



**Workshop Report II:  
Sahelian Security in Flux  
London, UK, 13th of May 2019**

The West Africa Peace and Security Network, the University of Portsmouth and Chatham House co-hosted a workshop on the subject of “Sahelian Security in Flux” on 13 May 2019 at Chatham House in London. Academics and practitioners from West Africa, the UK, and Europe discussed the current state of insecurity in the Sahel region, including violent insurgencies, sub-state challenges, and past and future responses. The event comprised two keynote presentations and two panels.

**Keynote One: Prof Isaac Albert**

Professor Isaac Albert’s (University of Ibadan) keynote “**Scoping the Security Crisis in the Sahel**” focused on the different types of insecurity in the Sahel including violent extremism, environmental scarcity, transnational crimes including arms, drugs and human trafficking. It provided a critical look at the structural causes of the problems and identified gaps in current intervention strategies. Professor Albert outlined a number of key problems, including current spikes of violent attacks, structural problems such as environmental scarcity, illegal mining and transnational organised crime. He critiqued the current response options such as avoidance, strategic withdrawal, third party decision making, and confrontation, which very often ignore the root causes of the conflict. The Sahel is not a regional but a global question which requires multidimensional solutions for its multidimensional problems on the social, political, economic, and environmental level. A cross-pillar approach across the development, humanitarian, and peace and security nexus is needed to address the root causes of crises, tackle exclusion and poverty, and promote good governance. Future interventions need to be tied to the root causes of the instability in order to create stability.

**Sub-State Challenges in the Sahel**

**Luca Raineri** (Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna, Pisa) - The rise of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara: A Deviant Case of Violent Extremism in the Central Sahel?

**Vincent Foucher** (International Crisis Group) - The Birth of a Jihadi Rural State on Lake Chad: Al Barnawi’s ISWAP from Theology to Practice

**Han Van Dijk** (Leiden University) - The Fulani Factor and Political (in)stability in West Africa

The first panel discussed the sub-state challenges in the Sahel by looking at the rise of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, the ‘Jihadi Rural State’ established by Islamic State in Nigeria, and the Fulani Factor in West Africa. Dr Raineri addressed the Rise of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara by looking at the deviant case of violent extremism in the Central Sahel. In that context, the two hypotheses “ungoverned space” and “state abuse” were discussed. The first examines the social deprivation of marginalised groups, lack of public education and ethnic based security dilemmas in weak states as conflict drivers. The second considers state action such as corruption and discrimination as determinants of conflict. Key drivers for radical mobilisation in this case were highlighted as weak states, economic deprivation, and the neglect of systematic abuse by other non-state actors. It also discussed alternative explanations of radicalisation such as identity, ideology, and greed. The ‘Birth of a Jihadi Rural State on Lake Chad’ was discussed by Dr Foucher. The focus was on former ISWAP leader Al Barnawi and the approach of ISWAP under his tenure noting how the group has been able to establish a proto-state in the Lake Chad region. The paper discussed ISWAP’s more lenient treatment of Muslims in the region (compared to the other faction Boko Haram) and highlighted in detail the economic practices of the group. The

'Fulani Factor and Political (in)stability in West Africa' was presented by Prof. Van Dijk focusing on the role of Fulani pastoralists on political (in)Stability in West Africa and the impact on this group. The Fulani are nomadic pastoralists with an enormous geographic dispersion across West Africa. Urbanization, migration, and dryland dynamics have been identified as some of the problems which are causing a crisis of pastoralism further intensifying the uneasy relationship between pastoralists and the state. The Fulani are increasingly marginalised and have little political representation, so they are mainly dependent on self-defence. In Nigeria, there are currently more casualties related to Fulani related issues than Boko Haram.

### **Keynote Two: Dr. Jean-Hervé Jézéquel**

Dr. Jean-Hervé Jézéquel's (International Crisis Group) keynote "**Insurgencies and Armed Violence in the Central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger): The Recent Past and Prospects in the Immediate Future**" focused on transnational terrorism and its role in the destabilization of the Sahel region. According to Dr. Jézéquel, Africa is the key continent in terms of the fight against terror. The keynote outlined the geographic expansion, governance, and agenda of jihad in the region. It discussed the different agendas between local and global jihad as well as the ruralisation of jihad. In Mali, civilians are more in the focus of jihadi groups which are facing resistance from the local population, so there is no overarching victory for these groups and no single control of distinct centres. Jihadi groups tend to leave urban centres and focus on rural areas exploiting the frustration against the state and existing conflicts. Dr. Jézéquel highlighted the importance and limitations of jihadi groups as service providers providing services such as justice and security while being unable to build streets and hospitals. The local population is introduced to Muslim regulations such as norms in daily life, dress code, etc. Services are initially free, so welcomed, but then payment is required, which can make jihadi groups as unpopular as the state.

### **Assessing Contemporary Responses**

**Elisa Lucia Lopez** (Université Libre de Bruxelles) - The European Union Integrated and Regionalised Approach Towards the Sahel

**Amandine Gnanguenon** (Université d'Auvergne) - African patchwork approach in the Sahel: learning the lessons for a more coherent regional cooperation

**Tony Chafer** (University of Portsmouth) France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutional Perspective

**Aoife McCullough** (Overseas Development Institute) - Preliminary Research on Climate Change and Armed Groups in Niger.

The second panel discussed contemporary responses such as the European Union's 'Integrated and Regionalised Approach' towards the Sahel, an 'African Patchwork Approach' to regional cooperation and France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel. The European Union Integrated and Regionalised Approach towards the Sahel was presented by Dr Lucia Lopez as an important part of the response to the Sahel conflict. The panel discussed its structural reform of the EU's efforts and why they have been unsuccessful so far. Outlining four key issues that detract from the EU's efforts, Dr Lucia Lopez noted the politics of the host country, political pressure from the intervener (France), the politics of the EU, and a lack of knowledge of the politics of the host country. The notion of an 'African Patchwork Approach' in the Sahel was used by Dr Gnanguenon to discuss the requirement for a more coherent approach to regional cooperation. She highlighted the problems created by multiple overlapping regional organisations, such as the African Union, ECOWAS and the G5 Sahel in West Africa. Prof Chafer offered a Historical Institutional perspective on France's recent interventions in Mali and the wider Sahel. On the surface they appear to mark a new departure in French military policy, in view of the approach to multilateralism adopted, the regionalisation of the response and the levels of violence deployed. Yet Prof Chafer wondered: how 'new' is this new 'multilateral' approach, when set against the historical backdrop of French military interventions in Africa. Aoife McCullough presented some preliminary findings on the question of climate change in West Africa and its role in conflict, suggesting that while an important issue, the impact of climate change may be less than feared in some cases.