

DIALOGUES

SECURITAIRES
DANS L'ESPACE
SAHELO - SAHARIEN

SECURITY CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN THE SAHELO-SAHARAN REGION

THE MOROCCO PERSPECTIVE

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CONTENT

FOREWORD	4
INTRODUCTION	5
I. MAJOR SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO MOROCCO	6
II. MOROCCAN APPROACH TO SECURITY	11
III. MOROCCAN STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE SAHELO-SAHARAN REGION	13
IV. CHALLENGES, SECURITY THREATS AND JOINT APPROACHES IN THE SAHELO-SAHARAN REGION	14
V. RECOMMENDATIONS	15
BIBLIOGRAPHY	17

FOREWORD

The recent Malian and Libyan crises have exacerbated the multidimensional insecurity (at personal, economic, political, social, environmental, healthcare, etc. levels) that affects the populations living the Sahelo-Saharan region, and have showcased not only the weakness of the States but also the necessity for regional cooperation, especially between the Maghreb and West Africa. Together, they may face up to similar challenges.

The project called "Dialogues about Security in the Sahelo-Saharan Region" stems from this observation. It was initiated by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Office in Mali, in partnership with its counterparts in Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia, in order to underscore the strong interdependences that exist between North and West Africa regarding security matters, and to promote national and sub-regional dialogues about the security challenges and issues that prevail within the States and across borders.

It aims at assessing the overall situation in the region, in light of the concept of human security. This is why country-based studies were conducted in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad and Tunisia. Each country-based study went through a validation process led by a committee of human security specialists from the country in question. Also, each country-based study was discussed by experts during a workshop that was organized for the purpose of not only identifying shared issues, but also agreeing on the top political actions that must be carried out in the Sahelo-Maghreb region.

These country-based studies represent the first phase of an on-going multiyear project. They are also the intellectual basis on which some upcoming activities will be based, such as a regional conference that will focus on the priority issues that the experts have defined during their respective workshops.

The outcomes of the project will be used by all the key players involved in the various aspects of human security across the region. They will also be important sources of information and guidelines for the policy-makers and the members of the civil society, as well as for national and foreign researchers and university staff members.

Bamako, July 2016

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INTRODUCTION

Political instability, jihadism¹ and various kinds of illicit trafficking have affected negatively North Africa, the Sahelo-Saharan region, and Western Europe in recent years. This means that Morocco belongs to a region where identity, security, economic and political crises have generated a number of threats.

The Moroccan security sector includes the main institutions that handle justice and security issues, and the related control and management activities. These institutions are:

- The Royal Armed Forces (FAR), Royal Gendarmerie, General Directorate for National Security (DGSN), General Directorate for Counterintelligence (DGST)², General Directorate for Studies and Documentation (DGED)³, Military Police, Auxiliary Forces and private security companies.
- The bodies in charge of law enforcement: the judiciary, the prison system, and the investigation and prosecution services.
- The management and control bodies of the executive branch (the King, the Head of Government, the Ministries of Justice, Interior, Finance and Public Administration, and National Defense).
- The management and control bodies of the legislative branch: Parliament and parliamentary committees.
- The supervisory bodies: National Council of Human Rights (CNDH), and the office of the Ombudsman (Diwan Al Madhalim)⁴.
- The informal supervisory bodies: Research centers, human rights organizations, political parties and media.

One may ask a few questions:

- What are the main features of the security challenges that Morocco is facing?
- What are the sources and characteristics of the existing threats?
- What are the factors that hinder the implementation of a regional security policy, and what impact does the conflict in the Sahara have on the regional security situation?

This study will consist in synthesizing the major security issues and their related dimensions: strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats. It will also address the following questions:

- What lessons can be learned from the emergence and characteristics of the existing threats?
- What are the changes to be expected and what are their consequences?
- What are the necessary political, security, religious, social, civil and cultural measures that the Moroccan State should implement?
- What approaches and analysis ought to be used in formulating a comprehensive security strategy that aims at mobilizing all segments of the Moroccan society.

According to several Moroccan political, religious and security officials, the kingdom has put in place a national security strategy that is proactive, inclusive, global and permanent. This strategy focuses on security on the one hand, and on

¹ In this study, the concept of 'jihadism' refers to the action of extremist groups that advocate "Jihad" as a propaganda tool.

² One needs to identify both the internal and external threats to Morocco in order to deal systematically with their related security challenges and issues. This approach includes a restructuring of the security institutions, as with the case of the Central Bureau for Judiciary Investigation (BCIJ) that was created in March 2015. It fights against jihadism, crime, drugs and weapons trafficking, terrorist attacks, and kidnapping. The BCIJ falls under the General Directorate for Counterintelligence (DGST). This new agency was created in a context of proliferating attacks claimed by jihadist organizations in the region.

³ The General Directorate for Studies and Documentation (DGED) is a State agency charged with intelligence and counterintelligence operations, and headed by a civilian since 2005.

⁴ "Diwan Al Madhalim": According to the Decree of 4 December 2003, the role of this forum is to promote mediation between Moroccan citizens and the State administration, and to deal with complaints and grievances. For the aggrieved citizens, this office proved an effective remedy to decisions or acts rendered by the Government or a public authority, but deemed inequitable or contrary to the law.

economic and social development, on the other hand. Morocco is positioning itself as a model country in terms of reorganizing its religious sector, updating its legislative and regulatory texts, and upgrading its State agencies in charge of security, human development, and international cooperation.

