INTRODUCTION

For the past decade, increasing instability in the Sahel and Sahara region has been a source of growing concern in Europe and the United States. Western governments have been worried that the weakness of state control in the area would allow criminal and terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda in the Islamist Maghreb and other jihadist organizations to expand their influence and establish safe havens in areas outside government control. Political instability within the Sahel region and each state's complicity with organized crime, were the main factors allowing organizations such as AQIM to grow. Furthermore, the presence of few alternative activities that could produce similar profits and rapid enrichment led to the spread of organized crime and more specifically to activities such as smuggling of Moroccan cannabis resin, cocaine smuggling, and kidnapping for ransom. The crimes in the Sahel region have caused many problems to the physical and psychological world of the inhabitants. Environmental, political, humanitarian and economic problems have arisen, and it is very important to unite forces worldwide in order to diminish these problems and prevent them from happening again by restoring peace within the Sahel region. Criminal activities are widely spread and every day that passes by, the strength of the warlords, which are responsible for the majority of it, increases. For that reason, with the prevention of crimes by warlords, our world and especially the Sahel region is one step closer to restore peace.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Militia

A military force that is raised from the civil population to supplement a regular army in an emergency.

Warlords

A warlord is a military commander who has seized power, especially in one section of a country or a region. In our case warlords are considered not only individuals but also criminal organizations who have gained power within the Sahel region taking into advantage their military power and their political influence.

Ungoverned warlordism

It refers to a type of warlordism in which the warlord is operating independently of the state and is viewed as a rebel, insurgent, or strategic political competitor of the regime. In the case of the Sahel region the warlords event though ungoverned, they do have a political influence since they are the ones who have the power.

Narcotrafficking

It refers to the illicit trade of drugs which is one of the main criminal actions of the warlords in the Sahel region.

Background information

Key drivers of the crisis

There was a major drought in the Sahel in 1914, caused by annual rains far below average, that caused a large-scale famine. After this drought, and even though the region underwent an increase in rainfall in the 1960's, everything started to fall apart. Recurrent shocks (droughts, floods, epidemics, locust), chronic poverty and political instability have contributed to the deterioration of livelihoods and to a lack of opportunities for the youth. Above 50% of the population lives below the poverty line and the life expectancy is around 60 years old. With the market being unstable, warlords took advantage of the vulnerability of the nations within the Sahel region and caused more problems than already existed. This vulnerability of the nations only became worse, since the

presence of State administration and access to basic social services, remained limited in areas of insecurity in parts of the north and centre of Mali. Finally, inter-community conflicts and socio-political factors continue to fuel sporadic displacements allowing the warlords to influence political figures and increase corruption.

Conflicts and political instability

Most states in the Sahel region have witnessed various attempts by rulers or aspiring rulers to establish their legitimacy and the lack of political stability is a huge obstacle in acquiring that. Since independence, Niger has had seven republican regimes and has experienced four military coups. Mali has undergone three military coups and Mauritania at least four. Burkina Faso confronted military mutinies in 2011 and it's facing a potential transition from the regime of its ageing President Campaoré. All of these nations, are states that lack legitimacy in the eyes of the people, and are undermined by corruption and its adverse impact on development. On the other hand, Boko Haram-related violence seems to be never-ending, affecting 30 million people living in the poorest areas of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. This lack of political stability, is proven to be beneficial for the warlords since the government is unable to protect its citizens and the dire consequences that may result from such a situation, were dramatically illustrated in Mali in 2012, when the Malian state forces were proven powerless to protect the North against the Tuareg separatists (MNLA) and jihadist groups (Ansar Dine, AQIM, MUJAO). Furthermore, in January 2013 a French-led and Chad-supported intervention stopped the advance of the warlords which tried to take advantage of the whole country. The conflict compounded the security and humanitarian crisis, in part by disrupting supply routes and causing food shortages.

