

Potential new hotspots for extremism and opportunities to mitigate the danger

The case of the Sahel

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This paper was originally presented at the Pluscarden Programme conference on 'The Future of International Cooperation in Countering Violent Extremism' at St Antony's College, Oxford University, 8-9 October, 2010.

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Introduction

West Africa and increasingly some of its Sahelian states namely Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger are prey to a number of factors that make them susceptible to illicit trafficking, organized crime and terrorism. They are ranked among the most vulnerable 10 out of the 177 countries listed in this context. The structural weakness of the Sahelian states economies, characterized by small domestic markets and an over-reliance on only one or two export commodities, renders them highly susceptible to external shocks and low intensity security threats.¹ The huge, open expanses of land with few settlements and a limited number of law enforcement officers compound the already formidable challenges facing these vast countries.

National institutions in the Sahelian states are often under-resourced, weak and fragile as they strive to emerge from poverty and long, drawn-out institutional crises.² As a result, criminals are exploiting these conditions in order to traffic a wide range of products, including drugs, cigarettes, weapons and ammunition, and counterfeit medicines. They simultaneously engage in armed robbery, the smuggling of petrol and human trafficking. In other words, any commodity of value is trafficked. While trafficking has historically caused problems in these Sahelian states, it is the emerging new trend of a deepening collaboration between traffickers and terrorist or rebel groups that poses an even greater threat. The nature and potential negative consequences of such collaboration need to be understood.

The threats posed by both the traffickers and armed or terrorist groups are considerable owing to the fragility of these states. As a result, the most serious challenges to state survival at the beginning of the 21st century are not only the influx of multiple trafficked goods, but also the links and relationships among these groups. Increasingly, it has become the trend for terrorist or rebel groups to provide safe passage and protection to traffickers in exchange for a percentage of the total face value of the trafficked goods. Through the levying of such taxes, terrorist or rebel groups gain substantial financial spin-offs which enable them to continue with their activities. The scale of such spin-offs means that traffickers impact the public and private sectors and any community institutions in which a culture of quick and easy acquisition of money occurs. In some countries, this has bought traffickers friends in high places and there is evidence of penetration of national institutions at the highest level, particularly in Mauritania. Yet another worrying development is that money

obtained through trafficking activities also co-exists and intermingles with licit money from legitimate businesses.

Among all the Sahelian states there has in recent years been a noticeable upsurge in the use of their territory as transit points for trafficking purposes. This has occurred mainly owing to an environment that permits various criminal, terrorist or rebel groups and their local collaborators to exploit already established networks for the storage of goods, and for providing information on routes, the identification of watering sources, the presence of tourists, and the activities of soldiers or security forces, as well as warehouse for storage, a warren of safe houses and, in some instances, the connivance of law enforcement agencies. These have developed into multiple interlocking pieces and reflect the fact that the Sahel region has a long history of trafficking activities, perpetrated chiefly by the Tuaregs, and that the roots of the current collaboration between traffickers and terrorist or rebel groups in fact span several years.

The clashes between traffickers and terrorist or rebel groups and the state have basically become the Sahel's new war. Rather like legitimate businesses, the relationship between trafficking and criminal networks and terrorist or rebel groups has been forged by multiple shared interests primarily to maximize profit with the minimum of risk and to obtain the financial means to carry out their attacks on governments. The net results of this strategic calculation are two-fold: first, criminal enterprises engage in more than one activity in order to maximize their profits. Smuggling routes, for example, used for one illegal commodity can often easily be used for others. Second, co-operation exists among and with others engaging in the underground economy, including the bartering of illicit commodities between criminal groups.

Increasingly, both traffickers and terrorist or rebel groups seek out weak entry points within state structures and then exploit such institutional fragilities to their economic and political benefits. The Sahelian states possess much such vulnerability which in turn allows traffickers to manipulate such opportunities for their own criminal gain.

This paper analyses the extent of knowledge surrounding these issues, the current situation, Sahelian states capacity for response and the common trends among these four Sahelian states. Furthermore, there will be analysis of recent trends and commonalities in activities in all these countries. Finally, I discuss opportunities to mitigate the problem.

