

# DIALOGUES

SECURITAIRES  
DANS L'ESPACE  
SAHELO - SAHARIEN

SECURITY CHALLENGES AND ISSUES  
IN THE SAHELO-SAHARAN REGION

THE NIGER PERSPECTIVE

by Mahaman ALIO

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# CONTENT

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I. MAJOR CHALLENGES IN NIGER</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>II. SECURITY THREATS IN NIGER</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>III. NIGER'S RESPONSES TO SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>IV. EVALUATION OF REGIONAL AND MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>V. RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>20</b>

## 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-Maghrebian 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.

Dakar, March 2017

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## INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Niger is located between Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, and Nigeria, making it a crossroads between Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa. Niger is the biggest country in West Africa, however, more than 80% of its surface area is covered by the Sahara Desert. This is one of the reasons for its low population density of only 12 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. With growth of more than 4% per annum, the population of Niger is currently estimated at 19.3 million inhabitants, and is expected to triple to 56 million in 2050. More than half the population is made up of Hausa and Zarma-Songhai people. Niger, whose population comprises a majority of Muslims (98%)<sup>1</sup>, maintains a reputation as a secular state protected by the law.

The main natural resources of Niger are gold, iron, coal, uranium and oil. In 2012, Niger was ranked among the least developed countries in the world by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which gave the country a Human Development Index (HDI) of only 0.304 in its annual report.

For a certain number of years, security has been a major, even a vital issue in Niger. The events that occurred in Mali, with the presence of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and, more recently, the appearance of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad area, have left Niger virtually surrounded. Political instability and security issues in post-Gaddafi Libya compounded the situation, convincing Niger's authorities that security warranted a particular focus.

In order to eradicate these scourges or at least reduce their impact, the Nigerien authorities, in collaboration with their bilateral and multilateral partners, made efforts to ensure the security of people and property and establish a climate of lasting peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Observatoire de la Liberté Religieuse au Niger ([www.liberte-religion.org/Niger](http://www.liberte-religion.org/Niger))

## I. MAJOR CHALLENGES IN NIGER

In a regional environment plagued by terrorism and faced with the social consequences of the virtual lack of economic development, today's Niger is up against enormous challenges, upon which its ability to maintain peace and security in its territory depends.

### 1. Endemic social vulnerability

Niger is faced with enormous social difficulties: endemic unemployment and underemployment, poverty, a low level of education and an inefficient health care system.

With a poverty rate of 48.9% and a per capita income of 420 dollars, Niger is one of the poorest nations in the world. In 2015, it was ranked at the bottom of the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index, occupying 188<sup>th</sup> place out of 188 countries. In Niger, more than 3.6 million people suffer from food insecurity during the hungry season. This represents nearly a quarter of the population. In Diffa and Dosso, an increase was noted in the number of admissions of children with severe acute malnutrition<sup>2</sup>. Low rainfalls and the cereal deficit were partially responsible for an increase in the number of households affected by food insecurity, but the instability of neighbouring Mali, Nigeria and Libya also played a role.

The social situation is also marked by rural poverty and women's poverty. The studies of the National Statistics Institute on the poverty profile showed that poverty was a phenomenon that affected more rural than urban dwellers, with greater prevalence among women than men. The phenomenon was also more endemic in certain regions (Maradi and Tillabéry).

Unemployment affected both young people and older people, due to a sluggish economy and the fact that entrepreneurs and administrators mostly hired close friends and relatives. The employment situation was characterized by the predominance of informal employment, due to the low level of education in the labour force and the limited supply of formal jobs, which accentuated precariousness. Thus, in 2014, 60.1% of women and 10.2% of men in the labour force were without employment. Access to decent work was very difficult for young graduates. The informal economy is a survival economy, with a shortage of decent work.

With a literacy rate of 29%<sup>3</sup>, education in the country struggles to meet its goals due to the diversity of education systems: the so-called traditional system (the formal system), and the Koranic system, which is informal. Although the government controls the traditional system, this is not the case with the Koranic system, which is very widespread and convenient, particularly for rural families, disadvantaged social groups and preschool-aged children. In these schools, children are entrusted to marabouts, whose level of knowledge is never assessed by a competent body recognized by the government. Far from their families, children have no choice and are sometimes set on the path to radicalization. Indeed, *talibés* from Niger have been involved in every known religious movement in Nigeria<sup>4</sup>.

The climate of widespread poverty and employment insecurity explains why some young people, in desperation, agree to enrol in terrorist movements that offer them large sums of money and heaven in the event of martyrdom.

The difficult economic situation also impacts the health system, which is very inefficient. Despite the efforts made to implement modern health policies, health indicators are still cause for concern and health security is still threatened. Access to universal, quality health care suffers from a lack of proper infrastructure due to a serious lack of investments. The population,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bulletin humanitaire des Nations unies publié en Juin 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Banque africaine de Développement [www.afdb.org](http://www.afdb.org)

<sup>4</sup> Voir sur ce cas Bala Usman 1987, The manipulation of religion in Nigeria, 1977-1987, Gaskia Corporation LTD, Zaria et Isa Alkali Abba 1993, The Niger factor in the implementation of Kano's policy on almajirai, in A.I. Asiwaju et B.M.Barkindo (eds) 1993, Nigeria-Niger transborder cooperation, Malthouse Press LTD, pp.390-396

especially people living in remote areas, who are also poor, have difficulty accessing health care centres. Areas in the East and Far East (Zinder and Diffa) are the most severely affected by insufficient health care coverage. Life expectancy in Niger is one of the lowest in the world, at only 55.1 years<sup>5</sup>.

