

**Beatriz Gil-Schwandl | A Tale of Two
Jihads: Mali, Nigeria and the EU**



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ABSTRACT

Violence and political instability have turned the eyes of the international community to towards the Sahel region, where some of the world's poorest countries are located. In the aftermath of the Arab spring, the EU was quick to realise the threats, both humanitarian and economic, that lurked within the region, and to formulate and implement an intervention. Launched in 2011, the EU Sahel strategy was presented as a comprehensive action plan designed to tackle the mounting threat of terrorism and instability in the Sahel region through a strategy that promotes development through security. However, these actions have stirred up an old but still unanswered debate: to what extent is the EU's (and any other foreign power's) direct involvement in local African politics legitimate, and to what extent is it really necessary? In fact, is that even a pertinent question nowadays, or do the ends justify the means?

This paper will seek to bring light to these issues as well as examine the efficiency to the EU Sahel strategy through two case studies on Mali and Nigeria, and attempt clarify whether development through securitisation is a sustainable and legitimate framework for African foreign policy.

Keywords: Jihad; Mali; Nigeria; Boko Haram; EU Sahel Strategy; AQIM; Al-Qaeda

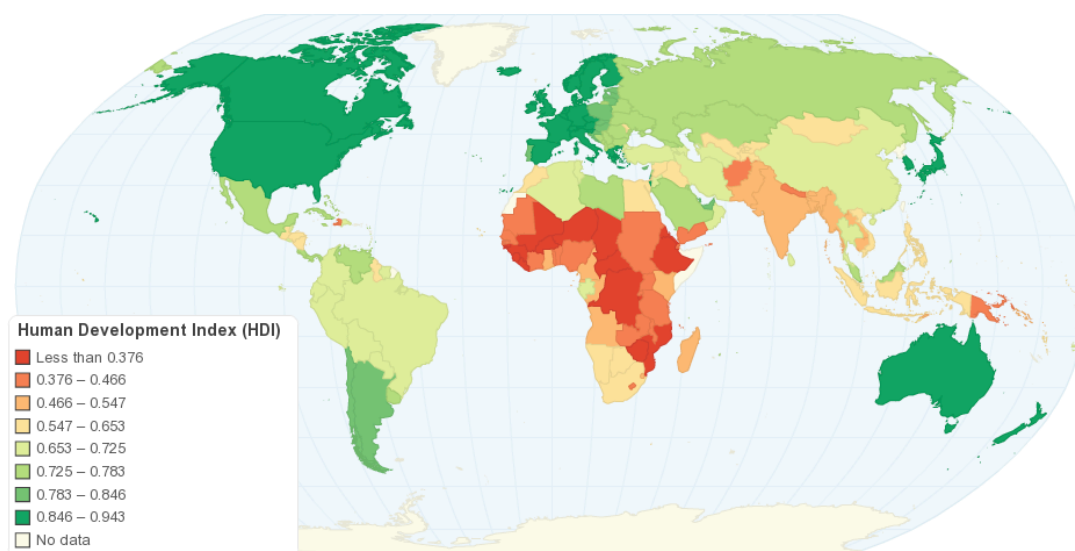
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Introduction

The Sahel region has long been known for its relative instability but, for the past decade, the security threats in the region have increasingly been making headlines. Unsurprisingly, since the poverty, high fertility and mortality rates, insufficient educational and professional opportunities and malnutrition which ravage the region are a heady recipe for disaster, not just economic but also political and humanitarian. The 2012 Human Development Report¹ commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) notes that a quarter of the people in Sub-Saharan Africa are undernourished, with the Sahel being the region who suffers the most food insecurity in the world. Furthermore, the area also has the highest concentration of the world's lowest Human Development Indexes (HDI), with Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Nigeria reporting indexes wavering between 0 and 0.35, a meagre figure indeed compared to North America's who boasts between 0.85 to 1.



¹ can be accessed here <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/africa-human-development-report-2012/>



If we use the UNDP's definition of human development as being "the expansion of capabilities, the freedoms that people have to lead the lives they value"², it is little wonder that the Sahel's population, amid chronic food and water shortages and weak, ineffectual governments, are not able to access the opportunities that would allow them to lift themselves out of poverty and regain control over their own destinies. Equally, it is in these conditions that religious extremism finds the right conditions to thrive: while poverty does not inherently breed extremism³, it undoubtedly makes it a more attractive option by offering a set of rules to live by, a close-knit community for support and an overarching sense of purpose that provides a form of certainty and security in a chaotic and unstable environment caused by a dysfunctional government. It is not a coincidence that north-eastern Nigeria, the poorest part of the country⁴, is also a hub of radicalism and the birthplace of Boko Haram.

