



**FROM NEW FRONTIER TO
NEW NORMAL:
COUNTER-TERRORISM
OPERATIONS IN THE
SAHEL-SAHARA**
RICHARD REEVE AND
ZOË PELTER
AUGUST 2014

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Cover image: A U.S. Navy SEAL advisor watches a Malian special operations vehicle unit run through immediate action drills for counter-terrorism missions during training February 26, 2010, near Gao, Mali. Photo by Max R. Blumenfeld, Joint Special Operations Task Force-Trans Sahara.

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From New Frontier to New Normal: Counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel-Sahara

**Richard Reeve and
Zoë Pelter
August 2014**

“The committee believes that U.S. Africa Command is on the front lines of the next phase of the terrorist threat”

**US House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services
Report 113-446 on the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2015, 13 May 2014**

“We have to get used to operating in Africa, and they have to get used to us,” [Commander of Marine Corps Forces Africa Maj. Gen. Raymond] Fox told a Washington defense conference April 9. “We want Marines to be as familiar with Africa as they are with Iraq and Afghanistan. I don’t want the first time they see that place to be when they’re going in there for real. So we’re going to deliver a path where Africa sees more of us and we see more of Africa.”

Marine Corps Times, 18 May 2014

“But why review our military deployment in Africa if it has functioned so well up to the present? Because the threat has diffused, it has multiplied. Because we must now respond to challenges which are those of speed, mobility, effectiveness and to do it with new means.”

President François Hollande, N’Djamena, 19 July 2014

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Glossary of Acronyms

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
AQIM	Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
BSS	Bande Sahélo-Saharienne (Sahel-Saharan Strip)
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy (of EU)
CT	Counter-terrorism
CTPF	Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (US)
DoD	United States Department of Defense
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
EUBAM	European Union Integrated Border Assistance Mission in Libya
EUCAP Sahel	European Union Civilian CSDP Mission in Niger
EUTM	European Union Training Mission in Mali
FY	Financial Year
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Algerian progenitor of AQIM)
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force (in Afghanistan)
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
JSOTF-TS	Joint Special Operations Task Force – Trans-Sahara
MALE	Medium Altitude Long Endurance (UAV)
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
PSI	Pan-Sahel Initiative
SAR	Search and Rescue
SBS	Special Boat Service (UK)
SOCAFRICA	Special Operations Command Africa
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SP-MAGTF	Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force
STOL	Short Take-Off and Landing (aircraft)
TIP	Terrorist Interdiction Program
TSCTI	Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative
TSCTP	Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership
TRANSCOM	US Army Transportation Command
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations

Executive Summary

Context

- The Sahel-Sahara is increasingly seen as the “new frontier” in global counter-terrorism operations. Recurrent security crises since the 2011 Arab uprisings and the NATO-assisted overthrow of Libya’s Gaddafi regime have radically changed international perceptions of northwest Africa as a focus of activities by jihadist groups. It is now the priority area for French external counter-terrorism operations and is rising rapidly in importance to the US. Both countries are implementing a “pivot to Africa”. This report documents the evolving importance of the Sahel-Sahara in French and US counter-terrorism strategy and the means with which they and their allies are waging overt and covert war against jihadist groups in the region.

- 2014 is a year of major transition for French and US counter-terrorism and crisis response forces in the Sahel-Sahara. On 1 August, France formally initiated its redeployment of military forces under Opération Barkhane. This sees French land, air and special forces move from a high intensity, short-duration mission in northern Mali to a permanent posture at over a dozen locations across five or more Sahel states. The US is increasing its presence more steadily in line with the maturation of its newest combatant command, Africa Command (AFRICOM), and the rolling out of a crisis response concept known as the “New Normal”. Already tested in South Sudan and Libya, this could see US Marines establish bases across the continent with the capacity to deploy within hours to anywhere that US citizens and interests are threatened.

- The Sahel-Sahara is a vast territory the size of the USA or China, its 12 countries home to over 200 million people and three primary jihadist groups – Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al-Shari’a and Boko Haram. France has been the dominant external security actor there for over a century and sees a direct threat to its citizens and territory from regional terrorist groups. European states, and increasingly some Asian states, have strong interests in Saharan energy exports (oil, gas, uranium) and trade, including arms sales. The US had few regional interests before 2002; the September 2012 deadly attack on its diplomats in Benghazi radically changed its perception of the threat to its interests from the Sahel-Sahara.

Operations

- The military operation launched in January 2013 against AQIM and its allies in northern Mali was one of at least seven such French-led interventions in the region since 1968. However, it was the first major overt operation by an external power to target jihadist groups and it was the most multinational. At least 22 other countries provided direct support for Opération Serval and the associated African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). Opération Barkhane and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) entrench the presence of over 9,000 external security forces in the Sahel-Sahara with mission and mandate to combat terrorist groups.

- The true nature and extent of counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel-Sahara can only be guessed at. Covert operations using Special Operations Forces have become an increasing feature of US operations. Several hundred are believed to be present in the region on undisclosed “contingency operations”. Since at least 2013, French, UK, Canadian and Dutch special forces also operate in Mali, Niger and Nigeria. Air-mobile US Marines task forces are increasingly deploying to Africa from bases in Spain and Italy and are known to be seeking at least one “Intermediate Staging Base” in coastal West Africa.

- France and the US are increasing their intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities in the Sahel-Sahara. Niamey airport in Niger is their main ISR base in the Sahel, where each operates two unarmed versions of the MQ-9 Reaper “hunter-killer” unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). The French base at N’Djamena in Chad has also been used for UAV operations, notably during the current US response to the Chibok abductions in northeast Nigeria. However, the most potent US UAVs operating over Africa are probably based at Sigonella in Sicily. So far, the only recorded regional usage of armed UAVs has been by the US during the NATO-led intervention in Libya in 2011. Algeria, the most capable regional actor, has immediate plans to acquire long endurance combat UAVs for use in the Sahara. Given gaps in its UAV coverage from Niamey, Sigonella and Djibouti, the US is likely to seek further long-term UAV basing facilities, possibly in Senegal and Chad. Meanwhile, France, the US and (sporadically) the UK and Spain operate a significant number of manned ISR aircraft across the Sahel-Sahara.

- Private military and security contractors (PMSCs) are a small part of French operations in the Sahel-Sahara but have run key parts of AFRICOM's covert counter-terrorism operations in the region. These include running a post-2007 ISR operation using light aircraft (Operation Creek Sand), transporting special operations forces, providing medical evacuation and search and rescue capacities, and to stockpile aviation fuel at regional airports. MINUSMA will contract PMSCs to operate its unarmed UAVs from Mali.
- Counter-terrorism training to regional security forces has become ubiquitous under AFRICOM's multifaceted Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and is likely to be expanded significantly under the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund announced in mid-2014. In addition to France, a range of second-tier external actors also play a role in regional counter-terrorism training, including the European Union, Canada, Israel, Colombia and Japan.
- The use of abduction and illegal rendition of terrorism suspects appears to have been a minor aspect of recent counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel-Sahara. However, there were numerous such cases documented between 2001 and 2004 implicating Algeria, The Gambia, Libya, Mauritania and Morocco. Morocco, the US' primary regional ally, was accused of hosting secret detention and torture facilities. Since October 2013 US special forces have twice abducted terrorist suspects from Libya and taken them for trial in the US without the consent of the Libyan government.

Outcomes

- Over its eighteen months, Opération Serval (January 2013 to July 2014) achieved tactical successes within major strategic limitations. The (overstated) advance south of jihadist groups was repelled and control of much of the north was returned to the Malian government. However, French, African and UN intervention has not addressed the political and social nature of the northern rebellion and has limited ability to protect civilians against a terrorist rather than insurgent threat. Moreover, intervention in Mali appears to have displaced AQIM and its allies into Libya, Niger and possibly Nigeria. UN mandates for ongoing French operations in parallel to MINUSMA effectively authorise an indefinite right of deadly pursuit of groups that France may define as terrorists. This is a dangerous precedent that goes beyond the normal understanding of peace support operations and UN accountability.

- The US has set much more strategic objectives for its TSCTP but so far has seen marginal success. While AFRICOM and Washington have established a regular military presence in all regional countries and thus a close knowledge of its local partners' capabilities, there is little recognition of the often toxic nature of these partnerships. Successes in building capacities of Mauritanian and Chadian elite units is balanced by dismal failures in Mali and Libya and the disruption caused by repeated political interventions, mutinies and coups by elements of allied regional militaries.
- Governance and human rights are considerably undermined by the current securitisation of policy in the Sahel-Sahara. France, and to a lesser extent the US, relies hugely on the support of Chad's authoritarian government for basing and combat support. Undemocratic governments in Algeria and Mauritania have also been able to normalise their international relations, including arms imports, as crucial partners in Saharan counter-terrorism operations. Perceived international protection may discourage some regional governments from seeking internal political settlements. The elected Malian government seems to have interpreted the post-2013 French military spearhead and UN shield as a reason not to pursue a peace process with northern separatists.
- Rather than discrediting terrorist ideology as planned, the heightened visibility of US and French forces in the Sahel-Sahara and the strengthening of Islamist militia during the Libyan civil war appears to have significantly increased the profile and activity of jihadist groups. The threat they pose to the US, France and Europe from Sahel-Saharan jihadist groups is still largely assumed; neither AQIM, Boko Haram nor Ansar al-Shari'a has yet launched an attack outside its home region. While some disruption of such groups has been effected since 2013, at least the motivation for retaliatory attacks is likely to increase as the militarisation of the Sahel-Sahara continues.

Introduction

The Sahel-Sahara region of north-west Africa has witnessed a steady build-up of foreign military and intelligence forces over the last decade in line with US and European attempts to counter the spread and threat of radical Islamist ideas associated with the al-Qaida network. Two events in 2012 thrust it into the international spotlight as a “new frontline” in the global counter-terrorism campaigns begun by the US and its allies in 2001. The first was the take-over of the northern half of Mali by al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and two of its local allies in the first half of the year. This put al-Qaida in control of a million square kilometres of territory bordering four other countries. The second was the attack on US diplomatic buildings in Benghazi of September 2012, which killed the US Ambassador to Libya and three other US citizens. A third event in April 2014 captured the world’s humanitarian attention as Boko Haram, a northern Nigerian group, abducted over 200 girls from a school in Chibok.

Such events were shocking but not new in the region. One of its states, Algeria, had concluded its decade-long battle with armed Islamist opponents before such civil wars had even begun in Iraq, Syria or Yemen, and with a more deadly outcome than any of these conflicts. The collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya was achieved through spectacular violence and foreign intervention. Nigeria’s northern conflict had been spiralling out of control since at least 2010. Dozens of Europeans had been captured and ransomed or killed by militants across the Sahel-Sahara since 2003.

This report analyses how the Global War on Terror came to northwest Africa in terms of efforts by external security actors to counter the perceived threat from al-Qaida-linked jihadist groups. How such groups became established in the region is a linked but separate story. This is the story of the evolution of the long-standing French military presence in the Sahel-Sahara as well as the build-up of US military resources and interests in the region since 2002.

Three developments of particular interest to the changing nature of counter-terrorist operations in the Sahel-Sahara are thus central to this report. The first is the French transition in 2014 from Opération Serval to Opération Barkhane. This marks a shift from a tactical, limited duration mission focused on northern Mali to an open-ended mission that spans the Sahel, indefinitely basing French forces in at least four states and shifting further to intelligence and special forces-led operations.

The second is the development of US Africa Command (AFRICOM) as the first US “full spectrum combatant command” to be created since and in light of the lessons of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since its establishment in 2008, AFRICOM has operated in almost every country on the continent, yet it has only a few thousand assigned troops, no conventional armoured forces and barely any fighter aircraft or

combat vessels. It represents something new in US strategy and the Sahel-Sahara is the laboratory for experiments in “light-touch” counter-terrorism.

The third is the operationalisation in Africa of a US strategic concept known as the “New Normal”. Born in response to the Benghazi attack, the New Normal looks set to increase the US military presence in Africa, including the likelihood of basing facilities for US Marines in West Africa. More than this presence, the still nebulous New Normal crisis response concept has the potential to change the US terms of engagement in Africa, increasing its capacity and willingness to intervene militarily to protect US interests wherever they seem threatened. Such a concept has been central to French military engagement in Africa for half a century.

These three developments point to 2014 as a critical year in the militarisation of the Sahel-Sahara and the entrenchment of foreign powers there. This report is the first attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the character and scope of all counter-terrorism operations being conducted by external security actors along this new frontline. A brief first section defines the Sahel-Sahara region and examines the various local and external security actors and their interests. The main section analyses the nature of counter-terrorism deployments and operations in the region and known plans for new ones. The final section provides a brief evaluation of the main French and US regional operations and programmes against their stated objectives.

By their nature, many counter-terrorism operations are conducted covertly and details are classified. We have tried to indicate where such uncertainties exist but leaked US diplomatic cables, Congressional hearings and research reports, publicly available procurement and spending data, the admirable US culture of government accountability and the valiant work of a very few investigative journalists¹ provide many clues to the extent of US operations below the radar. In addition to whatever is documented herein, it may reasonably be assumed that much more is happening than has yet been disclosed and there will be more to come.

¹ Craig Whitlock of *The Washington Post* and Nick Turse of *The Nation* Institute’s *TomDispatch.com* deserve special acknowledgement for their reporting and for signposting many other sources.

Security Actors and Interests in the Sahel-Sahara

This section gives an overview of the primary actors involved in counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel-Sahara region and their economic and security interests in the region's stability.

The Sahel-Sahara

For the purpose of this report the 'Sahel-Sahara' region is defined as the 12 countries (13 if one includes Moroccan-occupied and partially recognised Western Sahara) that touch on the arid Sahara desert and semi-arid Sahel strip to its south. Covering 10 million km², it is a vast region, larger than China or the USA, home to over 200 million people. This is both a geographic region equivalent to northwest Africa, and a geostrategic location in the "War on Terror", where Western states militarily confront armed jihadist groups that they perceive to be hostile to their interests and security. Broadly speaking, it is the area in which three jihadist groups and their splinter factions operate: Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an Algerian-origin group; Boko Haram, a Nigerian group; and Ansar al-Shari'a, a newer North African group.

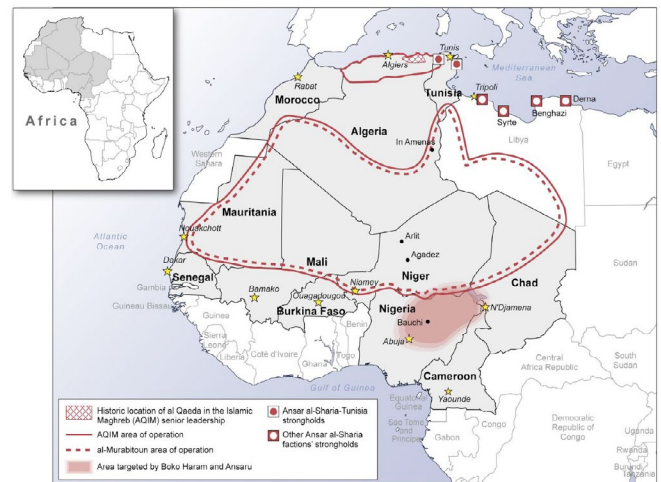
In US security parlance the region is referred to as the Trans-Sahara. In French military usage it is referred to as the Sahel-Saharan Strip (Bande Sahélo-Saharienne: BSS). The dozen countries are Algeria, Burkina Faso, northern Cameroon, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, northern Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. Not coincidentally, these are the 11 current and one invited partner states of the US' Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). The region as considered here thus excludes the eastern Saharan and Sahelian states: Egypt, Sudan and Eritrea, which have rather different security dynamics.

