

The Reality of Organized Crime in the Sahel Region and Its Repercussions on Algerian National Security

واقع الجريمة المنظمة في منطقة الساحل وانعكاساتها على الأمن القومي الجزائري

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المخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل واقع ظاهرة الجريمة المنظمة بأشكالها المتعددة في منطقة الساحل، كون هذه الظاهرة عرفت انتشارا كبيرا بع نهاية الحرب الباردة، ما جعلها من أكبر التحديات الأمنية للدول، من خلال وضع تعريف للجريمة المنظمة، وتحديد خصائصها الرئيسية، وتسليط الضوء على الأسباب التي حولت المنطقة الساحل إلى بؤرة لنشاط جماعات الجريمة المنظمة بمختلف أشكالها، كما تستعرض الدراسة تأثير أشكال الجريمة المنظمة المختلفة على الأمن الجزائري بأبعاده المختلفة، كون الجزائر تمتلك حدودا واسعة مع دول المنطقة والتي تعد عمقا استراتيجيا لها.

وقد تم التوصل إلى العديد من النتائج من بينها؛ أن الانتشار الواسع للجريمة المنظمة في الساحل يضعف بشكل كبير الأمن القومي الجزائري بأبعاده المختلفة، لا سيما ذلك المتعلق بالبعد الاجتماعي، وهذا واضح من الكميات المحجوزة من المخدرات بمختلف أنواعها، والتداعيات السلبية لتهريب المهاجرين والهجرة غير الشرعية على الأمن المجتمعي بشكل خاص.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجريمة المنظمة، منطقة الساحل؛ تهريب المخدرات؛ تهريب البشر؛ الأمن القومي.

Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the reality of the phenomenon of organized crime in its various forms in the Sahel region, since this phenomenon became widespread after the end of the Cold War, which made it one of the greatest security challenges for countries, by defining organized crime, identifying its main characteristics and highlighting the reasons which made the Sahel region a hotbed of activity for organized crime groups under its various forms. The study also examines the impact of various forms of organized crime on Algerian security in its various dimensions. Algeria shares extensive borders with the countries of the region, which are considered for it as a strategic depth.

The results indicate that the widespread presence of organized crime in the Sahel significantly undermines Algerian national security across its various dimensions, particularly the social dimension. This is reflected in the quantities of various drugs seized, as well as in the adverse effects of migrant smuggling and illegal immigration on societal security.

Key words: organized crime, the Sahel region, Human trafficking, Drug trafficking, national security.

Introduction:

Organized crime has become one of the major transnational threats in the Post Cold War era, attracting increasing attention from states, particularly following the rise of terrorism. Although not a new phenomenon, organized crime has evolved into highly sophisticated and professionally structured networks characterized by secrecy, careful planning, and the pursuit of financial profit through illicit activities such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and human trafficking.

Globalization and advances in information and communication technologies have accelerated the expansion of organized crime by facilitating cooperation among criminal networks across different regions. In this context, the Sahel has emerged as a major hotspot for organized criminal activity due to factors such as political instability, weak governance, porous borders, and limited state control over vast territories. These structural vulnerabilities have enabled criminal groups to expand their operations and establish links with terrorist organizations, creating serious security challenges for the region and neighboring countries, particularly Algeria.

Given its extensive borders with Sahelian states, Algeria has become increasingly exposed to the spillover effects of organized crime. The growth of illicit activities, especially drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, and human trafficking, poses significant threats to Algerian national security, particularly its social and border security dimensions. Consequently, organized crime has become one of the most pressing security concerns facing Algeria in recent years.

These criminal groups operate with a high degree of professionalism, strict organization, and secrecy, employing both legal and illegal means. Their activities span a wide range of illicit enterprises aimed at maximizing profits, including smuggling, drug and arms trafficking, and notably human trafficking. In recent years, human trafficking has become one of the most significant criminal activities, as these groups exploit vulnerable individuals (especially those from conflict zones) who are desperate to migrate at any cost. The smuggling of drugs and migrants has had severe negative impacts on Algeria, posing a direct threat to the country's social security.

Problem statement:

From the above, This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What is the reality of organized crime in the Sahel region?
- What are its implications of organized crime for Algerian national security?

Hypotheses :

- 1- The Sahel region has become an incubator for various forms of organized crime.
- 2- Organized crime has significant repercussions for Algerian national security across its various dimensions.

Objectives of study: this study aims to:

- Examine the reality of organized crime in its various forms within the African Sahel region, an area experiencing rapidly evolving security threats;
- Identify the factors driving the growth of this phenomenon in the region;
- Assess the repercussions of organized crime on Algeria's national security across multiple dimensions, considering Algeria's extensive shared borders with Sahelian countries.

Methodology used :

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach to examine the phenomenon of organized crime in the Sahel region. It analyzes the factors contributing to its expansion and explores its repercussions for Algerian national security.

Structure of the study:

The study is divided into two main sections:

- 1- Types of organized crime in the Sahel region,
- 2- Repercussions of organized crime on Algerian national security.

1- Types of Organized Crime in the Sahel Region: in this section we will focus on defining organized crime and exploring the various forms it takes in the Sahel region.

1.1- Definition of organized crime.

According to the Oxford Dictionary the organized crime is a criminal activity that are planned and controlled by powerful groups and carried out on a large scale.