## **2. Limited development prospects**

Niger also faces significant structural challenges. The focus on security issues should not obscure the major hardships it is experiencing. All indicators are in the red. With 7.6 children per woman, the country has the highest population growth in the world, namely 3.9% per annum, which holds back its economic development potential. 60% of the population lives on less than a dollar a day. This problem is further aggravated by a very high illiteracy rate due to low school enrolment. In view of the trend in the GDP per capita, the country has been steadily growing poorer. Uranium only contributed 5% to the national budget. Even though some think that other natural resources, such as oil, could allow the country to cover its needs, corruption and the apparent indifference of the multinationals that exploit those resources to the people's standard of living calls their optimism into question. Encouraged by religious and cultural traditions, strong population growth means that a large labour force is available. Furthermore, Niger is essentially a rural country that has yet to embark on the transition to urbanization.

In 2015, the rate of growth in the GDP declined to 4.4 %, against 6.9 % in 2014. Since prices depend essentially on the supply of foodstuffs, annual inflation remained below the rate set by the convergence criteria of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) at 3%. Niger also faced significant macro-economic risks due to security threats along its borders with Mali, Libya and Nigeria and the collapse of commodity prices. There were serious risks of macroeconomic disruptions linked to the aggravation of imbalances in external accounts and public finances. Although the risk of over-indebtedness was moderate in 2014, the country should keep an eye on the sustainability of its debt in light of the increase in the external public debt observed between 2014 and 2016 (it rose from 27% in 2014, to 33% in 2015 and 35% in 2016) to finance projects in extractive industries, and lower uranium and oil prices. The debt ratio is expected to reach 37% in 2018, and drop back again once the projects are completed. Given these risks, the quality of debt and public investment management will continue to have a significant impact on the sustainability of the debt and public finances. Although it is not yet possible to evaluate precisely the economic and social consequences of the military intervention against Boko Haram that is currently taking place in Nigeria, on the southeast border of Niger, the budgetary repercussions linked to increased spending on defence and intake of refugees entail a high annual cost and thus reduce the amount of resources available to fund economic development investments.

## **2. Political challenges**

These challenges are linked to poor governance and institutional instability in Niger.

- **The matter of governance**

Governance, peace and social stability are interdependent and indivisible. Peace and social stability are impossible without good governance. On the other hand, good governance cannot be established or institutionalized without peace and social stability. Today, these three factors

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<sup>5</sup> Cf Programme des Nations Unies pour le Développement, 2013

are the foremost prerequisites for economic recovery, the fight against poverty and sustainable human development. The challenge of governance depends on the appropriation of the notion of the state. Governance is founded on a sense of responsibility, equity and justice that ensure that citizens of specific regions or specific ethnic groups do not feel abandoned.

The promotion of the rule of law and good governance presupposes the existence of an effective and transparent administration<sup>6</sup>, with an institutional capacity that allows it to define strategic orientations, draft and implement appropriate public policies and control the outcomes of public action. This institutional capacity arises from an optimum combination of several factors, notably human, financial and logistical resources. However, the Nigerien government is far from meeting these criteria<sup>7</sup>. Instead, observations reveal a lack of transparency in the management of public resources, non-compliance with public procurement regulations, misappropriation of public funds, and mismanagement of the internal and external debt, sometimes leading to legal action between the government and private interests. To this should be added lavish government spending that it is hard to reconcile with the standard of living of the population or the economic situation in the country. This has prompted the government itself to create HALCIA (the High Authority to Combat Corruption and Related Crimes) and civil society to create ROTAB (the Organization for Transparency and Budgetary Analysis), although these bodies have yet to prove their effectiveness.

- **Recurring political-institutional instability**

The political history of Niger, from the First Republic to the present day, has been marked by periods of stability and periods of crisis<sup>8</sup>. Niger spent three decades learning the democratic process, characterized, beginning in the 1990s, by a high degree of political and institutional instability, marked by three military coups in 1996, 1999 and 2010. Niger has seen 5 changes of government through military coups and 2 civilian coups d'état. Between 1993 and 2011, there were 7 ballots, 5 presidential elections and repeated violations of the constitution. The political crisis that took place in 2010 challenged the stability of the country, resulting in a sudden cessation of constitutional order and a temporary interruption of external investments and development cooperation. Following the coup d'état of 2010, Niger adopted a new, semi-presidential constitution on November 25, 2010. The ballots of 2011, which ended the transition period, facilitated the return to a constitutional order and marked the advent of the 7<sup>th</sup> Republic. However, democratic consolidation remained insufficient and the stability of the national unity government formed in 2013 did not achieve the desired goals. This context leaves little scope for optimism. In addition to the environmental factors of destabilization (Libyan chaos to the north, Malian crisis to the west and the worrisome spread of Boko Haram to the southeast) the country is beset by corruption and the deterioration of the domestic political situation, characterized *inter alia* by the weakening of the opposition parties, harassment and arrests of political opponents. This weakness is illustrated by a tense political climate marked by political rivalry. Chronic instability is observed in the institutions of the Republic, a real cancer, chiefly due to the responsibility of political players. At each change of government, the players set up a special committee to design a new constitution. Several factors of political and institutional instability can be identified. Firstly, there are divisions in the political space. There are currently over sixty political parties, most of them created for purely opportunistic and profiteering reasons. In addition, they lack sufficient political training.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Bilan de la gouvernance du PNUD au Niger [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Analyse commune de contexte au Niger, Octobre 2015