The region forms a historical or cultural entity in three respects. In the first respect, at its centre is the homeland of several traditionally nomadic and stateless groups, including the Tuareg, Toubou and Maur, Sahrawi and Shuwa Arabs. These groups' quests for unity, autonomy or sovereignty are an integral part of regional security dynamics. Secondly, Sufi-influenced Sunni Islam has been a relatively unifying force in the region, with the spread of Islam across the Sahara following medieval trade networks. Finally, the Sahel-Sahara was for several generations almost entirely colonised by France, whose economic and cultural influence has been predominant in most countries since independence c.1960³.

² Libya is the current invitee. Burkina Faso (2009) and Cameroon (2014) were added to the TSCTP after its launch around a smaller core of states.

³ The only exceptions were northern Nigeria (British), Libya (Italian, though France administered the southern Fezzan region 1943-51) and Western Sahara (Spanish). Technically, Morocco was a French (and Spanish) protectorate, and coastal Algeria was a part of metropolitan

Figure 1: Key Terrorist Groups in Northwest Africa and their Regions of Operation, 2009-2014



Source: GAO analysis of State information; Map Resources (map). | GAO-14-518

Regional actors

Within the dozen regional states, only two have sufficient capacity to play a unilateral role in regional counter-terrorism operations. By far the largest is Algeria, which has the most capable armed forces and largest military budget in Africa. However, Algeria is a relatively isolationist state that does not use its armed forces outside of its own territory. It has been a major player in counter-terrorism operations longer than any other in the region due to its extremely violent civil war against Islamist political factions. For most Algerians, this war had concluded by 2003, although the displacement into the Sahara of one faction of what became AQIM at this time played a major role in amplifying the current cycle of violence in the Sahel-Sahara. Algeria is a major producer of oil and gas, mostly from its Saharan regions, and thus has a vital interest in the security of its very sparsely populated southern regions. The January 2013 attack on the In-Aménas gas facility in eastern Algeria demonstrated the ongoing threat to such interests from radical groups.

Nigeria is the other powerful regional actor. With the largest economy and population in Africa, Nigeria is the regional power of West Africa and since 1990 has led numerous regional peace support operations in coastal West Africa. However, it has a relatively small, poorly equipped military and lacks the equipment, training and political incentive to be a significant security actor in the arid Sahel-Sahara. Like Algeria in the 1990s, it is primarily a counter-terrorism actor on its own territory, fighting Boko Haram in its northeast. Its huge oil and gas industry is located in its Niger Delta, well away from the turbulent Sahel regions but subject to its own major insecurities. Nigerian agriculture, trade and manufacturing are also focused in the coastal south.

France, rather than being colonies.

Stability in Niger and Algeria could provide Nigeria with a pipeline route for its gas to European markets but plans for such infrastructure have never been well advanced.

It should be noted that both the Algerian and Nigerian states have been accused of stoking the current cycle of jihadist violence in the region for their own domestic or international ends. Algeria's Pouvoir (the military-business-political clique that has run the country since independence) has been accused of encouraging radicalisation and use of extreme violence against civilians by Salafist groups in order to discredit its civil war Islamist opponents⁴. Since 2001, and again since the Malian crisis of 2012, it has leveraged its confrontation of jihadist groups to secure rapprochement and arms sales from the US and European states formerly alienated by its human rights and governance records. By some accounts, Algiers has had an interest in perpetuating a minor jihadist rebellion in its remotest Sahara to maintain its international security relationships and authoritarian domestic policies⁵. Various Nigerian politicians from both governing and opposition factions have been accused of fuelling the Boko Haram rebellion in northern states as part of that country's north-south power struggle⁶.

The most powerful remaining regional state actors are Morocco and Chad. Morocco has a large military and a strong security relationship with the US and France but it is geographically isolated from the more unstable regions of the Sahel-Sahara and is economically oriented towards Europe and the Atlantic⁷. Like Algeria, its regional rival, Morocco's international relations – marred by its occupation of Western Sahara – have improved in line with its participation in counter-terrorism activities since 2001. Its main interest in Africa is securing recognition of its claim to Western Sahara.

Chad is a very minor country economically but it has used its recent oil revenues to build up the most powerful armed forces in the Sahel. Since the reductions of tensions at home and with Sudan in 2010, and the demise of rival Muammar Gaddafi in Libya the following year, these forces are increasingly used by President Idriss Déby Itno to assert a greater regional and international role for Chad. France and the US have trained Chad's Special Anti-Terrorism Group. As of 2013, France considered it the only reliable regional partner for counter-terrorism operations in

4 See, for example, John R. Schindler, 'Algeria's Hidden Hand', *The National Interest*, 22 January 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/algerias-hidden-hand-7994>

5 See, for example, Jeremy Keenan, *The Dark Sahara: America's War on Terror in Africa*, Pluto Press, 2009.

6 For a summary of Nigerian conspiracy theories about Boko Haram see Jideofor Adibe, 'Explaining the Emergence of Boko Haram', *Brookings Blog*, 6 May 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/africa-in-focus/posts/2014/05/06-emergence-of-boko-haram-adibe>

7 'US rewards Morocco for terror aid', *BBC Website*, 4 June 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3776413.stm>

desert environments⁸. Chad replaced Morocco as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in January 2014. Nigeria is also a member in 2014-15.

Regional security organisations are also of some importance, especially the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has long been developing a regional component of the African Standby Force, the rapid response element of the African Union's (AU) peace and security architecture. However, ECOWAS depends militarily on Nigerian leadership and assets as well as on external funding and logistics. Few of its 15 member states have experience in or equipment for counter-terrorism or desert-fighting operations. ECOWAS' security coordination with North Africa, where attempts at regional integration are moribund, is historically poor, although a number of initiatives brokered by the AU and others have attempted to overcome this in recent years, with Mauritania (AU chair in 2014 and a former ECOWAS member) leading the way. The Tripoli-based Community of Sahel-Saharan States (known as CEN-SAD) does span the Sahara (Algeria excluded) but it has been crippled by the demise of its founder and funder Muammar Gaddafi. Chad and Morocco have tried to revive CEN-SAD since 2013 as a vehicle for their own regional ambitions⁹.

France

France was the colonial ruler of virtually all of the Sahel-Sahara region from the end of the nineteenth century until 1956-62, when all of its former possessions there were granted independence. This did not mean that France withdrew its troops from the region. It maintained defence agreements with most of its former colonies in the Sahel and maintained small military presences in some of them as well as maintaining ongoing training arrangements with most regional militaries that heavily influenced their structure, doctrine, equipment and, arguably, their loyalties. French troops and aircraft have mounted repeated interventions in Chad (1968, 1978, 1983, 1986, 2006), Mauritania (1977) and Mali (2013) to protect friendly regimes against foreign or internal challenges, and ostensibly to protect French citizens.

French interests in the region are shaped by economic and security concerns. Most of the countries of the region are too small and poor to be major markets but French companies do have some interests in oil production in Libya and Algeria. Oil and gas imports from North Africa are modest. More significantly for

8 *Le Monde*, AFP & Reuters correspondents, 'L'armée tchadienne aux avant-postes de la guerre au Mali', *Le Monde*, 4 March 2013, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/03/04/l-armee-tchadienne-aux-avant-postes-de-la-guerre-au-mali_1842230_3212.html

9 Madjiasra Nako, 'Tchad: La Cen-Sad est morte, vive le Cen-Sad', *Jeune Afrique*, 25 March 2013, http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Articles/Dossier/JA2722p068_02.xml0/diplomatie-tchad-idriss-deby-itno-mouammar-kadhafitchad-la-cen-sad-est-morte-vive-le-cen-sad.html

the French energy sector, which is overwhelmingly dependent on nuclear power, are French-owned uranium mines in northern Niger. These provide about 30% of French uranium imports, and thereby about a quarter of its electricity¹⁰.

French security perceptions of the Sahel-Sahara are shaped by threats to the homeland and to the many thousands of French citizens who live, work or visit the region. Between 1994 and 1996 there were several threats and attacks made by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), an Algerian progenitor of AQIM, against France, including a hijacking of an Air France flight and a series of bombings in Paris. Terrorist plots linked to North African groups continue to surface in the French media¹¹. Attacks on French citizens in the Sahel-Sahara have been a more pressing threat in the past decade¹². Since 2007, more French citizens have been kidnapped and killed by jihadists in the region than any other nationality¹³, including raids in Mauritania, Niger, Mali, Nigeria and Cameroon. These have mostly been by AQIM or its splinter factions but have included more recent attacks by Nigerian groups. French Prime Minister François Fillon “declared war” on AQIM in July 2010 in response to its murder of one French hostage¹⁴.

The United States

The US has historically been a minor player in the Sahel-Sahara, where it does little trade or investment, has small numbers of citizens and has limited energy interests. Its share of Algerian and Nigerian oil exports has fallen as domestic shale production has boomed in the 2010s. US involvement in regional counter-terrorism began to change radically in nature in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the US and the Sahel belt began to attract attention within unfolding thinking on “ungoverned spaces” as refuges for al-Qaida and its allies. The US launched its small-scale Pan-Sahel Initiative in late 2002, folding it into a larger Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) from 2005¹⁵.

10 ‘Nuclear Power in France’, World Nuclear Association, updated July 2014, <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/Country-Profiles/Countries-A-F/France/>

11 See, for example, ‘Paris: La tour Eiffel et le Louvre cibles par les terroristes-djihadistes?’, Metronews, 9 July 2014, <http://www.metronews.fr/paris/paris-la-tour-eiffel-et-le-louvre-cibles-par-les-terroristes-djihadistes/mngi!Nex82AYcaaekw/>

12 François Hollande, ‘Discours du président François Hollande à la base militaire française KOSSEI, à Ndjamena’, Elysée (French Presidency official website), 19 July 2014, <http://www.elysee.fr/assets/pdf/discours-du-president-francois-hollande-a-la-base-militaire-francaise-kossei-a-ndjamena.pdf>

13 Data up to 2011, from Alex Thurston, ‘AQIM Kidnappings and Murders in the Sahel, 2007-Present’, Sahel Blog, 18 January 2011, <http://sahelblog.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/aqim-kidnappings-and-murders-in-the-sahel-2007-present/>

14 Andre Le Sage, *The Evolving Threat of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*, National Defense University Strategic Forum, July 2011, p.4, <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratforum/SF-268.pdf>

15 Lesley Anne Warner, *The Trans Sahara Counter*

Threats against or attacks on US interests, firms and citizens in the Sahel-Sahara or by terrorists based in this region were very limited up to 2012. The 11-14 September 2012 attacks on US diplomatic facilities in Benghazi (Libya) and Tunis radically changed the perception of the threat to US interests in the region, in particular by activating Congressional enquiries and inter-party competition for a robust response. The great majority of foreign terrorist organisations designated by the US since then have been located in the Sahel-Sahara.

Other European and NATO states

The European Union is a significant development actor in the Sahel-Sahara and the major export market for most of the region’s states. Saharan hydrocarbons are of enormous interest to southern Europe. Nigeria (albeit from coastal regions well south of the Sahel-Sahara), Algeria and Libya were respectively the world’s 5th, 13th and 15th largest oil exporters in 2012.¹⁶ Almost half of the region’s 100 billion barrel proven oil reserves are located in Libya¹⁷. Over 70% of Libyan oil and virtually all of Algeria’s natural gas goes to the EU, including via a network of pipelines to Spain and Italy¹⁸. Spanish, Italian, UK and Norwegian firms have stakes in the oil and gas sectors in the two countries. Canadian, alongside UK, Australian and South African firms, also have a growing presence in gold and other non-energy mining projects across the Sahel.

European states also have a major interest in supplying arms to North Africa, which is now one of the world’s largest markets for weapons. Over 2008-12 Algeria was the world’s sixth and Morocco the world’s twelfth largest importer of major conventional weapons systems¹⁹. Most of Algeria’s contracts go to Russian firms but European firms are keen to win multi-billion euro contracts as the country modernises its security forces. For example, AgustaWestland, an Anglo-Italian helicopter producer, has a contract to supply over 80 aircraft²⁰ and Airbus is competing with US and

Terrorism Partnership: Building Partner Capacity to Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism, CNA Strategic Studies, March 2014, pp. 22-24, <http://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/CRM-2014-U-007203-Final.pdf>

16 Top World Oil Net Exporters, 2012, US Energy Information Administration, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/index.cfm?topL=exp>

17 2012 World Proved Reserves, US Energy Information Administration, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/index.cfm?view=reserves>

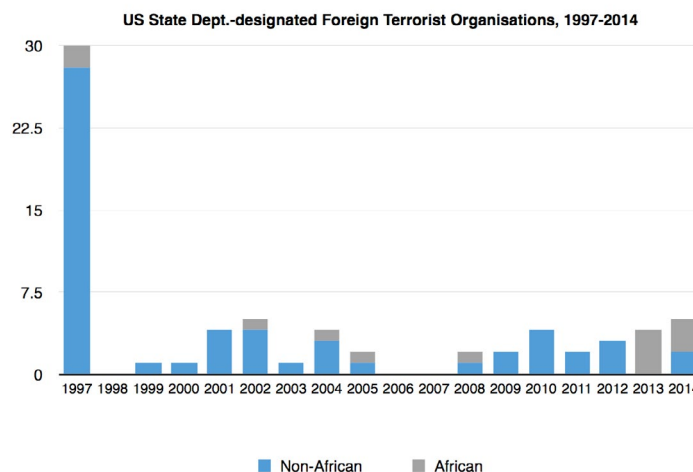
18 Algeria and Libya Analysis Briefs, US Energy Information Administration, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=AG> and <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=LY>

19 Paul Holtom et al, ‘Developments in arms transfers, 2012’ in SIPRI Yearbook 2013: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2013, pp. 257-261.

20 Defence IQ Press, ‘Agusta-Westland wins 100 helicopter Algerian order, 30 September 2009’, Defence IQ, <http://www.defenceiq.com/air-forces-and-military-aircraft/articles/agusta-westland-wins-100-helicopter-algerian-orde/>

Defining the Enemy: US-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations in Africa

Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) are designated by the US Secretary of State on the basis that they “threaten the security of U.S. nationals or the national security (national defense, foreign relations, or the economic interests) of the United States”²¹. Since 1997, 13 African groups have been designated as FTOs, of which seven since 2013. All are Islamist armed groups. Two groups have subsequently been de-listed: Algeria’s Armed Islamic Group (listed 1997-2010) and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (listed 2005-13). Whereas African groups represent less than 20% of all designated FTOs overall, they represent 78% of all groups designated since the September 2012 attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi.



Islamic Group (Gama'a al-Islamiyya) – an Egyptian Islamist group active since 1992, but largely inactive as an armed group since 1998 and, since the 2011 revolution, associated with a Salafist political party there. Listed since 1997.

Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – founded as the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) during Algeria’s 1990s civil war, AQIM took its present name in 2007. A faction of the GSPC moved south into the Sahara in 2003, hiding in northern Mali, which it eventually occupied in 2012. The core of the group remains active in northeast Algeria. Various katiba are also active in Libya, Mauritania, Mali and Niger. Listed since 2002.

Libyan Islamic Fighting Group – founded in the mid-1990s by veterans of the Afghan-Soviet war, the LIFG opposed the Gaddafi regime and affiliated with al-Qaida in 2007. Massively suppressed, many of the Group’s members were amnestied in 2009-10 and fought in the 2011 Libyan civil war. In 2004, leader Abdelhakim Bejjad was illegally detained in Asia and rendition by the US to Libya, where he was tortured and imprisoned.²² He is now an Islamist party leader. Listed since 2004.

Al-Shabaab – the only designated FTO in East Africa, Shabaab is a Somali group fighting against the Somali government and US-supported African Union troops. It has also launched attacks in Kenya,

have repeatedly attacked Shabaab positions since 2007. Listed since 2008.

Ansar al-Dine – a Tuareg-led ally or proxy of AQIM, Ansar al-Dine was part of the Islamist take-over of northern Mali in 2012. Since the 2013 French intervention there it has fragmented. Listed since March 2013.