I. MAJOR SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO MOROCCO

Morocco is facing security challenges that have specific features due to the regional geopolitical context. Given these multifaceted threats, Morocco must understand the true nature and dimensions of the transnational organized crime that is spreading over its national territory. It needs an effective security strategy against the spreading of such threats.

1.1 Jihadism

Many political and security officials have stated clearly that Morocco is committed to fighting against jihadism. The State authorities believe that all members of the international community must participate in the collective fight against this scourge. They presented their multidimensional approach to fighting religious extremism during a meeting organized by the Executive Directorate of the Antiterrorism Committee (DECT) in New York, on September 30, 2014. According to the Ministry of the Interior, this approach helped the country to suppress the following threats between 2002 and 2015:

"The neutralization of 126 terrorist organizations, including 41 with ties to hotbeds like Iraq, Syria and the Sahel⁵, and the arrest of 2676 terrorists, including 266 recidivists;

The neutralization of 276 malicious acts, including 119 bombings that targeted offices used by security services, tourist sites, diplomatic legations, and Christian and Jewish places of worship;

109 assassination attempts on members of the security services, Moroccan Jews, civil servants, political and foreign personalities, and tourists, as well as 7 abduction attempts and 41 theft attempts and armed attacks⁶.

At the DECT meeting, the Moroccan delegation showed that the members of jihadist groups represented more than 80 nationalities, and they embodied a threat that could destabilize the whole world. Moroccans constituted a significant portion of foreign fighters affiliated to the Islamic State and Nusra. Some official sources provide the following figures:

By the end of 2014, 1203 Moroccan fighters had joined the ISIS network in Syria and Iraq⁷, including 218 ex-prisoners. This calls into question the role of the prison system with regard to reintegrating "extremists." More than 254 individuals perished during battles or suicide missions, notably in Syria. Hundreds are still looking for opportunities to join ISIS. The Moroccan approach to security issues focuses on disrupting the financing networks, and the recruiting and sending of fighters because 473 Moroccans with dual nationality also entered Syria from Europe. Out of this group of 473 individuals, 360 came from Belgium, 52 from France, 37 from the Netherlands, 13 from Spain, 6 from Germany, 3 from Great Britain, 1 from Italy and 1 from Greece⁸.

⁵ In his statement dated 20/01/2016 and published by the site le360.ma (+ MAP), the Director of the BCII mentions some other figures. He said that "since 2002, anticipating terrorist attacks allowed them to neutralize 150 terrorist groups, and more than 50 groups had ties with conflict zones like the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area, Iraq, Syria and the Sahel".

⁶ See the report presented by the Moroccan delegation, on September 30, 2014, at the meeting of the Executive Directorate of the Antiterrorism Committee. www.un.org. New York. 2014.

⁷ Other sources reported 2,500 Moroccan fighters in the ranks of the ISIS. In March 2015, the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior stated that nearly 3,000 Moroccan jihadists were fighting in Syria and Iraq, and about 2,000 had dual nationality (Morocco and a European country). Since the Casablanca attacks of May 2003, Morocco has adopted a "proactive" strategy to combat terrorism. This security policy made it possible to arrest 2,500 "radical Islamists" between 2003 and 2015, and to dismantle more than "140 sleeper cells." According to many agencies, Morocco has put in place a coherent and effective strategy to fight against widespread terrorism. In 2014 and 2015, the country has accelerated the pace in dismantling jihadist cells (up to 20 dismantled cells annually). This proactive approach has helped Morocco to gather a maximum of information on the objectives and the operating mode of the ISIS.

⁸ For the period of March 2015 - January 2016, the Director of the BCII has reported some other data: "This office has dismantled 23 terrorist cells that had targeted national and Western interests, and had recruited and sent combatants to Syria and Iraq, on behalf of the ISIS (...). The cell that was dismantled in January 2016 first intended to go to Syria, then opted to go to Libya in order to join the local branch of the Islamic State in this country". See le360.ma. 20/01/2016 issue.

In addition, 128 jihadists had returned to Morocco. They were suspected of wanting to carry out terrorist attacks in the kingdom and were arrested. This means that the country failed completely at reintegrating the Moroccans "jihadists" who had returned⁹.

One should note that Morocco and the Netherlands submitted 19 relevant reports ('applications') on foreign fighters in 2014¹⁰. In addition, the Moroccan Parliament has recently voted an anti-terrorism Act that punishes terrorist attacks or attempts at joining terrorist organizations in combat zones with sentences of 5 to 10 years in prison.

In 2015, rallying Syria proved very risky. Thus, the ISIS strongly encouraged North Africans to join its ranks in Libya. Its new strategy is based on massing North African fighters in Libya. An analysis of the latest communiqués and videos of the ISIS (January 2016) reveals that this terrorist organization intends to strengthen its presence in Libya, while it intensifies its attacks on Europe. Its goal is to become a permanent threat to the Mediterranean basin.

This represents a change for Moroccans who wanted to join the ISIS because Libya was not their favorite destination. In 2012 and 2013, the first groups of fighters had joined the ranks of Ansar Ach-Sharia actually.