Background

Mali

Mali's geographic characteristics make it attractive to criminal activities that threaten the security of its regions and population, not least because of the porous

nature of its borders.³ This has encouraged small arms trafficking (and other types of trafficking); internal armed conflicts; illegal immigration through the use of forged travel documents; Islamist radicalism; the emergence of armed non-state actors; transnational organized crime and the possible struggle for control over natural resources. The wide expanse of land makes the bulk of the northern regions, including Tombouctou, Gao⁴ and Kidal, favourable for criminal and terrorist activities.

For several years there has been rebellion in Mali, although the last peace agreement between the Government and the rebel *Alliance démocratique du 23 mai pour le changement*, which was signed in Algiers, Algeria in 2006, seems to be holding. The implementation of the Algiers Accord has reached its final stages. However, uncertainty surrounds the issue of whether the rebel group, which has not yet disarmed, will return to its violent ways.

Rebels, terrorists, bandits and criminal groups operate in northern Mali, including known terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Salafists. AQIM, however, poses the greatest threat to the country. Traffickers engage primarily in the trafficking of people, cocaine, heroin and small quantities of cannabis. Mali is often used as a transit point for these goods, which are chiefly destined for Morocco, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria.

One of the main terrorist strongholds in Mali is Kidal, which serves as a base and safe haven for supplies such as food, water and petrol. The main reason for this is because Kidal is a mountainous region with good water resources, essential for the survival of terrorist groups and criminal networks operating in the area. Kidal is also particularly important because all arms transiting Mali towards Algeria, Mauritania and other places cross this area of the desert. Tigaharghar, Tadhakk, Boghassa and Esseli in the north-eastern part of Mali are also favourable for terrorist activities. Tinedima is an active supply base in the Tombouctou region, as are Tedjereste and Bourem in the Gao region.

Although AQIM is strong, in Mali it operates through small cells mainly from Morocco, Mauritania, Libya, Algeria and Egypt. Meanwhile, in Burkina Faso, which shares its borders with Mali and Niger in the northernmost part of the country, the Tuareg ethnic groups that are spread out across all three borders have begun to show signs of potentially causing trouble. Until recently, the Tuareg groups in Mali and Niger were known primarily for cattle-rustling and car theft, particularly of cross-country 4x4 vehicles, which are either sold in-country or across the borders. Although such activities have not yet reached alarming proportions, Burkinabe officials are aware of the possibility of escalation owing to the fragility of the situation across the country's northern borders and the tendency for Tuareg groups to commit crimes in Mali or Niger before hurrying into Burkina Faso to seek refuge with their ethnic brothers.

Although few actual kidnapping acts have taken place in Mali, the country has, however, become a location for trading hostages seized in Niger, Algeria and Tunisia overseen by Ag Bahanga.

Terrorist groups are known to be present in Mali, although they are not active in that country. Instead, terrorists act as logisticians to facilitate the purchase of arms and the provision of intelligence to other terrorist groups. Terrorism is perceived as a threat to Mali and its neighbours mainly because their objective is to create an Islamic state by first weakening the state structure, winning support and then taking over the state structure. Consequently, northern Mali has become a refuge for terrorists who as yet do not have any permanent base in the country.

More importantly, northern Mali is ideally situated for terrorists to recuperate following engagements in Algeria and Mauritania. The relationship between traffickers, terrorists and the local population is extremely close in northern Mali. This is underpinned by several factors:

- intermarriage with local communities;
- close cultural ties;
- religion;
- skin colour; and
- the exploitation of the traffickers superior purchasing power, who sometimes buy goods at twice the going market rate. This has the effect of distorting market forces while gaining loyalty and support from the Tuareg groups.

Furthermore, because of the sparse population and the wide distances involved, but more importantly a limited government presence, terrorist groups not only bring financial inducements but also supply medications to these communities, thus becoming the providers of social welfare.

The use of violence and force is 'respected' in the regions of Tombouctou and Kidal in northern Mali. As a result, terrorist acts are condoned. This longstanding view of the use of force has contributed to the rise of criminal gangs and illegal activities. Historically, arms and weapons have long been exchanged between Malian and Nigerien rebels. When a rebellion ends in one country, weapons are hired to active rebels in another for a fee. Although this region is sparsely populated, terrorists, traffickers and local communities are prepared to support one another on the basis of mutual reciprocation. Kidal is particularly targeted in this sense since the local people provide intelligence and are known to co-operate with AQIM.