Boko Haram – probably the deadliest jihadist group currently active in Africa, Jama’atu ahl al-Sunna li’l-Da’wa wa’l-jihad (roughly meaning Sunni Group for Preaching and Jihad) has been responsible for at least 10,000 casualties since taking up arms in 2009²³. Founded in Borno state, Boko Haram has launched attacks across Nigeria. While it uses bases in Niger and Cameroon, it is focused on Nigeria rather than pursuing a regional or global jihad. Listed since November 2013.

Ansaru – a late 2011 break-away from Boko Haram, Ansaru opposes Boko’s targeting of ordinary Muslims and has a more internationalist agenda and has targeted foreign workers and Nigerian troops deploying to Mali. It has been described as the al-Qaida-affiliated wing of Boko Haram²⁴. Listed since November 2013.

Al-Mulathamun – a 2012 breakaway from AQIM, al-Mulathamun is better known as the Signed-in-Blood Battalion or, since its 2013 merger with the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), al-Murabitoun. With prominent Algerian, Tunisian, Libyan, Mauritanian, Malian and Nigerian members, its jihadist aims are more transnational than its peers. State describes it as “the greatest near-term threat to U.S. and Western interests in the Sahel”²⁵. Listed since December 2013.

Ansar al-Shari’a – listed as three separate groups operating in Benghazi, Derna (eastern Libya) and Tunisia, Ansar al-Shari’a is an Islamist movement that has gained great influence since the 2011 Arab uprisings. Reputedly close to al-Qaida, it is alleged to have organised attacks on US diplomatic facilities in Benghazi and Tunis in 2012. Benghazi leader Ahmed Abu Khattala was captured by US special forces on 15 June 2014. Listed in January 2014.

Uganda, Ethiopia and Djibouti. Founded in 2006 in response to US-backed Ethiopian intervention, Shabaab affiliated with al-Qaida in January 2012. US drones, air and naval gunships and special forces

21 Bureau of Counterterrorism, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations, State Department website*, viewed 29 July 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>

22 Cases: Abdel Hakim Belhadj, *Reprieve website*, viewed 29 July 2014, <http://www.reprieve.org.uk/cases/abdelhakimbelhadj/history/>

23 Authors’ figures derived from Nigeria Watch database figures, July 2014. See <http://www.nigeriawatch.org/>

24 *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*, International Crisis Group, *Africa Report No.216*, 3 April 2014, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/nigeria/216-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-ii-the-boko-haram-insurgency.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/west-africa/nigeria/216-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-ii-the-boko-haram-insurgency.pdf)

25 Office of the Spokesperson Media Note, ‘Terrorist Designation of the al-Mulathamun Battalion’, Department of State website, 18 December 2013, <http://www.state.gov/r/prs/ps/2013/218880.htm>

Russian rivals to replace Algeria's strategic transport and refuelling fleet²⁶. German, Italian and Spanish ship-builders are supplying or refurbishing the Algerian Navy^{27,28,29}. Germany's Rheinmetall reportedly won a €2.7 billion contract to supply armoured vehicles to Algeria in mid-2014³⁰. Morocco is France's second largest customer for its weapons³¹. Many European firms have an interest in resupplying the Libyan armed forces, including with "counter-terrorism" equipment (see figure 2).

As well as French citizens, the Saharan kidnapping industry has targeted European tourists, ex-patriates and aid workers since 2003, notably Germans, Austrians, Swiss, Spaniards, Italians and at least one Swede and Dutch, as well as Canadian diplomats³². Almost all of these abductees have been released, usually when their government paid a multi-million dollar ransom or arranged a prisoner exchange. Like the US, the UK government refuses to pay ransoms and its one abducted citizen, Edwin Dyer, was executed by AQIM in 2009. In each of these cases, the abduction received wide media coverage and led to pressure on the parent government to "do something" about insecurity in the Sahel-Sahara. This pressure increased on the UK and Norway in particular after several of their citizens were killed in the In-Aménas attack.

The urge to curb illegal migration to the European Union from North Africa is also of increasing interest to European politicians and security agencies. Libya is now the main departure point from Africa to Europe, especially Italy. While most migrants leaving Libya now come from the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and coastal West Africa, the Sahel-Sahara is synonymous for many European policy-makers with illicit trafficking of goods and people seeking illegal entry to Europe.

Asian states

The Sahel-Sahara is a relatively new region of interest to states in distant Asia and their interests are overwhelmingly commercial or related to energy supply. While several Asian countries, including India, Malaysia and Vietnam have some involvement in extractive sectors, only China and Japan are of much regional significance. Japan is a significant investor in and importer of Niger's uranium and a significant source of development aid for several countries. More Japanese than any other nationality were killed in the In-Aménas attack.

China has a growing interest and expertise in mining and energy in the Sahel, expanding west from its initial forays in Sudan. It is the dominant actor in the minor oil production, transport and refining sectors in Chad and Niger. In Niger it has also broken the traditional French monopoly on uranium production and has plans to expand³³. In Mauritania, China buys up about three-quarters of the country's primary export: iron ore³⁴. These are small investments and exposures by Chinese standards but they do put Chinese workers deep into the Sahel-Sahara, where kidnappings of other nationalities have been frequent. Secular Tuareg insurgents abducted a Chinese uranium prospector in July 2007³⁵ and ten Chinese workers were abducted from a construction site in northern Cameroon in May 2014, probably by Boko Haram³⁶. China is also a significant supplier of arms to Nigeria and has begun to penetrate the larger Algerian market³⁷.

26 'Algerian Air Force validates A330 MRTT aircraft', *AirforceTechnology.com*, 15 May 2013, <http://www.airforce-technology.com/news/newsalgerian-air-force-validates-a330-mrtt-aircraft>

27 Tom Kington, 'Algeria prepares to receive LPD amid defence spending boost', *Defense News*, 31 January 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140131/DEFREG04/301310036/Algeria-Prepares-Receive-LPD-Amid-Defense-Spending-Boost>

28 Luca Perozzi, 'Algerian amphibious ship enters the water', *IHS Jane's Navy International*, 22 January 2014, <http://www.janes.com/article/32850/algerian-amphibious-ship-enters-the-water>

29 David Ing, 'Navantia completes first upgrade on Algerian amphibious ships', *IHS Jane's Navy International*, 19 June 2014, <http://www.janes.com/article/39820/navantia-completes-first-upgrade-on-algerian-amphibious-ships>

30 'Rheinmetall to sign 2.7 billion euro deal with Algerian military for 980 Fuchs vehicles', *defence Web*, 18 June 2014, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=35122:rheinmet-all-to-sign-27-billion-euro-deal-with-algerian-military-for-980-fuchs-vehicles&catid=50:Land

31 Siemon Wezeman and Pieter Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers 2013*, SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2014, <http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1403.pdf>

32 See note 13.

33 'Uranium in Niger', *World Nuclear Association*, updated May 2014, <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/country-profiles/countries-g-n/niger/>

34 David Lewis, 'Mauritania's SNIM targets iron-ore output of 13Mt in 2014', *Reuters*, 29 July 2014, <http://af.reuters.com/article/mauritaniaNews/idAFL6N0Q42WQ20140729>

35 Xinhua, 'No death threat to Chinese hostage in Niger', *China Daily*, 08 July 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/08/content_912565.htm

36 Sui-Lee Wee, 'China concerned about suspected Boko Haram attack on workers in Cameroon', *Reuters*, 20 May 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/20/us-china-cameroon-violence-idUSBREA4J0B920140520>

37 'Algeria acquires Chinese artillery, evaluating UAVs', *defence Web*, 27 January 2014, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33353:algeria-acquires-chinese-artillery-evaluating-uavs&catid=50:Land

Counter-Terrorism Operations in the Sahel-Sahara



Mauritanian soldiers take part in a casualty evacuation training exercise in Gofat, Niger, Feb. 27, 2014. The Mauritanian armed forces are being trained by partner nations during Exercise Flintlock 2014. U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Timothy Clegg.

This section analyses how counter-terrorist operations have been conducted in the Sahel-Sahara and how the strategies of France, the US and other regional and extra-regional powers are evolving. The array of means deployed in the Sahel-Sahara has increased massively since January 2013 but the roots of the present build-up of forces go much deeper, to the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the US, to the Algerian civil war of the 1990s, and to efforts to contain Muammar Gaddafi's Libya in the 1980s.

Major conventional military interventions

Two major foreign forces have made major conventional military interventions into the Sahel-Sahara to combat jihadist groups, both in 2013. The first was the French *Opération Serval*, launched in January 2013. The second was the peace support operation begun in early 2013 as the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and which became the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on 1 July 2013.

From *Opération Serval* to *Opération Barkhane*

France launched *Opération Serval* on 11 January 2013 in response to a request from the Malian transitional government to defend it against an offensive into central Mali by jihadist forces, which had captured most of northern Mali during 2012. Although this offensive was widely reported as an al-Qaida push to seize Mali's distant capital Bamako, it was almost certainly a more limited attempt to seize the Malian garrisons at Sévaré and Diabali in an attempt to forestall deployment of a mooted African peace enforcement mission to northern Mali³⁸.

French forces were well prepared for *Serval* thanks to French pre-positioning of equipment and personnel

38 Richard Reeve, *Security in the Sahel: Part I – Stabilising Mali in 2013-14*, Oxford Research Group, 29 January 2014, http://oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/stabilising_mali_2013_14

at bases in the region. Within hours, France was able to move armed helicopters and special forces from its base at Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 400 km away. Armoured reinforcements were able to be moved from Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (1,000 km south) within days. French Mirage fighter jets flying from their base in N'Djamena, Chad (2,000 km east) were able to provide reconnaissance and close air support to ground troops. Other Rafale attack aircraft flew combat sorties from southern France, 3,000 km away, using inflight refuelling after Algeria agreed to open its airspace.

By February, a coalition of about 6,500 personnel had been assembled under *Opération Serval*. These included 4,000 French troops, 2,000 Chadian troops (which refused to serve under AU command) and small numbers of personnel plus 35 support aircraft from another 10 countries. The US (*Operation Juniper Micron*), UK (*Operation Newcombe*), UAE, Netherlands, Canada and Sweden all provided strategic transport aircraft to airlift troops, armour and helicopters. The Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Spain and Denmark provided tactical transport aircraft and battlefield support helicopters³⁹. The UK and US also provided reconnaissance aircraft and the US deployed MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper UAVs to Niger and in-flight refuelling aircraft from a base in the UK.

From mid-2013, as MINUSMA strengthened and incorporated Chadian troops, these numbers steadily declined until France incorporated *Serval*'s remaining 1,600 troops into the new regional *Opération Barkhane* in July 2014. *Barkhane* is designed to maintain an indefinite presence of 3,000 French combatants in the five Sahel states (see Box), only 1,000 of them in Mali. These will be supported by six fighter jets (based in N'Djamena), refuelling aircraft, 10 transport aircraft, 20 helicopters, and 200 armoured vehicles spread across more than a dozen bases⁴⁰. The reopening or reinforcing of a string of bases in northern Niger and Chad suggests that the aim of the deployment is not only to search out and destroy jihadist groups in remote areas but to extend the projective range of French and allied forces far towards southern Libya, now probably the least governed space in the whole Sahara and a known refuge for AQIM, Ansar al-Shari'a and other radical anti-western groups.

From AFISMA to MINUSMA

Opération Serval was both facilitated and precipitated by the UN Security Council's unanimous Resolution 2085 of 20 December 2012. This mandated AFISMA

39 'Opération Serval : contribution alliée au transport tactique intra-théâtre', French Ministry of Defence website, 27 June 2013, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/mali/actualite-operation-serval-contribution-alliee-au-transport-tactique-intra-theatre>

40 'BSS: visite du Président de la République auprès des militaires français' French Ministry of Defence website, 21 July 2014, [http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/international/bss-visite-du-president-de-la-republique-aupres-des-militaires-francais/\(language\)/fre-FR#SearchText=barkhane#xtcr=1](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/international/bss-visite-du-president-de-la-republique-aupres-des-militaires-francais/(language)/fre-FR#SearchText=barkhane#xtcr=1)

Opération Barkhane: France's Revised Military Presence in the Sahel-Sahara

In January 2014 France announced a reorientation of its military presence in the Sahel-Saharan Strip - Bande Sahélo-Saharienne (BSS) in French military jargon – to incorporate existing Operations Serval (Mali), Epervier (Chad) and Licorne (Côte d'Ivoire). Its planned deployments from 2014 onwards include about 3,000 troops in five countries within the BSS with about another 1,600 supporting them from the coast. The new operation was officially launched and named Barkhane, a type of crescent-shaped sand dune, on 1 August 2014.

Five countries of the BSS – which France refers to as the “G5 Sahel” - are officially within the operational remit of Opération Barkhane.

Chad

French forces in Chad are a legacy of Opération Epervier, a 1986 intervention that defeated a Libyan invasion and established Chad as a ‘French aircraft carrier in the BSS’. The Chadian capital, N'Djamena, hosts the Barkhane headquarters as well as most of its combat aircraft (3 Mirage 2000D and 3 Rafale fighters), various transport (C-160 and C-130), refuelling (KC-135R) and ISR (Atlantique II) aircraft, combat search and rescue helicopters (Puma and Caracal) and one mechanised infantry battle group. Overall personnel deployed should rise from 950 to 1,250. French forces also have a presence securing and maintaining airfields Abéché, near the Darfur border, and Faya-Largeau, an oasis in the far north near Libya. These are large enough to accommodate fighter, refuelling and strategic transport aircraft. A tiny French presence has also been re-established at Zouar, an outpost in the Tibesti mountains near Niger.

Mali

French forces had no significant presence in Mali before Opération Serval. The plan is to reduce them from 1,600 (July 2014) to 1,000 troops, a mix of regular and special forces, in support of but independent from UN peacekeepers. These are mostly in Gao (the main logistics hub, now spoken of as a permanent French base) and Tessalit (the main forward operating base), the two longest paved airstrips in the north. Remote northern sites including Kidal, Taoudenni, Ménaka and Ansongo will see a rotating presence. Army attack (Tiger), armed reconnaissance (Gazelle) and transport (Puma and Caracal) helicopters support French forces in Mali.

Niger

Base 101 at Niamey International Airport is used as the main UAV base for French and US MQ-9 Reaper reconnaissance drones. French fighters, ISR and transport aircraft also use the base. A small special forces base has been established at Madama, a fort deep in the Saharan desert near Libya. French special forces are also believed to guard the French-owned uranium mines (and foreign workers) at Arlit, in the Sahara near Algeria, and may have a training presence at Ouallam⁴¹. Total French presence is about 300.

Burkina Faso

Ouagadougou is the base for French Special Forces in West Africa. Based with helicopters and tactical transport aircraft at the international airport, they are tasked with rapid deployments across the western Sahel, including attempts to free French hostages.

Mauritania

Since 2009, France has worked closely with specialist mobile units of the Mauritanian army and has a small presence of special forces at the recently renovated Atar airport, northwest Mauritania. These train and advise Mauritanian forces and may provide ISR support.

Two more countries in coastal West Africa have a permanent French military presence and are integral to the supply and reinforcement of Barkhane.

Senegal

Dakar is now mostly used to train West African militaries. It can be used for logistics and Dakar airport is used by French Navy ISR (Atlantique II) aircraft patrolling the desert and has been used by command and control aircraft (E-3 Sentry). Armoured vehicles are stored in Dakar and a joint command unit is maintained in readiness for operations. There is also a French signals intelligence post at Rufisque. 350 French personnel are present in Senegal.

Côte d'Ivoire

Although outside the Sahel, Abidjan is the main French reserve and logistics base serving operations in the BSS. The French presence is expanding from 450 to 800 personnel, mostly conventional troops with light armour and helicopters, based at Abidjan airport and port.

In addition, under Mission Corymbe the French Navy normally keeps one helicopter carrier in the Gulf of Guinea with up to 450 marines, armour and helicopters for rapid deployment in West or Central Africa, via port facilities in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon or Gabon.

