ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN THE SAHEL | WHY BOKO HARAM'S EXPANSION IS CRITICAL FOR THE REGION

The Sahel is currently facing a multifaceted crisis that has sparked the interest of the international community, especially within the European Union and for the United States. Nigeria and its Islamic insurgency led by Boko Haram in the north of the country might worsen the situation in the region by outflanking the borders, hence making the Sahel a lingering instable place in Africa. Although the Islamic insurgency in Nigeria is adamantly different from Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), there are some worrisome trends that could enhance their cooperation. The deteriorating situation shows that security and development approaches should be rethought at local, regional and international levels.

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While the media and the international community seem to discover the complexity and the challenges posed by the Sahel in terms of security and development, many aspects of the Mali crisis have reflected the remaining multifaceted issues in the region. Northern Nigeria, and more broadly the entire country is another unstable state that needs to be focused on. Ten years after Boko Haram was created, the way the Government and security forces have tried to address the situation is an important signal of "what should not be done". Bombing of the UN facilities in August 2011, allegedly hostage-taking in 2013, extensive communication skills developed through video tapes posted on Youtube, Boko Haram and Ansaru splinter groups are no beginners in the arena of violent extremism in the Sahel. Regarding the inability of the Nigerian Government to tackle this issue, how are international actors supporting the most populous African country currently facing a thorny situation that goes beyond national security? And how does that impact the region?

The European Union has established long-term relations with the Sahel, especially through those member-states that have important historical ties to the region (France, Spain, Italy for instance) but also via development assistance programs that have, however, shown their limits. For many reasons[1], the United States is becoming increasingly interested in the region although it is not America's foreign policy and defense first priority. The American paradigm in the region has been mainly guided by security and military programs. Therefore, beyond counter-terrorism perspectives other features have to be taken into consideration. One remaining question (and three sub-questions) will shape our analysis: How will or could Boko Haram's expansion affect the region? Is there a potential space for a larger black African jihadist perspective in the Sahel? Can the "civilization" rhetoric trigger broader conflicts? And finally, how will U.S. engagement impact other actors in the region?

| Boko Haram from local to regional?

A | Boko Haram and its evolving regional context

On 14 May 2013, the President of Nigeria, Jonathan Goodluck, declared the state of emergency in three states (Borno, Yobe and Adamawa) of the north permitting the military to engage vast operations with larger power. One month before that, mass killings occurred in the so-called region, with satellites tracking evidence that the military had been responsible for atrocities on the populations. In August 2011, UN facilities in Abuja were targeted by terrorist attacks, killing at least two dozen of people. These attacks usually intensified during the Christmas period (2011, 2012). Amnesty International and Human Right Watch published several reports regarding the military and security forces brutality while tempting to tame the Islamic insurgency. Finally, the Atlantic journal began one of its articles by asking if Nigeria was turning into a failed state[2].

These trends are reinforced by worrisome demographic trends. In the 12 northern sharia (Islamic law) states in Nigeria, the birth rate per woman is reportedly to be, at least, 7.3. We were told that this rate is probably underestimated due to the difficult access to the region and collect of accurate data[3]. In fact, these trends drive to urbanization issues, hence hindering development policies.

Regarding the theology and ideology dimensions of Boko Haram, there are critical analyses that need to be mentioned in order to better understand what the situation is (today) in Nigeria. Below are a few elements about the origins of the movement and the persons who participated in its rise to power[4].

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[1] Africa Growth Initiative (Brookings Institution), Top five reasons why Africa should be a priority for the United States, March 2013.
[2] John Campbell and Asch Harwood, Nigeria is caught between military abuses and islamist rebels, *The Atlantic*, June 18 2013, last access June 21, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/nigeria-is-caught-between-military-abuses-and-islamist-rebels/276989/?utm_source=Africa+Center+for+Strategic+Studies+-+Media+Review+for+June+20%2C+2013.
[3] Interview, Washington DC, 17 June 2013.
[4] Two "must read" scholars need to be cited here: Paul Lubeck, Nigeria: Mapping a Shari`a Restorationist Movement" in Robert Hefner (ed.) *Shari`a Politics: Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, April 2011; Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos, Boko Haram et le terrorisme islamiste au Nigeria: insurrection religieuse, contestation politique ou protestation sociale?, *CERI, question de recherche/Research Question, N° 40*, June 2012.

| The region of Lake Chad: breeding ground for Boko Haram expanded activities?