Terrorists and traffickers also exploit traditional Tuareg marriage rites to gain a foothold within local communities. In Tuareg cultural practices, marriage provides an opportunity for 'foreigners' to be accepted as part of community. Thus, terrorists and traffickers earn the right to protection. By bearing children with their new families and providing goods and social services, stronger bonds are formed.

The exploitation of religious sentiments is also an important part of the strategic processes terrorists and rebels connect with local communities. AQIM and its supporters use the medium of preaching to convert would-be members to their cause. In Kidal, there are two recruitment systems in operation: through the spiritual mode by which they win converts to their 'type' of Islamic religion, and through marriage with local people. They form the domestic or local component of the terrorist groups, but there is also a transnational or international component made up of terrorists from Algeria and Burkina Faso. At present, part of AQIM's strategy is to occupy sparsely populated areas where the state has little influence. This makes northern Mali particularly attractive and vulnerable. Here, the security forces are harassed and they operate freely with the Tuaregs. As a result, AQIM aims to establish its presence in the region while simultaneously expanding its activities. The end result of the constant assault on the state reflects the groups aim to threaten and occupy the Sahelian states.

There appears to be an emerging new trend in the manner in which trafficking and terrorist activities manifest themselves in Mauritania. There is sufficient anecdotal evidence pointing to the growing connection between these two activities, giving rise to the suspicion that parties involved in such activities are starting to work together more closely in the Sahel region. For example, the capture of Edwin Dyer, one of four Westerners who kidnapped when their convoy was ambushed near the border between Niger and Mali in January 2009, is a typical example of such collaboration between terrorist groups and traffickers or criminal elements. In fact, the four were kidnapped by a group considered to be 'pure criminals', and were eventually handed over AQIM, which held them in northern Mali until Dyer's execution in mid-2009. The remaining three hostages were eventually released. This incident demonstrates that not only are terrorist groups willing to co-operate with traffickers across national boundaries, they are also profiting from their own direct involvement in trafficking by creating safe passages for traffickers and criminal gangs alike.

Mauritania

Any discussion about the challenges of trafficking and terrorism in Mauritania should be concerned with how both groups collaborate with each other and benefit from such engagements. This vast expanse of land, the greater part of which is uninhabited and whose borders have only minimal protection is ideal for all types of criminal and terrorist activity. As a result it has become a centre of operation for traffickers and terrorists, with AQIM having a visible presence in the country.⁵

Until 2008 there was a perception that due to its size, Mauritania served more as a logistic space for AQIM. Furthermore, while it was thought that Mauritanian terrorists trained in northern Mali but operated elsewhere, there is some evidence, as yet unconfirmed, that some of these terrorists may be infiltrating back into the country. While the evidence at present is not definitive, were it to be so, this could indicate a disturbing new trend leading to the possible escalation of terrorist activities.⁶

In exploring the opportunities and avenues for how both traffickers and terrorists might exploit social links among local communities in Mauritania, evidence suggests that in the more populated communities of the south and along the coast no such regular support bases or protective social links exist, and it is difficult to establish their presence in any case. This contrasts sharply with the wide swath of northern desert areas where there may well be links 'because people are living off each other because they need each other to survive'⁷.

A definitive new trend seems to be emerging in terms of the operations of terrorist groups in Mauritania, Mali and Niger. Traffickers used to have trouble with the franchising of al-Qaeda to AQIM, because previously there was disagreement over the control of desert routes between traffickers and terrorists, but this now appears to have been resolved. It is important to note, however, that several clans, particularly the Tuareg groups in both Mali and Niger are in conflict with their governments, resulting in the rise of active rebel movements between Western Sahara and Niger, namely the Front patriotique nigérien (FPN), the Mouvement des nigériens pour la justice (MNJ), the Front des forces de redressement (FFR) in the north and located in the Massif de L'Air and Agadez region, and the Forces armées révolutionnaires du Sahara (FARS) located in the eastern district of Manga in the Diffa region.