Displacements due to lack of security within the nations

Due to the numerous attacks by criminal organizations and warlords, such as Boko-Haram and MUJAO resulting in the weakening of each country's boarders, there has been a steep increase in the number of migrants within the Sahel region. As of December 2015, an estimated 9.1 million people need urgent assistance and protection. More than 2.5 million people have been displaced by Boko Haram violence, of which 2 million in Nigeria alone – half of which are children, and as far as far as Mali is concerned 200,000 Malians remain displaced. Finally, an anarchic Libya, a deteriorating situation in Darfur, and the return to civil war in the Central African Republic, had a deep impact on the Sahel countries and continue to compound their chronic difficulties. Cameroon and Chad both host over 300,000 refugees each, most of which in already extremely vulnerable areas. All the displaces have lost their homes and they are often being hosted in highly vulnerable communities.

People do not have the psychological strength to deal with the violence and insecurity that exists in Sahel Region and they are in desperate need of emergency relief. They are begging for an assistance and protection after all the suffering caused by civil wars, Boko Haram violence and lack of security. They don't have a choice as the violent conflict has led to a surge in population displacement. Conflict in northeast Nigeria, forced people to be internally displaced in Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Also, in Mali the volatile security situation has a severe impact on civilians as it is affecting the market, it is preventing the full restoration of basic services and at the same time it has a negative effect on humanitarians that are not able to access those people in need. Some people decide to leave the Sahel region in order to pursuit a different and a better future, but unfortunately the majority of these people are being displaced under the force of violence and both civil wars but also external conflicts.

Major countries and organization involved

Mali

This specific part of the Sahel region for the past decade, has suffered from various natural disasters such as floods, which have resulted in a steep increase in the rates of poverty and famine. In the coming rainy season, 30,000 people are expected to be affected by flooding, and this is just one of the many problems

Figure 1: Somalia's warlord-governed military stalks on the streats on a regular basis.

these people face. Poverty and famine have weakened the people and allowed the warlords to control the nation by taking advantage of the high rates of political corruption. Organized crime truly began to take hold in northern Mali at the time of a rebellion led by several Tuareg officers from Kidal, that began in May 2006. While the outbreak of the rebellion was due to wider political grievances, rivalries over the control of smuggling gradually became more prominent in the dynamics of the conflict. The political leaders of the country took advantage of the situation in order to exert its influence by playing leaders from certain communities against others and relying on select tribes to keep the north under control. From August 2007 onward, only a small group of rebels continued to fight the criminal organizations and with the political stability needed being absent the country is mostly under the influence of the warlords.

Chad

As far as natural disasters but also illnesses are concerned, the same thing applies to Chad. The country has been struggling in order to strengthen its economy but with the market being unstable and the crops being ruined by the numerous floods over the past years, the country is in constant need for help in the form of humanitarian, military and economic support. Despite the malfunctions within the nation Chad was able to assist France in 2015, in a mission to support Mali in their fight against radical Islamist insurgents who tried to seize power in the North African nation. Finally, Due to the ongoing crisis in the Lake Chad Basin, Chad is now the seventh largest refugee-hosting country in the world with over 750,000 displaced persons, the majority of whom are refugees or Chadian returnees who fled from the Central African Republic, Libya, Nigeria, and Sudan.

Libya

The crisis in Libya started out with peaceful demonstrations on 15 February 2011 but quickly turned into an internal conflict after street protests were violently suppressed by the Government. After diplomatic initiatives by the UN failed to offer a solution to the crisis, the conflicts only became more and also worse as time passed by. The price of this on-going crisis is not only paid by the Libyan people but also affects countries of the Sahel region such as Chad, Mali, the Niger, Algeria etc. In a relatively short period of time, the Governments of these countries, had to deal with the huge influx of hundreds of thousands of traumatized and impoverished returnees as well as the inflow of unspecified and unquantifiable numbers of arms and ammunition from the Libyan arsenal. In addition, these countries are directly threatened by an impending food security and nutrition crisis that could further exacerbate and negatively affect the political, social and economic situation in the region.