From Aboubakar Gunmi[5] (Elite Nigerian Scholar) to the charismatic Boko Haram leader Mohamed Yusuf and his "master" Ja'afar Mahmoud Adam, Boko Haram has his grassroots in the Izalah movement, a salafist movement. In the 1970s some Hausa and Fulani traders regularly crossed the border between Nigeria and Niger hence developing economic and socio-cultural ties in the Lake Chad region. Aboubakar Gunmi was an innovative preacher radically opposed to Sufi doctrines - especially Tijjaniya brotherhood. He and Ja'afar Mahmoud Adam had contacts in Saudi Arabia. Mohamed Yusuf is often described as a polite, tempered and disciplined person. His credibility arguing with Ulemmas eventually helped him become a proper preacher recognized by the community in Maiduguri (Northeast of Nigeria), the current bastion of Boko Haram. As a viable person he also made connections with the Governor of Borno. He finally did not agree with the "political sharia" that was implemented in the early years of 2000 and broke his ties with the political representatives in the region. He called upon real sharia law to be re-established in Northern Nigeria. The breakout events occurred in 2009 when some of his followers were killed, allegedly by security forces. It triggered the insurgency (June-July 2009) that became a (djihadist) war between Boko Haram and both the local and national government. Yusuf was finally killed without official trials, hence galvanizing Boko Haram support within the population.

According to some interviews conducted in Washington[6], although it is not clear from whom exactly, the Izalah movements[7] do enjoy financial support from Saudi Arabia and Qatar[8]. They are responsible for reformist/conservatism Islam in both Niger and Nigeria. They reject Sufi doctrines and its followers. In Niger[9], Isalah movement does not openly promote violent extremism and jihad. However, the current situation in the region potentially opens up the way for the movement to fall into violent extremism. One remaining question is: does Isalah networks have connections or does it fit into AQIM and its affiliates ideologies? According to a researcher interviewed in Washington, there were some documents found in Ben Laden's house in Abbottabad (Pakistan) reporting contacts between Boko Haram and Al Qaida's leader. Although there is no public evidence about it, it is a substantial element that will need to be further investigated. Another researcher interviewed wonders if Boko Haram has interests in developing deeper tights with radical Islamic groups in the region[10]. According to Carlos Echeverria Jesus, Sidi Ahmed Ould Hamma, a Mauritanian individual affiliate to AQIM, has been linked to Boko Haram terrorist attacks in Nigeria in summer 2011[11]. Regarding Al Shabbab in Somalia, the Islamic rebellion that claims to have relations with core Al Qaida, there are also suspicions about potential connections with Boko Haram (probably training - Improvised Explosive Devices for instance and military insurgency).

In May 2013, four Lebanese were arrested on allegations of terrorist activities. They have remained in prisons since then and are reportedly linked to Hezbollah network[12]. Southern Libya is definitely a new Islamic stronghold[13]. This vast uncontrolled area worries both the United States and France[14]. Ansaru, which is reportedly a splinter group or another emerging Islamic armed group in Nigeria, might have ties with Hezbollah cells in the region since they are responsible for the abduction and killing of seven workers from a Lebanese Company in Nigeria - February 2013.

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[5] Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Conference "Islam in Africa", March 2013.
[6] Interviews conducted between April and June 2013.
[7] See Paul Lubeck, *op cit*.
[8] Interviews in Washington DC, United States, April to June 2013.
[9] The Mali crisis, the U.S. increasing role in the region (drones bases on SOFA accord with Niger) and the population's reluctance to Western values might make Niger a breeding ground for terror. Radicalization will come both from the outside (probably like the 23 May attacks claimed by the MUJAO and Belmokhtar AQIM splinter group) and within the Nigerien society.
[10] Interview, Washington DC, June 18th.
[11] Carlos Echeverría Jesus, Yihadismo: escenarios africanos, *Analisis del GEES*, July 29, 2011.
[12] Lebanese men accused of terrorism sue Nigeria for 25 millions dollars, *Voice of America*, 19 June 2013, last access, 22 June 2013, http://www.voanews.com/content/lebanese-accused-of-terrorism-sue-nigeria-for-nearly-twenty-five-million-dollars/1685005.html?utm_source=Africa+Center+for+Strategic+Studies+-+Media+Review+for+June+20%2C+2013+&utm_campaign=6%2F20%2F2013&utm_medium=email. Barak Ravid and Reuters, Nigeria nabs Hezbollah cell plotting attacks on Israeli, Western targets, *Haaretz Journal*, 30 May 2013, last access, 22 June 2013. http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/nigeria-nabs-hezbollah-cell-plotting-attacks-on-israeli-western-targets-1.526919?utm_source=Africa+Center+for+Strategic+Studies+-+Media+Review+for+May+31%2C+2013&utm_campaign=5%2F31%2F2013&utm_medium=email
[13] Libya becomes the "new Mali" as islamists shift in the Sahara, *Reuters*, 31 May 2013, Last access 22 June 2013, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30691:insight-libya-becomes-the-new-mali-as-islamists-shift-in-sahara&catid=52:Human%20Security&Itemid=114&utm_source=Africa+Center+for+Strategic+Studies+-+Media+Review+for+June+3%2C+2013&utm_campaign=6%2F3%2F2013&utm_medium=email
[14] Jamel Arfaoui, Hezbollah emerges in Libya, *Magharebia*, 11 June 2013.