There is clearly close collaboration between these four rebel groups and traffickers. The rationale for this collaboration, it seems, is the financing of the purchase of small arms. While small arms and light weapons are only available to license-holders, this 'inconvenience' is easily circumvented by the rebels through their links with the traffickers, from whom they may obtain weapons. Some of the more serious terrorist attacks to have taken place in Mauritania since 2008 include the attack on the Israeli embassy in February 2008; the killing of 12 soldiers by terrorists in September of that year; the murder of an American citizen in June 2009; and the suicide attack near the French embassy in September 2009. All the indications are that their support bases are limited to the geographical areas in which they operate. Thus their criminal activities scarcely include the populated urban areas and cities.

A similar case involved the arrests by Mauritanian law enforcement officers of individuals believed to be Salafists, but who eventually turned out to be traffickers, thus demonstrating that the gulf between traffickers and terrorists in this vast country is beginning to narrow. Another example of such complicity occurred in the aftermath of the December 2007 murder of four French tourists in Aleg, Mauritania, when the suspects managed to flee to Guinea-Bissau. Following their arrest with the help of French agents and subsequent return to Mauritania, one of the suspects again 'managed to miraculously escape from court in Nouakchott', but was later re-arrested. The fact that terrorists are able to carry out attacks in one country before fleeing to another in the Sahel region points to the need for international co-operation in fighting terrorist groups and traffickers.

These incidents raise further questions about the emerging trends and patterns of collaboration between traffickers and terrorists. Is the widespread evidence of a new

trend in collaboration more a reflection of an increase in such instances of collaboration, or, is this just an old problem that is now coming to the fore because it has received more publicity?

There is also emerging evidence that both traffickers and terrorists have started to use alternative routes when engaging in their activities in the desert, which leads to the conclusion that they are well-guided in their choice of such routes and the precise timing of their use. Such intimate knowledge is a sign of increased information-sharing between these two groups.

Similarly, the attack on the Zouaraët mine in September 2008 highlights a definitive new trend towards what can be termed as 'reverse attacks namely, Mauritanian terrorists who with the help of their transnational partners attack domestic targets. There is some uncertainty as to the rationale behind this particular attack, but it is possible that the intention at the time was to knock out the country's electricity supply. Taking into consideration the distances covered by the perpetrators during the attack, this new trend demonstrates the ability of Mauritanian groups to attack critical infrastructures over long distances.

There are several new trends in terms of the perception of Mauritania as a 'haven for traffickers'. Mauritania now serves several functions:

- as a base for the recruitment of traffickers and terrorists in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, focusing primarily on vulnerable youth groups (unemployed and uneducated) in 'secret societies';
- the establishment of front or shell companies by traffickers for trafficking purposes;
- provision of logistic posts in the desert in exchange for water;
- provision of contacts with locals to obtain intelligence about the movement of soldiers, tourists and security personnel in general;
- the hire and use of fishing vessels for the transfer of drugs on the high seas paying as much as four times what a normal fishing expedition would net;
- provision of desert landing strips for the landing of planes and the supply of fuel;
- the provision of Mauritanian guides who provide guide services for traffickers and terrorists;
- as a base for the supply of equipment, satellite phones, uniforms, weapons, and petrol for terrorists;
- as a base for the transport and transfer of cocaine to Europe;
- as a base for the transport and transfer of cannabis to Egypt and Middle East fish and drugs for Spain

Another area where links have deepened between terrorists and traffickers in Mauritania relates to terrorist financing. According to an official source at the Ministry of Justice, criminal elements and terrorist groups financed their activities in 2005-6 through the theft of a large number of all-terrain 4x4s and other luxury vehicles. However, since 2007 this trend has changed and it is believed that terrorists now

finance their activities through collaborating with traffickers of drugs and cigarettes. Given this situation, it is more likely that terrorist groups in Mauritania offer not only safe passages for traffickers, but may also be involved in the actual trafficking. It will be interesting to see whether in the future such criminal groups expand their activities beyond the trafficking of drugs and cigarettes.