<sup>8</sup> Rapport du Forum National d'Agadez, tenu du 22 au 23 décembre 2010.

Although Niger is viewed as a laboratory for democracy, it is unfortunately a poor example in terms of political and institutional stability. The opposition and civil society are struggling to play their role to the fullest, since channels for dialogue with the government are rare, if not inexistent. The organization of transparent and honest elections requires full and attentive participation by all stakeholders. However, during the elections of February and March 2016, a splintered political opposition and a civil society divided along ideological lines engaged in behaviour that bordered on abdication. The authorities took advantage of the opposition's boycott in the second round to hold elections that lacked transparency and credibility.

The functioning of the parliamentary institution was contested by the opposition represented by the Alliance for the Republic, Democracy and Reconciliation in Niger (ARDR), a coalition that includes the three main opposition parties. The current government of President Issoufou has been accused of pursuing antidemocratic policies that cause chronic institutional instability in the country. As the separation of powers is no longer upheld, justice has become selective, a tool in the hands of the highest government authorities. This is demonstrated by the legal proceedings launched against opposition member Hama Amadou after his coalition split with the government over a “presumed child”<sup>9</sup> case. Several heads of major opposition parties were summoned by the criminal police in the framework of a procedure initiated following the publication by the ARDR of a document entitled “*Livre blanc des institutions de la République*” (white paper on the institutions of the Republic). In addition, the decisions handed down by the Constitutional Court are regularly contested on grounds that it is inconceivable, in a democracy, that one can cross the floor without being expelled from one's original party and with the approval of the courts of law. In fact, a number of political personalities belong to both the government and the opposition, which would appear to be impossible.

These long-lived and recurrent tensions have further deteriorated an already very difficult political environment and compromised all hopes of invigorating Nigerien democracy. The current political situation in Niger is preoccupying, marked as it now is by uncertainties as to the democratic functioning of the institutions, trends in the political climate and compliance with democratic rules and principles.

## II. SECURITY THREATS IN NIGER

These threats include internal threats, but they are mainly the product of the current geostrategic environment of the neighbouring countries.

### 1. National security threats

These threats are essentially related to conflicts in natural resources management and calls for Tuareg independence.

- **Conflicts between individuals over natural resource management**

Agriculture and herding are the pillars of the Nigerien economy, although only 15% of the land in the country is arable. In Niger, 85% of the population lives in rural areas and access to natural resources is the primary source of food and income. Due to recurring droughts and demographic

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<sup>9</sup> Offence consisting of attributing motherhood of a child to a woman other than its birth mother, without undertaking adoption procedures.

pressure, there is currently an increase in both the frequency and intensity of conflicts between rural operators. There are various types of land disputes in Niger, but the most common are conflicts between farmers and herders. These conflicts cause serious social problems: they suspend or destroy income-generation opportunities, create food insecurity, harm the environment and are the underlying causes of clashes that sometimes result in loss of human lives.

The practice of pastoralism requires large areas of pastureland. However, in Niger, due to the strong pressures exerted on natural resources by the sedentary population, combined with recurring droughts, herders have dwindling access to pasturelands. This makes farming difficult, and pastoralism is one of the few remaining subsistence activities. Herders travel between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso without consideration for national borders. Today, however, their activity is threatened by insecurity and armed groups. In Niger, as in many other countries in the Sahel, pastoral herding is like any other economic activity. Thanks to their mobility, pastoral herders are better equipped to deal with the consequences of climate change, which leaves arid regions at greater risk due to more extreme droughts and flooding. Conflicts arise between farmers and herders when animals on pasture graze or otherwise destroy crops before harvest, leading to clashes. In Niger, there has always been an implicit contract of temporary occupation (after the harvest and before sowing) between farmers and herders. This agreement allows the soil to be naturally enriched with organic material from the animals' droppings. What was once a mutually beneficial complementarity has disappeared due to the impact of multiple factors including demographic pressures, successive droughts and economic change. Faced with this permanent threat, the ancestral values of solidarity and sharing have been replaced by a difficult cohabitation between farmers and herders in Niger, studded with conflicts that are often deadly. This situation, in addition to the illegal circulation of firearms, promotes violent clashes<sup>10</sup>.