41 AFP. 'AREVA a renforcé la sécurité de ses sites au Niger et poursuit son activité', *Le Point*, 24 January 2013, http://www.lepoint.fr/societe/areva-a-renforce-la-securite-de-ses-sites-au-niger-et-poursuit-son-activite-24-01-2013-1619922_23.php

under African Union command and urged “Member States, regional and international organizations to provide [...] any necessary assistance [to AFISMA] in efforts to reduce the threat posed by terrorist organizations” and to recover territory in the north⁴². It also convinced AQIM and its Malian allies to launch their doomed January offensive to neutralise bases vital to the expected build-up of African forces.

In the event, AFISMA only deployed after French forces and operated in a supporting role, holding territory in central and northern Mali already taken by French and Chadian forces. Despite months of preparation, most West African forces were poorly trained, equipped and prepared for deployment. Most lacked any experience of counter-terrorism or desert operations. Algeria and Mauritania, the two largest regional armies with such experience, refused to participate. Nigeria, the only participating state with its own air power, withdrew most of its troops in August 2013 to concentrate on its domestic counter-insurgency campaign. Niger, whose small army had desert experience and had been trained by France during 2012, was the one well-prepared regional state.

Drawing on UN resources, MINUSMA is a far more capable force but has still struggled to get close to its authorised strength of 12,640 uniformed personnel and has been dependent on “French troops [...] to use all necessary means [...] to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat”⁴³. Two-thirds of its 9,300 personnel are drawn from West Africa and its immediate neighbours. Other large contributors are Bangladesh, the Netherlands, China and Cambodia.

The Dutch contribution of 534 personnel is particularly notable in a context in which NATO forces rarely contribute frontline units to UN operations in Africa. This followed the Netherlands role as the largest contributor of tactical airlift to Opération Serval. In May 2014 the Netherlands deployed four AH-64DN Apache attack helicopters to MINUSMA, a type of unrivalled sophistication and firepower within UN service. Dutch special forces and intelligence personnel are also managing a human, signals and electronic intelligence system that has no parallel within the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations⁴⁴.

While MINUSMA is a peacekeeping mission with a robust Chapter VII mandate to use “all necessary means” to protect civilians, it does not have the same “peace enforcement plus” mandate as its UN Counterpart in the DRC (MONUSCO), which has its

own special forces brigade with equipment to conduct specifically offensive operations. Nevertheless, the same UN mandates that authorise MINUSMA also authorise French forces to be present in essentially this offensive role in Mali, without overly prescribing their role. The mandates are also explicit that AQIM, other terrorist organisations and their Malian allies should not be treated as part of the peace process.

The effect is to grant French forces indefinite right of deadly pursuit of groups that they consider to be terrorist affiliates. Given the dependence of French intelligence in Mali on local allies with very complicated relations and rivalries with neighbouring groups, this is a dangerous precedent that goes beyond the normal understanding of peace support operations. Not surprisingly, jihadist elements in northern Mali do not differentiate between French or UN troops in their own attacks.

Regional Operations

Two states of the region have mounted their own major military operations against terrorist groups operating on their own territory and probably have greater military strength in the region (albeit on their home territory) than France or the US.

Algeria has waged its own massive campaign against jihadist groups since the start of its civil war in 1992. While the main Islamist insurgent forces were defeated in northern Algeria by 2002, smaller factions continued localised struggle in the mountains east of Algiers and, from 2003, in the far Saharan south. Algeria has tens of thousands of well-equipped troops and gendarmes in its Saharan regions, backed by dozens of modern armed helicopters, attack and reconnaissance aircraft. However, these rarely do more than guard towns, highways and mining infrastructure. Algeria is opposed to projecting its forces into neighbouring countries and its constitutional Article 26 binds it to “settle international disputes through peaceful means”. It did not strike into Libya after the attack by jihadists based there on its In-Aménas gas facility in January 2013. Nor has it sought to assist French, African or UN forces in northern Mali.

Nigeria has been highly active in pursuing a domestic counter-terrorism operation against Boko Haram since 2009 and in May 2013 declared a state of emergency in three north-eastern states (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe) to give the army unrestrained powers. Several thousand Nigerian army and armed police have conducted a ham-fisted counter-insurgency operation in this area with disastrous results for the civilian population. Indiscriminate killings have been recorded by both Boko Haram and the state security forces, with over 7,000 casualties since the state of emergency was declared⁴⁵. Like Algeria, Nigeria has been cautious about seeking external military assistance other than special forces

42 UN Security Council Resolution 2085, paragraph 14, 20 December 2012 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2085%282012%29

43 UN Security Council Resolution 2100, paragraph 18, 25 April 2013. This Resolution mandated MINUSMA and French forces in Mali, until superseded by Resolution 2164 of 24 June 2014.

44 ‘Dutch contributions in Mali’, Netherlands Ministry of Defence website, undated, <http://www.defensie.nl/english/topics/mali/contents/dutch-contributions-in-mali>

45 Figures extracted from Nigeria Watch database, *op. cit.* See Richard Reeve, *The Internationalisation of Nigeria’s Boko Haram Campaign*, Oxford Research Group, May 2014, http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/internationalisation_boko_haram

training and intelligence support.

Special Forces Operations

Compared to conventional counter-insurgency operations that need to gain and hold territory, counter-terrorism operations make disproportionate use of special forces troops. Since 2001, US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) has more than doubled from about 33,000 troops to over 70,000 in 2014⁴⁶. That is about 5% of total current active duty personnel. AFRICOM deployments, both overt and covert, draw heavily from SOCOM and their training presence has had a strong influence on the development of elite units in partner militaries, including African and French forces.

SOCAFRICA

AFRICOM has had an exceptional experience in its genesis as a combatant command in the era of counter-terrorism operations. In effect, most of its operations are special operations, since there is no formal basing presence in Africa and, unlike France, the US is not treaty-bound to defend any African state. One conventional army brigade combat team (BCT) is “regionally aligned” with AFRICOM at any time but almost all US forces engaged in frontline or combat operations in Africa are special forces of one type or another. This would include the up to 300 personnel deployed across Central Africa in pursuit of the Lord’s Resistance Army (Operation Observant Compass), many small CT training missions, and covertly deployed reconnaissance, combat and snatch squads. According to Defense News, 1,140 US Army troops were receiving hostile fire pay for service in Africa in early 2014⁴⁷.

In the Sahel-Saharan region it is not clear how many special forces operations or operatives the US has. AFRICOM has established a Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAFRICA) based in Stuttgart. This has four elements, a Joint Special Operations Air Command, a Naval Special Warfare Unit, a Signals Detachment, and a Joint Special Operations Task Force – Trans-Sahara (JSOTF-TS). There are no JSOTFs for other regions of Africa. Chad, Mauritania and Niger are particular focal points for US assistance to regional militaries. The former hosts a Special Operations Forces Liaison Element, which provides training and logistical support⁴⁸.

Including overt CT training programmes with most of the states of the region, it is clear from US tendering documents that small teams of Special forces

46 Nick Turse, ‘Special Ops Goes Global’, *Tom Dispatch*, 7 January 2014, http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175790/tomgram%3A_nick_turse,_special_ops_goes_global

47 Joe Gould, ‘Inside Africa Ops’, *Defense News*, 27 January 2014, p. 12

48 Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2012*, State Department, 30 May 2013, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2012/209979.htm>

operatives are deployed across a wide area of the Sahel. For example, a document issued in April 2013 calls for a private contractor to provide casualty evacuation, personnel airlift, cargo airlift, and air drop services from Ouagadougou to almost anywhere in the northern half of Africa⁴⁹. An additional tender from 24 April 2014 calls for personnel recovery, medical evacuation and search and rescue services anywhere within 500 nautical miles of Niamey, an area focused on Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. What these special forces units do in the Sahel is not clear. In Somalia and Libya, special forces units have been used as ‘snatch squads’ to abduct presumed terrorists threatening to US interests.

A leaked US cable from October 2009 suggests that an operational concept known as Oasis Enabler was at least planned at this time to embed US special forces as operational advisors with US-trained Malian (and possibly other Sahelian) counter-terrorism units sent to disrupt AQIM in the Sahara. It appears that US diplomats in Mali vetoed such operations as they would likely precipitate jihadist attacks on such Malian units and antagonise Algeria, which opposed the deployment of foreign troops near its border⁵⁰.

The ‘New Normal’

US policy to Africa shifted radically in tone and priority in the wake of the September 2012 attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi, eastern Libya, which killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other US citizens. Two dedicated forces have subsequently been established to provide rapid response protection to US facilities and citizens across Africa. This enhanced crisis response and assets protection policy has rather coyly been labelled by US policy-makers as the “New Normal”⁵¹ and began deployment in mid-2013.

The East African Response Force is based in Djibouti, manned by a battalion of the US Army’s regionally aligned BCT, and covers the Horn and East Africa region. It was first used in South Sudan in December 2013, operating out of Entebbe airport, Uganda to secure the US Embassy, Juba airport and to evacuate US citizens from the besieged town of Bor⁵².

49 Oscar Nkala, ‘US Army seeking private contractors for African commando transportation’, *defence Web*, 7 May 2013, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option%3Dcom_content%26view%3Darticle%26id%3D30403:us-army-seeking-private-contractors-for-african-commando-transportation%26catid%3D47:Logistics%26Itemid%3D110

50 Cable from US Embassy in Bamako, 19 October 2009, <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/10/09BAMAKO669.html>

51 The genesis and adoption of the term are uncertain but it may have begun as a US Marine Corps concept in early 2013. See Col S.L. Dickey (USMC), ‘A ‘New Normal’: The U.S. Marine Corps’ Approach to Meeting Evolving Global Security Requirements’, unclassified PowerPoint presentation, 10 May 2013, <http://www.afcea.org/events/jwc/13/documents/AFCEAUSNI10May131Dickey.pdf>

52 Cheryl Pellerin, ‘Marines Evacuate More US Embassy Personnel from South Sudan’, US Department of

Across North and West Africa, the capacity to protect US assets is provided by some 800 AFRICOM-aligned US Marines in the Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SP-MAGTF) Africa. This force is based 140 km north of Africa at Morón Air Base in southern Spain. Since May 2014 a 180-strong detachment has been based at the US Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily, within easier range of Libya and Tunisia⁵³. This was used on 26 July 2014 to evacuate all US personnel from the Embassy in Tripoli. This operation reportedly involved at least seven aircraft, comprising three F-16 fighter aircraft (flying from Aviano air base, northeast Italy), two refuelling aircraft (one flying from RAF Mildenhall in the UK) as well as Marine transport aircraft from Sigonella and an unspecified number of UAVs⁵⁴.

According to an April 2014 article in the Marine Corps Times, the Corps has plans to relocate an additional detachment to coastal West Africa⁵⁵. Dakar, Senegal, already home to a French base and used by UK forces for interventions in Sierra Leone (2000) and Mali (2013, aircraft only), may be the preference and received a SP-MAGTF flight in November 2013⁵⁶. Other locations along the Gulf of Guinea, such as Accra, which received a visit from SP-MAGTF in May 2014, are also possible⁵⁷. The US House Committee on Armed Services reported in May 2014 that it was concerned that AFRICOM did not have sufficient resources to shoulder its “New Normal” requirements in many African “high risk, high threat” environments⁵⁸. This appears to be directed at West Africa, where most capitals are over 3,000 km (or 7 hours flying time) from either Morón, Sigonella or Djibouti. The US Senate was more gung-ho in passing the National Defense Authorization Act the following month, expressing its concern about the ISR and other resources available to “New Normal” response teams and stating that:

Defense website, 03 January 2014, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121429>

53 John Vandiver, ‘US crisis response Marines mobilized for North Africa threat’, *Stars and Stripes*, 14 May 2014, <http://www.stripes.com/news/us-crisis-response-marines-mobilized-for-north-africa-threat-1.282966>

54 Andrew deGrandpre and Jeff Schogol, ‘New details emerge on Libya embassy evacuation’, *Military Times*, 26 July 2014, <http://www.militarytimes.com/article/20140726/NEWS08/307260049>

55 Hope Hodge Seck, ‘Corps wants crisis response unit in western Africa’, *Marine Corps Times*, 12 April 2014, <http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/article/20140412/NEWS08/304120026>

56 Capt. Sharon A. Hyland, ‘Marines conduct long-range flight into Senegal’, AFRICOM website, 22 November 2013, <http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/article/11497/marines-conduct-long-range-flight-into-senegal>

57 Marine Forces Europe and Africa, ‘Ghana receives visit from US Marines’ crisis response unit’, *Marines*, 12 May 2014, <http://www.marforeur.marines.mil/News/NewsArticleDisplay/tabid/7617/Article/164846/ghana-receives-visit-from-us-marines-crisis-response-unit.aspx>

58 House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, Howard P. “Buck” McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, Report 113-446, p. 270.

“the Department of Defense should posture forces forward and achieve the associated basing and access agreements to support such forces across the Continent of Africa in order to meet the “New Normal” and general mission requirements in the area of responsibility of United States Africa Command.”⁵⁹

The technological means by which the “New Normal” is achieved is a partnership between three systems: the Bell Boeing MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor vertical landing aircraft, the Lockheed Martin KC-130J in-flight refuelling and transport aircraft, and medium altitude long endurance (MALE) UAVs such as the MQ-9 Predator⁶⁰. With in-flight refuelling, MV-22s can transport Marines over long distance at high speeds before landing or hovering anywhere that a short-range helicopter could. By these means the US Marine Corps has a solution to the traditional problem of littoral warfare – how to deliver troops further inland than the normal helicopter-range from a ship. A network of “lily pad” basing agreements or “cooperative security locations” as the US has established across Africa would further facilitate such actions.

However, the implications of the “New Normal” are far from clear. US diplomatic facilities are sovereign US territory and attacks on them would provide a relatively clear rationale for the US to intervene to protect its citizens and assets. But what about protecting US citizens more broadly or US commercial interests? Experience of French interventions in Africa since the 1960s suggests that once special or commando forces are established in-region or in-country, the temptation to use them to overthrow or constrain governments threatening to external interests can be very strong.

Other NATO Special Forces

Several other NATO member states have deployed special forces in the Sahel-Sahara since 2013, with at least two of them in frontline operations. These are France and the UK, the two European states with special forces on the ground (alongside US and Qatari operatives) in Libya during the 2011 aerial intervention there. Netherlands special forces operate in Mali within the mandate and under the command of MINUSMA.

France relies increasingly on special forces in its operations in the Sahel-Sahara, especially in its search and destroy operations in northern Mali. Indeed, its repositioning to many smaller bases or forts under Opération Barkhane relies on small units of air-mobile special forces that can be rapidly and flexibly redeployed⁶¹.

59 H.R.4435 - Howard P. “Buck” McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, p.670, Sec. 1261

60 James K. Sanborn, ‘Corps pins its future on the multi-mission KC-130J Super Hercules’, *Marine Corps Times*, 19 May 2014, <http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/article/20140519/NEWS/305190028/Corps-pins-its-future-multi-mission-KC-130J-Super-Hercules>

61 Olivier Fourt and Véronique Barral, ‘Infographie :

SOF Counterterrorism Crisis Response Force

A June 2014 Department of Defense (DoD) document outlining plans for use of funds allocated from FY2015 under the new Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) is illustrative of US plans to expand basing infrastructure in Africa in support of the “New Normal”. The section on establishing a SOF Counterterrorism Crisis Response Force is worth quoting in full:

As forces are withdrawn from Afghanistan, more SOF will be available to support Combatant Commanders' efforts to counter a range of challenges across the globe. The demand for U.S. forces to expand the counterterrorism capabilities of allied or partner forces will likely increase in the coming years. The United States will continue to advise, train, and equip partner forces to perform essential tasks against terrorist networks, complementing other U.S. activities in the field. Operations and activities in the Maghreb, Sahel, and Horn of Africa, for example, further our national security interests without a large commitment of U.S. forces.

This item would fund infrastructure, communications systems, and renovation of an Intermediate Staging Base required to support the rotational deployment of over 200 SOF personnel in support of CT and Crisis Response missions. The CTPF could be leveraged to increase the crisis response capability of U.S. Africa Command by providing a more robust steady state SOF CT presence in Africa. The DoD will continue to protect its capacity and capability to counter terrorist threats around the world. U.S. SOF play a central role in these efforts, increasingly maintaining persistent forward presence to prevent crises in addition to serving as a crisis response and contingency force.