Niger

The AQIM's level of active terrorist engagement in Niger is low. However, it is perceived to be in the process of establishing a foothold in the northern part of Niger, though there is no clear indication whether the terrorists are in contact with Nigerien rebels. The Tuaregs, who usually co-operate with the rebels, have in the past been known to do business with customers who will patronize their goods irrespective of their political affiliations, and such trade is usually carried out among the Arab settlers on the border with Mali. Criminal gangs have also infiltrated these trafficking networks and are now doing business with rebels in northern Niger. However, it is clear that both the rebels and criminal Tuareg gangs are aware of each other's bases and presence, though they do not share this knowledge with the authorities. They enjoy a symbiotic relationship, whereby the rebels not only provide protection for the traffickers convoys comprising up to 16 cross-country vehicles, but also desert guides and fuelling facilities.

There have been several instances of the kidnapping of Westerners, including UN staff, with the first such incidence being in December 2008, just 40 km from Niamey, the capital of Niger. Taking into consideration the distances that the rebels had to travel from the point of kidnap to the location of their captives release, and the location of the groups that held these hostages prior to their release, it would appear that some level of collaboration must exist between traffickers and terrorists.

Clearly, trafficking and rebel activities are linked, not least because both parties need and protect each other. In particular, traffickers require protection from armed groups when transporting their plunder. In October 2009 four French citizens and their driver were kidnapped by the FFR. Kidnappings have taken place in Arlit and In-Gall under the auspices of the MNJ. Furthermore, this group is also suspected of planting mines in the north and south of Niger, with the latest incident taking place in Niamey in September 2009, when one person was killed and another wounded in an explosion.

The increase in the number of foreigners in the Agadez region of Niger may have some bearing on the rise in kidnapping incidents. These include French nationals working in the uranium mines for the French company, Areva⁸. In addition, Chinese and Canadian nationals have been prospecting for petroleum and coal in the same region. Taking into consideration the fact that foreigners are perceived as high-value hostages, one can expect some level of kidnapping. Meanwhile, tensions have arisen in the Diffa region where there has been conflict over the provision of oil prospecting rights to the Chinese Government.

Discoveries of uranium and oil deposits in northern Mali, and the attendant presence of mining companies from Algeria and Australia, and possibly Venezuela in the future, creates the risk of employees of these companies becoming potential hostage targets.

To fully appreciate the challenges that Niger faces from both traffickers and terrorists, one must consider its size and location. Niger's geographic position makes it particularly vulnerable, and its mountainous northern terrain has enabled trafficking and rebel activities to flourish. Each of Niger's seven neighbours, Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali and Nigeria must contend with either rebel movements or some form of trafficking.

Owing to these multiple forces operating in Niger, the country has become a fertile breeding ground for nascent traffickers and rebel groups, who are able to recruit new members, as well as prepare, equip and outfit themselves. Its borders have become a refuge for traffickers and rebel groups in the Sahel⁹. The result is that outside infiltrators can enter the country with ease, and engage in their activities with little chance of detection, identification, arrest or prosecution.

Not only is Niger experiencing an upsurge in trafficking, but also the nature of trafficking activities throughout its regions has changed, chiefly owing to the conflicts in the north of the country. Such conflicts provide a convenient camouflage for foreign traffickers, many of whom used to come from Nigeria and Ghana, but more recently this has varied. Since 2000 trafficking in Niger has been aggravated by the frequent clashes between security forces and traffickers, who are increasingly well armed and willing and prepared to engage security forces in combat. But more importantly, there has been an increase in the quantity and variety of the trafficked substances. The traffickers are also well equipped with all-terrain vehicles that can outpace those used by the security forces. What has not changed is that Niger still remains predominantly a transit country with minimal domestic usage of cocaine and other forms of narcotics.

It is difficult to ascertain in actual monetary terms what the financial spin-offs have been for the rebel groups. It is possible that the rebels may be taking their rewards either in cash or imposing a 'tax' on traffickers totalling around 10 - 15% of the face value of the goods for which they provide either safe passage or security during their transit through the desert. In some instances, such 'taxes' have been valued at up to 60 million CFA francs.