It should also be noted that, in Niger, land transactions without written records are still common and, under those conditions, property lines are not guaranteed. This difficulty, combined with the low level of agricultural productivity, prompts farmers to occupy spaces reserved for animal crossing and access to water holes, although they are absolutely necessary for pastoralists. It should be stressed that rich herders grab pasturelands in pastoral regions, keeping other pastoralists from accessing resources<sup>11</sup>.

In addition to land conflicts, security threats founded on religion were observed, notably the development of the Izala sect, a new school of Islam which aims to expurgate the faith of innovations. This school, which calls itself "Ahl al-Sunna" (the people of the path of the prophet), has opened numerous educational institutions, where people and especially children are educated, to ensure that their action is sustainable. It was on that foundation that jihadist movements such as Boko Haram were built.

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<sup>10</sup> In November 2016, 38 people, mostly young farmers, were arrested by police following the death of 18 villagers due to confrontations between farmers and herders in the Tahoua region, in the west of the country. (Information provided by RFI. Published on 03-11-2016. Modified on 03-11-2016).

<sup>11</sup> One example is the green belt in Niamey. As its name indicates, it is a wall of greenery surrounding the city of Niamey, erected in 1964. At first, the city was not completely surrounded, as trees were only planted on the left bank. Subsequently, even the area that had been planted was divided up and sold and another section was ransacked by people who deemed that the green belt occupied land that belonged to their ancestors. Finally, the space was built up by private individuals, and particularly politicians.

- **Autonomist attempts**

Niger has experienced inter-community conflicts, as well as three armed rebellions sanctioned by three peace accords<sup>12</sup>. The current context is marked by new threats to the country, either due to centrifugal forces, or through the presence on the national territory of terrorist and fundamentalist groups, armed movements and criminal organizations involved in traffics of all kinds. This situation of persistent security instability raises the spectre of the menace of rebel groups, particularly Tuareg and Toubou, who felt they had been excluded from the political management of the country and, in the case of the Tuareg, that they did not benefit from the mineral resources extracted from their regions. Despite the signing of several accords, insecurity persists in the country due to the Tuareg and Toubou rebellions and the rebellion of the MNJ (Nigerien's Movement for Justice).

Niger has also experienced attempts at irredentism, particularly in the Saharan area peopled by the Tuareg. These attempts expanded after the discovery and especially the intensification of mining activities. These rebellions, which were associated with crime, led to the creation of self-defence groups by Arabs and Fulani to ensure their own security, but the groups were not disarmed when they ended. These groups have therefore contributed to the perpetuation of insecurity and the circulation of illicit arms.

Tuareg movements were a major threat because they had very close cultural and geographic ties to the Tuareg in Northern Mali who were still in rebellion quite recently. The government feared a fusion or contamination of those movements by potential or real rebel groups from Niger. Not to mention the development of a “hostage economy”.

The Tuareg of Mali fought to liberate the Azawad territory, for the independence of the region. In Niger as well, the northern Tahoua region is known as Azawagh. The Tuareg of Niger have raised the issue of autonomy, although various negotiations between the government and rebel groups, facilitated by Algeria and Libya, have culminated in decentralization, which allowed the communities to participate more fully in the handling of their affairs.

## 2. External security threats

Faced with vast territories to be controlled, Niger is particularly vulnerable to the instability that is rampant in the Sahel-Saharan strip. The country is faced with multiple and multifaceted terrorist actions and worrisome cross-border crime (trafficking in arms, munitions, explosives, migrants and human beings). Their impact on social, political, religious and economic life is incalculable given the position of the country.

- **The terrorist threat**

Today's Niger is located on Sahelian land fraught with numerous dangers. To the north, southern Libya represents a risk zone. From there, terrorists radiate throughout the Sahel region. To the west, in Mali, AQIM and MUJWA wreak havoc. To the south, Boko Haram carries out bloody attacks on a whole swath of Nigeria.

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<sup>12</sup> The first peace accord was signed between the Nigerien government and the Coordination of the Armed Resistance (CRA) on April 24, 1995. The second peace agreement was signed between the Nigerien government and the Toubou rebellion in the northeast led by Barka Wardougou, on August 21, 1998 in N'Djamena. The third peace accord was signed with the Nigerien's Movement for Justice (MNJ) led by Aghali Alambo in 2007.

On May 23, 2013, Niger suffered two terrorist attacks on a military camp in Agadez and on the French nuclear group Areva's site in Arlit. Responsibility for the attacks was jointly claimed by the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) and by the Katiba of "Those Who Sign in Blood", founded by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) dissident Mokhtar Belmokhtar, in December 2012. One week later, on May 31, an attack described by the Nigerien authorities as a terrorist attack was perpetrated on the civilian prison in the capital, Niamey. These attacks, which were the first of their kind in the country, confirmed the fears of the countries in the region as to the transnational nature of the extremist and terrorist threats which, in the case of Niger, had previously been limited to abductions of Westerners.