The link between development and peace and security is self-evident, and in the light of the EU's historical, economic, cultural and migratory relationships with the African continent, it is clear why the Sahel's political turmoil is a source of increasing concern. In 2011, the EU's foreign policy ambitions gave birth to the Sahel Strategy, created on the principal that security and development are intrinsically linked and that achieving one will help reach the other. This concept is not new, as previously illustrated by the 2005 European Consensus on Development⁵ and the 2007 Joint Africa-EU strategy⁶, and can also be seen as the continuity of the Cotonou Agreement⁷. Both share the principles of governmental transparency, universal access to education, equality of partnership and ownership of development strategies, and the necessity of political dialogue and global economic integration. However, the Cotonou Agreement considers

² p9 <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/africa-human-development-report-2012/>

³ poverty and support for militant politics: evidence from pakistan, <http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/MORTARA-FAIR-Poverty-and-Support-for-Militant-Politics-Pakistan.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/> According to the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), poverty rates in northern Nigeria in 2012 hover above 76%, compared to 59.1% in the south.

⁵ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/development/general_development_framework/r12544_en.htm

⁶ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-351_en.htm

⁷ The Cotonou Agreement is a treaty signed in 2000 (and later revised in 2005 and 2010) between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) with the aim of promoting development and the eradication of poverty.

security as simply one of the many elements that contribute to development and reductively defines it as fighting against terrorism and arms trafficking. On the other hand, the EU Sahel Strategy sees addressing security as an integral and principal factor in achieving its goal of tackling "the root causes of extreme poverty and [...] create the grass-root conditions for economic opportunity and human development"⁸, thereby heralding a marked departure from prior strategies.



Map of the Sahel Region ⁹

Although the Sahel Strategy's often refers to the "mutual interests in improving the security and development situation in the Sahel"¹⁰ as its motto, the extent to which those interests are mutual is questionable, as is the efficiency of its implementation. Certainly, the merging of development and security concerns to pursue targeted geographical action is an innovative strategy that reunites all the elements needed to be successful long-term, unlike its predecessors. However, in order for a foreign-led programme such as this one to be effective, it needs to harness the expertise as well as the regional and cultural "know-how" of local institutions and authorities. Yet, although the Sahel

⁸ EEAS, "Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel", p.4

⁹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/homepage/highlights/addressing-the-situation-in-the-sahel?lang=en>

¹⁰ ibid



Strategy professes to rely on "actively African responsibility and ownership"¹¹, it has until recently made precious little use of the available regional resources. Indeed, the late involvement of local stakeholders such as ECOWAS highlights the EU's unilateral approach which, instead of seeking to immediately leverage existing initiatives, preferred to employ a "one size fits all" attitude towards tackling the region's complex challenges. This leads to the question of who is really intended as the main beneficiary of the EU Sahel Strategy: the Sahelian states, namely Mali, Niger and Mauritania, who are the focus of the programme, or the EU itself? Although it can be argued that this is an irrelevant detail as long as positive results are achieved, understanding where the Sahel Strategy's priorities lie is crucial to assessing the coherence of its implementation strategy and evaluating its long-term results, as well as shedding light on the scope of the EU's external ambitions. Lastly, the consequences of this experiment will certainly bear influence on future foreign policy in the region, and it remains to be seen whether the "securitisation of development" will result into a pragmatic and logical framework that will promote stability and independence in the region through a piecemeal approach, or whether it will simply reduce the notions of security and development to self-serving gateway for prolonged military intervention in the region under the guise of "liberation"?

This paper will attempt to shed light on these key issues through an examination of the Sahel Strategy's scope and geostrategic implementation using two case studies, Mali and Nigeria. They were chosen because they are pivotal players in the region by virtue of their size and clout, and also provide the most accurate crystallisation of the Sahel Strategy's strengths and weaknesses by showcasing how, and why, the EU's approach to both countries differs so vastly. Moreover, it will demonstrate that, despite a discourse that holds security and development as equal and interdependent goals, the former has often been neglected for the latter. Consequently, the disproportionate weight given to security has thus far met with little success both in significantly reducing instability as well as in ameliorating living standards or alleviating poverty. Its late response to Mali's theocratic regime and decision to focus on the Sahel's most vulnerable states

¹¹ ibid



(Mauritania and Niger) while avoiding facing the realities of Boko Haram's rise in scale, power and prestige highlight a chronic and inherent misunderstanding of the region's dynamics, which has so far resulted into a strategy that is more geared towards crisis management than prevention, as we shall see below.



PART 1: THE EU SAHEL STRATEGY: WHAT, WHERE AND WHY?

As mentioned in the introduction, the Sahel Strategy is based upon the principle that political security and human development are inseparable, and the success of latter rests upon the achievement of the former (and vice-versa). This is indeed a logical assumption: poverty, and the lack of opportunities for communities to lift themselves out of it, can lead to them seeking out alternative forms of governance and leadership, not necessarily because they are objectively more legitimate or efficient but simply because they appear to be the lesser of two evils. For example, Boko Haram, AQIM (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and Al-Shabaab count on the cooperation- whether in the form of active support or tacit condonation- to operate¹².