Morocco takes the presence of Moroccan fighters in Libya seriously because they are very well trained and plan to come back home. In this regard, four points should be highlighted:

- 1- Before 2013, the Moroccan fighters who had joined the ISIS filled the ranks of Harakat Cham Al Islam, founded by Brahim Benchekroune. He was a Moroccan, and was killed in Syria during a military operation. His Katiba¹¹ included fighters from the Maghreb region only. This tells of the problems North Africans face when it comes to integrating the branches of jihadist organizations¹². Hundreds of them went to Turkey. Others chose to return to Morocco where they were arrested and imprisoned.
- 2- When the ISIS was created in February 2013, a North African recruit facilitated the integration of fighters from Maghreb within its ranks. This explains the significant number of kamikazes from Maghreb among the ISIS groups that operate in Syria and Iraq.
- 3- The number of Moroccan fighters in the ranks of the ISIS in Syria, Libya and Iraq keeps increasing. One needs to analyze seriously the reasons behind this phenomenon.
- 4- Several sources indicated that the majority of Moroccan fighters came from the northern region of the kingdom. They leave the country via Ceuta and Mlilia where crime-based networks finance their recruiting and sending to conflict zones. For the past two years, cooperation between Spanish and Moroccan security agencies made it possible to dismantle several jihadist networks and cells in both countries.

1.2 Origins and characteristics of the existing threats

New forms of armed conflicts are affecting North Africa. These conflicts do not have the morphology of conventional conflicts. Proxy wars have now become a significant mean to destabilize regions of strategic interests¹³.

Morocco maintains a climate of secrecy around its arms purchases. The number of soldiers is no longer a valid criterion. Warfare is no longer based on conventional battles between armies. Thus, Morocco is leaning towards the purchasing of sophisticated weapons like drones, and the strengthening of its surveillance capabilities (modern equipment). This approach is justified by the fact that Morocco is expected to play a strategic role in the fight against international terrorism. In addition, Algeria does not represent a threat at this moment, since its military forces are engaged in its southern and eastern regions.

⁹ Regarding Moroccans who join jihadist groups, the Director of the BICJ said: "For us, all of them are terrorists, and may be subjected to investigation and prevention measures if they return to Morocco". See le360.ma. 20/01/2016 issue.

¹⁰ Both Morocco and the Netherlands presided over the inaugural meeting of the "Task force on foreign terrorist fighters" held in Marrakech under the auspices of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF). December 2014.

¹¹ Term used to denote a group of fighters in Arabic.

¹² Several sources mentioned that ISIS fighters from the Maghreb region face integration and communication problems. This explains why several North African jihadists come back to their country. This phenomenon existed already within Nusra. A former prisoner from Guantanamo, Brahim Benchekroun, was then appointed emir of Harakat Cham Al Islam because jihadists from Maghreb were the majority in this katiba.

¹³ Defense Nationale magazine. E.S.I.G. NO. 751. France. June 2012.

The destabilizing effect of proxy wars is highly visible in the forms of separatist and jihadist movements. These groups impose new forms of conflict: suicide attacks, urban warfare, media propaganda, sabotage, etc. They conduct an asymmetric military campaign.

The ongoing multifaceted crises in the Arab world and the Sahelo-Saharan region have and will continue to have a significant impact on the security situation in Morocco. The absence or weakness of the State authorities across the region, ongoing religious wars in the Middle East (especially between Sunni and Shi'a groups), political instability and insecurity in the Sahel and in Libya, rising level of violence in the Middle East, and the involvement of regional and international forces in the crises in the Arab world contribute to the success of the recruiting efforts and the implantation of jihadist movements. Multifaceted demands based on ethnic, autonomist, separatist reasons, security issues and the porosity of the borders constitute endemic problems that threaten the fragile stability that exists in the Northern part of Africa. The economic situation and the social, political and cultural contexts are affected negatively. The end result is forced mobility or migration, particularly to the countries located on the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. These threats have a serious impact on the issues of peace, security and stability in the region. The security and stability of a society transpire through its handling of such issues as law and justice, cultural diversity and good governance, among others.

Morocco adopted the position of facing up to religious extremism after the triggering events of 2003¹⁴ had turned hypothetical certainties upside down. The State authorities came up with a new strategic thinking and listed terrorism as a major threat that requires coordinated actions at global level. Given its geographic position, Morocco is concerned with the situations of the Arab world, the Mediterranean basin and the Sahelo-Saharan region.

In the face of various threats, Morocco must put in place a security and military strategy. In the context of its geopolitical relations, it must cooperate with the States of the region. This means that Morocco bears some important responsibilities when it comes to ensuring international security. The recent jihadist attacks around the world show that no country seems out of reach of the multifaceted threats; only the degree of exposure to threats varies according to the geographic location of each State, and its ability to remain vigilant and anticipate various threats.

The main question for Morocco is the following: How do the State authorities stop the dynamics behind the recruiting of fighters for the Islamic State or for Nusra? These dangerous groups fascinate from a distance, and to an extent that seems impossible to counter. They provide "identities" to people who are at a loss in their own societies. The use social networks and other means to recruit misfits who find in their allegiance to the IS a kind of revenge against their own States. The reasons for joining the ISIS or Nusra vary from one country to another.

Given the number of Moroccan fighters in the ranks of the IS, one should identify the reasons and origins of such a migration. Several sources revealed that the majority of Moroccan fighters are from the northern region of the country. They join jihadist groups through recruiting networks based in Ceuta, Mlilia and Fnideq in particular. Despite the effort made by the Moroccan State in transforming the economic and social conditions in the northern region, smuggling activities still attract a large number of young people. In the short term, it is urgent to restructure these informal activities in order to stop many Moroccan from joining jihadist groups.