Today, the chief extremist threat to Niger is Boko Haram, which is based in Nigeria and in the Lake Chad Basin. The first attacks by Boko Haram Islamists on neighbouring Niger date back to February 6, 2015, prompting the government to proclaim a state of emergency, which was repeatedly renewed. When Boko Haram joined Islamic State, neighbouring countries and their populations were significantly more worried in the light of the resources available to the sect through assistance from Islamic State. In addition, Boko Haram sought to impose a reign of terror by making no distinction between targets. Military personnel and civilians alike suffered heavily in the conflict.

Perhaps the most pernicious aspect of Boko Haram was the way it defied the most cherished social standards. Use of drugs, particularly tramadol, by the followers of the sect, inhibits their conscience and makes it easier for them to commit their well-known acts of barbarity.

Furthermore, the presence of French interests in the country, such as the Areva, which had already been targeted, left Niger more vulnerable to attacks by terrorist groups, which had threatened to strike any country that "dared to send troops to Mali or collaborated with the invader"<sup>13</sup>.

- **Cross-border crime**

Niger is characterized by a very vast territory that is difficult to control. Porous borders promote the development of cross-border crime. The main constraint is the lack of adequate security for the territory, people and property due to the country's porous the borders and lack of human, material and technological resources to exercise proper control over criminal movements. Government presence throughout the territory and control over borders with Libya, Mali and Nigeria remain important challenges for Niger to meet. However, limited resources do not allow it to effectively control the whole of its territory. The government's absence in certain poor areas characterized by a lack of infrastructure and basic social services is an ideal breeding ground for the emergence of traffics of all kinds which take place on Nigerien territory and particularly in its Saharan portion: drug smuggling and trafficking in human beings and arms. Three drug-trafficking routes have been identified in Niger:

- the first is the northern traffic, which essentially covers the northern desert area, where convoys convey cannabis resin along the Algerian-Nigerien border and south to the city of Agadez near the Tiguedit cliff. Both Nigeriens and nationals from other countries in the sub-region are involved in this traffic.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Rapport sur la paix et la sécurité dans l'espace CEDEAO, publié par l'Institut d'Etudes et de Sécurité (ISS), N°7, Septembre 2013.

- the second route involves trafficking linked to the migratory phenomenon. Given its geographic location, Niger is becoming a gateway for clandestine migrants on their way to the Maghreb or Europe. Clandestine migration is accompanied by trafficking in cocaine, crack, synthetic drugs used as narcotics and other pharmaceuticals. The drug-smuggling migrants are essentially from Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, etc.
- the third route pertains to trafficking in airports. It is drug smuggling that transits through airports in countries targeted by traffickers due to their limited ability to control their airports<sup>14</sup>.

Arms trafficking had been developing for some time due to the various rebellions, however, it grew further with the collapse of Libya. Niger has long been an area of passage for merchants and pilgrims, which has led to the creation of a network of routes, which have been updated in present times by traffickers. This has promoted the development of organized cross-border and transnational crime: drug trafficking, arms trafficking, trafficking in human beings, terrorism, etc., particularly since the country is vast and controlling its borders presents a major challenge. Niger, which is a corridor (a point of passage for drugs, trafficking in human beings, clandestine migrations, etc.) especially in its Saharan areas, is also a point of departure for migrants to the Maghreb and Europe.

### III. NIGER'S RESPONSES TO SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES

Currently, Niger lacks the capacity to resolve all of these conflicts. However, the state has initiated policies and strategies to contain certain conflicts and threats faced by the country.

#### 1. Internally

The military reflex of the Nigerien government in response to terrorist attacks derived from a well-entrenched logic on the part of the national authorities, especially following the armed insurrection by the Nigerien's Movement for Justice (MNJ) in 2007. This was a Republican logic, dictating that the army should have a strong presence on the political stage. This reflex highlights the need for preventive initiatives to deal with the security issues of the region. Thus, during the Libyan crisis that saw the return of Tuareg combatants, the latter were systematically disarmed by the army and their reintegration was facilitated. However, the military approach to terrorism is a one-off approach that does not necessarily take account of the structural parameters of medium- and long-term instability.

Geographically located in an isolated, austere area, with soaring population growth as well as an economy dominated by informalism, the country is subject to constraints that expose its population to all sorts of ideologies, as long as they help solve their everyday problems. Recurring political instability has also contributed to the aggravation of impoverishment. In the light of this, the authorities have added a socioeconomic focus to the military and security focus. Unemployment, especially youth unemployment, food insecurity and the lack of basic services

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Sahel Dimanche, consommation de la drogue au Niger ; un phénomène inquiétant, in [www.lesahel.org](http://www.lesahel.org)

cannot be fought with arms or regulations. These issues need to be addressed with effective development policies.