Source: DoD Budget, Fiscal Year 2015: Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund and the European Reassurance Initiative, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), June 2014. http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2015/amendment/FY2015_OCO_CTPF_and_%20ERI.pdf#page=10

Covertly, it also has special forces around Arlit, northern Niger, guarding the French-owned uranium mines and foreign workers, who have been targeted by al-Qaida-affiliated kidnappers. In Mauritania, French special forces have a robust partnership with elite units of Mauritania's military, which they partner with against AQIM from a base at Atar airport. Ouagadougou airport in Burkina Faso is the base for a unit of the French 4th Special Forces Helicopter Regiment, tasked with rescuing French hostages as well as supporting Opération Barkhane.

UK special forces were deployed to Mali in early 2013, although their role has not been specified, nor if and when their activities ceased⁶². The Special Boat Service (SBS) was also used in a disastrous hostage rescue

la France «réarticule» son dispositif militaire au Sahel, RFI, updated 08 February 2014, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20140108-france-reorganisation-forces-militaires-armee-zone-sahel-sahara/>

⁶² Nick Hopkins, 'UK special forces active in Mali', *The Guardian*, 22 January 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jan/22/uk-special-forces-active-mali>

attempt in Sokoto, northern Nigeria in March 2012⁶³. UK, French, US and Canadian Special forces may have been among teams sent to Nigeria in May 2014 to assist Nigerian officials in locating and liberating the over 200 girls abducted from a school in Chibok⁶⁴.

Canadian special forces, equipped with three Griffon utility/assault helicopters, have been very active in training Nigerien forces since at least January 2013 but the Harper government denies that they have any combat role there or in Mali⁶⁵. They were previously involved in training Malian forces before the April 2012 coup. In addition to the US, France, UK and Canada, NATO countries whose special forces regularly participate in the annual JSOTF-TS-organised Exercise Flintlock, which trains and tests special forces from all TSCTP countries, are Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Spain⁶⁶. Norwegian special forces also participated in Flintlock 2014.

UAVs and other ISR Assets

The Sahel-Sahara region has seen a major increase in aerial surveillance in the last decade. While the deployment of US and French unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, or drones) since 2013 has garnered most headlines, these are fewer in number than the growing presence of manned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft criss-crossing the Sahara. The international response to the Chibok abduction crisis in northern Nigeria in mid-2014 has seen the latest manifestation of ISR build-up.

There are likely to be more foreign UAVs and ISR aircraft operating from more bases across the Sahel-Sahara in future. Both the US and France have concluded from recent operations that ISR assets are a critical shortcoming of their regional presence⁶⁷. In May 2014, the US Senate authorised an additional \$60 million for ISR support to AFRICOM's counter-terrorism operations⁶⁸.

⁶³ Robert Winnett and Thomas Harding, 'British hostage killed in failed SBS rescue bid', *The Telegraph*, 8 March 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nigeria/9132481/British-hostage-killed-in-failed-SBS-rescue-bid.html>

⁶⁴ David Smith and Harriet Sherwood, 'Nigeria launches military operation to find kidnapped girls', *The Guardian*, 15 May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/14/nigeria-launches-military-operation-to-find-kidnapped-girls>

⁶⁵ Steven Chase et al, 'Ottawa contributing to fight in Mali by training Niger forces', *Globe and Mail*, 12 January 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/ottawa-contributing-to-fight-in-mali-by-training-niger-forces/article7279904/>

⁶⁶ AFRICOM website, *Flintlock*, <http://www.africom.mil/what-we-do/exercises/flintlock>

⁶⁷ David Cenciotti, 'These are the Lessons the French have Learned from the Mali Air War so far', *The Aviatorist*, 14 February 2013, <http://theaviationist.com/2013/02/14/lessons-learned-mali/>

⁶⁸ US Senate Committee on Armed Services, 'Senate Committee on Armed Services Completes Markup of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015', 23

UAVs

The first UAVs operated in the Sahel-Sahara were actually operated by local militaries. Algeria has operated ten South African Denel Seeker II reconnaissance drones since the late 1990s, although these have a range of only 250 km and are thought to be based in the north of the country. Algiers is interested in acquiring longer endurance and possibly armed UAVs and is reported to have evaluated systems including the Seeker 400 and the Chinese CH-4 from Saharan airfields in early 2014.⁶⁹ In 2013, Algeria was also reported to be interested in acquiring US armed drones or Emirati Adcom Systems Yabhon United 40 Block 5 UAVs.⁷⁰ As such, Algeria may be the first operator of armed UAVs in the Sahel-Sahara.

Morocco is the most capable regional operator of UAVs, having purchased four 1,100 km range General Atomics MQ-1 Predator drones from the US and, in 2013, three shorter range IAI Heron drones from Israel via France⁷¹. These are unarmed versions of the drones. Tunisia has the only regional UAV manufacturing capability, via Tunisia Aero Technology Industries (TATI), which plans to build an armed UAV⁷². Nigeria's air force claimed in December 2013 to have a domestic capacity to design and build medium range UAVs but the Gulma prototype then unveiled is not known to have entered service and appeared almost identical to the Israeli Aerostar UAVs that Nigeria formerly operated for maritime surveillance around the Niger Delta⁷³. Nigerian and Ivorian Aerostars are now thought to be unserviceable, leaving no active UAV operators in West Africa.

There are currently two known UAV bases for external operators in the Sahel and both are used jointly by France and the US. A third base in Italy is used to monitor Libya and the northern Sahara. The first two of three French Harfang UAVs, with 1,100 km range, were deployed in January 2013 to the military airfield (Base Aérienne 101) at Niamey International Airport, which is shown by open source satellite imagery to have begun

May 2014, <http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/SASC%20NDAA%20markup%20release%2005-23-14.pdf>

69 'Algeria Evaluating Chinese CH-4 UAV', *defence Web*, 11 March 2014, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33927:algeria-evaluating-chinese-ch-4-uav&catid=35:Aerospace

70 Gareth Jennings, 'Algeria shows interest in MALE UAV from UAE', *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 November 2013, <http://www.janes.com/article/30184/dubai-air-show-2013-algeria-shows-interest-in-male-uav-from-uae>

71 Gareth Jennings, 'Algeria shows interest in MALE UAV from UAE', *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 November 2013, <http://www.janes.com/article/30184/dubai-air-show-2013-algeria-shows-interest-in-male-uav-from-uae>

72 Ami Rojkes Dombi, 'Morocco Acquired IAI's Heron', *Israel Defense*, 21 January 2014, <http://www.israeldefense.com/?CategoryID=472&ArticleID=2702>

73 Oscar Nkala, 'Nigerian commissions new UAV', *defence Web*, 19 December 2013, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33115:nigerian-commissions-new-uav&catid=35:Aerospace&Itemid=107

its development as a drone base in October 2012⁷⁴. French Harfang are reported to have conducted about 17 missions per month from Niamey since then, hence far from providing continual surveillance⁷⁵. In June 2014, French Air Force operators controlled the Harfang over Niger for the first time from Cognac, France⁷⁶.

The US Air Force established a co-located base for its UAVs in February 2013. Two of its 1,850 km range MQ-9 Reaper UAVs are based at Base 101. There is an ongoing presence of about 120 US Air Force personnel at the base to support these UAVs⁷⁷. Based on the limited range of the Harfang, Paris took the decision in mid-2013 to procure a dozen MQ-9, with the first two prioritised for Niamey. These arrived in December 2013 and began operational flights early in 2014. Their range allows them to cover all of Mali and Niger as well as much of Mauritania and Algeria and southwest Libya. Although the MQ-9 is the standard platform for US armed drone attacks in various other theatres, neither the US nor French aircraft used in the Sahel-Sahara is armed and there have been no recorded drone strikes in the region except during the 2011 Libya air campaign.

The second active drone base is N'Djamena, although this appears not to have any long-term UAV presence. French Harfang may have been operated from there and the US moved about 80 personnel there in May or June 2014 to operate at least one MQ-1 Predator UAV over northern Nigeria and surrounding countries in the search for girls kidnapped by Boko Haram⁷⁸. N'Djamena is potentially a link-up landing/launching point for medium range UAVs like the MQ-1 or MQ-9 moving between Niamey and Djibouti and could give such UAVs continuous coverage of almost all of the northern half of Africa. The current regional exception is coastal Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, which could make a UAV launching site in Senegal or Mauritania an attractive proposition.

74 'France Committed to Mali Intervention as early as October 2012', *Open Source IMINT*, 24 May 2013, <http://osimint.com/2013/05/24/france-committed-to-mali-intervention-as-early-as-october-2012/>

75 Cassidian press statement, 'Harfang MALE UAS controlled successfully from a French Air Force base almost 5,000 km away', *defence Web*, undated (June 2014), http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=35302:harfang-male-uas-controlled-successfully-from-a-french-air-force-base-almost-5-000km-away&catid=35:Aerospace&Itemid=107

76 'Sahel: Premier vol du drone Harfang piloté depuis Cognac', *French Ministry of Defence website*, 20 June 2014, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/operations/sahel-premier-vol-du-drone-harfang-pilote-depuis-cognac>

77 Eric Schmitt, 'Drones in Niger reflect new US approach in terror fight', *New York Times*, 10 July 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/11/world/africa/drones-in-niger-reflect-new-us-approach-in-terror-fight.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&pagewanted=all&adxnnlx=1406736295-0mmlBr6r7k7gUwaUIK8UUA

78 Nancy Montgomery, 'What's stopping the US from rescuing kidnapped Nigerian girls? It's complicated', *Stars and Stripes*, <http://www.stripes.com/news/what-s-stopping-the-us-from-rescuing-kidnapped-nigerian-girls-it-s-complicated-1.289764>

The third, and probably most potent, drone base for surveillance of the Sahara is located offshore at Sigonella in Sicily. This is a NATO base and was used by French Harfang and US MQ-1 Predator UAVs during the 2011 Libya campaign, when US UAVs (some operated remotely by UK pilots) launched at least 105 strikes.⁷⁹ It has been used since then by the US' most capable reconnaissance drones, the unarmed RQ-4 Global Hawk.⁸⁰ The US Air Force admits to using such UAVs over Nigeria, piloted from California.⁸¹ The jet-powered RQ-4 has a range of 14,000 km and endurance of 28 hours. It flies at 60,000 feet, higher than almost any African state can detect, let alone intercept it. In theory, a RQ-4 launched from Sigonella or al-Dhafra in the UAE could fly on mission to almost anywhere in Africa and back to base.

Figure 3: Map of US and French bases in and around the Sahel-Sahara



Key: Red = French bases; Pink = French rotational deployments; Blue = US bases. Copyright: ZeeMaps

MINUSMA also has plans to operate unarmed reconnaissance UAVs from northern Mali. An April 2014 Request for Expressions of Interest from MINUSMA seeks private contractors to own and operate at least two UAVs from Gao and Timbuktu airports.⁸² These should be MALEs with range of 600 km and endurance of 12-18 hours. MINUSMA would be the second UN operation to operate UAVs after MONUSCO in 2013.⁸³ This is part of probably the most sophisticated

79 Chris Woods and Alice K. Ross, 'Revealed: US and Britain launched 1,200 drone strikes in recent wars', *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, 4 December 2012, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/12/04/revealed-us-and-britain-launched-1200-drone-strikes-in-recent-wars/>
 80 'Where on the Globe are US Global Hawks?', open Source IMINT, 23 April 2013, <http://osimint.com/2013/04/23/where-on-the-globe-are-the-us-global-hawks/>
 81 Dana Lineback, 'Reservist has key role in Global Hawk mission over Nigeria', *US Air Force website*, 04 June 2014, <http://www.af.mil/News/ArticleDisplay/tabid/223/Article/485282/reservist-has-key-role-in-global-hawk-mission-over-nigeria.aspx>
 82 UN Request for EOI EOIH9777, 'Unmanned Aerial System/Vehicles for Information Gathering (UAS/UAV)', 28 April 2014, <http://www.un.org/depts/ptd/pdf/eoi9777.pdf>
 83 Oscar Nkala, 'UN to deploy unarmed surveillance drones in Mali', *defence Web*, 20 June 2014, <http://>

Intelligence-gathering operation that UN peacekeepers have ever mounted, including Dutch AH-64 Apache helicopters, special forces and intelligence personnel.

Manned ISR aircraft

Prior to the overt deployment of French and US UAVs to the Sahel in early 2013 there was a build-up of manned ISR assets operated by these two militaries in the region. France operates modified naval Atlantique II long range surveillance aircraft from Dakar, Niamey and N'Djamena and these fly across the Sahel, sweeping the desert for intelligence. At the peak of Opération Serval, France had five Atlantique II operating in the region. France also operated one E-3F Sentry Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft from Dakar in 2013.⁸⁴

The UK has also twice deployed its Sentinel R1 ISR aircraft to West Africa for counter-terrorist surveillance, in support of Opération Serval from January-May 2013 (from Dakar) and in support of the Nigerian search for kidnapped schoolgirls from May 2014 (from Accra). According to a leaked US diplomatic cable, in 2008 Spain also made available for counter-terrorism surveillance a Cessna 208 light aircraft deployed to Nouakchott for monitoring illegal migration.⁸⁵

Building up the ISR capacities of the small air forces of Sahel states is a priority for the US Government.⁸⁶ The air forces of Niger and Mauritania received two Cessna 208B Grand Caravan aircraft each in July 2013 and June 2014 respectively.⁸⁷ Fitted with various sensors, these also have the capacity to deploy and supply small units of special forces.⁸⁸ Mali was offered two similar aircraft in FY2010 but these were never delivered.⁸⁹ The US is also reported to be upgrading the ISR capabilities

www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=35164:un-to-deploy-unarmed-surveillance-drones-in-mali&catid=35:Aerospace&Itemid=107
 84 'Operation SERVAL in Mali – weekly update 4: Major operations and consolidation of the force', *French Embassy in India*, 8 February 2013, http://www.ambafrance-in.org/IMG/pdf/Operation_SERVAL_in_Mali_-_Weekly_Update_4_-_08_Feb_2013.pdf
 85 Cable from US Embassy in Nouakchott, 8 November 2008 ('The Post-Coup al Qaeda Threat in Mauritania'), <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/11/08NOUAKCHOTT666.html>
 86 DoD Budget, Fiscal Year 2015: Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund and the European Reassurance Initiative, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), June 2014, http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2015/amendment/FY2015_OCO_CTPF_and_%20ERI.pdf#page=10
 87 Laurent Touchard, 'Niger-Etats Unis: une coopération militaire soutenue', *Jeune Afrique*, 26 March 2014, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20140325171053/>
 88 'US donates two Cessna Caravan aircraft to Mauritania', *defence Web*, 09 July 2014, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=35421:us-donates-two-cessna-caravan-aircraft-to-mauritania&catid=35:Aerospace&Itemid=107
 89 Cable from US Embassy in Bamako, 19 October 2009, <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/10/09BAMAKO669.html>

of Niger's two Diamond DA 42 observation aircraft.⁹⁰ Algeria and Morocco have several more sophisticated ISR aircraft, bought from the US and France.

Base-sharing by US and French forces

One of the defining features of the growing US military presence in Africa is the sharing of basing facilities with French forces, which have often been stationed in-country since colonial times. Indeed, in West Africa the only overt US military deployments are co-located with larger French presences. As one Franco-American commentator has put it, in the Sahel as in Libya in 2011, the US is "leading from behind" France.⁹¹ In East Africa, this relationship has been inverted as the US has displaced France as the primary external security actor and now operates assets from several countries with no French presence (Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Seychelles).