Considering Europe's historic ties with the African continent, relative geographic proximity and powerful migratory and economic flows, the EU's decision to establish a programme to keep a check on the Sahel region's rogue states and extremist groups is unsurprising. Indeed, the Sahel region is of paramount strategic importance to the EU's economy: Nigeria represents approximately 50% of EU exports to the region and almost 70% of all imports (namely in the form of oil), and a number of renewable solar energy projects are being developed in the region such as Germany's Desertech, which aims to construct solar panels in Western Sahara and Algeria to generate electricity to be exported back to Europe primarily via Morocco. As a result, political turmoil and instability in the region pose a vivid threat to European commercial interests, giving the EU its main incentive for intervention in the region.

However, achieving a level of stabilisation in the region high enough to lay the ground for modest but sustainable economic growth in the Sahel will be no mean feat. Indeed, the region's instability is driven by cross-border and transnational elements, whose identities, impact and goals are often difficult for outsiders to disentangle and

¹² A poll conducted in Nigeria in April 2013 shows that 1 out of 10 Nigerians believe amnesty should be given to Boko Haram, while 3 in 10 believe the Federal Government should foster dialogue with the group. Only 13% support military intervention. Available at <http://us5.campaign-archive1.com/?u=49b0aad9cb04a7467834a9d88&id=16c7ce8beb>



make sense of, let alone fight against. However, the EU believes that the framework it has developed is comprehensive enough to promote security and development in the region by placing emphasis on four pillars consisting of:

- 1) Development and good governance
- 2) Internal conflict resolution
- 3) Security and the rule of law
- 4) Countering violent extremism

The rationale behind this strategy is to enable a holistic "prise en charge" of the Sahelian states concerned, and calculated to form a positive domino effect in the region and reverse some of the damages caused by the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring, with the sudden and colossal changes that ensued in Libya and Tunisia led to a significant reconfiguration in the region, occurred around the time of the official launch of the Sahel Strategy and the EU consequently scrambled to find ways to adapt it to the new socio-political realities of the region without relinquishing its original geostrategic goals. The biggest source of concern was the consolidation of AQIM's forces in Mali, yet foreign intervention in the country came too late, as an unprepared and poorly-equipped Mali was left to deal alone with a wave of well-armed and financed Tuareg mercenaries and AQIM fighters who set their sights on Libya's weak and inviting neighbour after Gaddafi's fall. The failure on the EU's part to foresee this danger which led to the establishment of a Malian Islamist theocracy would perhaps be more forgivable if a similar mistake was not currently occurring in Nigeria. In spite of Boko Haram's increase in violent attacks that threaten to spill and spread across the border, Nigeria is still not part of the core focus of the Sahel Strategy, and it is only recently that the EU has begun having serious dialogue with local authorities and comprehend how serious a threat Boko Haram poses to the Sahelian stability.



PART 2: A PIECEMEAL APPROACH

Gradually, the EU has started to realise how inept some aspects of its strategy have been, and taken steps to address them. Launched in December 2010, the European External Action Service (EEAS) appointed a special Sahel department to oversee and provide a continuous assessment of the Sahel Strategy's results every three months. This has led to some positive and encouraging changes: although the EU had been slow to draw in and harness local organisations such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), who are much better-placed to understand the realities of the terrain and address regional challenges than a foreign body such as the EU is, these regional stakeholders have been given an increasingly important role in assisting with the implementation of the Sahel Strategy. Furthermore, in 2012 the EU released a statement in which it estimated that around €650 million of its aid budget was being allocated to this programme, although only a small percentage of this sum was actually being invested in security reforms¹³. Presently, a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) unit is in place in Niger and has been allocated a budget of almost € 9 million in order to overhaul the country's security forces and establish a stronghold against AQIM. A similar deployment was set up in Mali at the request of the local government in February 2013 to support the training and reorganisation of the country's military. Yet no similar efforts have been made in Nigeria, despite its key position in the region as the most populated African country¹⁴ and detainer of a wealth of valuable resources, particularly as it is Africa's largest crude oil producer with 2.2 million barrels of oil a day according to the OPEC¹⁵.

However, the EU's piecemeal approach to security and development in the region focussing on the three core states of Mali, Mauritania and Niger, increasingly seems

¹³ ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly p.9, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/acp/dv/follow-up_lome_/follow-up_lome_en.pdf

¹⁴ The European Commission estimates that Nigeria has a population of around 160 million, with two-thirds of these living on less than \$1 USD a day. Source: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/acp/country-cooperation/nigeria/nigeria_en.htm

¹⁵ <http://www.opec.org/>



woefully ineffective, yet no moves have been made to reconsider this plan of action. The problem lies not with the piecemeal strategy itself, but with the choice of countries, and the decision to persist in targeting the weakest states in the post-Arab Spring context is symptomatic of the inflexibility and slowness to respond to change that characterises the EU's intervention in the Sahel region. Continuing to prioritise action in weaker states leaves fewer resources to allocate to more urgent threats such as Boko Haram, and is the recipe for a similar disaster such as the one in Mali, which has set yet another precedent for a successful extremist coups against governments. Thus, in order to understand the sequence of events that led to Amadou Toumani Toure's Bamako-based government's toppling in 2012, and the likelihood of similar consequences in Nigeria, we will examine the EU's attitude to both countries in order to establish pattern similarities and identify redemptory course of action:

1) Case Study 1: Mali

1.1) Setting the scene



Map illustrating areas of conflict in Northern Mali¹⁶

Mali has provided a tragic example of what AQIM is capable of, and has been the country where the aftermath of the Arab Spring has been the most visible and painfully felt. The EU has allocated the largest portion of its Sahel Strategy budget to Mali, with an expected 294 million Euros to be invested in addressing terrorism and development in the country¹⁷, although in reality this is number is likely to be significantly higher given that two-thirds of the budget had already been spent by the end of 2011. In addition, the EU has made considerable efforts to provide ongoing support to the African Union and ECOWAS in facing the challenges posed by the Islamist coup d'etat in March 2012, although these have yet to be rewarded.

Currently, Mali is divided between an AQIM-dominated region in the north, and an increasingly vulnerable south, with almost half a million citizens having been forced to abandon their homes since violence erupted¹⁸. However, there are forces other than AQIM to be contended with in the country, and it has proven difficult for Western

¹⁶ Source: Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Mali_conflict_\(2012%E2%80%93present\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Mali_conflict_(2012%E2%80%93present)))

¹⁷ EEAS, “Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel”, p.9

¹⁸ UNHCR source: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4f79a77e6.html>



officials to grasp the complexity of this network fraught with ethnic divisions and tight-knit webs of loyalty and vendettas. Although AQIM is a powerful threat, it is by no means a cohesive and united front, and several factions are attempting to challenge its supremacy with more or less success. Some key players the MUJAO (Movement for Monotheism and Jihad in West Africa), a splinter group which proclaimed itself as a separate entity in December 2011, and the Tuareg-led Ansar al-Din, formed in November 2011. Even more recently, in December 2012, the disgruntled ex-AQIM commander Mokhtar Belmokhtar founded al-Muwaqun Bi-Dima, which can be said to be somewhat less radical than its peers, although still cause for serious concern. Additionally, there are also the little-mentioned (in the Sahel Strategy) National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and National Front for the Liberation of Azawad (FLNA), both secular groups who fight for control over Azawad, a territory situated in Northern Mali and an unrecognised state.

In order to better understand the dynamics at play, an analysis of each of these main groups helps shed some light as to if, and how, they differ, and their overall impact in Mali's crisis:

AQIM



Map of AQIM's activities in the Sahel region ¹⁹

¹⁹ International Centre for Terrorism Studies, <http://www.potomac institute.org/attachments/article/1358/Terrorism%20in%20North%20Africa%20&%20the%20Sahel.pdf>



This radical group in particular has caught the EU's attention and has been giving growing cause for concern over the past few years. Al-Qaeda's Maghrebian branch, known as AQIM, has been attracting an increasingly number of supporters who vocalise their beliefs through systemic violence against their perceived enemies, which includes even those who do not support them directly; in short, if one is not with them, one is against them. According to the American National Counterterrorism Center²⁰, AQIM is a Salafi-jihadist militant group headquartered in Algeria and led by Abdelmalek Droukdel, who described the group's goal as the establishment of a unified Islamic state in the region²¹. Currently, AQIM is especially active around Algeria, Mauritania, Niger and Mali, operating using guerrilla tactics including suicide bombings, raids and assassinations. The Council On Foreign Relations²² notes that the group obtains funds mainly through kidnappings for ransoms and the trafficking of arms, people and drugs. These methods have evidently proved successful, as AQIM is widely recognised as being Al Qaeda's wealthiest faction²³. Given the scope of AQIM's influence and financial resources, it is not surprising that it used the power vacuum created by the Arab Spring to launch itself into an even stronger foothold.

ANSAR AL-DIN

A coalition of Malian ethnic tribes, notably Tuaregs, Ifoghas and Berabiches, they are believed to unofficially cooperate with AQIM similarly to the way the Taliban and Al-Qaeda conduct operations. As such, they can be considered as an independent local AQIM franchise whose main goal is to impose Sharia law worldwide, starting with their own country. The group is headed by Iyad Ag Gali, a Tuareg, and has strong presence in the north, especially Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. Unlike AQIM and MUJAO, Ansar

²⁰ <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/aqim.html>

²¹ *ibid*

²² <http://www.cfr.org/north-africa/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-aqim/p12717>

²³ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/07/26/us-mali-usa-africom-idUSBRE86P11C20120726>



Al-Dine tends to avoid direct confrontation with the secular FLNA and MNLA, presumably because they have ethnic and blood ties to these groups.