The Republic of Niger Strategy for Development and Security in Sahel-Saharan Areas of the Country (SDS), drafted in October 2012, responds to the need to take account of socioeconomic difficulties in the counter-terrorism plan of action. The ills that contribute to the rise of violence, notably unemployment, insecurity, the lack of socioeconomic opportunity and clandestine immigration, should be dealt with in an integrated fashion. The SDS focuses on the reinforcement of the security of property and people in urban and rural areas, with a view to creating and reinforcing the people's access to economic opportunity by developing agricultural, forestry and livestock potential, and promoting tourism and crafts while protecting the environment in vulnerable areas. Education, health and other public utilities, and the promotion of a governance focusing on capacity building for stakeholders in decentralization at the local and community level are taken into account. The plan also includes reinforcement of social participation and promotion of youth with the involvement of community leaders. Today, the Nigerien government increasingly focuses on the participation of opinion leaders in dealing with security. Clerics, the bishop of Niamey and the president of the Islamic association have spoken on national television to call for peace and tolerance and they even occasionally participate in political mediation in the event of crisis between the majority and the opposition, with a view to preserving peace. The strategy of the Nigerien government consists of exercising constant vigilance, through the Islamic association and certainly through other networks, over all of these developments.

Regarding the conflicts between farmers and herders, which are very common in Niger, a number of organizations and stakeholders are involved in the prevention of rural land disputes. These chiefly include traditional chiefs, administrative authorities, rural code organizations and producers' organizations. The administrative authorities are involved in conflict prevention through consensual determination of the dates on which fields will be opened and closed and by broadly disseminating these dates among all rural operators. Like the customary authorities, the administrative authorities organize information and awareness missions for their respective entities on matters of general interest, such as the culture of peace, peaceful cohabitation among rural populations, and protection and conservation of natural resources. In the framework of establishing land security for rural operators and preventing land conflicts, the government set up specialized land administration units at various levels of administrative organization in the country. According to their administrative level, rural code organizations carry out various activities aimed at conflict prevention: popular information and awareness, delivery of land security deeds, leading the land security process, issuing right of priority use certificates on herders' traditional lands, and leading the process of setting dates for opening and closing fields.

The administrative decentralization policy has been one of the responses to the issue of rebellion (Act No. 96-06 of February 1996, which was only implemented in 2004). It remains that administrative decentralization was not accompanied by substantial resources enabling the local authorities to successfully carry out their tasks and effectively fight insecurity.

In terms of security, actions have included operational and infrastructural capacity building for the defence and security forces. This entails the creation of new police headquarters, neighbourhood police stations and security companies, staffing and training, specialized counter-terrorism and civil protection equipment, technical and forensic police laboratory creation, provision of computer equipment for units and departments, etc.

Where justice is concerned, the plan includes capacity building for judicial departments with respect to the fight against illegal traffics, organized crime and terrorism. The national financial intelligence and processing unit of Niger (CENTIF) was created to verify the origin of certain bank transfers<sup>15</sup>, etc. The jurisdictions of the courts were extended to include financial matters. The Government of Niger reinforced its legal framework on the fight against terrorism by adopting three ordinances on January 27, 2013. These ordinances focused on the organization of the jurisdictions of the Republic of Niger and amendments to the criminal code and the criminal procedure code. In order to bring solutions to the issue of governance, the office of the high commissioner on the modernization of the state (Haut-Commissariat à la Modernisation de l'État) was set up to reflect on and implement such solutions. Similarly, in response to the circulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), the national committee for the recovery and control of illicit arms (Commission Nationale de Collecte et de Contrôle des Armes Illicites - CNCCAI) and the defence and security forces conducted arms recovery and mine-clearing operations.

## 2. Externally

It should be noted that Niger is at the heart of a region in crisis with Northern Mali to the west, where various terrorist or irredentist groups run rampant; Libya to the north, a state in total decline that is flooding the rest of the Sahel with arms and, in the Lake Chad region, to the southeast, the presence and expansion of Islamic State in West Africa (formerly Boko Haram).

Since the armed intervention by NATO in Libya in 2011, the country has become a breeding ground for terrorists who have made the Sahel region a haven for increasing insecurity among the countries of the region. In this framework, the Heads of State of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad met in February 2013 to create G5 Sahel. This new group forms an institutional framework for the coordination and monitoring of regional cooperation. The priority is first of all to adapt their counter-terrorism strategies and cooperate to secure the zone. The countries have therefore pooled their forces to create synergy in their actions with a view to effectively combating terrorism and guarantee cross-border security. It is in this spirit that bilateral agreements on the right of pursuit and intelligence sharing were signed between Mali and Niger, and regular meetings are held between high-level officials in G5 defence forces to monitor operations and planning. These inter-army operations have made it possible to secure this huge expanse by neutralizing Jihadist bases and fuel, food, munitions and arms supply positions. However, porous borders and the limited logistic resources of the G5 defence force make it impossible to effectively control all movements of terrorist and criminal groups. To take one example, the length of the Niger-Chad border is estimated at three hundred and fifty kilometres.