Finally, do salafist groups want to integrate the political arena in the region? What role do they play as civil society actors, especially in terms of development and humanitarian assistance? Last but not least, how would local political institutions as well as regional and international partners react to a greater Islamic engagement in the political arena?

B | These (alarming?) factors for a broader ambition

| A black African perspective?

In November 2012, Bilal Hicham, a MUJAO commander in Northern Mali surrendered to his country, Niger, condemning racism within Al Qaida networks in the region[15]. It is actually not the first time that black African djihadists complain about AQIM commanders and behavior towards them. This situation may spark the creation of other splinter groups in the region in order to promote black African grievances within the Islamic extremism framework. Since then, the MUJAO created a *targui seryia* (unit) and a Songhai one[16]. It also reveal how ethnic and tribal (nomad vs. non-nomad) tensions enter into consideration even when it comes to djihadist and armed group organizations. One can wonder if AQIM, Boko Haram and other Islamic extremist groups can take advantage of if these sociological animosities[17]. For instance, "In Mauritania ethnic rivalries and slavery legacy dramatically impact societal cohesion [18](…)". Therefore, it could "be a barrier to our programs in the field[19]".

| A Civilization narrative?

Pentecostal (Christians) movements have dramatically increased in the middle belt region of Nigeria. Some of them are considered to be fundamentalists and have had an impact on the societal fabric of Northern Nigeria. The consequence is that "They scare Muslims because of their extremism and are also responsible for atrocities and pillages in the region, which we do not much talk about in the news[20]". Moreover, it seems that Pentecostal groups have some support from Pentecostal associations within the United States[21]. Although Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos argues that Boko Haram issues should not be viewed as a clash of civilization rhetoric, between the North and the South, it seems to be an important dimension that might have consequences within the djihadist framework and their flexible communication strategy[22].

Therefore, a wide range of factors (both internal and external) need to be addressed in Northern Nigeria, including the security forces' brutality in military operations. "The first thing to do is to reform the police"[23]. The government security services' behavior and acts of corruption have bolstered and enhanced Boko Haram support within the population (the demand for sharia law is deeply rooted in the historical legacy of the region). Moreover, the population lacks education and health. One suggested that "The security sector should be reformed[24]".

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[15] For more information, Jérôme Pigné, Les forces rebelles au Sahel, *Armées d'Aujourd'hui*, March 2013.
[16] Jérôme Pigné, *ibid.*
[17] During the negotiations (for Mali elections and the situation in Kidal) that took place in early June in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, several problems were raised between the parties to reach an agreement. Bringing Arab and other armed groups for the negotiations was refused by the Tuareg delegations. Parties eventually came to an agreement on 19 June.
[18] Interview, Nouakchott, January 2013.
[19] Informal discussions, Washington DC, May 2013.
[20] Interview, Washington DC, 17 June 2013.
[21] Interview, *ibid.* Also, for further information on that topic refer to Ruth Marshall, Political spiritualties, the Pentecostal revolution in Nigeria, University of Chicago Press, 2009.
[22] Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos, *op cit.*
[23] Interview, Washington DC, 17 June 2013, *op cit.*
[24] Interview, Washington, *op cit.*

| Policy implications in the Sahel

A | Confronting EU and U.S. paradigms:
colonial legacy vs. Global War on Terror legacy

The situation described above shows that there is a significant need to adapt security and development collaboration with respect to sociological and historical legacies in the region, especially when dealing with weak or failing states. The challenge is likely to rebuild a broader transversal approach based on a "lesson learned process" also including a greater role from the civil society[25]. Rethinking foreign assistance (and its limits) seems to be the corner stone for a new strategy by the international community as well as for rethinking the approach towards dealing with weak (failing) states.