MNLA & FLNA

Both these groups are united in their common desire to acquire the independence of Azawad in northern Mali. Consequently, they are allies, although each group remains independent, and they position themselves alongside ethnic lines instead of religious ones. The vast majority of the MNLA is composed of Tuaregs who desire Azawad to become a Tuareg state, although they publicly claim that all northern ethnic tribes (i.e. the Fulani and the Songhai) would be welcome. This is not inconceivable, given that the group's leader, the Tuareg Bilal Ag Cherif, relies heavily on his closest deputy, a Songhai named Mahamadou Maiga. It is important not to underestimate this group, despite the fact that its notoriety has taken a backseat to AQIM's, as the current crisis is a direct consequence of the MNLA's military takeover of northern Mali and the Tuaregs' clamouring for a independent state, which dates back to their first rebellion in 1963, continues to fuel violence and instability. Although the FLNA's ultimate goal is similar, the group is largely formed by Arabs, who state that they want the Malian government to grant Azawad the right of self-determination, and to decide whether or not they wish to remain part of Mali. Neither group advocates the implementation of Sharia law.

MUJAO

The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUUJAO) is described by the United Nations as a splinter group of AQIM set up by dissidents in 2011. Despite this, they often appear to collaborate in fending off mutual enemies, both foreign and local. Generally speaking, this category encompasses anyone who is perceived as an enemy of



Islam, and especially the "Malian army, which let the enemies of Islam come to Gao"²⁴, but also their secular counterparts such as the MNLA. AQIM and MUJAO, as well as Ansar al-Dine, are unified in their common desire to bring Sharia law to Mali and the rest of the world, and the MUJAO reportedly counts on the support of regional Arab drug lords to acquire funding ²⁵.

Washington and the EU have often interpreted the existence of this multitude of factions as a sign that AQIM is weakening. Yet this is an erroneous analysis, and a dangerous one: many of these factions are loosely allied and, in any case, often share common goals, even if their methods and focuses differ.

1.2) Mali's relationship with France

The precariousness of the country's civilian population has been exacerbated by the famine which has spread across the Sahel region, and caused a further deterioration of the political situation with a limping economy and disastrous humanitarian crisis that threaten to spill over its neighbours. Mali's predicament poses a grave threat to European interests, not only due the kidnappings of EU nationals but also affects energy supplies as well as arms and drug trafficking flows that are threatening to worm their way into Europe.

As a result of these threats, the local government and the EU have united in order to promote stability through security and development (cf "Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel") by aiming to address the underlying causes of instability through local, national and regional programmes. Over the past few months, 22 EU countries have sent 550 troops to Mali, with France leading the pack with 207 troops, followed by 71 from Germany and the rest being divided by Belgium, Poland, Britain, Spain and the Czech Republic (source BBC). The EU hopes that the first European-

²⁴ Al-Jazeera quote from Abou Walid Sahraoui, spokesman for MUJAO. Source: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/02/2013210112741105848.html>

²⁵ UN Security Council. Source: <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE13412E.shtml>



trained Malian battalion will be ready by July, and set an example for the rest of the Malian forces, which currently hover around 6,300 soldiers (source), which will then have to rely on West African troops for support as France plans to withdraw most of its soldiers once training is completed.

France's involvement in Mali comes as no surprise. Indeed, France has often be accused, and not entirely unduly, of having put a considerable amount of effort to retain its political, economic and especially cultural influence in its former colonies, forming a "network" often referred to as "la Franceafrique". In order to understand this phenomenon, one must look back to the early 20th century, when the end of WWII finished exposing the contradictions inherent in the French assimilationist ideology throughout its African colonies. The idea of a *mission civilisatrice* had its roots in the French Revolution, but it emerged with unprecedented strength during the 19th century, although there are debates as to exactly when this occurred. According to Johnston (W.G Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal: The Struggle for Power in the Four Communes, 1900-1920*, p. 25), the 1848 Revolution that marked the onset of the *Seconde Republique* simultaneously signalled a new turn in French imperialism imbued with the desire to outdo its predecessor, the First Republic. As a result, this period saw the granting of a place for all Senegalese colonial deputies in the National Assembly in Paris. The experiment in Senegal strongly shaped colonial policy for the rest of French African colonies, including Mali, as it was the only colony at the time to have been granted such a (comparatively at least) level of "independence". Yet to understand France's motivations behind such strategies, it is necessary to grasp the mentality that accompanied it. Conklin (A. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1985-1930*,) brilliantly articulated the essence of the justification for imperialism as being based of the principle of "mastery" above all else. The belief was that the French had managed to achieve such a high degree of civilization thanks to their ability to have mastered nature as well as social behavior, freeing themselves from oppression and ignorance and instigating the reign of reason and knowledge, whereas the colonies had not. Despite not being focused on Africa, in Edward Said's main argument in *Orientalism* is nevertheless applicable: based on the Foucauldian discourse theory, he affirms that the



monopoly of knowledge is strongly linked with the expression of power, which rendered all French colonial understandings of their colonies political. It is upon this tenet that I put forward the case that the French assimilationist policy was ultimately well-intentioned, if pragmatic in its preoccupation to serve French interests.