1.3 Jihadism in North Africa

Jihadism is evolving rapidly. Morocco is influenced by the connections that jihadist in the country have established with groups that operate in the region. They represent ramifications that can be a threat to Morocco:

- The presence of Abdelmalek Droukdel, the emir of AQIM, in Northeast Algeria remains a threat to the Maghreb and the Sahel. In January 2014, Khalid Chaib (Abu Loukmane), one of Droukdel's closest assistants in Bejaia, was selected as the new leader of the Ansar Ach-Sharia movement in Tunisia and Libya. He replaced Abu Ayad. Recently a branch of Ansar Ach-Sharia pledged allegiance to the IS. The presence of Jond Al Khilafa in Northeast Algeria also signals that jihadist groups are very active in this portion of North Africa.

¹⁴ The evening of May 16, 2003, 14 extremists launched suicide attacks on various hotels, restaurants and community centers in Casablanca. These young people came from the slums in Casablanca. They joined a Salafist jihadist group that was affiliated with Al-Qaida. In the end, 12 out of the 14 attackers were killed, as well as 33 other persons.

- The return of Mokhtar Bel Mokhtar to Central Sahara now that he has negotiated an agreement with Droukdel will affect the entire region. In 2014, Bel Mokhtar managed to unify the jihadist groups Moulattamoun, the movement for unity and jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Al Mouwakiouun Bi Dimaa – 'Signatories by blood' - into a single Katiba: Al Mourabitoun. However, a fraction of Al Mourabitoun, headed by Aboulwalid Sahraoui pledged allegiance to the IS. This triggered a race between AQIM and the IS in North Africa. Recent IS videos (January 2016) mention a concern about the rebirth of AQIM. The IS calls on the AQIM Mujahideen to join the Caliphate of Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi²⁵. The return of Iyad Ag Ghali, the head of Ansar Eddine in Mali, and the linkage between this group and AQIM also explain the terrorist attacks that occurred in Bamako in November 2015 and in Ouagadougou in January 2016.

These events occur at a time when some North African States are facing problems of destabilization. This is a source of concern for Morocco. Some Moroccan sources indicated that several Moroccan fighters received authentic Libyan passports to facilitate their entering into the kingdom.

Moreover, the re-emergence of AQIM and the creation of a new command of the ISIS in Libya can disrupt the processes of democratic transition in Tunisia and of political transition in Libya.

1.4 Drugs

For two decades now, Morocco has been confronting illicit imports of large quantities of psychotropic tablets²⁶. The fact that Morocco is a producing source of cannabis makes this problem harder to solve. Given its location in the Sahelo-Saharan region, Morocco can also become a transit country for cocaine. Transnational networks and criminal gangs distribute these products. In Morocco, drug consumption is a growing problem. According to a 2014 study conducted by the National Observatory on Drugs and Addictions, the prevalence of overall drug use and dependence among the population over the age of 17 years was 4.2%. The risk associated with the use of synthetic drugs is likely to rise also.

Faced with these challenges, Morocco has adopted an approach based on strengthening its legal system in order to fight drug traffickers better. At the medical level, the country has focused its efforts on reducing the demand for illicit drugs by implementing awareness campaigns about the harmful effects of drug use, and the creation of treatment centers for drug users. However, these efforts are insufficient. Thousands of drug addicts do not get appropriate treatments, and are rejected by the larger society²⁷.

Regarding cannabis, the Government of Morocco has implemented economic development programs with the goal of eradicating the cultivation of cannabis in the northern part of the country. These programs promote the cultivation of alternative crops like olive.

In terms of international cooperation, Morocco has established partnerships with the United States and some European and African countries, in order to coordinate better its fight against international drug trafficking networks, and create mechanisms that counter the transiting of drugs through its territory. No drug policy can be effective if the Central Body for the Prevention of Corruption (ICPC) is not endowed with adequate capabilities²⁸. This is why the new Constitution that was ratified in 2011 gives this body the necessary legal grounding.

Morocco has signed all the conventions against drug trafficking and is actively involved in the work, programs and strategies of specialized UN agencies. It cooperates with all the relevant international bodies, such as the UN Office against Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The Moroccan anti-drug strategy is based on two approaches:

- 1- The creation of a national body that coordinates anti-drug activities. The Government is carrying out a national strategy against the cultivation, consumption and trafficking of drugs, which promotes the development of alternative crops. It resulted in eliminating more than 65% of cannabis cultivated in the country, with the number

²⁵ Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim Ali Al-Badri, also known as Abu Bakr Albaghdadi, was born on July 28, 1971. He was appointed as Head of the Islamic State in Iraq (EI) after the death of Abou Omar Al Baghdadi. In 2013, the EI organization changed its name to Islamic State in Iraq and in the Levant (ISIL). In 2014, Abu Bakr Albaghdadi claimed the title of Caliph of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) during a public gathering at a mosque in Mosul (Iraq).

²⁶ Moroccan official statistics show that, on the average, 300,000 "Rivotril" tablets are seized on the eastern border annually.

²⁷ "Situation et politique en matière de drogues". Dr. Maria Sabir, University Hospital Ar-Razi, Prof. Jallal Toufiq, Director of the National Observatory of Drugs and Addictions. Rabat. 2014.

²⁸ The mission of the Central Body for the Prevention of Corruption is to coordinate, supervise and ensure the follow-up on the implementation of policies that aim at preventing corruption, and to collect and disseminate information pertaining to this matter.

of hectares decreasing from 134,000 hectares in 2003 to 47,500 hectares in 2010. Data provided by the National Observatory of Drugs and Addictions suggest a significant drop in cannabis production¹⁹.

- 2- The Government of Morocco works closely with international agencies in order to fight against narcotic drug traffickers. These agencies include UNODC, the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), INTERPOL and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

Other practical measures were adopted to fight against the transit of drugs, including cocaine, through the Moroccan territory:

- Strengthening the capacities of various security agencies;
- Implementing a policy of border control;
- Training continuously officers in charge of detection and suppression;
- Using new technologies for detection at ports and airports²⁰;
- Cooperating with other countries through INTERPOL.