While the Sahel (and West Africa) is mainly francophone and has profound ties with France and European countries, Nigeria has a deeper relationship with the U.S. (economic, commercial and military cooperation). Hence we could reasonably wonder how these two types of relationships will interact with one another[26].

From a spatial prism, the European Union is spanning the region from North (Maghreb) Sahara to the Sahel region (Mauritania from the West to Somalia in the East). For the United States, the prism keeps an eye primarily on Nigeria and might get further attention northward (Sahel and North Africa). These geographic analyses correspond to both the Europeans and Americans' security and development policies and priorities. Therefore, the current situation and fragility in the whole region (from North to South, West to East) requires drawing a dark and worrisome review: both approaches have lacked, during many decades - especially for the EU development assistance - accurate data or full understanding of the societal realities.

B | Focus on the U.S. approach

Since the 9-11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. government' interest in Africa has grown, despite the Sahel not being a foreign policy priority. According to the Africa Growth Initiative there are five domains in which the United States should focus its attention: trade and investment, energy, national security, development assistance and the role of China[27].

The United States maintains strong and important bilateral relations with Nigeria, which is seen as the second most influential country in Africa after South Africa. Nigeria is the U.S. largest trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa, mainly due to the high level of petroleum imports from Nigeria, which ranks fifth in petroleum delivery to the United States. The United States, in turn, is the largest foreign investor in Nigeria, with U.S. foreign direct investment concentrated largely in the petroleum/mining and wholesale trade sectors[28]. With a population of almost 160 Million Nigeria is Africa's most populous state, with approximately half of the population identifying as Muslims, 40% as Christians, and the other 10% following various indigenous beliefs. Due to its size, population and economic importance to West Africa and the Sahel region, Nigeria's internal problems and the ongoing crisis with Boko Haram and Ansura clearly have implications for West Africa, the Sahel and the wider region.

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[25] Jemal Oumar, L'Islam modéré "seul moyen" de mettre un terme aux préjugés, *Magharebia*, May 2013. As most of the countries in the region lack a true and effective decentralization policy, a greater role for civil society is claimed to be part of the solution in order to enhance the relay between the states and the localities.

[26] While tempting to compare the U.S. and EU strategies in the Sahel we have asked, to our interlocutors (both Europeans and Americans), during our research in the U.S., how they perceived and assess European historical relations with the region and how the Global War on Terror (GWT) doctrine impact U.S. capacities to develop efficient cooperation in the Sahel. The findings are the following: most of the interviewees consider the historical relationship (for instance French, Spanish and Italians), as an advantage to galvanize and foster political, military and development cooperation although the colonial legacy might sometimes hinder some processes. Regarding the GWT, the outcomes are pretty much balanced, especially within the U.S. Administration. Some people rather not comment GWT legacy or think that the U.S. savoir-faire is a substantial advantage. Others think that GWT is a "burden" to U.S. foreign policy and that they have to shift toward a more comprehensive approach in the Sahel and in Africa. Further investigations shall be necessary to draw a bigger, and more detailed, picture of the U.S. government perception towards the Sahel.

[27] Africa Growth Initiative (Brookings Institution), Top five reasons why Africa should be a priority for the United States, March 2013.

[28] U.S. State Department, Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Relations with Nigeria, Fact Sheet, November 20, 2012. Last access 15 June 2013, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2836.htm.

On June 3rd the U.S. launched a "Reward for Justice" for African terrorists, offering a reward of 7 millions of dollars for the capture of Aboubakar Shekau (allegedly Boko Haram leader), effectively making him the most wanted terrorist militant in the Sahel[29]. Even though Nigeria is part of Tran-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Programs (TSCTP), it seems that greater emphasis is put on the bilateral side which we may interpret as efforts by the U.S. Government to run programs and cooperation through bilateral commitments rather than multilateral "One U.S. interest is to keep Nigeria unified[30]".

