foreign actors (especially the EU) and the practical coordination on the ground to implement them, which has significant consequences on any endeavor to prevent conflicts or violent extremism.

The participants suggested as well to analyse the impact of foreign military interventions on the local and regional level and how not only they contributed to the radicalisation of entire populations but also to the regionalisation of the jihadist threat. In particular, it was suggested to examine the impact of the French military interventions in the region, with a focus on Mali, and the need for the EU to play a more important role in the region.

The Demographic and Climatic Challenges

Dr. Raquel Barras Tejado presented climate and demographic changes in the Sahel and the interconnection between them.

Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders

Participants agreed that the chapter has a great potential and contains invaluable data. However, the structure of the chapter should be amended, adding a thorough analysis on the impact of demographic issue and climate change on conflicts between populations and hence on security. In order to better reflect the focus of the chapter, a modification of title was suggested to

“Climate change and demographic issues in the Sahel as security challenges”. A participant suggested to add an analysis of food insecurity and famines as a security challenge. Concrete examples on land issues in the Sahel and how jihadist groups are taking advantage of pastoralist grievances to recruit among them were given, including how for instance Amadou Koufa has been able to mobilise pastoralists communities like the Fulani for an Islamist agenda. Another participant gave the example of climate change and its effects on local social relations. The participant stated that since 2001, 60,000 people have died in pastoralist related violence in Nigeria. Therefore, it was suggested that these and other concrete examples on the connection between climate change, demographic issues and security are needed in the chapter, in order to support the data and make it more valuable.



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