The lack of cooperation between the countries of the Maghreb prevent them from implementing a regional strategy to fight against the scourge in question.

1.5 Arms trafficking

Several reports and press releases discuss the types of arms trafficking that is taking place in Central Sahara. This situation generates several risks at the southern and southeastern border areas. Reports from the Algerian army mention the manufacturing of weapons near the borders with Mali and Libya, which illustrates the scale of arms trafficking in the central Sahara region. The same reports indicate that Kalashnikovs and ammunitions are the types of weapons that circulate in the southern and southeastern border areas.

The security crisis in Libya and Northern Mali contributes to the proliferation of such weapons. The Moroccan delegation at the meeting of the DECT, held in New York on 30/09/2014, talked about the security agencies seizing "an arsenal of weapons including Kalashnikov rifles, machine guns, automatic and semi-automatic guns, RPGs, mortar shells, silencers, detonators and shotguns"²¹.

Today, due to the legal and operational arsenal it has put in place, Morocco manages to control the quantities of arms that enter its territory. However, some threats do come also from the northern region, particularly from the two cities under Spanish control: Ceuta and Mlilia. In March 2015, the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations (BCIJ) announced the confiscation of an arsenal of weapons, after it had searched the premises of a "jihadist cell": seven automatic pistols, 400 bullets of different calibers, and electronic equipment. In April 2015, the Police thwarted an attempt to deliver, from the port of Rotterdam, an important shipment of weapons to the enclaves of Ceuta and Mlilia.

From time to time, the Moroccan Police publishes news releases about arms trafficking networks and their ties to jihadist groups. The intensity of arms trafficking activities in the Sahelo-Saharan region will depend on such factors as political stability in Libya and the role of the new National Unity Government, the dynamics behind jihadism across the region, strategies to resolve the existing internal and external conflicts, and human development programs.

1.5 Impact of the conflict in Sahara

The issues of regional stability and integration are linked to the conflict that opposes Morocco to Algeria regarding the status of 'Western Sahara'²². Since 1975, this conflict has been the main reason for contention between Morocco and Algeria, and

¹⁹"Situation et politique en matière de drogues". Dr. Maria Sabir, University Hospital Ar-Razi, National Observatory of Drugs and Addictions. 2014.

²⁰In December 2015, the General Directorate of National Security (DGSN) revealed that 6.462 operations were conducted by the police, who seized 10 kg of cocaine, 194 kg of chira, 762 kg of cannabis, 108 kg of contraband tobacco, 29.788 tablets of psychotropic drugs, and 65 kg of maajoun. Up to 16,976 suspects were arrested.

²¹ Executive Directorate of the Anti-Terrorism Committee. September 2014.

²² The conflict of "Western Sahara" opposes Morocco to the Front Polisario (FP) since 1976. Algeria supports the FP. The war ended in 1991 when a resolution of the UN Security Council was adopted to this effect. Morocco controls about 80 percent of the disputed territory, while the FP controls about 20%. Morocco built a long sand wall to divide off the territory, as

the top impediment to building a unified Maghreb. The deteriorating relations between the two neighboring countries only contributes to destabilizing the whole region, at a dangerous pace sometimes.

The current regional climate allows Morocco to play a major role in West Africa. This geopolitical shift blocks the ambition of Algeria to become the leading State in the region. This explains why the two countries do not maintain normal relations as of now. Morocco is bound to play a strategic role in the fight against international terrorism, while Algeria is forced to defend its military and security interests to the South and Southeast (Mali and Niger), and to the East (Libya and Tunisia).

In 1989, the creation of the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) translated the will to build a unifying political organization and an integrated economic market across the Maghreb. Today, the expectations of 100 million North Africans are shattered due to the dispute between Algeria and Morocco over the question of the Independence of Western Sahara. For the kingdom of Morocco, the Algerian State uses the conflict in the Sahara in a Machiavellian way to weaken its position.

Morocco considers the position of the Algerian State as a hostile and aggressive policy that reached a crescendo when Morocco initiated a process of settling the conflict in the Sahara by proposing a regime of "autonomy" to the Front Polisario in 2007. Such a regime fits the notion of Moroccan sovereignty and national unity. To Morocco, this initiative will end separatism, promote reconciliation, and consolidate the rule of law, individual and collective rights, and economic and social development.

In 2015, the Mozabites (Ibadites) and Chaambas (Maalikis) communities clashed in the wilaya of Ghardaïa (Algeria). Some Algerian officials tried hard then to implicate Morocco in a problem that concerned Algerians only. One should remember that the borders between the two countries are closed since 1994, and this situation facilitates smuggling and illicit trafficking.

Regarding the conflict in the Sahara, the Moroccan strategy is based on linking national security to territorial integrity. However, given the current threats to the entire sub-region, it becomes essential for Algeria and Morocco to work together and participate in the implementation of a joint security policy.

II. MOROCCAN APPROACH TO SECURITY

A systemic and dynamic diagnosis of the Moroccan approach to security issues consists in understanding a complex system based on institutions that play complementary roles. Such a diagnosis includes four aspects: strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats.