Is the U.S. shifting its position toward a more offensive, even aggressive, approach in the region? Although that question was asked to several U.S. officials working on counter-terrorism issues in the Sahel, we are not really convinced by the answers we collected (most of the time DOD officials would rather not comment on the reward for justice as it is initiated by Department of State in association with the Department of Justice). It raises another question about the capacity of the U.S. government's inter-agencies to efficiently work together towards these issues and their ability to establish common views, interests and means towards tackling the problems it poses. The U.S. faces other issues regarding the political instability of most countries in the region. In Mali, the coup d'état that occurred in March 2012 is binding the government to its constitution that prevent them from working with illegal and illegitimate governments. This is a law that directly constrains the Department of State whereas the Department of Defense has more political flexibility, even though they usually operate jointly. Regarding that situation it seems that the U.S. has been much more reluctant to condemn the current situation in the Central African Republic, maybe to avoid the constraints, above mentioned, on the ground? Other similar situations happened in 2005 and 2008 when two successive coups toppled the government of Mauritania. Niger has been ruled by a democratic government only since the elections of Mohamadou Issoufou in April 2011. One can also wonder how long Chad will remain stable. However, "Chad appears to be a strong partner right now and it can't be denied. We, as international partners, have to uphold such actors in the region, there are very few that we can rely on", said a High European Representative in Washington.

Other remaining questions would be to assess U.S. Counter Violence Extremism (CVE) Programs in the region. How does the U.S. government deal with its GWT legacy while implementing transversal and interagency programs like TSCTP? The GWT has fostered the gap and reluctance between the West and the Middle East - which also echo the civilization dimension of the war on terror[31]. How does America handle that question on the ground? As M. Darboe claims, "The United States' war on terrorism has profound implications for Islam and unintended consequences for internal politics[32]". How does the Arab spring, especially with Islamic governments having come to power, impact U.S. foreign policy? In fact, a government's ability to have strong communication skills and ability to have an accurate perception of their "enemy" is quite an important challenge in terms of policy making[33].

Understanding the social roots of violent extremism[34] is another crucial point that needs to be taken into consideration as well as giving importance to the ways in which Islamism and extremism are being defined[35]. These different sub-questions raise a larger problem: how to assess the potential threat posed (in this case from a U.S. point of view) by Islamic extremism groups in the Sahel? "Do international actors understand what is at stake in these countries (…)? For instance, it seems that the U.S. has experienced difficulties in implementing efficient strategies in Security Sector Reform in West Africa[36]". "They (referring to the United States) are too much focused on security and military strategies and often overlook geographic, historical and sociological factors in the Sahel". "However, let's admit they are prudent and probably happy that the French are in the front line in Mali (…). This will probably bolster French/U.S. relationship, which is a good thing (…)"[37].

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[29] U.S. State Department, Reward for justice - first reward offers for terrorists in West Africa, 4 June 2013. Last access 22 June 2013, http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/06/20130604275445.html?utm_source=Africa+Center+for+Strategic+Studies+-+Media+Review+for+June+5%2C+2013&utm_campaign=6%2F5%2F2013&utm_medium=email#axzz2VRFwlqLA

[30] Interview, Washington DC, 18 June 2013.

[31] Jean-Michel Valantin, Religion et stratégie aux Etats-Unis, *Revue internationale et stratégique*, Armand Colin, 2005/1 – N°57, p 103-114.

[32] Momodou Darboe, Islamism in West Africa, Gambia, *African Studies Review*, Vol47, N°2. September 2004.

[33] Joshua Alexander Geltzer, US Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Al Qaida, signaling and the terrorist world-view, Introduction, Routledge (Contemporary Security Studies), 2010.

[34] Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF), Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders, no dates.

[35] Jourde Cédric, Politique des récits de l'islamisme en Mauritanie Entre « marée montante » et « islamisme kalachnikov », *Politique africaine*, 2009/2 N° 114, p. 67-86.

[36] Interview, Washington DC, 11 June 2013.

[37] Interview, Washington DC, June 14th 2013.

It would also be interesting to look at the EU-US cooperation regarding Nigeria. Although both actors have common interests, it is hard to understand, through interviews and further research, what level of collaboration exists and what the expectations are from both sides. "The EU is really disorganized and there is barely a solid strategy for Nigeria. However the EU and even European countries through bilateral strategies could do much more on Security Sector Reform. SSR and elections should be the focus for external partners[38]". Furthermore, how could foreign partners better interact and foster regional cooperation? In other words, should international partners constrain themselves to galvanize indirect support in order to promote sub-regional efforts in security and development programs?