Djibouti

Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport is the location of the largest concentrations of both US and French troops and equipment in Africa. The US has "approximately 4,000 U.S., joint and allied forces military and civilian personnel and U.S. Department of Defense contractors" on site in 2014.⁹² France has retained a large base there since independence in 1977 and has about 1,900 personnel there. US troops have occupied an adjacent former French and Djiboutian base known as Camp Lemonnier since 2003. This is described officially as a "US Navy led installation", having been established by the Marine Corps from 2002 to 2006. AFRICOM assumed responsibility for the camp in October 2008. US aircraft share the runway, though not hangars or handling, with French aircraft. US UAVs were relocated from the airport to a remote landing strip 8 km southeast in 2013 after a series of crash landings around Djibouti city. Japanese maritime patrol aircraft also use Camp Lemonnier in anti-piracy operations.

Niger

Neither France nor the US had more than a visiting military presence in Niger before 2012. Since February 2013 the two countries share facilities at the Niger Air Force's Base

Aérienne 101 at Niamey-Diori Hamani International Airport, including operating a common system, the MQ-9 Reaper UAV. The US has about 120 personnel at the base, which is also used for manned ISR flights by US or contractor aircraft. Nigerian Alpha Jet and C-130 aircraft also used the base in 2013.

Chad

N'Djamena International Airport is the headquarters for French counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel-Sahara, as well as hosting French air and ground forces. US liaison officers are posted to the base. Since May or June 2014, the base has also hosted at least one US MQ-1 Predator UAV and possibly MC-12W Liberty (King Air) manned ISR aircraft for use over northern Nigeria, supported by about 80 US personnel.

Burkina Faso

Neither France nor the US has an official base in Burkina Faso but aircraft and special forces from both countries (or their contractors) have used Ouagadougou International Airport for counter-terrorism operations. France is formalising this arrangement under Opération Barkhane. US air operations from Ouagadougou appear to be via private contractors but include transport of regular forces. Since 2006 there has been a dedicated hangar for US Joint Special Operations Air Detachment (JSOAD) use.

Senegal

French forces have a base at Dakar-Léopold Senghor International Airport, alongside the Senegalese Air Force. These facilities are occasionally used by other NATO air forces such as the UK, Germany and Denmark during Opération Serval. The US maintains large stocks of jet fuel at the airport and may see it as a potential future hub for logistics, ISR or crisis response activities in the region.

⁹⁰ Guy Martin, 'Niger Air Force gets New Helicopter Hanger', *defence Web*, 22 October 2013, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=32343:niger-air-force-gets-new-helicopter-hangar&catid=35:Aerospace&Itemid=107

⁹¹ Maya Kandel, 'Obama et la Libye aux origines du Leading from behind', *Froggy Bottom blog*, 12 February 2014, <http://froggybottomblog.com/2014/02/12/obama-et-la-libye-aux-origines-du-leading-from-behind/>

⁹² Camp Lemonnier website: https://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnreurafswa/installations/camp_lemonnier_djibouti.html

Section 1206 Counter-Terrorism funding⁹³

Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2006 provides the US Secretary of Defense with authority to train and equip foreign military forces for two specified purposes—counter-terrorism and stability operations—and foreign security forces for counterterrorism operations. Funds may be obligated only with the agreement of the Secretary of State. Currently, there is a cap of \$350 million on Section 1206 obligations per fiscal year.

Figures for Section 1206 allocations for FYs2012-14 show that the proportion of funds allocated to the Sahel-Sahara doubled to about 21% of global total after 2012. With Niger and Mauritania the primary recipients, notably of ISR aircraft and counter-terrorism training. As ISAF ends combat operations in 2014, more funds are likely to be made available to African operations from 2015.

Recipient	Programme	FY2012 (\$ million)	FY2013 (\$ million)	FY2014 (\$ million)
Burkina Faso	CT Capability Enhancement		5.9	
Chad	Logistics Company (CT Support)		7.3	
Libya	SOF Support Company		8.4	
Mauritania	CT Logistics Support Package	7.0		
	Aircraft and ISR Capability		21.7	
	Contract Logistics Support		0.5	
	Aviation and Medical Capabilities Enhancement			14.4
Niger	Air Logistics and Communications Enhancement	11.7		
	Logistics Company (CT Support)		8.5	
	CT Battalion			14.7
	Aircraft and ISR Capability			24.8
Tunisia	Maritime Security Capability	6.9		
Total Sahel-Sahara		25.6	51.8	63.5
Other Africa	Burundi, Kenya, Uganda	18.8	48.5	39.6
Europe	Mostly support for ISAF contributors	100.3	87.1	99.0
Asia & Pacific	Bangladesh, Malaysia, Philippines	22.1	0	0
Middle East	Bahrain, Lebanon, Yemen	37.4	55.2	73.3
Total		218.6	255.8	290.2
Sahel-Sahara % of Total		11.7	20.3	21.9

Figures for the six previous financial years show that \$103.6 million was spent in Sahel-Sahara countries, or about \$17 million per year. Tunisia (\$39.5 million) and Mauritania (about \$38 million) were the largest recipients of these funds, followed by Mali, Nigeria, Chad and Senegal. Minor sums were allocated to intelligence capability support to Algeria, Morocco and Niger.⁹⁴

Allocations are also made under Section 1208 of the FY2005 NDAA, which provides support to “foreign forces, irregular forces, groups, or individuals” that assist or facilitate US military operations conducted by special forces to combat terrorism. Capped at \$50 million, these allocations are classified. How either of these funding mechanisms (totalling \$400 million annually) will coordinate with the new \$5 billion annual CTPF allocation from 2015 is not yet clear.⁹⁵

93 This box paraphrases and is based on information provided in Nina M. Serafino, ‘Security Assistance Reform: “Section 1206” Background and Issues for Congress’, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress RS22855, 4 April 2014, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22855.pdf>

94 Elisabeth Sköns, ‘The United States’, in Olawale Ismail & Elisabeth Sköns (eds.) *Security Activities of External Actors in Africa*, SIPRI, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 123-124.

95 Nina M. Serafino, ‘The Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) Proposal: Questions for Congress’, CRS Insights, 14 July 2014, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/IN10103.html>

Aztec Silence and beyond

The US deployment of ISR aircraft to the region is less clear. Officially it has none of its own ISR aircraft (excluding UAVs) based in the Sahel-Sahara, with the exception of one E-8 Joint STARS ISR and command and control aircraft operated during Operation Serval.⁹⁶

A much publicised incident in early 2004 supposedly saw a US Navy P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft pursue a faction of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC, the Algerian group that later became AQIM) from southern Algeria, through Niger to northern Chad.⁹⁷ Where this aircraft was operating from was never officially disclosed, although it has been reported that Algeria allowed the US to operate P-3 aircraft out of its major Saharan base at Tamanrasset.⁹⁸ This may have been part of a counter-terrorism operation known as Joint Task Force Aztec Silence, which facilitated the collection of intelligence over northern Africa by US Navy Sixth Fleet ISR assets based at Sigonella between December 2003 and 2004 or 2005.⁹⁹

Thereafter, US access to Algerian airspace seems to have become more difficult. A leaked cable from the US Embassy in Algiers of December 2009 reveals that the US had asked permission for overflight of Algerian airspace by P-3C aircraft based in Rota, southern Spain, en route to gather signals intelligence over AQIM operating areas in Mali and Mauritania.¹⁰⁰ At this time this did not appear to be a routine request. A further cable from the US Embassy in Rabat suggests that Morocco was more amenable to the same request.¹⁰¹

By 2009, the main US ISR programme over the Sahel-Sahara had shifted to Burkina Faso, via Mauritania, and was being conducted by private contractors in unmarked light aircraft under the covert Operation Creek Sand.

96 Tony Osborne, 'Mali mission matures Sentinel capability', 15 July 2013, *Aviation Week*, <http://aviationweek.com/awin/mali-mission-matures-sentinel-capability>

97 See, for example, J. Peter Pham, 'Violence, Islamism and terror in the Sahel', *World Defense Review*, 22 Feb 2007, <http://worlddefensereview.com/pham022207.shtml>

98 Daniel Volman, 'Africom: The new US military command for Africa', *Pambazuka*, 7 November 2011, <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/44273/print>

99 Testimony of General James L. Jones Statement of General James L. Jones, USMC Commander, United States European Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 1 March 2005, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/2005_hr/050301-jones.pdf

100 Cable from US Embassy in Algiers, 30 December 2009, <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/12/09ALGIERS1162.html>

101 Cable from US Embassy in Rabat, 04 January 2010, <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/01/10RABAT5.html>

Private Military and Security Contractors

The practice of hiring private military contractors to undertake ISR and infiltration/exfiltration activities across West and East Africa has been a cornerstone of US covert operations on the continent since at least 2007. The US also uses private contractors to supply and maintain jet fuel depots across the continent for military use. The UN will also use private contractors to operate its UAVs in northern Mali.¹⁰² Nigeria makes use of Israeli contractors for training and intelligence support, including installing and running a cyber-security and internet monitoring facility.¹⁰³

The US House Committee on Armed Services reported in May 2014 that "within U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the Department [of Defense] relies heavily on contractors to provide logistical, linguistic, intelligence, and transportation support to ongoing training, advising, and other assistance missions."¹⁰⁴ It noted that it was "concerned about the extent to which the Department may face operational contract support challenges in AFRICOM" and requested an official review of such contracting processes to report by April 2015. Significantly, this was not a concern that was expressed in relation to other US commands.

Creek Sand and Aztec Archer

Operation Creek Sand was an airborne ISR programme designed using unmarked light aircraft. It was in place from 2007 until at least 2012. Initially operating from a network of airfields across Mauritania, the operation paused and relocated to Ouagadougou after the August 2008 coup in Mauritania.¹⁰⁵ As of April 2009, there were 14 active duty DoD personnel in Burkina Faso and 24 private contractors, with an additional 27 personnel or contractors expected by end of year.¹⁰⁶

The programme was described by the US Air Force as 'theatre wide...airborne ISR...specifically designed for AFRICOM's unique mission of integrating engagement, capacity building and reconnaissance' which aims to 'build partner nation intelligence capacity, relationships and trust while enabling US DoD ISR access'.¹⁰⁷

102 See note 82.

103 'Elbit Systems officials arrive; begin installation of \$40 million Internet Spy facility for Nigeria', *Premium Times*, 26 November 2013, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/150333-exclusive-elbit-systems-officials-arrive-begin-installation-40-million-internet-spy-facility-nigeria.html>

104 House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, Report 113-446, pp. 248-249.

105 Craig Whitlock, 'US expands secret intelligence operations in Africa', *The Washington Post*, 13 June 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-expands-secret-intelligence-operations-in-africa/2012/06/13/gJQAHyvAbV_story.html

106 Cable from US Embassy in Ouagadougou, 23 April 2009, <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/04/09OUAGADOUGOU298.html>

107 US Africa Command, 'Africa Command ISR Initiative

Creek Sand was reportedly paired with something known as the Aztec Archer “intelligence fusion cell” in Ouagadougou.¹⁰⁸ The fusion cell concept seems to be a contractor-operated intelligence clearing house to share at least some of the intelligence derived from flights with host states, which control response forces, and to develop their intelligence capacities.¹⁰⁹

A call for contractors issued in May 2010 by AFRICOM for Africa Command ISR Initiatives Operations suggested that operations would consist of at least 15 personnel using contractor owned and operated Pilatus PC-12/47 aircraft with sensor systems including infrared full motion video.¹¹⁰ Further unclassified documents prepared by the US military for an ‘Industry Day’ in June 2010, in which more than 50 contractors were invited by AFRICOM to develop proposals for Creek Sand, show that that the US military expected contractors to have a minimum 150 airborne hours per month, supplying their own concealed surveillance equipment, and to take on further roles as pilots, intelligence analysts and linguists.¹¹¹ Given the possibility of aircrews going down while on surveillance flights, private personnel were required to have already completed military survival, resistance and escape training.

It is not clear if or when Creek Sand ceased operations. It was exposed in an article in the Washington Post in June 2012¹¹² and may have been superseded by the deployment of MQ-9 UAVs in Niamey. During Operation Serval, US special operations light ISR aircraft seem to have been used more openly. For example, commercial satellite imagery from February 2013 shows two PC-12 (U-28A in US nomenclature) and C-26B Metroliner type ISR aircraft at Niamey airport.¹¹³ There has also been a transfer of light ISR aircraft by the US to regional militaries to carry out similar roles.

Trans-Sahara STOL Airlift Support Initiative

Private contractors are also in use to transport US special forces around the region. A pre-solicitation notice issued in April 2013, stated that the US Army’s Transportation Command (US-TRANSCOM) sought

Operations (Aii Ops Contract): Industry Day (Power Point presentation), 11 June, 2010 <https://www.fbo.gov/utills/view?id=1c457e4bd2c38a77de7f10add7f4e634>

¹⁰⁸ Advanced Technical Intelligence Association, 2008 Award Recipients (Technical Intelligence Collaboration Award) <http://www.atia-assn.org/2425/17501.html>

¹⁰⁹ See note 30.

¹¹⁰ (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/systems/creek-sand.htm> (NB find original document to confirm)

¹¹¹ Craig Whitlock, ‘Contractors Run US Spying Missions in Africa’, *The Washington Post*, 14 June, 2012 http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/contractors-run-us-spying-missions-in-africa/2012/06/14/gJQAvC4RdV_story.html

¹¹² Craig Whitlock, *US Expands Secret Intelligence Operations in Africa*, *The Washington Post*, 6 June 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-expands-secret-intelligence-operations-in-africa/2012/06/13/gJQAHyAbV_story.html

¹¹³ See Google Earth imagery, 11 February 2013.

private contractors to fly personnel from the Joint Special Taskforce Trans-Sahara as they conduct ‘high risk activities’ in 31 African countries.¹¹⁴ The notice stated that contractors would be expected to conduct air drops from Ouagadougou, fly commandos in and out of hostile territory and carry out short notice medical evacuation from August 2013 until June 2017. Additionally, they are expected to drop equipment and personnel, flying up to 1,000 hours over the four year period.

In July 2013, Texas-based Berry Aviation was awarded a \$49 million contract to provide aircraft and personnel for “Trans-Sahara Short Take-Off and Landing services.” To this end, Berry Aviation will “perform casualty evacuation, personnel airlift, cargo airlift, as well as personnel and cargo aerial delivery services throughout the Trans-Sahara of Africa,”¹¹⁵ Berry has procured two DHC-6-300 Twin Otter STOL aircraft for these tasks.