* Strengths:

- The stability of State institutions;
- The Constitution that was ratified in 2011 confirms the pluralistic identity of the Moroccan society;
- The implementation of a multidimensional approach that focuses on security, religion, and human development. This new national strategy is based on legislative, regulatory, institutional and security components. It also takes into account the question of human development, the need to restructure the religious field, and the implementation of a multidimensional cooperation program;
- The launching, in 2004, of a project that aimed at restructuring the religious field. Morocco has adopted a balanced approach that combines traditions and modernity when it comes to managing religious issues;
- The institution called "Commanderie des Croyants" has a strong social and constitutional grounding. It provides the King with the exclusive prerogative of preserving "religious security" across the country, promoting what he calls "Islam of the Middle", and advocating interfaith dialogue, harmony and freedom of religion;
- The institution called "High Council of Ulemas" is the only body that is authorized to pronounce fatwas. This makes extremism, radicalism and similar types of fundamentalism illegal;
- There is a Charter for the imams;
- The implementation of a program for the continuing education of imams and mourchidines, and the fact that this program is now available to women who want to be trained as women ulemas and morchidates;

negotiations between the two parties took place under the auspices of the United Nations. In 2007, Morocco initiated a plan for the "autonomy" of Western Sahara in order to resolve a conflict that has lasted more than 40 years.

- The broadcasting, since 2004, of public radio and TV programs (Radio and TV Mohammed VI of the Holy Quran) that aims at sensitizing and educating people about the modern concept of "Islam of the Middle";
- The specific role of the mosque. It is to preserve the religious discourse from any possible corruption. The mosque must remain a place for learning, memorization and declamation of the Quran. It must also be used as a study room in the context of the State initiative to combat illiteracy;
- Changes to anti-terrorist laws in 2015;
- The creation of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations (BCIJ) in March 2015;
- Adequate and effective use of anti-terrorist mechanisms by the defense and security services, by specialized judges, and by monetary and financial institutions;
- The implementation of the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) to fight against poverty, exclusion and precariousness;
- The implementation of a new migration policy. Since 2013, Morocco has adopted a new policy toward sub-Saharan communities, and regularized the situation of 18,000 people. Starting from 2009, Morocco has become a country of residence for many immigrants.

* Opportunities:

- Active participation in all the bodies and organizations charged with combatting terrorism;
- Proven experience in fighting terrorism at the regional and international levels, and given as an example for other countries to follow;
- Morocco is a major player in the global fight against terrorism and a strategic partner: Exchange of information and expertise, training of imams, participation in the anti-ISIS coalition. Morocco is co-Chair of the International Forum against Terrorism;
- The strategic importance of West Africa and of the Sahelo-Saharan region for Morocco when it comes to security issues.

* Weaknesses:

- The delay in creating the High Council for Security (CSS). According to Article 54 of the 2011 Constitution, this body is to handle security issues and the related aspects of governance²³;
- Several questions on the governance of security remain. They relate to such challenges as coordinating the national security policy, matching needs and security threats, building on the strength of the justice and security agencies, as well as the strength of the management and control institutions²⁴;
- Security remains a restricted field in Moroccan legislation. In addition, documents and studies about the governance of the national security sector are very scarce;
- In 2006, the Equity and Reconciliation committee made some recommendations about reforming the security sector. Human Rights organizations are still waiting for the implementation of the recommendations in question²⁵;
- The lack of a comprehensive security policy that values the roles of different national security agencies. Security and safety issues should not be dealt with in isolation. The key players have complementary roles. Thus, security

²³ Article 54 of the Constitution refers to the creation of a "High Council for Security". The King chairs this Council. It is a "forum on the internal and external security strategies of the country, and on crisis management". It "also ensures the institutionalization of good security governance standards".

²⁴ See the proceedings of the symposium organized by the Centre for Human Rights Studies and Democracy (CEDHD) in partnership with the Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (CDCAF) in Geneva. Rabat, 21-22 March 2013. Since 2007, the CEDHD publishes a series on the governance of security in Arabic.

²⁵ Ibid.

agencies, political parties, trade unions, civil society organizations, and research centers must work together to find lasting solutions to the existing threats.

- The lack of a forum for dialogues between the national security agencies, private security companies, and civil society organizations about issues pertaining to national security;
- The definition of 'terrorism' is too vague. The reports generated by security agencies, and used indiscriminately by the media, talk regularly of their arresting terrorists. However, the justice system only may determine whether an individual is a terrorist or not. In addition, no study was conducted officially on the 'terrorists' that the justice system set free;
- Human Rights associations often criticize criminal procedures and certain practices leading to abuses in Morocco. This has an impact on the ranking of Morocco when it comes to respecting the international criteria pertaining to human rights;
- Media coverages of security issues create a problem with interpreting effectively the statistics that security agencies report, and with grasping the political and security context in Morocco.

*** Threats**

- The large number of Moroccans and binational individuals who join the jihadist groups.
- The massive use of communication technologies by jihadist groups.
- The nature of jihadism and trafficking in the Polisario camps²⁶, especially in the Saharan portion to the East of the sand wall²⁷. The report on the situation in the Sahara that Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, presented to the Security Council on 8 April 2013 highlights serious security concerns about the area to the East of the wall and in the Tindouf camps (paragraphs No. 25-45-59-60-61-103-105-110);
- The lack of a North African framework for cooperation regarding security issues;
- The presence of numerous jihadist groups in Libya;
- Political, social and security problems that are affecting North Africa;
- The danger associated with the spreading of ethnic and religious conflicts in the Middle East to North Africa;
- Smuggling activities in the northern region of Morocco, Ceuta and Mlilia, and the border areas near Algeria.