France

Relative to its other commitments and to other European nations' focus on the continent, France is relatively active across Africa and that can be easily justified by the presence of many French colonies such as Chad and Mali within the Sahel region. Of 8,150 military personnel deployed overseas in January 2014, 810 were in West Africa, 3,565 in the Sahel-Saharan band, and 1,600 in Central Africa. Even though nothing is yet to be publicly announced France seems to be changing its approach towards the crisis by focusing more on combating extremist groups and preventing established terrorist sanctuaries. Though not adding any additional troops, the 3,000 French soldiers already stationed in the Sahel would be re-organized into "specialized posts." A post in Ivory Coast would be used for logistics, a second in Chad for air power, and a third in Niger for unmanned aircraft. These specialized posts aim to increase efficiency and reduce the time needed to deploy troops and supplies in potentially chaotic zones. Despite these military successes, however, Operation Barkhane may be doing more harm than good, since what is actually being done is providing crucial support to the repressive governments that are at the heart of the Sahel's problems.
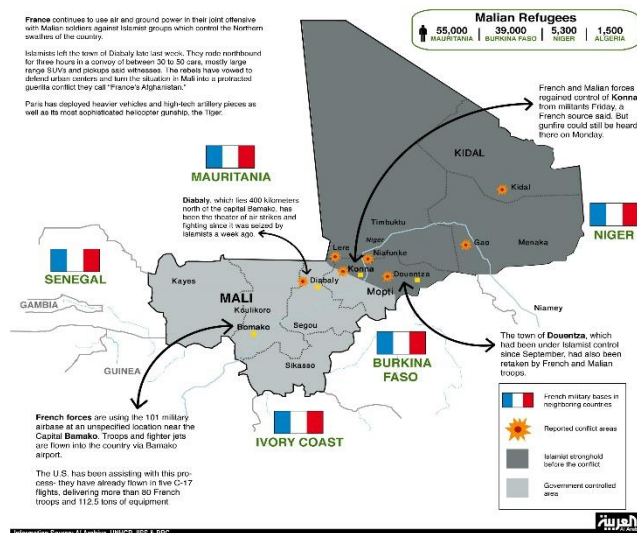

Figure 2: Basic details and characterization of French intervention in Mali

United States of America

Historically, U.S. interest in and support for Africa has been inconsistent. After an unsuccessful intervention in Somalia in the early 1990s, U.S. policy for many years was mainly to avoid military involvement in Africa and thus the Sahel region. In recent years, the United States has altered their approach and pursued a more balanced one that is still constrained by limited means and will. For example, recent U.S. involvement in the Sahel is still small, including the addition of a base for unmanned aerial systems in Niger and training support for local militaries engaged in peacekeeping or counterterrorism missions.

ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States is a regional group of fifteen West African countries. Founded on 28 May 1975, with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos, this organization's aim is to promote economic integration across the region. Being one of the pillars of the African Economic Community, the organization was founded in order to achieve "collective self-sufficiency" for its member states by creating a single large trading bloc through an economic and trading union. Its assistance does not end there since it also serves as a peacekeeping force in the region. The ECOWAS Commission has developed, in collaboration with the West African Monetary Union Commission and the Permanent Interstates Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, a Sahel Strategy Document with an Action Plan composed of 31 priority projects estimated at 4.75 billion dollars. The implementation of this action plan is scheduled for the period of 2016-2020, and it is supported by a Coordination Platform comprising major stakeholders.

UNODC

UNODC is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime. Established in 1997 through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention, UNODC operates in all regions of the world through an extensive network of field offices. Since the illicit trade of drugs is one of the main problems within the Sahel region, resulting in the strengthening of the warlords, this organization plays an important role in the efficient tackle of the issue.

Figure 3: Representation of involvement of parties within the ECOWAS nations.

Focus on the Sahel trip

During his four-nation trip to the crisis- African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, the European Commissioner for Development and NEPAD, visited the countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger (shown on the map). The European Union and the World Bank pledged over $8.2 billion to the region.

Country	Burkina Faso	Chad	Mali	Niger
Population	17 million	11.5 million	15.8 million	16.1 million
GDP per capita	$643	$885	$694	$383
HDI Rank*	181	183	175	186

Human Development Index rank out of 187 countries

Sources: CILSS, UNDP, World Bank (2012 figures).

AQIM

An Islamist militant organization which aims to overthrow the Algerian government and institute an Islamic state. To that end, it is currently engaged in an anti-government campaign not only as far as Algeria is concerned but also the Sahel region and more specifically Mali is concerned.