However, the execution and the results of such policies, no matter their intentions, was ultimately one of the main catalysts for the dismantling of the French colonial empire. However, as noted above, France retains significant control over Mali and the rest of its former African colonies. It could be argued that this is a well-intentioned attempt to nurture the relationship through cultural exchanges and trade, which presumably would encourage development, but in Mali's case, as well as in other countries, the arrangement is somewhat less wholesome. Indeed, it can be viewed as the pursuit of a French neo-colonialist agenda, in which France secures resources in exchange for hefty bribes and military support. Now, with the government no longer in control of Mali, France's supplies of oil and uranium are under severe threat. Thus, it is certainly with these economic considerations in mind that Jean-Yves le Drian, the French Minister of Defence, defended France's intervention by stating that "it is impossible to sit and watch a terrorist state developing on Europe's doorstep" (ref). Indeed, it is worth noting that Areva, a leading French energy company, is in the process of opening a new site approximately 300 km from the Malian border, and that France is heavily reliant upon West Africa for its nuclear power derived from uranium: around 80% of French electricity runs on nuclear power. Additionally, the Malian government had just granted France and the USA exploration rights in March 2012, promoting foreign prospection under the Authority for the Promotion of Oil Research in Mali (AUREP). As Mehdi Taje from the Strategic Security Center for the Sahel and Sahara noted, France and America share the some of the same motivations for wanting to intercede in Mali: not only do they want to secure the country's precious resources, they also want to gain advantage over rival powers, namely Russia and India but especially the Chinese, who represent the most active threat after having gained permission to exploit Niger's oil less that two years ago (Ref). However, France's heavy-handed involvement has also been responsible for challenging the implementation of the EU Sahel Strategy from a regional point of view: Algeria's tense



relationship with its former metropole has proven to be an obstacle to obtaining cohesion, as Algeria often equates EU decisions with French ones, which has not been helped by the fact that France often appears as the EU's African spokesperson.

1.3) Future Outlook

At the time of the writing of this paper, France's troops, together with their local and regional allies, have succeeded in pushing the rebels to their mountain and desert strongholds. Furthermore, Francois Hollande has confirmed that he will uphold his decision to cut back on French military presence in Mali, with plans to leave behind just over a thousand soldiers by the end of the year and leaving the bulk of the peacekeeping mission to the United Nations. However, only time will tell whether this initial victory is indeed a victory in the longer term, and whether suicide bombings, like the one that occurred on the 13th of April 2013 in Kidal (northern Mali), are merely residual outbursts, or whether they will increase as French military presence decreases. Meanwhile, the Malian army has come under attack from the International Federation for Human Rights for breaching human rights and specifically targeting ethnic groups such as the Tuaregs and the Arabs. Despite receiving combat and strategic advice from their French allies, it seems that the training provided was not extensive enough to cover the prevention of unwarranted abuses of power.

Nevertheless, it would seem that foreign military intervention was not frowned upon by Mali's civilians. The Voice of America (ref) has compiled several accounts from Gao's citizens, and the general opinion seems to have been in favour of France's assistance in dealing with local armed groups. Indeed, many amongst the local populace fear and distrust the Malian army and are not confident in its ability to instil and maintain stability in the country. Niger's and Senegal's troops which has been sent to assist in overseeing operations are presumably not much better equipped to engage in the guerrilla warfare practiced by AQIM, MUJAO and their ilk.

However, even if these group managed to reaffirm their grip on Mali, it is highly unlikely that they have the financial resources, cohesiveness and numbers to be able to instigate a real, global jihad. Moreover, the Tuaregs have already failed two attempts to



rebel against the Malian government in 1990 and 2007, and they only acquired any real military strength after Gaddafi rallied and armed them during the Libyan civil war, after which they returned to Mali with AK47s in hand but lacking a truly united front. Finally, it would be ludicrous to claim that Mali's government was a paragon of democracy before it was overthrown. It is important to remember that it was the military's discontent with the government that provoked the coup, partly caused by its woeful incompetence in handling the conflicts in the north, especially in Azawad. Power in Mali currently lies, and has always lain, in the hands of those with the most and the most powerful weapons. It is therefore unlikely that the country's transitional government's, headed by Diango Sissoko, promise to hold elections in July will give birth to a truly democratic state.

2) Nigeria

2.1) Nigeria and the EU Sahel Strategy

As violence in Mali threatens to spill over to its neighbours, it is become increasingly clear that in order to be successful, regional actors have to be actively involved and participate in creating an environment which promotes security and development. This includes involving surrounding countries, and especially key players such as Nigeria. The ever-expanding threat of Boko Haram (the literal Hausa translation meaning "Western education is forbidden") affects not only the country itself, but also its neighbours, including Mali, where the group has taken part in military combat in Gao and is a contributing factor of destabilisation, highlighted by its close relationship with Al-Qaeda and subsidiaries. Yet it was only in mid-2012 that EU officials realised the overall impact of Boko Haram's activities on the rest of the Sahel region (ref). Fortunately, the Nigerian group's importance is slowly being reconsidered by EU Sahel strategists, albeit a lot of damage has already been done, and Boko Haram's involvement in Mali appears to be escalating: its alliance with AQIM and other African jihadi groups have enabled it to stretch beyond Nigeria's confines and become a truly regional threat. With those considerations in mind, it is imperative that the EU



mobilises ECOWAS and other regional and local authorities in order to address and contain Boko Haram's expansionist ambitions which are quickly spiralling out of control.