Since 2005 there has been a dramatic increase in the number of arrests and seizures of cannabis resin and psychotropic drugs. While it is generally agreed that cocaine trafficking has become particularly problematic and that it can be assumed that traffickers and rebel groups are in collaboration with one another, the available evidence shows that only minute quantities of cocaine and heroin are actually seized. The explanation for this is that because the traffickers operate in the harsh terrain of north Niger, which is mainly under the control of the military, details of whatever

seizures take place this cocaine or arms are not shared with the police, gendarmerie or customs. Therefore, in this particular area actual figures and details are rare.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso has seen a growing trend in the trafficking of cannabis, cocaine and small arms from Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Mali. Until recently, criminal gangs have used Burkina Faso chiefly as a transit country, but increasingly the larger criminal gangs with substantial incomes are alleged to be investing in real estate through their own networks. As the economy grows, opportunities are being created for these criminal gangs, and there has been a mingling of funds from licit and illicit sources. Although Burkina Faso is a generally poor country, there have been reported instances of massive infusions of cash into the country. Owing to the perception that funds can be brought in and invested, Burkina Faso is perceived as a 'safe haven for criminal gangs'. The mining areas located in the north of the country warrant close attention. Concerns have been expressed that Canadian and Chinese nationals working in the mines are at risk of kidnapping and being 're-sold' to other terrorist groups by Tuareg activists present in the country. The gold mine at Dedougou is one such potentially lucrative target.

New and Emerging Trends

This section summarizes some of the common trends perceived within the four Sahelian states: Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger in terms of organized crime, trafficking and terrorism.

The available evidence suggests the emergence of a new trend in the way terrorist activities are financed in both Mali and Mauritania. Petrol-powered luxury vehicles, which can be driven for long distances at high speeds, are being purchased in Spain before being sold on in both countries. Previously, such vehicles were stolen, and their parts 'cannibalized' and sold. Another area of interest is the 'hawala' system of money transfer.¹⁰ These two methods of money laundering are effective, because there is little question of accountability, and very little paper trail. All that is needed for the exchange of huge sums of money is limited telephone contact and trust among accomplices.

There also seems to be a definite shift and broadening of the traffickers and terrorists recruitment base from predominantly 'white Moors' to black Muslims. Terrorist groups in Mauritania have taken advantage of the oppression of blacks for their recruitment purposes, while in Niger and Mali the 'white Moors' have organized against the black-led states. In each case, however, the large number of unemployed and unemployable youth in the Sahel poses a particular problem, because such people become a ready source of recruitment. Initial evidence points to the fact that English-speaking people from as far away as Nigeria and central Africa, are being targeted, thus widening the traffickers and terrorists reach.

First, it is important to consider the type of goods that traffickers transport and deal in across these states. According to official sources, the commonest items are cigarettes, cannabis, cocaine, heroin, cannabis resin, small arms and people. However, it should be emphasized that in this case human trafficking generally relates to the trafficking of illegal immigrants trying to reach Europe across the Sahara region.

Traffickers in all four countries are known to be heavily armed, drive cross-country 4x4 vehicles and move around in convoys numbering between five and 16 vehicles. Attempts by security forces to intercept these convoys always result in fierce confrontation and gun battles.

While in the past traffickers and terrorists originated from countries other than Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, there is now an increasingly strong recruitment drive by organized criminals, especially drug traffickers and terrorist groups targeting unemployed and unemployable youths ranging from 20 to 25 years old. The ethnic group of people being recruited has changed too. An earlier preference for 'white Moors' has been replaced by a shift towards black Muslims, who blend in easily in most West and Central African countries.

A multi-layered relationship has developed between terrorist groups and traffickers. Officials have alluded to the increasing level of collaboration among organized criminals, traffickers and terrorist networks. Such collaboration involves the provision of safe passage by rebel and terrorist groups for traffickers. In return, terrorist and rebel or criminal groups exact a form of taxation from traffickers, either in cash or in kind. Monies raised through these taxes are then used by the groups to finance their activities. It remains unclear how, apart from through these taxes, the traffickers are able to generate the bulk of their financing for terrorist or rebel activities.

However, it is believed that terrorist and rebel groups also sometimes engage in drug trafficking, the sale of luxury cars, and gun-running to raise funds. Kidnapping for ransom, particularly of Western tourists who are perceived as high-value commodities, has also been identified as one of the several methods employed by terrorist and armed groups to raise funds and court publicity. It can be concluded, therefore, that traffickers, organized criminals and terrorist groups operating in the Sahel are known to each other, collaborate, and sometimes share information among themselves.