Search and Rescue and Medevac

In a June 2014 request for funding for the new CTPF, the DoD states its intention that “CTPF resources would provide the ability to fund 3-5 sites across Africa with one fixed wing asset and one rotary wing asset to ensure contracted capability is in position to conduct personnel recovery missions as required.”¹¹⁶ A tender notice issued by the Navy Supply Systems Command in April 2014 calls for personnel recovery, medical evacuation and search and rescue services anywhere within 500 nautical miles of Niamey. It states that “the contractor shall provide all personnel, aircraft, equipment and supervision necessary to conduct [the role] utilizing STOL fixed wing and rotary wing air lift for transport, insertions and extractions.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Oscar Nkala, ‘US Army Seeking Private Contractors for African Commando Transportation’, *Defence Web*, 7 May, 2013, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30403:us-army-seeking-private-contractors-for-african-commando-transportation&catid=47:Logistics&Itemid=110

¹¹⁵ Dallis Peterson, ‘Berry Aviation Expands Airlift Support into Africa for USTRANSCOM’, *Berry Aviation Press Release*, 29 July, 2013, <http://www.berryaviation.com/latest-news/330-berry-aviation-expands-airlift-support-into-africa-for-ustranscom.html>

¹¹⁶ DoD Budget, Fiscal Year 2015: Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund and the European Reassurance Initiative, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), June 2014, http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2015/amendment/FY2015_OCO_CTPF_and_%20ERI.pdf#page=10

¹¹⁷ R--Personnel Recovery(PR)/ Casualty Evacuation (CASEVAC)/ Search and Recover (SAR) support to Department of Defense (DoD) for United States African Command (USAFRICOM) utilizing Short Take Off and Landin, posted 24 April 2014 on Federal Business Opportunities website, <https://www.fbo.gov/>

Supply of Aviation Fuel

The US also uses private contractors to supply and maintain reserves of jet fuel for its use at at least 22 airports in 19 African countries. A Defence Logistics Agency solicitation notice of February 2013 requests Into-Plane Delivery of Aviation Fuel across the continent.¹¹⁸ This may not be a full list of locations. As of December 2010, the Defense Logistics Agency cited 29 Into-Plane contracts in 27 countries in Africa, with plans to expand.¹¹⁹

Figure 4: Scheduled US Supplies of Jet Fuel to African Airports, 2013-2016

Country	Airport	Volume of jet fuel (Gallons)	Equivalent C-17 refuellings
Djibouti	Djibouti-Ambouli	5,932,146	167
Senegal	Dakar-Léopold Sédar Senghor	1,873,840	53
Egypt	Cairo International	885,298	25
Ethiopia	Addis Ababa-Bole	717,393	20
Kenya	Mombasa-Moi	705,994	20
Uganda	Entebbe	657,334	19
Ghana	Accra-Kotoka	562,128	16
Seychelles	Mahé-Seychelles	553,182	16
Cape Verde	Sal-Amílcar Cabral	514,726	15
Mali	Bamako-Senou	457,136	13
Burkina Faso	Ouagadougou	437,056	12
Mauritania	Nouakchott	349,133	10
Kenya	Nairobi-Jomo Kenyatta	336,125	9
Morocco	Marrakech-Menara	243,549	7
Botswana	Gaborone-Sir Seretse Khama	229,498	6
Cameroon	Douala	221,182	6
Cape Verde	Praia	205,890	6
Cameroon	Yaoundé-Nsimalen	201,264	6
Niger	Niamey-Diori Hamani	174,549	5
Nigeria	Abuja-Nnamdi Azikiwe	174,548	5
Chad	N'Djamena	171,434	5
Tunisia	Tunis-Carthage	118,961	3

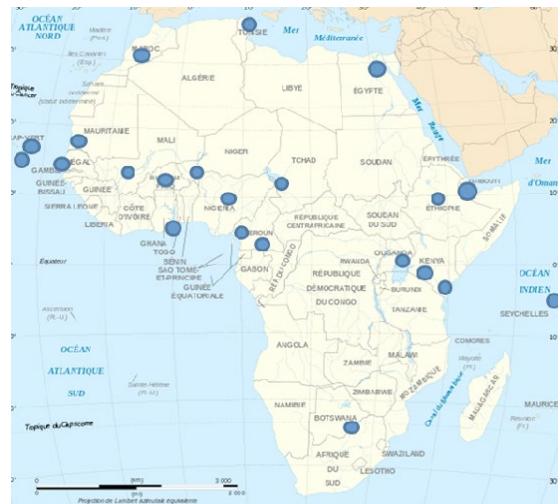
Source: Federal Business Opportunities Solicitation Number SP0600-13-R-0209, Schedule of Supplies, 08 February 2013.

Most of these quantities of fuel are not large, although the type of fuel can be used for most turboprop aircraft as much as huge jets like the C-17 strategic transport on which US supply chains depend. What the data does show is two concentrations of fuel-holding in Africa, one in the Horn of Africa (five airports), with Djibouti as the hub, and one spread across West Africa (12 airports), with Dakar as the hub.

118 Federal Business Opportunities Solicitation Number SP0600-13-R-0209, https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=8094d18e474662da8d662a79f-95b4087&tab=core&_cview=1

119 DLA Energy Europe and Africa, 'DLA Energy Europe & Africa supports AFRICOM warfighters', 29 December 2010, http://www.dla.mil/DLA_Media_Center/Archive/newsarticle0906.aspx

Figure 5: African airports scheduled to receive US supplies of aviation fuel, 2013-16



In addition to use of these airports, the DLA cited contracts for ten marine gas and oil bunker locations in eight countries in Africa in December 2010. These may include ports in Cameroon, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria.

Counter-Terrorism Training and Doctrine

The transfer of counter-terrorism doctrine via training programmes has been an important aspect of external involvement in the Sahel-Sahara since the US launched the Pan-Sahel Initiative in 2002-04 with the intention of training elite company-sized counter-terrorism units within the militaries of Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The range of external partners involved in such activities has steadily grown and included regular, special forces, contract and civilian personnel.

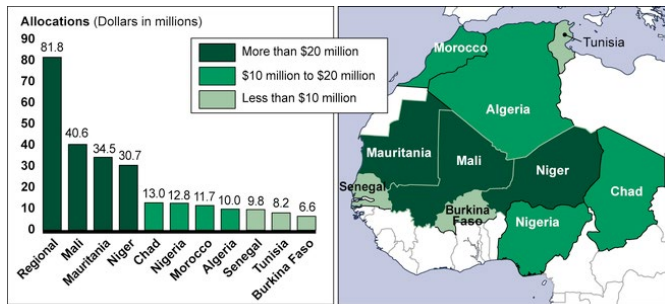
Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership

The TSCTP is the main US government programme to counter terrorism in the Sahel-Sahara. In place since January 2005, the TSCTP proposes a triple-pronged combination of defence, diplomacy and development efforts. Its stated aims are to: strengthen regional counterterrorism capabilities; enhance and institutionalize cooperation among the region's security forces; promote democratic governance; discredit terrorist ideology; and reinforce bilateral military ties with the United States'. Operation Enduring Freedom – Trans-Sahara (OEF-TS) was the DoD component of the TSCTP, being renamed Operation Juniper Shield in 2011.

Since 2008, training programmes have fallen under the auspices of SOCAFRICA's JSOTF-TS. Through TSCTP, a total of \$288 million was allocated to Sahel-Sahara partner countries over 2009-2013 through a combination of State Department and DoD funding channels such as the Economic Support Fund, International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement, the Counternarcotics Program, and Global Train

and Equip. However, a June 2014 report by the US Government Audit Office found that only 48% of funds allocated for 2009-2013 had been disbursed.

Figure 6: TSCTP Allocations by Country and Regional Programs, Fiscal Years 2009-2013



Source: GAO analysis of State and USAID data; Map Resources (map). | GAO-14-518

TSCTP programmes include training to improve border and aviation security and overall counterterrorism readiness. TSCTP also continues specialised Counterterrorism Assistance Training and Terrorist Interdiction Program (TIP) activities in the Trans-Sahara region and possible regional expansion of those programmes. Military programmes to expand military-to-military (and military-US military) cooperation, to ensure adequate resources are available to train, advise, and assist regional forces, and to establish institutions promoting better regional cooperation and information sharing.¹²⁰

US forces also work with partner-nation gendarmerie, police, and customs and border patrol to strengthen their capacity to protect critical infrastructure, conduct hostage negotiation and post-blast investigation, and secure borders against illicit trafficking. Legal advisers in Mauritania, for example, coordinate regional training on countering money laundering and terrorist financing with Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, in cooperation with the African Union.

Other US agencies are further involved in diplomatic and development focused arms of the programme. In Morocco, representatives from the US Agency for International Development and Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement work to prevent the radicalization of prisoners while they are incarcerated. Diplomatic efforts extend country-wide: among numerous activities, DoD’s Military Information Support Teams develop fliers and billboards in Nigeria and Mauritania encouraging communities to report security threats to local security forces.¹²¹

The flagship military component of the TSCTP is Exercise Flintlock, an annual special operations exercise to train, test and coordinate regional, NATO and South African militaries in counter-terrorism operations. Since 2005, this has been held in Mali,

120 United States Africa Command, Program Overview: The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership <http://www.africom.mil/Doc/7432>

121 Warner, March 2014, pp. 44-45.

Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mauritania and Niger.

European Training Missions

The European Union has established three training missions in the Sahel-Sahara since mid-2012 under its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). These are located in Niger, Mali and Libya. None is specifically a counter-terrorism programme, although the perceived threats of terrorism and insurgency have influenced their genesis.

Within the context of its 2011 Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, the EU established a civilian mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel) in July 2012 to assist domestic efforts to combat terrorism and organised crime across the Sahel.¹²² In conjunction with other actors, EUCAP is mandated to support regional and international coordination to combat terrorism and organised crime, develop criminal investigation capacities and training programmes for national security forces, with a particular focus on Nigerien security forces. EUCAP liaison officers have been deployed to Bamako and Nouakchott, to assist regional cooperation between the security forces of Niger, Mali and Mauritania.¹²³

Following intervention in Mali, the EU has established a training mission (EUTM) to support the rebuilding of the Malian armed forces and to meet their operational needs by providing expertise and advice on operational command, logistic support, human resources, operational preparation and intelligence. This is not specifically a counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency training mission, aiming rather to develop the basic skills and discipline of Malian infantry forces.

In May 2013 the EU established a two-year civilian mission in Libya known as the EU Integrated Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya).¹²⁴ This trains, advises, mentor and coordinates international support to Libyan security institutions to control border against, inter alia, movements of organised criminals and terrorists. More obviously, EUBAM responds to the EU’s disquiet about the huge numbers of sub-Saharan migrants illegally crossing from Libya to Italy and Malta since 2013.

122 European Union External Action Service, Fact Sheet: The European Union and the Sahel, 16 January 2013, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224335/evidence-eeas-sahel-factsheet.pdf

123 European Union External Action Service, Fact Sheet: Common Security and Defence Policy Civil Mission in Sahel, 9 July 2012, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/1704249/fact_sheet_sahel_coordinated9_july.pdf

124 European Union External Action Service, Factsheet: EUBAM in Libya, February 2014, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions_operations/eubam-libya/eubam_factsheet_en.pdf

Other Counter-terrorism Training Programmes

Several non-NATO but western-aligned actors have also been involved in offering counter-terrorism training to regional states in recent years. Morocco was reported to be training at least 600 Malian troops in counter-terrorism and desert-fighting techniques as of July 2014.¹²⁵ Colombia has provided training and advice to several West African states, including Senegal, on techniques for combating “narco-terrorism”, following the logic of Plan Colombia.¹²⁶ Israeli expertise have been very influential in developing Nigerian, Cameroonian and possibly other states’ counter-terrorism and intelligence capabilities.¹²⁷ Israel reportedly sent such personnel to Abuja in May 2014 in the wake of the Chibok abduction.¹²⁸ In early 2013, following the death of ten of its citizens in the In-Aménas attack, Japan pledged \$16 million towards counter-terrorism capacity building in the Sahel, including for border security.¹²⁹

Abductions and Renditions

Given the relatively late development of the Sahel-Sahara as a front in global counter-terrorism operations, the use of abductions and extraordinary renditions of suspected terrorists from the region appears to have been limited and sporadic. However, the extreme isolation of most of the region and its absence of journalists or human rights investigators makes it very difficult to know the scale of the issue. A 2013 report by the Open Society Justice Foundation into CIA secret detentions and extraordinary rendition named Algeria, The Gambia, Libya, Mauritania and Morocco as having been complicit in such activities between roughly November 2001 and 2004.¹³⁰ Morocco, the only

US Major Non-NATO Ally in the region, is accused of hosting secret detention and torture facilities.

More recently, under the Obama administration, there have been at least two successful abductions of alleged terrorists from Libya by US agents. Abu Anas al-Libi was kidnapped from near his home in Tripoli and “lawfully detained by the U.S. military in a secure location outside Libya” in October 2013.¹³¹ In June 2014, US special forces abducted from Benghazi Ahmed Abu Khattala, the alleged leader of the September 2012 attack on the city’s US consulate. Both men are believed to have been taken via US Navy vessels to custody in the US, where they face trial.¹³² The Libyan government claims that it did not authorise either operation or the rendition of the suspects.

125 RFI, ‘Mali: des militaires et des imams formes au Maroc’, RFI website, 21 July 2014, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20140721-mali-militaires-imams-formes-maroc-contre-le-terrorisme/>

126 Mabel Gonzalez Bustelo, ‘Exporting (In)Security? Questioning Colombian Military Engagement in West Africa’, *Sustainable Security*, 20 March 2014, <http://sustainablesecurity.org/2014/03/20/colombian-engagement-in-west-africa/>

127 The former commander of the Israeli Defence Force’s Duvdevan special forces unit was long adviser to the Presidential Guard in Cameroon; see Yossi Melman, ‘Ex-IDF top officer dies in Cameroon helicopter crash’, *Haaretz*, 22 November 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/ex-idf-top-officer-dies-in-cameroon-helicopter-crash-1.326171> Chad (which does not recognise Israel, but bought Israeli vehicles during its proxy war with Sudan) is also rumoured to have received Israeli training. Mauritania enjoyed a close security relationship with Israel up to 2009, when it severed relations. Burkina Faso and Senegal are the other two regional states that recognise Israel.

128 ‘Chibok: Israel Sends Anti-Terrorism Experts to Nigeria’, *The Advocate*, 12 May 2014, <http://theadvocatengr.com/new/chibok-israel-sends-anti-terrorism-experts-to-nigeria/>

129 Global Counter Terrorism Forum Sahel Working Group - Co-Chair’s Summary, Oran, Algeria, 24-25 June 2013, <http://www.thegctf.org/documents/10299/55810/Final+EN+SWG+Oran+June+2013.PDF>

130 Globalizing Torture: CIA Secret Detention and

Extraordinary Rendition, Open Society Foundations, 2013, <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/globalizing-torture-20120205.pdf>

131 Rob Wise, ‘The Capture of Abu Anas al-Libi’, CSIS, 7 October 2013, <http://csis.org/publication/capture-abu-anas-al-libi>

132 ‘Benghazi consulate raid suspect in US court’, *BBC News*, 28 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-28072428>

AFRICOM at War in the Horn of Africa

The expansion of covert warfare across the Sahel must be understood within a wider context of counter-terrorist operations by AFRICOM, which have particular precedent in the Horn of Africa. As in the Trans-Sahara region, Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA) has worked closely with regional states and France, the dominant maritime power in the western Indian Ocean. Unlike in the Sahel-Sahara, AFRICOM in the Horn has a large combat base, at Djibouti airport, and uses it to launch attacks by air, sea and land.

In late 2002, the US established headquarters of a Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, at the entrance to the Red Sea, thus providing access to both Somalia and Yemen, two fragile or failing states that the US considered 'ungoverned spaces'. CJTF-HOA comprises around 4,000 US and allied personnel and contractors.

Armed UAVs have been used to target militants in Somalia since June 2011 and in Yemen as early as 2002.¹³³ Further basing facilities for UAVs have been used in Ethiopia and Seychelles in addition to Djibouti, although it is unclear if armed aircraft have used these bases.¹³⁴ Between 13 and 19 drone and covert operations are estimated to have been carried out in Somalia alone in 2007-14.¹³⁵

Unlike in the Sahel, the littoral nature of operations in Somalia allows a more expansive use of conventional weaponry in covert action. The 2006 invasion of Somalia by Ethiopian forces saw Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) launch a series of air, naval and ground attacks against alleged al-Qaida militants. In January 2007, AC-130 aerial gunships struck militant camps up to four times.¹³⁶

In June 2007 the USS Chafee carried out a naval bombardment on Islamic militants in northern Somalia.¹³⁷ A number of warships among those kept in the Indian Ocean have been used to launch missiles and fire at targets in Somalia and Yemen.¹³⁸ Lewis and Clark class ships – used

to ferry fuel and cargo to military bases – have been used as Afloat Forward Staging Bases near Djibouti to house special forces and to launch helicopters and small boats for operations.¹³⁹

The crash of a US Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle fighter-bomber in the UAE in 2012 has drawn attention to the potential use of air strikes by the US in the Horn of Africa.¹⁴⁰ While the presence of these aircraft in Djibouti is known, their operational use has not been stated.