Niger is seeking to control its borders as tightly as possible, even though it is aware of the difficulty of the task in light of its limited means in view of the scope of its territory. It has adopted a policy of non-negotiation with terrorists. Accordingly, its action follows a logic of cooperation and unity of action with the countries with which it shares a border and those experiencing similar security issues. Note should be taken of Niger's cooperation with Nigeria on the matter of Boko Haram, with Chad on the same matter, with Algeria in relation to AQIM and with Mali on security threats in Northern Mali. Bilateral cooperation consists of reinforcing border controls, sharing intelligence, harmonizing instruments pertaining to issues of terrorism,

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Aymeric Janier, Au Niger, un scrutin sur fond d'instabilité sécuritaire, [www.LeMonde.fr](http://www.LeMonde.fr) (Le 22.02.2016)

trafficking, etc. Multilateral cooperation has also been developed to track down terrorists. Accordingly, the Nigerien authorities were alerted very early on to the consequences of destabilization in Libya and called for military intervention to oust the “terrorist groups and narco-traffickers” who had taken control of Northern Mali. Niger also took part in the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA / MISMA) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which took over from MISMA, with the currently deployed elements. These various positions and actions have made Niger a potential target for Jihadists.

#### IV. EVALUATION OF REGIONAL AND MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION

While it is true that the core countries, namely Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, were quick to discern the issue of terrorism and transnational crime, one of the major concerns of the authorities in the Sahel-Sahara and West African region is structured around the inefficiency of the regional cooperation frameworks.

Two regional cooperation initiatives were taken in recent years in the framework of the fight against terrorism in the Sahel-Sahara region. The first of these initiatives involved the establishment by the core countries of the Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL) based in Algiers and the Joint Military Staff Committee (CEMOC) based in Tamanrasset, in 2010. The purpose of the UFL is to gather, process and disseminate information on terrorist activities. CEMOC, which is viewed by many stakeholders as a “paper tiger”, has a mandate to coordinate the military counter-terrorism actions of the core countries. Regular meetings were planned, although many observers felt that, aside from declarations of intent, actions and especially impact by UFL and CEMOC on criminal and terrorist groups remained limited. The fragility of the regional mechanisms has been revealed by attacks by terrorist groups.

In order to curb the threats to its security, Niger has stepped up its cooperation with Mauritania, Chad and Nigeria. On August 20, 2013, a military cooperation agreement was signed between Niger and Mauritania. This bilateral initiative was aimed at alleviating the inefficiency of the existing security cooperation frameworks. Paradoxically, these bilateral initiatives will only be truly effective if they eventually form part of a coordinated, structured regional framework. However, the Nigerien authorities have stressed the difficulties of cooperation with certain regional actors. The deficiencies observed in the regional initiatives underway have been partly due to divergences in the different countries’ assessments of the threats depending on whether they are located at the very edge of the battlefield or further away. A lack of political will on the part of the national authorities was one of the greatest weaknesses in regional cooperation. However, all of the countries unanimously recognized that none were left unscathed by terrorism and religious extremism, which was an additional reason to pool their efforts to overcome those threats. In any case, at the present time, Niger does not seem to expect much from the regional community. Indeed, the authorities felt that ECOWAS could and should do better. It should immediately begin the implementation of the Regional Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted in February 2013 in Yamoussoukro. In order to remedy the shortcomings of cooperation, on March 17, 2013, the African Union initiated a process aimed at “deepening security cooperation through coordination and enhancement of the effectiveness of border

surveillance measures, as well as through intelligence sharing and the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahel-Sahara region”. This process, known as the Nouakchott process, has already been the focus of several meetings. Firstly, two ministerial meetings were held in Mauritania, to lay the foundations of the process and another on the reinforcement of cooperation on security and operationalization of the architecture. Next, two meetings were held for heads of intelligence services in the Sahel-Sahara region in April 2013 in Bamako and June 2013 in Abidjan. Finally, a meeting was held on reinforcing operational cooperation on the security of land borders in the Sahel-Sahara region, in Tripoli, in September 2013.

In terms of multilateral cooperation, the European Union was the main actor, intervening through various projects, notably the Contre-Terrorisme Sahel (CT Sahel) project and G5 (a group of 5 countries involved in the fight against terrorism in the region) with technical, logistic and financial support. It also contributes to the equipment of Niger’s defence and security forces. The EUCAP Sahel Niger Project, launched in 2012 to support capacity building for Nigerien actors in the area of security, provides advice and training to enhance the capacities of the Nigerien authorities in the area of security. A number of international experts from European security forces and justice departments are permanently deployed in Niger. The EU also developed a multisectoral support program for the Nigerien authorities with regard to the fight against terrorism and organized crime. Through this cooperation, it seeks to maintain its traditional position in the Sahel region but also to protect itself from interconnecting Sahelian issues<sup>16</sup>.

More recently, we have noted the updating of military cooperation with the United States and the recent arrival of Germany. The United States, for its part, has set up projects such as the Pan-Sahel Initiative and the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative in the framework of its military cooperation with Sahelian countries, with a view to training national armies to combat terrorism.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. National-level recommendations

- Organize debates that promote a national consensus on the security issue by developing a harmonized communications strategy and including traditional media and social networks to better deal with terrorist threats.
- Faced with the development of religious radicalism, which is considered to be still in its infancy by the authorities and social actors, Niger should encourage the creation of a national framework for dialogue on the religious education system with a view to defining the contents of national education curricula, providing a framework for its financing mechanisms and reducing the potential frustrations of those left behind by the official French-speaking education system.
- Enhance civil society resources and skills by defining its role and its place in the fight against security threats and the promotion of stability in the country.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Rabbani, Forum d’Agadez, p. 24.

