



**COUNTER IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE**

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**SUBJECT: (REPORT) CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE FIGHT AGAINST YIHADIST INFLUENCE EXPANSION
IN TRI-BORDER AREA MALI/BURKINA FASSO/NIGER FOR ALLIED AND PARTNERS INTEREST
IN THE MID AND LONG TERM.**

REFERENCE: C-IED COE –S251/2020 - SOME NOTES ABOUT THE TERRORIST GROUP DAESH OF GREAT SAHARA (Islamic State of the Great Sahara), 11 December 2020

1. CONSIDERATIONS

C-IED COE has been following the rising process started late 2019 : Maghreb/Sahel area has suffered more than 650 terrorist attacks during 2020, situation that set the focus of attention and analysis in that area as well as in the national and multinational initiatives taken with regard with this problem. The result is that the C-IED COE defined more than two years ago this area as a strategic objective in the global fight against DAESH, if not its Center of Gravity. This opinion has started to flourish and been common also in recent group of experts studies drafted in November 2019 and published in May 2020.

In spite of the competition for fighters recruitment, local power and resources control in the Mali-Burkina Fasso area between DAESH (Islamic State in the Great Sahel, ISGS) and Al-Qaida (Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin, JNIM), the different terrorist/insurgent groups' dynamics have shown a clear expansion towards the south and east of Africa. This is going on even without the clear evidence of any alignment of efforts from the different groups that, mostly, are obeying the rules of a terrorist franchise system.

The expansion of the jihadist movement has not been limited by the persistent Al Qaida idea of closing the Sahel belt, as Osama Bin Laden declared from the beginning of Al Qaida's implication in the continent, which consequences will be mentioned below in the conclusions paragraph. But also, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), DAESH is trying to expand its influence to Burundi, Tanzania, Mozambique and towards the tri-border mentioned area.

In this way DAESH influence has grown by the benefit of local groups joining its cause. These local groups have increased their violent activity in several African interconnected countries as follows:

- In Nigeria, (aligning the efforts of Boko Haram and DAESH in the Western Africa, ISWAP).
- In Burkina Fasso, (huge increase of attacks in southwest direction).
- In Niger, (even against US forces).
- In Chad (in the west border).
- In Mozambique, (factions of the local Shabaab group showing DAESH flags, which claims ownership of the attacks' perpetration).
- Democratic Republic of Congo.

In collaboration with its expansion in the Sahel, DAESH supports terrorist initiatives opened in Algeria, Libya and Egypt (mainly, but not only, in the Sinai Peninsula) and keeps cells in Morocco, Tunisia and Somalia (Puntland).

In the other hand, Al Qaida has some links in Mauritania, it partially controls the south of Mali and acts in Burkina Fasso, keeping also close relation with the very active Al-Shabaab in Somalia. In parallel, Al Qaida propaganda activity in the Sahel has exponentially grown in terms of quality and quantity and has also expanded the target audiences' scope.

Sahel area offers great opportunities for population radicalization because of the difficulties to put in place countermeasures on the ground, in addition to the increase, training and freedom of movement of jihadist actors.

The overlapping of different national and multinational initiatives/operations in the Sahel (Barkhane, EUTM-Mali, MINUSMA, G5-Sahel, Takuba...) does not seem to have reached the expected success in the tactical/operational levels. It has been also affected by COVID-19 implications, institutional crisis in Mali and the festering Burkina Fasso arguments against international support.

To sum up, the common border between Mali, Burkina Fasso and Niger has evolved to a focal point of jihadist violent influence and activity, which would become key in the extension and consolidation of the jihadism all along the Sahel belt between both African oceanic coasts. It's worth to point out the importance on the geographic area "Niger", which is suffering a cross effect from the influence of local groups and, at same time, being the concurrence area of Sahel and the radicalization axe from Indic Ocean.

It is not necessary to mention the importance of the instability situation in Nigeria (mainly because of the presence of one of the terrorist groups, Boko Haram), a country with the 10th biggest oil reserves in the world and with The Netherlands, Spain and France among its five bigger importers. The current stability situation in the oil production areas in the Delta of the Niger River is highly volatile. Its fragile stability will last as long as it last the Nigerian capacity to keep the budget and spends for development initiatives (in fact operating like bribe payments to local rebel groups to keep the stability in the area, payments in which some EU countries were accused to participate in 2011 and which seems to be an open issue).

2. CONCLUSIONS

Military defeat in the fight against jihadism in the tri-border area would have the following main consequences:

1st- Movement of jihadist uncontrolled activity directly towards the African north coast. Sahel is a broad geographic area but with interest only in the southern and northern limits, the African North coast and the area around the tri-border latitude parallel. Rest of Sahel is empty area. The movement of terrorist activity to the North African coast could begin in less than 2 years.

2nd- The stability of the 10th biggest oil reserve in the world is pending on the capacity of the countries in the area (mainly on how the stability situation could impact on Nigeria) to hold definitively the jihadist activity.

Having said that, from operational point of view, Barkhane and Takuba Operations are essential for success in the fight against jihadism expansion in Africa. Combat, Intelligence and support to both missions have to be considered as essential and priority activities, being the necessary multinational approach secondary to the expected effectiveness. The analysis of threat networks and targeting are basic capacity requisites for these operations.

Currently both mentioned Operations along with the Defense Capacity Building (DCB) initiatives in the area countries (without direct budget allocation to governmental bodies) are considered by the C-IED COE as priorities over all other operations/activities in the area and must be coordinated and synchronized with them. These latter operations/activities focused on educational, economic, institutional and governance development in the area are currently implying huge expenses with no impact in the operational ground.

Hoyo de Manzanares, 11 December 2020.

Approved

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