III. MOROCCAN STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE SAHELO-SAHARAN REGION

Despite its apparent poverty, the Sahelo-Saharan region stands in today's global market as an energy hub that is very much coveted by the major powers²⁸. A buffer zone between Central Africa and North Africa, this vast territory is difficult to control, and has become a source of widespread insecurity. The Sahelo-Saharan region lacks appropriate State monitoring agencies. It covers a quarter of the surface area of the African continent. It is becoming increasingly the object of a geopolitical and geostrategic confrontation between different regional and international powers that want to control its natural resources: oil, gas, gold, phosphate, diamonds, copper, iron, coal, nickel, zinc, bauxite, uranium, plutonium, manganese, cobalt, silver, chrome, tin, salt deposits, fresh water, fish, shellfish, biological diversity, livestock, precious wood, etc. Over the next decade, geopolitical considerations across the Sahelo-Saharan region will constitute a decisive element for the stability of Africa and the neighboring European and Asian continents. The region is currently at the crossroads of all kinds of dangers because people are desperate and the security situation is unstable.

This context has allowed Morocco to become a key player across the continent. The kingdom has worked at implementing gradually a multidimensional strategy that reflects the redirecting of Moroccan priorities in Africa. Morocco's new policy is based on South-South cooperation in the areas of social economy and basic infrastructure development. It aims at

²⁶ Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro.

²⁷ In order to prevent the Polisario attacks, Morocco built between 1980 and 1986 a sand wall that is 2,700 km long. This wall is a series of two to three lines of sand embankments, minefields, and barbed wire. The Moroccan Army monitors it continuously.

²⁸ El Moussaoui El Ajlaoui: "Enjeux géostratégiques et sécuritaires dans l'espace sahélo-saharien". Article published in Libération. (Morocco) 28-12-2013.

consolidating peace and stability. For Morocco, this is an important mission, and African countries have a role to play in building peace. This South-South cooperation is a means to materialize the Moroccan vision of a new Africa through participatory and shared processes. Morocco's new Africa policy is also based on efficiency, performance and credibility. The kingdom works towards achieving economic and social development and regional integration by targeting such promising sectors as agriculture, industry, science, technology, and infrastructure development.

West Africa and the Sahelo-Saharan region rank high among Morocco's priorities in Africa, especially when it comes to economic and religious matters. The strategic importance of Morocco for the Sahelo-Saharan region is based on both historical connections and immaterial capital rooted in Maliki Sunni Islam.

Since 2013, and due to jihadist threats to the region, the South-South model of cooperation with other African partners that Morocco has advocated included a specific religious component. Several African countries like Mali, Guinea Conakry, Ivory Coast, Niger and Nigeria, among others, requested the assistance of Morocco with monitoring and managing their religious fields, and this illustrates the significance of the Moroccan concept of "Islam of the Middle" based on the Sunni Maliki rite and Sufi thinking. Given the lack of credible religious institutions, South-South cooperation in the field of religion becomes an important and decisive card to play against the jihadist propaganda across the Sahelo-Saharan region.

At the economic and financial level, Morocco participates in the development efforts of the Sahelo-Saharan States. It also provides some assistance with regard to building their capacity at the institutional and security level.

For Morocco, the following strategic interests in the Sahelo-Saharan region are at stake²⁹:

- The potential for economic growth in West Africa and the Sahelo-Saharan region;
- The importance of this region in preserving security, territorial integrity and national unity;
- The challenges of economic development and stabilizing the region through diplomacy and political, religious and economic exchanges.

Morocco's Africa policy is multidimensional, and is based on the following strong components:

- The important role played by Morocco in the fight against terrorism;
- The focus on West African and Central African countries;
- The high number of conventions and agreements signed with Sub-Saharan countries;
- The appealing model of monitoring the field of religion as a bulwark against extremism;
- A model of economic cooperation that appeals to many countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

However, the following weak points of this policy must be addressed:

- The weakness of some Sahelo-Saharan States;
- The presence of formidable competitors like South Africa;
- Poorly developed infrastructure and logistical means;
- The fact that Morocco is no longer a Member State of the African Union (AU);
- The Sahara conflict.

IV. CHALLENGES, SECURITY THREATS AND JOINT APPROACHES IN THE SAHELO-SAHARAN REGION³⁰

Growing jihadism, effective preaching and recruiting, multifaceted claims for autonomy and rights based on ethnicity, separatist temptations, insecurity, the porosity of borders and the fact that a large portion of the Sahara has become a no man's land, are now endemic problems that threaten directly the already fragile stability in the area. As a result, the economic situation of the region and its social, political and cultural contexts have deteriorated. The aforementioned threats have and will continue to have a serious impact on peace, security and stability in the area. The issue of security in the sub-region is related to demands for more rights and justice, and the promotion of cultural diversity and good governance.

The military intervention launched in Mali in January 2013 changed by itself the topography of jihadism in the Sahelo-Saharan sub-region. However, one needs a joint political approach to address fully the facets and severity of the crisis.

²⁹ El Moussaoui El Ajlaoui: "Enjeux stratégiques du Maroc dans l'espace Sahélo-Saharien". Colloque: "Le Maroc dans la géopolitique africaine". Institute of African Studies. Rabat, May 2015.

³⁰ El Moussaoui El Ajlaoui: "Architecture sécuritaire dans l'espace saharien". Bamako. 3 – 4 December, 2013

Instability affects not only the Sahelo-Saharan countries, but also a significant portion of the North Africa region. Libya has become a sanctuary for jihadists, drug traffickers and other groups that threaten its political transition.

The absence of State authorities allows the illicit trafficking of drugs, human beings, oil, cigarettes, counterfeit medicines, weapons and toxic waste to spread through the region.