Other elements of covert operations in the Horn of Africa are clearly reflected in developments in the Sahel. ISR operations in the region have been run under Operation Tusker Sand, a direct counterpart to Creek Sand. Operating out of Entebbe (Uganda) and Djibouti airports, the programme uses private contractor owned and operated Beechcraft King Air twin-turboprop aircraft fitted with imaging technology and sensors.¹⁴¹

Tusker Sand has provided ISR support to Operation Observant Compass, the US operation launched in late 2011 in support of the AU mission to find and combat the Lord's Resistance Army. Separate from CJTF-HOA, up to 300 US special forces support operations by regional countries in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. This is the most overt use of US special forces anywhere in Africa.

Training and equipping East African militaries to fight against al-Shabaab as part of the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is a major focus of US regional operations. The US also runs a number of covert training programmes in the Horn. The CIA is reported to run a programme for Somali intelligence agents and operatives out of Mogadishu's Aden Adde International Airport, including an underground prison. Somali intelligence agents are reportedly paid directly by the CIA.¹⁴²

133 Walter Pincus, 'US Says Yemen Aided Missile Strike', *The Washington Post in The Daily Gazette*, 6 November, 2002, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=7nsuAAAAIBAJ&sjid=7YkFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2811,1484648&dq=targeted-killing&hl=en>

134 Craig Whitlock and Greg Miller, 'U.S. building secret drone bases in Africa, Arabian Peninsula, officials say', *The Washington Post*, 20 September, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-building-secret-drone-bases-in-africa-arabian-peninsula-officials-say/2011/09/20/gIQAj8rOjK_story.html

135 Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 'US Covert Actions in Somalia', <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/category/projects/drones/drones-somalia/>

136 Chris Woods, 'US Covert Actions in Somalia: Militants and Civilians Killed in Multiple US Somalia Strikes', *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, 22 February, 2012, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/02/22/militants-and-civilians-killed-in-up-to-20-us-somalia-strikes-new-study-shows/>

137 Jeff Schogol, 'US Destroyer Shells Somali Militants', *Stars and Stripes*, 5 June, 2007, <http://www.stripes.com/news/u-s-destroyer-shells-somali-militants-1.65000>

138 David Axe, 'US Used Destroyers, Gunships and Spy Planes in Somali Hunt', *Wired*, 28 November, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/2011/11/warships-gunships-spyplanes-somalia/>

[somalia/](http://www.wired.com/2011/11/warships-gunships-spyplanes-somalia/)

139 Hon. Ray Mabus, *Speech at the Hamer Institute, Jackson State University*, 9 October, 2009, p5 <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/people/secnav/Mabus/Speech/Hamer%20Institute%20Naming%20of%20Medgar%20Evers%209%20Oct%2009%20Rel.pdf>

140 David Cenciotti, 'The Mysterious US F-15E Strike Eagle Detachment in Djibouti', *The Aviationist*, 11 May, 2012, <http://theaviationist.com/2012/05/11/strike-eagle-djibouti/>

141 Spencer Ackerman, 'Special Ops Forces Killed in African Spy Plane Crash', *Wired*, 20 February, 2012, <http://www.wired.com/2012/02/spy-plane-crash-africa>

142 Jeff Schogol, 'US Destroyer Shells Somali Militants', *Stars and Stripes*, 5 June, 2007, <http://www.stripes.com/news/u-s-destroyer-shells-somali-militants-1.65000>

Meeting Objectives: Counter-terrorism Outcomes in the Sahel-Sahara



An MV-22B tiltrotor Osprey headed to Ghana as part of a two day training event with U.S. Marines. Photo by Lance Cpl. Alexander Hill

The US and France have set themselves strategic and tactical objectives in committing heavily to counter-terrorism programmes and operations in the Sahel-Sahara. These need to be revisited in order to make any assessment of whether the outcomes of these missions are meeting these objectives.

For Opération Serval, France set itself three essentially tactical objectives:¹⁴³

1. To help the Malian Armed Forces to halt and repulse the progress of terrorist groups while assuring the security of the civilian population;
2. To help Mali to recover its sovereignty and territorial integrity;
3. To facilitate the operationalization of international decisions to permit the rapid deployment of two complementary international missions: AFISMA and the EUTM.

It is too early to assess outcomes of Opération Barkhane but France has set two top-level mission goals¹⁴⁴:

1. To support the armed forces of BSS partner countries in their fight against terrorist armed groups;
2. To help prevent the re-establishment of terrorist safe havens in the region.

The US Government has set out rather more strategic objectives for its TSCTP, which it says aims to defeat terrorist organisations by:¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ 'Présentation de l'Opération', French Ministry of Defence website, 25 October 2013, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/mali/dossier/presentation-de-l-operation> It is unclear if these objectives were set at the outset of Serval or later.

¹⁴⁴ 'Lancement de l'opération Barkhane', French Ministry of Defence website, 01 August 2014, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/actualites/lancement-de-l-operation-barkhane>

¹⁴⁵ United States Africa Command, 'Program Overview: The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership', AFRICOM

3. Strengthening regional counterterrorism capabilities;
4. Enhancing and institutionalizing cooperation among the region's security forces;
5. Promoting democratic governance;
6. Discrediting terrorist ideology; and
7. Reinforcing bilateral military ties with the United States.

Opération Serval

Evaluating the French objectives is relatively straightforward. Opération Serval did successfully repulse the January 2013 jihadist offensive into central Mali and by February 2013 had pushed jihadist groups out of all significant population centres in the north and allowed and encouraged AFISMA to deploy in a second line capacity to secure central Mali and some regained territory. By April EUTM had commenced training and the transition from AFISMA to MINUSMA began a process of developing a robust and reasonably well resourced peacekeeping presence in the north. This, in turn, allowed Mali to begin restoration of its administrative presence in the north and the holding of peaceful presidential and legislative elections in every district of the country later in 2013.

However, establishing a French and UN military presence across northern Mali has not proved to be the same as restoring a Malian state presence in all of these areas, nor of guaranteeing peace there. This reflects three strategic shortcomings. The first is the diagnosis of the problem in Mali as one of jihadist terrorism rather than a domestic political crisis. While French intervention scattered AQIM and the main jihadist elements from their safe havens in northern Mali, it did not resolve the prior armed conflict between the Malian state and secular Tuareg separatist groups, which regained control of Kidal district and became more important French allies in counter-terrorism operations in this, the centre of AQIM's Malian operations, than the Malian security forces. Indeed, the elected Malian government seems to have interpreted the French military spearhead and UN shield as a reason not to pursue a peace process with the separatists.

The second shortcoming was that the French were able to use superior conventional forces to repulse a conventional offensive and recapture territory but they have not so easily been able to hold that ground against the asymmetric and unconventional tactics of a dispersed terrorist adversary. Successive reports in 2014 by the UN Secretary-General on Mali have attested to deteriorating security conditions in the north as French forces have drawn down and jihadist groups and cells have reorganised. Most people displaced from Mali in 2012-13 have still not returned. Counter-terrorism operations require very different military

website, <http://www.africom.mil/Doc/7432>

means as well as comprehensive non-military efforts to address the factors that mobilise militants.

The third shortcoming was in attempting to destroy highly mobile transnational armed groups with a campaign limited to one country with completely open borders. Thus, Opération Serval has displaced the jihadist problem from Mali into neighbouring countries, especially Niger – where there was a series of attacks in mid-2013 by groups formerly operating from Mali –southern Libya, and northern Nigeria.¹⁴⁶ AQIM was badly damaged in Mali but some of its splinter factions appear to have gained in strength.¹⁴⁷ This is a lesson that France aims to address with the more integrated regional approach of Opération Barkhane and the dispersal of its assets across the Sahel-Sahara. But it is still a military-first approach.

Additionally, whatever France does militarily to counter AQIM in the Sahel-Sahara has been undermined by the payment of huge ransoms by European governments to AQIM. An investigation by the New York Times suggests that \$91.5 million was paid by European governments or their affiliates for release of hostages held by AQIM between 2008 and 2013.¹⁴⁸ \$58.1 million of this sum is reported to have been paid by France. European governments deny or refuse to confirm such payments.

TSCTP

The more strategic approach of the TSCTP, now in its ninth year, has yielded both gains and losses for the US and its regional partners. On the plus side, it has certainly reinforced bilateral military ties as US trainers have operated in virtually every country of the region (and Africa) and US military aircraft, contractors and special forces appear to have access to facilities and territory across the Sahel-Sahara. Exercises like Flintlock and various seminars and summits have promoted regional inter-military cooperation, although the degree to which this otherwise happens through African Union and ECOWAS-led and bilateral processes should not be under-stated.¹⁴⁹

146 Christophe Boisbouvier, 'Afrique Invité: Philippe Migaux, auteur de «Al-Qaïda, sommes-nous menacés?»', RFI, 11 March 2014, <http://www.rfi.fr/emission/20140311-philippe-migaux-al-qaïda-menaces-mali-niger/>

147 Romain Mielcarek, 'Où sont passés les jihadistes qui ont combattu au Mali?', RFI, 26 October 2013, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20131023-aqmi-passes-jihadistes-ont-combattu-mali/>

148 Rukmini Callimachi, 'Paying Ransoms, Europe Bankrolls Qaeda Terror', *New York Times*, 29 July 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/30/world/africa/ransoming-citizens-europe-becomes-al-qaedas-patron.html>

149 The AU launched its Nouakchott Process in March 2013 in the wake of Serval. The G5 Sahel, France's partner in Opération Barkhane, was formed by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger in February 2014. ECOWAS has long-standing policies on defence and security cooperation and regional exercises for its 15 members. Sub-regional border-security partnerships include, for example, a tripartite

On the minus side, the escalation of terrorist attacks and threats to local and western interests in the Sahel-Sahara, especially since the 2011 NATO-assisted military intervention in Libya, strongly indicates that terrorist ideology has not been successfully discredited. In the Libyan example, it is also clear that local counter-terrorism capabilities have been weakened rather than strengthened as the state and its security forces have disintegrated and at least one US-designated FTO now has a role in government. As in Afghanistan two decades ago, that some of the most powerful militia in Libya were developed by US and other NATO special operations forces in 2011 does not imply any loyalty to these countries.¹⁵⁰ In April 2014 jihadist militants actually captured the compound near Tripoli where US special forces had been trying to train Libyan counterparts.¹⁵¹ In other Sahel-Saharan states the balance sheet is mixed. US-trained Chadian, Mauritanian and, to a lesser extent, Nigerien counter-terrorism forces seem to be relatively effective as fighting forces. Malian forces were ineffective in 2011-13 in meeting the challenge from the north. Nigerian troops have made the Boko Haram terrorism challenge very much worse, fanning it into a full-blown insurgency.

However, the main critique of both US and French counter-terrorism programmes in the Sahel-Sahara must be in terms of governance outcomes. The pursuit of counter-terrorism operations and basing or logistics infrastructure across the Sahel-Sahara is dependent on maintaining relationships and status of forces agreements with national governments: the local partners. This has strengthened a number of non-democratic regimes since the perception of reliable partners in the "war on terrorism" seems to be strongly correlated to authoritarian regimes' investment in their security forces. The Algerian Pouvoir, the quasi-military Mauritanian government and especially the Déby government in Chad are thus pillars of external counter-terrorism strategies for the Sahel-Sahara and largely immune from pressure to improve their repressive treatment of citizens and political opponents. The situation is strongly analogous to uncritical Cold War alliances.

An embarrassing corollary to the governance critique for the US is the fact that, of the four militaries they initially began training under the PSI, three (Mauritania in 2008, Niger in 2010, Mali in 2012) have subsequently overthrown democratically elected governments and the fourth (Chad in 2006) split in a brief civil war. In the case of Mali, the leader of the April 2012 coup d'état was a US-trained green beret officer. There is

force of Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso and cooperation between Nigeria, Niger and Chad around Lake Chad.

150 Nick Turse, 'Washington Fights Fire with Fire in Libya', *TomDispatch.com*, 15 April 2014, http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175831/tomgram%3A_nick_turse,_the_pentagon,_libya,_and_tomorrow's_blowback_today

151 Eli Lake, 'Jihadists now control secretive US base in Libya', *The Daily Beast*, 23 April 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/04/23/jihadists-now-control-secretive-u-s-base-in-libya.html>

no indication that Washington planned or encouraged such actions, which actually disrupted TSCTP activities in those countries but inter- and intra-service rivalries may have been stoked by PSI and TSCTP development of elite units. Moreover, the divisions that these coups witness, and the strength of military relative to political institutions in the Sahel-Sahara, demonstrate how compromised and potentially toxic an actor the military is when attempting to counter terrorism.

One final objective which French and US policy in the Sahel-Sahara presumably aspires to, but does not always articulate, is making their homelands and citizens more secure from terrorist threats. This is difficult to judge, not least because the threat to the US, France and Europe from Sahel-Saharan jihadist groups is still largely assumed. AQIM, Boko Haram and Ansar al-Shari'a have never launched attacks outside their home regions. Kidnappings of westerners has declined in Mauritania, Mali and Niger since 2013 but that may reflect the flight from the Sahel-Sahara of such vulnerable foreigners. Kidnappings in Nigeria and Cameroon have increased in the same period. France is probably more of a prized target for jihadist groups since launching Serval. Few of its interests have been attacked in the Sahel-Sahara since then,¹⁵² but this is unlikely to last, even with 3,000 well trained and equipped troops to protect them.

¹⁵² The Areva uranium mine at Arlit is the obvious exception. Al-Mourabitoun suicide bombers attacked the site in May 2013 in revenge for French intervention in Mali. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/23/us-niger-attacks-idUSBRE94M14W20130523>

Conclusion

While French-led operations in Mali, US “snatch” and evacuation operations in Libya, and the international response to the Chibok abductions have garnered headlines on counter-terrorist operations in northwest Africa, a far-reaching reorganisation and entrenchment of US, French and other NATO militaries’ presence in the Sahel-Sahara has been underway. Opération Barkhane is a more strategic military response to some of the tactical shortcomings of Opération Serval but it makes overt rather than fundamentally changing the way that French forces have been deployed in all five or six Sahel countries for several years.

The more significant changes are those concerning the US presence in the region, including personnel and equipment operating out of southern Europe. These are being implemented with minimal fanfare. US defence budget documents for FY2015, including new allocation requests under the CTPF, make explicit that the US is seeking to establish a small number of basing locations for crisis response task forces under the “New Normal” concept and that the tempo and complexity of AFRICOM operations necessitates greater on-continent capacity for personnel recovery across Africa. The 2013 establishment of a UAV facility in Niger may also be the vanguard of a greater deployment of US ISR assets in the Sahel-Sahara, possibly following the precedent of combat UAV strikes in the Horn of Africa. Clearly, the US administration expects to be more involved in the region in future but it is not clear whether it will be content to “lead from behind” France indefinitely.

This overt and covert build-up of foreign forces in and off the Sahel-Sahara has not gone unnoticed in the region. French, US or UN counter-terrorism operations in the region do not yet appear to have caused large numbers of civilian casualties, as they have elsewhere, although there remains the potential for a “Black Hawk down” type incident to shift perceptions against them. Rather, it is the alliances that Washington and Paris have made and must maintain with local strongmen – politicians, military, secret police and, at times, rebel leaders – that are likely to undermine local confidence in counter-terrorism operations. For fear of such reputational risks, the US treads lightly in Nigeria and Algeria but it is compromised by its relationships in Chad, Mauritania and elsewhere. French legitimacy in Mali has already been squeezed by its dependence for counter-terrorism operations on northern armed separatist groups.

Looking to the future, it is likely to be the implosion of Libya that increasingly concerns local and external security actors. Jihadist ideology has not been countered effectively there and armed Islamist groups have been major beneficiaries of the post-Gaddafi vacuum. Weapons supplies from Libya’s looted arsenals and the payment of millions of euros in ransoms by European governments has further reinforced the appeal of jihadist groups across the region. Intervention in Mali has restored some stability

to parts of that country but at the expense of Libya at an extremely vulnerable point in its consolidation. At best, the new configuration of foreign forces in the Sahel-Sahara may partially contain the security challenges displaced from Mali to Libya but its presence, actions and compromising alliances are more likely to exacerbate than to mitigate the appeal of jihadist and nationalist groups. These foreign legions may not be coming home soon.

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