2.2) Understanding Boko Haram

Boko Haram first emerged in north-eastern Nigeria in 2001 thanks to Mohammed Yousuf, who has since then been apprehended and killed by governmental forces. Boko Haram's ideology positions itself directly against anything that is considered "Western" which is considered synonymous with immoral and anti-Muslim, and virulently rejects its educational values, including Darwinism. However, this must not be mistaken with a rejection of the modern world, as is evidenced by the group's reliance on modern apparel such as DVDs, cell phones and of course, bombs. The group's members believe that the Nigerian government has been seized by false Muslims and must be purged and replaced with true believers, i.e. Boko Haram itself, whose duty it is to establish Sharia law across the country.

For the first seven years or so of its existence, the group was more or less peaceful, but became increasingly violent after 2009 after it came to the attention of Nigerian authorities that its members were acquiring weapons. Unfortunately, governmental authorities heeded the numerous warnings too late, and their investigation into Boko Haram's activities quickly turned into a bloodbath with over 700 dead after the wave of violence that began on the 26th of July 2009. The United States Institute of Peace²⁶ notes that, since August 2011, the group has attempted to bomb public spaces on an almost weekly basis in north-eastern Nigeria, including churches and schools. At the same time it remarks that, unlike AQIM, Boko Haram's focus is not primarily directed towards Westerners or foreigners, but towards their own countrymen.

Boko Haram was born out of Nigeria's economic turmoil and country-wide dissatisfaction with the government. Nigerian history is fraught with ethnic and

²⁶ United States Institute of Peace Special Report by Andrew Walker available at <http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR308.pdf>



religious clashes, especially since the late 1980s, aggravated by the co-existence of a large proportion of Muslims and Christians in the same cities. However, reducing these conflicts to their religious elements is a reductive and erroneous move, as many of these conflicts were born out of political motivations, which, it can be said, are on equal footing with religious incentives. Muslims and Christians have traditionally been divided not only amongst ethnic and religious lines, but also political ones, as illustrated by the elections in 2011, when violence erupted in the southern regions, and especially Kaduna, over an electoral dispute. It is salient that the dysfunctional Nigerian political system, with its rampant abuses and endemic bribery and nepotism, has bred a generation of disillusioned citizens, many of them young and suffering from hardship²⁷ and living in a world where violence is the only way to gain authority and assert power. It follows that the state's first response to Boko Haram should therefore be one of violence.

2.3) Lagging crisis and nebulous future

Despite the government's protestations that it does not have the necessary resources to address the challenges posed by Boko Haram, it is clear that the main obstacle is a sheer lack of understanding about the group and an unwillingness to take the necessary- and possibly painful (at least for those in power)- steps to elaborate and implement a comprehensive and holistic strategy to tackle the problem at its roots. Indeed, President Goodluck Jonathan's announcement last year that the group's members had infiltrated senior government and military ranks has been accused of being unsubstantiated and self-serving, especially given that Goodluck seized this opportunity to launch a round of investigations and arrests, attempting to harness public sympathy for Boko Haram's attacks on his regime. It is therefore perhaps not coincidental that these public announcements came at the same time as he signed off an agreement to increase fuel

²⁷ According to the World Bank, "youth make up over half of Nigeria's population, yet 38% of them are either underemployed or unemployed and their education and skills levels are low". Source: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/03/26/world-bank-finance-nigerian-efforts-improve-education-quality-boost-job-opportunities-young-people>



prices. Some commentators even go as far as to claim that the president is exploiting Boko Haram's threat in order to increase national security budgets and to secure future elections. Unfortunately for Goodluck's strategy, Boko Haram has made its sentiments towards him abundantly clear by announcing that it will cease violent attacks as soon as they have obtained a guarantee that he will not present himself at the 2015 elections. In Primate Ademisorun Turton's words, "the activities of the sect will continue until our President speaks out on his political ambition come 2015"²⁸. This statement comes a week after the President has voiced out the possibility of offering amnesty to the rebels, which was flippantly rejected by the group's current leader, Abubakar Shekau, with the explanation that this offer was inappropriate given that Boko Haram was not guilty of any wrongdoings. He is quoted by the AFP news agency as having stated that "surprisingly, the Nigerian government is talking about granting us amnesty. What wrong have we done? On the contrary, it is we that should grant you pardon"²⁹.