Social links between the traffickers and terrorist groups and the local communities are poor, however. It is clear that the general populace abhors acts of terrorism and does not support the drug traffickers' activities. As a result, local communities are not prepared to provide safe havens for them. This perhaps explains why most of terrorist groups and traffickers operate largely out of the uninhabitable areas of the Sahel, where there is greater sympathy for their activities.

There has been an intensification of the level of corruption within and an infiltration of the countries' economies through money laundering activities, resulting in a loss of credibility for these Sahelian states and their institutions.

Finally, the state capacity for responding to these difficulties is poor. State officials have admitted that none of the countries in the region are in a position to meet the challenges they are currently facing in relation to terrorism and trafficking. However, most of them are making frantic efforts to deal with the situation to the best of their abilities.

In conclusion, the cumulative effect of organized crime, trafficking and terrorism on the rule of law, stability and the economies of the Sahel region is negative, and this should be taken into consideration when addressing the problem of criminality in the region.

Opportunities to mitigate the problem

Because of the immensity of the dual problem of trafficking and terrorism, regional governors from Kidal and Tombouctou in Mali are in collaboration with their counterparts in Niger and Algeria. One of the problems facing them is the elusive rebel leader, Ibrahim ag Bahanga, who has perpetrated a number of terrorist acts against the state. Ag Bahanga is believed to be in hiding in the desert regions of north Africa, possibly in Libya, Algeria, or Niger. Terrorist groups have repeatedly demonstrated that they have the capacity to strike at the state and its agents whenever they want. An example of this is the fate of the Malian military intelligence officer, who was tracked down and killed in 2009 after he succeeded in infiltrating AQIM's operations and passing on intelligence. In addition to cooperating with other states in the Sahel region to combat terrorism, other countermeasures include the harmonization of specialized training programmes especially those that relate to illegal migration, false travel documents, trafficking and counter-terrorism; equipping counter-terrorism units within the security forces and the provision of logistical material suitable for their work; and the organization of surveillance activities in the areas considered to be terrorist bases and where they are likely to commit terrorist acts.

¹. Annual GDP per capita is US\$1,042 in Mauritania, US\$657 in Mali and US\$390 in Niger.

². See International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2010* (London: IISS, 2010).

³. Mali borders Algeria to the north, Niger to the east, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire to the south, Guinea-Bissau to the south-west, and Senegal and Mauritania to the west.

⁴. Crashed Plane In Mali On Drug Run?, November 18, 2009 at http://www.officialwire.com/main.php?action=posted_news&rid=41225&catid=3, accessed 15 September 2010; see also 'Sahara cocaine plane crash probed', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8364383.stm>. According to the UN, investigations were undertaken concerning the crash in the Sahara desert of a cargo plane, which is thought to have been

carrying cocaine from Venezuela. Alexandre Schmidt from the UN drugs agency told the BBC that the plane could have carried up to 10 tonnes of cocaine, which has not been found.

⁵ . 'French soldiers hunt for abducted workers in Niger', *The Associated Press* (20 September 2010), 'Mauritania kills two civilians in Mali Qaeda raid', *Reuters Africa* (20 September 2010); 'Arms in and Around Mauritania', *National and Regional Security: Implications Small Arms Survey* (Geneva: Graduate Institute of International Studies, 1 June 2010) .

⁶ . Jean-Pierre Filiu, 'Could al Qaeda turn African in the Sahel?', *Carnegie Papers*, No. 112, June 2010.

⁷ . Interview, Ministry of Justice, Nouackchott, 29 September 2009.

⁸ . See Maia de La Baume, '7 employees of French corporation abducted in Niger', *International Herald Tribune*, 17 September 2010, 17.

⁹ See, Charles Bremmer, 'Al-Qaeda fear as mining staff are snatched from their homes', *The Times*, 17 September 2010, 35s.

¹⁰ . This is a system for remitting money, primarily in Islamic societies, in which a financial obligation between two parties is settled by transferring it to a third party, as when money owed by a debtor to a creditor is paid by a person who owes the debtor money. Hawala transactions are usually based on trust and leave no written record.