- Create an enabling framework for constructive political dialogue between all of the players (government, opposition, civil society, etc.).
- Exercise stricter control over funding of Muslim charities so as to be able to trace sources of financing for extremist networks.
- Think about an alternative to the military solution that has been preferred up to now.
- Reinforce organizations aimed at maintaining and consolidating peace and focus on peace holidays such as April 24, which commemorates the peace accords with the Tuareg rebellion of 1995; give them national contents with poetry contests on peace.
- Equip the communes with more resources and infrastructure (police headquarters and gendarmerie brigades) so that they contribute more effectively to keeping the peace and combating terrorism.
- Promote a better distribution of national wealth for greater social justice.
- Increase government presence through decentralization, good governance, and education. Draft a better administrative and territorial management policy.
- Establish a climate of trust that promotes intelligence sharing and productive cooperation between the people and the defence and security forces to pre-empt asymmetric threats.
- Initiate effective preventive policies by providing training and awareness for civilians, especially opinion leaders, to spread messages of tolerance and peace during episcopal conferences and assemblies of Islamic councils to counter extremist Salafist ideology.
- Provide support programs for vulnerable groups (support funds for youth, for women...) by promoting access to basic socioeconomic structure for disadvantaged groups. Equitably distribute development projects across the territory so that no area feels excluded.

## **2. Recommendations for the Sahel-Sahara region:**

- In the light of the collusion between criminals and terrorists in the Sahel-Sahara region, only a concerted plan and pooling of resources for the effective implementation of the different regional instruments pertaining to the fight against terrorism and transnational crime can pay off. Security cooperation between North African countries and Sub-Saharan African countries should also be reinforced, particularly in the Sahel-Sahara region.
- In keeping with the operationalization process of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the area, initiated in Nouakchott, Mauritania, in March 2013, the AU, ECOWAS, other concerned organizations and their member states should work to improve cooperation in the areas of justice, intelligence and border control.
- Drought management necessitates the adoption of an early-warning system and a local fund to finance planned rapid response activities.
- While security is the priority of the G5 leaders, in order to better coordinate this security policy, development programs need to be initiated in order to improve the living conditions of the people. As a priority, the states need to identify underdeveloped areas in their respective territories in order to make investments to satisfy the people's urgent basic needs. Promote economic and social development
- When all is said and done, the G5 should also develop a communications strategy to help people in vulnerable areas become aware of transnational threats and their impact on their security.
- Security issues cannot be divorced from the broader issues such as poverty, the impact of climate change, the frequency of food crises and internal tensions. Economic

development and social justice should be promoted for vulnerable members of society in order to ensure a climate of peace, social tranquillity and prosperity. To this end, the Nigerien government must place the economic priority on the development of agriculture, which offers substantial advantages: available arable land and an irrigation system fed by the Niger River.

- The current threats to the Sahel-Sahara region are cross-border threats originating in cultural, political, socioeconomic, environmental and security factors. For a solution to be sustainable, it must necessarily incorporate the various factors and stakeholders in the sub-region and the Maghreb.
- In bilateral terms, coordinated patrols should be conducted and an intelligence-sharing and information exchange system on arms trafficking should be set in place to support operational actions and border surveillance.
- Set up an intelligence fusion unit; create a dedicated team that will identify the resources to be implemented and design a regional counter-terrorism strategy in the framework of the Lake Chad Basin Commission; this approach followed from the conclusions of the Lake Chad Basin Commission Summit in 2012.
- Mobilize donors in favour of programs that promote socio-economic development in the regions concerned.

## CONCLUSION

Niger, like all of the core countries, is faced with serious internal and external security problems and must therefore focus on producing a social, economic and defence policy to ensure the security of people and property within its territory. Since the 1980s, the Nigerien Sahara has been the theatre of armed activities, ranging from cattle theft to rebellion. From the time of the National Conference of 1991 and the elections that followed, the weakness of the state has benefited rebel groups, which expressed claims they had been unable to express in the past due to the authoritarian rule of the Supreme Military Council. Rebellions created insecurity which, once it began, was perpetuated despite the signing of peace and decentralization agreements. With the advent of Boko Haram and the Jihadist groups from Mali, the whole of the Sahara became a theatre of conflicts. The emergence of Boko Haram proved, most of all, that the religious discourse that had been visible for some time could become a real source of anxiety. However, each of the core countries is attempting to curb this evil, either using its own resources or through cooperation. Initiatives have been taken by the states concerned at the individual and collective levels in order to deal with the terrorist menace. In this study, we have sought to analyse these threats and challenges and issue a certain number of recommendations which, in our view, will make it possible to better identify the issues with a view to finding adequate solutions. Most of the responses reside in democratic governance founded on equity and justice and the promotion of inclusive citizenship.

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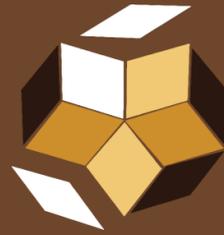
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## DIALOGUES

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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