Furthermore, amid this political tug-of-war the government has come to realise the extent to which some segments of the population support Boko Haram, even if they do not necessarily actively participate in its activities. According to Abubakar Kari from the University of Abuja, the present chaos is a direct consequence of the government's heavy-handed intervention against the group in 2009³⁰, which has swayed many civilians into tacitly supporting the rebels and considering them as the lesser of two evils. In addition, Boko Haram counts on a base of active, unabashed supporters in the north, who feel let down by the government's inability to provide them with economic opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty. As the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) National Secretary Bubu Galadima noted, "if people feel they are being denied anything or an injustice is being meted out to them, then there is a likelihood that they will take the law into their own hands and help themselves"³¹, as is shown to be the case. In conclusion, it is evident that, unless substantial changes are made to the way the government addresses the country's economic divisions, Boko Haram will continue to

²⁸ <http://nigerianewsday.com/national/2349-qhow-boko-haram-killings-will-endq-primate-ademisorun>

²⁹ <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-04-11-nigeria-boko-haram-leader-rejects-potential-amnesty-deal>

³⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15690981>

³¹ *ibid*



muster support (both financial and in kind) from Nigeria's dissatisfied populace and persist in using the guerilla tactics that the EU and its local allies find so hard to counter.



PART 3: Re-calibrating the Strategy - the need for regional partners and military engagement: Conclusive Thoughts

As these two case studies have highlighted, the Sahel Strategy's chances for long-term success depend mostly on its ability to engage with local West African partners and to develop a firm understanding of the complex and numerous groups that are the causes of political instability in the region. It should especially prioritise the involvement of key players such as Nigeria, who have the clout to tip the balance in either direction. Yet, although it appears the EU has (tardily) realised the need for a broader and more strategic framework, it remains unsure of which steps to take in order to achieve the desired effect. Critics argue that a broader focus would result into less targeted, and therefore less effective, scope for action, but perhaps what is needed is a more precise definition of what is implied by action. A targeted and narrowly defined area of military engagement is unquestionably strategically necessary, but when it comes to development, a wider and more flexible approach is likelier to yield more satisfying and sustainable results. Indeed, a militarised development initiative implies prohibitive costs and continuous physical presence in the region. On the other hand a local, grassroots approach is not only self-sustainable and cost-effective, but also directly empowers the population it aims to serve.

In the case of Nigeria, it has been demonstrated that economic grievances lie have allowed Boko Haram to seize momentum and power. Yet despite this knowledge, little has been done by the EU to help the government tackle these issues, which have not even been acknowledged as being a vital strategic threat to stability in the Sahel region. Although several meetings have taken place throughout 2012 between EU and Nigerian officials, the EU has stuck to its initial plans to only allocate a development aid budget for the country instead of scaling up the numbers in order to allow for a more comprehensive programme to kick-start the country's economy and generate employment. Certainly, it would be ill-advised to simply augment the budget and expect the country's economic problems to be solved overnight, not least because of Nigeria's notorious levels of corruption, but a re-vamping of economic exchanges would be



beneficial to both parties and would pave the way for development and thus security. Similarly, Mali's AQIM and MUJAO have capitalised on the country's poverty and lack of educational opportunities to offer an alternative to the government, which many have perceived as being viable to the so-called democracy that did little to promote the population's interests and prospects.

Furthermore, it is also astonishing that the ECOWAS participation was only actively courted after the programme was already well under-way, considering its powerful and long-standing links to Mali and Nigeria (not to mention Niger, Mauritania and other regional actors) and first-hand experience and understanding of AQIM, Boko Haram and their peers. Fortunately, this situation is now being addressed, and ECOWAS is now receiving intelligence training from the EU, and a number of projects such as the ECOWAS Peace and Security Project have been set up and are being funded by the EU in order to equip its regional partner with the necessary tools to take action independently in the future. Nevertheless, these oversights in seeking out the active involvement of local partners indicate that the EU's primary interests lie in the preservation of its influence and economic interests, and that regional actors are only valuable to the extent that they can assist in protecting these interests.

Thus, this study concludes that, although recent developments and evolutions in the implementation of the Sahel Strategy have been very encouraging, much work remains to be done. It is at this stage premature to pronounce a damning verdict on the Sahel Strategy's chances of achieving long-term success in their regional goals, but it is clear that in order for this to be possible, an urgent recalibration is necessary. This shift of focus must be direct firstly towards developing a better grasp of the cultural, religious and social environment in which extremist groups have found fertile ground to operate and thrive and, secondly, towards involving anchor states and institutions that are better-positioned to promote a regionally sustainable initiative to addressing local security and development issues. Not doing so is not only likely to result in wasted efforts over the long-term, but also damage the EU's credibility in future initiatives. This credibility and faith in the EU's ability to intervene internationally is of paramount importance in today's geopolitical panorama if Europe wishes to remain a key player in the foreign policy arena and face up to rival powers such as the US and China. More



importantly, if managed capably, the EU's involvement in the Sahel region has the potential to finally address the humanitarian and security problems that have been plaguing the region for decades: thanks to years of practice in formulating and building the regional institutions to implement them, as well as conducting peacekeeping missions, the EU has the unique expertise and ambition that are required to undertake this enormous challenge. Now that it has been presented with the opportunity to do so, the question is whether it will succeed before budgets and patience run out.