Finally, can Boko Haram become a new curveball for the U.S. government? And what would be the consequences of such a shift? If the American prism of the Sahel focuses primarily on Nigeria and Somalia with Al Shabbab in the Horn of Africa, how would the U.S. react to a greater role played by Boko Haram in the Western part of the Sahel?

| Conclusion

International actors probably overlooked the situation in the field with regard to the many aspects of the region's fragility and continuous instability, hence leading to some misapprehension and to (partially) wrong policy implementations. Both EU and U.S. strategies need some re-adjustments, not to say a comprehensive shift in their approach. One remaining question would be to assess their different type of legacies in the region and see how they impact their strategy and capacity to establish efficient and coherent initiatives. Islamic extremism in the region feeds itself thanks to both internal and external factors in the countries in which they spread their activities and recruitments.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram is a multi-class network that does not only attract poor people. This is a multifaceted phenomenon rooted in local grievances, though today it seems to get wider and galvanized through regional and international patterns. Can these issues be addressed only with local solutions? What are the links between the poverty-radicalization nexus (likely an internal issue) and the regional and international dynamics of Islamic extremism? The international community has focused on a development approach and the need for better governance at local, regional and national levels. Nonetheless, we believe that a proper answer, with appropriate political responses, would only work through a better understanding of the situation on the ground. There is an evolving and shifting paradigm mixing immediate and local grievances with external factors. The internal-external linkage is a key dynamic to be understood in order to draw a clear picture of what need to be tackled. In the Sahel, the multifaceted crisis is recognized as smuggling, kidnapping for ransoms, inter-racial marriages within the local population and by taking advantage of local grievances. However, extremist groups such as AQIM and affiliates are clearly not focused on addressing these local grievances. It is more likely a lure strategy for its own sake. Therefore, how do the trafficking-terrorism prisms affect both security and development initiatives[39]? From Mali to Libya, through Maghreb, these interactions form a new paradigm for counterterrorism strategies in the Sahel and probably far beyond. One can wonder this hybrid threat could be better tackled, spanning from security sector reform to development assistance and by taking into consideration sociological and anthropological dimensions. As one scholar said, "In Africa, there is a need for a new security paradigm[40]".

Finally, it seems important to look at the evolution of secularism and democracy in the Sahel as well as to the role of religion. For some analysts, "the rise of Islam has to do with the collapse of secular states in the region as they lost legitimacy[41]". What could be the role of traditional representatives (Sufi for instance in the region and even Christians)? How should we deal with an emerging Islamic civil society? What Alex Thurston wrote on the Mali crisis seems to be necessary to understand issues related to the Sahel and probably elsewhere in the World[42]. Before Modibo Diarra resigned (Prime Minister of Mali during the transition until December 2012) he appointed the Haut Conseil Islamique (High Islamic Council) to the

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[38] Interview, Washington DC, June 17th, *op cit*. Our interlocutor added that federation might be a solution for Nigeria, while probably not adequate for countries like Mali.
[39] James Bergeron, Transnational organized crime and international security, *The RUSI Journal*, Page 6-9, 2013.
[40] Conference on Africa, Washington DC, 17 June 2013.
[41] CSIS Conference, March 2013, *op cit*.
[42] Alex Thurston, Toward an Islamic Republic of Mali? *The Fletcher Forum on World Affairs*, Vol 37:2, Summer 2013.

government (first time ever in Mali hence challenging the secularism structure of the state). Several events within Malian society confirmed this assumption[43]. An emerging Islamic civil society is a concrete shifting position. We could call it "Politicization of Purity[44]". Therefore, three questions shall be underlined: 1) Do international partners ignore the socio-cultural dimension? (Emerging trends that create space to mobilize) 2) Can the international community find solutions to interact with religion? 3) Is there a limit to this interaction? How would governments and international partners deal with emerging Islamic civil society in the Sahel? In fact, we are not saying that the region is currently shifting to some form of (conservatism) Islamic societies neither that the populations are lenient with Salafism,[45] but there is a need to understand how these trends help reshaping individual and communities' identification.

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[43] For more information, read Alex Thurston, *ibid*.
[44] CSIS Conference, *op cit*.
[45] Defining salafism would be necessary to further deepen our analysis and understand the different steps that conduct to violent extremism.