MUJAO

A splinter group of the organization of Al-Qaeda in AQIM. MUJAO's leaders are known to be drug traffickers involved in the drug trades in the Sahel region.

Boko Haram

Boko Haram is a branch of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. It has been active in Nigeria since 2009. The name of the group means "Western" or "non-Islamic" education is a sin. The group is active in the north of Nigeria, and wants to impose radical Sharia law upon Nigeria and also is fighting to overthrow the government and create an Islamic state instead. If it was to the Boko Haram discretion, it wouldn't have been allowed to Muslims to participate in any political or social activity that is associated with Western Society. Its first attempt to create an Islamic state was made in 2009 when they launched military operations. Since then, the terrorist group has increased the use of asymmetrical attacks in the Sahel Region, which means that they have expanded their attacks in Chad and Niger, countries that have committed forces to the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Furthermore, there have been several killings and suicide bombers placed on Chad in order to kill police officers. In 2012, tensions within Boko Haram resulted in gradual split of the group between Salafist conservative faction led by Abu Usmatul al-Ansari, and the more dominant, violent faction led by Abubakar Shekau. By 2015, part of the group split into al-Qaeda affiliated Ansaru, and Shekau's faction became ISIL's West Africa branch.

Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

European Parliament resolution of 22 October 2013

Acknowledging the fact that the situation in the Sahel region is out of control posing a threat not only for the people of the Sahel region but also for the global community, since terrorist groups and

criminal organizations have been growing in strength while taking advantage of the region, the UN signed this resolution which recommends various solution in order to tackle important issues regarding the crisis. Accountability and reform of governmental, judicial and security institutions and Civic freedoms and democratic governance are topics mainly regarding the political instability in the region while at the same time various humanitarian prospects are covered.

Security Council's Resolution 2295 (2016)

This specific resolution is concentrated in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) which is now authorized to adopt a more "proactive and robust posture", including when protecting civilians against asymmetric threats, while increasing its troop levels and extending its mandate for a year. Since Mali is the country in need of much greater help for the time being, this resolution also gave permission to the French forces to be present and act in Mali, within the limits of their capacities and areas of deployment, until the end of MINUSMA's mandate.

Security Council's Resolution 1970 (2011)

After expressing its grave concern at the situation in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and condemning the violence and use of force against civilians this resolution focused on the preservation of peace in Africa and the establishment of the sense of security within the nations. More specifically, and due to the results of the on-going crisis in Libya at the time, the UN focused on tackling issues such as illicit trade of weapons between a state and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya but also issues of humanitarian character. Finally, after diplomatic initiatives launched by the UN proved to be unsuccessful, the Security Council together with the resolution 1973 (2011) authorized the use of "all necessary measures" to protect the civilian population.

Previous attempts to solve this issue

Even though the only main attempts to resolve the issue are the resolutions mentioned above and actions as the one taken by France, the UN is at the moment helping the Sahel region by providing economic, military and humanitarian assistance to the countries involved in the issue. As far as political instability is concerned, UNODC recently helped broker an agreement among Mali, Morocco, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Algeria to address the problems caused by drug trafficking, organized crime and terrorism. Also, in July, the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of a

peacekeeping mission to assist Mali on its way back to stability. Moving on to the fragile economies of the nations within the Sahel region, many funds have been raised by NGO's in order to ensure, or at least try, to financially boost these countries.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The Sahel region is directly related with inhumane conditions of living, natural disasters, deaths and criminal organization which overrule the nations by forcing their power upon the people. In order for the UN to efficiently tackle this crisis, many solutions must be proposed and agreed. One possible solution to the topic is for the north of Mali to be ''reclaimed'' by the government and me be set under its control, with the help of the UN. After reclaiming the north, the illicit trafficking should be tackled with efficiency and as soon as possible. On the other hand, Western societies should think of refraining from pushing regional governments to release criminals as part of ransom deals and peacekeeping troops could get more actively involved bearing in mind that time is of great essence. Furthermore, all member states should take the necessary measurements in order to establish security throughout their borders resulting in the elimination, or at least control, of the smuggling networks. Finally, political stability is of great importance and for that reason, the leaders of each nation within the Sahel region should establish legitimacy and tackle corruption within their borders, with the help of the UN.

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