4.1. The porosity of the borders

The porosity of borders and the lack of a regional cooperation framework constitute major security challenges. Without regional cooperation, borders that span thousands of kilometers will remain porous. No single State in the region may control all its borders, irrespective of the means it uses. The latest attacks of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad area highlight the porosity of State borders and the problems of coordination between the armies of the targeted countries (Chad, Niger and Cameroon) and the authorities in Nigeria. The lack of a shared strategy to ensure the protection of the entire sub-region threatens its territorial integrity. In this context, political instability and other transnational threats represent factors that weaken the State and society.

4.2. Jihadism

After it pledged allegiance to ISIS, Boko Haram changed its name to West African Province of the Islamic State. This organization is imposing its logic of destabilization on Lake Chad riparian countries. It harasses their armies and it may be targeting N'Djamena as its final objective. By taking the control of this city eventually, it would establish a corridor in the direction of Southern Libya and create a new bastion of ISIS in the Sahelo-Saharan region.

The jihadist map has changed recently due to the rebirth of AQIM. On the one hand, Droukdel and Bel Mokhtar reached an agreement, and on the other hand, Iyad Ag Ghali returned to the area. This explains the latest terrorist attacks in Bamako and Ouagadougou.

The Sahelo-Saharan region will experience a race between Bel Mokhtar and Aboulwalid Sahraoui, the emir of the other fraction of Mourabitoun who pledged allegiance to ISIS. The creation of new jihadist groups highlights the rise of jihadism in the Sahelo-Saharan and North African regions.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Broad recommendations

- Pay close attention to the methodologies used in conducting vertical analyses of the security challenges. 'Verticality' promotes the participation of the Community to the consolidation of the peace process and stability, and the detection of destabilizing factors.
- Make the conceptualization of a regional approach to security threats a priority;
- Adopt a security strategy that protects people and their goods, promotes economic development in the border areas, and improves access to basic services and local governance;
- Security and development are intertwined. The living conditions of the population deteriorate whenever the State fails to strengthen its own capabilities.
- Political leaders are bound to meet the challenges mentioned above because weak State institutions lead to failing States;
- The identification of areas and populations at risk;
- Assistance to populations affected by natural disasters;
- The integration of refugees and displaced persons;
- The development of the border areas;
- Securing adequate financial resources in order to implement projects and bilateral, regional and interregional cooperation activities;
- Establish democratic regimes in the region.

5.2. Recommendations about cooperation in the security sector

- Adopt a governance policy regarding the security sector;
- Strengthen cooperation and coordination initiatives regarding border control and monitoring in the Maghreb and Sahel regions;
- Security issues in Morocco and Algeria impact greatly the stability of the Maghreb. Thus, it is important that the two countries develop and maintain good relations;
- The linkage between democratization processes and stability in the Maghreb;
- The issue of leadership in North Africa. The challenge is to come up with a shared regional leadership mechanism;
- The creation of a Directorate of cooperation in the security and defense sectors;

- The collaboration with partnering countries located in the three regions (North Africa, Sahelo-Saharan region and Mediterranean basin);
- The implementation of a shared approach to security in the Maghreb region;
- Improving security at the borders through bilateral, regional and international cooperation strategies. The transnational character of the crisis requires the implementation of a comprehensive regional response;
- Strengthen the capabilities of the States of the region, in terms of new equipment and technologies;
- Strengthen cross-border cooperation in order to address security threats in North Africa, especially in Libya;
- Strengthen the capacity of political parties, elected officials, community leaders and civil society organizations so they participate in the fight against insecurity in the Sahelo-Saharan and North African regions;
- Monitor the movement of sophisticated weapons across the Sahelo-Saharan and North African regions;
- Promote Sunni Maliki Islam in order to counter the Salafist jihadist ideology.

5.3. Recommendations regarding Morocco

- Reduce the complexity of the security issue;
- Define the priorities regarding Morocco's contribution to maintaining stability in the region;
- Conduct studies on the causes of radicalization, particularly among young people;
- Collect data and study women's participation in jihadism, as a component of Morocco's approach to security;
- Clarify the mechanisms in place regarding security governance in Morocco. Are the existing mechanisms appropriate when it comes to fighting extremism?
- Address the lack of a shared framework for discussion, reflection, and comprehensive approach to security issues;
- Identify possible solutions to the security problems associated to the prison system in Morocco;
- Identify strategic security options for Morocco;
- Identify needs in the security sector;
- Anticipate and counter threats to security;
- Make the multidimensional and cross-sectoral approach a priority: Get the civil society, private sector and State authorities involved in identifying needs in the security sector;
- Enhance the position of Morocco regarding the security issues in the Sahelo-Saharan and Mediterranean regions;
- Consolidate the democratic process, and the restructuring of the informal sector. The latter represents a threat to Morocco in its current state.
- Make reforms a priority with regard to the field of religion.

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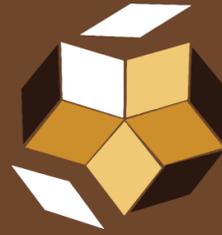
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DIALOGUES

SECURITAIRES
DANS L'ESPACE
SAHELO - SAHARIEN

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Summary

The country-based studies highlight the nature of the State and the key question of governance in the Sahelo-Saharan region. The types of relations that the State maintains with the populations become a crucial issue when one considers the identity/ethnic dimensions of the demands that minority groups often express at the risk of destabilizing the entire region. The issues of violent extremism and of crime organized across borders are also discussed.

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