Organized crime refers to coordinated and structured illegal activities carried out by groups or networks over a period of time for financial or material gain. These groups often operate across national borders and rely on secrecy, planning, violence, corruption, and money laundering to achieve their objectives.¹

According to Article 2 of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, organized crime refers to a structured group of three or more persons acting in concert over a period of time to commit serious crimes for direct or indirect material gain. This definition emphasizes the essential characteristics of organized crime, namely organization, continuity, transnationality, and the pursuit of profit.²

Through this definition, we see that the Convention has identified four main elements to define transnational organized crime. First, there must be an organized group composed of at least three individuals; therefore, a group of only two individuals cannot be considered organized crime. Second, the group must demonstrate its continuity for a sufficient period of time to develop and implement a plan to commit a criminal offense, in particular one of the acts criminalized by the Convention. Third, the objective of forming this group must be the pursuit of financial or other material gain. Finally, the fourth element is that the offense must be transnational in nature. However, this does not mean that organized crime does not exist at the national level of States, as globalization has significantly influenced the spread of this type of crime.

The Council of Europe defines organized criminal groups as any structured association, existing for a certain period of time, of more than two persons acting in concert with the aim of committing serious crimes for financial gain. Europol has added the potential activities of these groups, including: illegal activities on an international scale, incitement to violence, involvement in money laundering and corruption, economic or commercial structures, and arrangements aimed at ensuring internal control and discipline of their members, as well as compliance with the missions assigned to them.³

With the entry into force of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Algerian legislature defined organized crime in Article 6 of Law No. 04-15, amending Articles 176 and 177 of the Criminal Code. The law stipulates that organized crime is any association or agreement, regardless of its duration or the number of its members, formed or intended to commit crimes or offenses against persons or property, with the intention of making a profit, provided that the criminal act transcends national borders. It can also be described as professional, legitimate, planned, or transnational crime, on a large scale, and often involving violence. This definition is similar to that contained in the aforementioned United Nations Convention, particularly with regard to the essential elements that must be present in organized crime.⁴

From the above, we can define organized crime as a form of criminal activity characterized by careful planning and structured management. It involves a collective effort by a group of highly skilled and experienced individuals who seek rapid financial gain through the use of sophisticated, though not necessarily prohibited, methods and technologies. The defining feature of organized crime is its structured nature — it is a collective offense in which both the planning and execution are carried out by a group, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities assigned to each member.

From the United Nations definition of organized crime, several key characteristics of this phenomenon can be identified:

- **Hierarchical organization and division of roles:** Organized crime is carried out by structured criminal groups with a clear hierarchy and division of labor. Each member plays a specific role, under the leadership of a central figure who directs operations and makes decisions. Obedience and discipline are strictly enforced.
- **Secrecy and operational confidentiality:** These groups operate in absolute secrecy to avoid detection. Confidentiality is critical to the success of their operations, and any breach is met with internal punishment, ensuring loyalty and operational security.
- **Planning and Complexity:** Crimes are premeditated and executed with a high level of expertise. The activities are complex in nature, often involving elaborate strategies and multiple methods, making them difficult to detect or disrupt.
- **Continuity and Resilience:** Organized crime groups exhibit continuity over time. They remain active regardless of leadership changes or disruptions by law enforcement. Leadership is often transferred internally, ensuring the group's longevity and operational stability.

- **Violence, Extortion, and Corruption:** These groups frequently use violence and threats to intimidate victims, enforce silence, and achieve their goals. Bribery and corruption are also used to manipulate public officials, avoid prosecution, and secure protection.
- **Profit-Driven Motives:** The primary goal of organized crime is financial gain. These groups focus on high-demand illicit markets such as human trafficking, drug and arms trade. According to experts, the revenues generated often exceed the budgets of several states.
- **Blending Legal and Illegal Activities:** Criminal groups often disguise their illegal operations within legitimate businesses. This combination allows them to launder money, conceal illicit profits, and maintain a façade of legality.

1.2- Types of Organized Crime in the Sahel Region:

1.2.1- Introduction to the Sahel Region.

Defining the scope of this strategically important region is challenging, as it is shaped by a range of geoeconomic, geopolitical, and geosecurity considerations. Various state actors, each with differing interests and historical ties, influence how the region is perceived and defined. Former colonial powers such as France seek to maintain influence, while global powers like China and the United States aim to exploit the region's abundant natural resources. Meanwhile, neighboring countries like Algeria, due to their geographical proximity, view the Sahel as a vital component of their strategic depth and national security. These competing interests and strategic calculations make it difficult to arrive at a unified and comprehensive definition of the region.

The definition of the Sahelian territory varies considerably depending on the aspects being emphasized. According to demographer John Caldwell, "the term 'Sahelian countries' emerged in the 1970s, in line with United Nations usage, to refer to Senegal, Mauritania, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Niger, and Chad — although, strictly speaking, the majority of their populations live outside the Sahel itself."⁵

Although there is no universally agreed-upon definition, the Sahel region is generally described as a stretch of Africa extending approximately 5,500 kilometers from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, with a width ranging between 400 and 500 kilometers. The Sahel broadly encompasses the areas bordering the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. This includes Cape Verde, northern Senegal, southern parts of Mauritania, Algeria, and Niger, northern Burkina Faso and Nigeria, as well as central regions of Chad, Sudan, and Mali.⁶

The Sahel is also known as the semi-arid region extending from Senegal in the west to Sudan in the east, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea in the east, and includes northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, passing through the great circle of the Niger River in Mali, Burkina Faso (formerly the Haute Volta), southern Niger, northeastern Nigeria, central southern Chad, and up to Sudan.⁷

Most of the states of the Sahel are located between latitudes 10° North and 20° North, the Sahel is internally structured around a North–South divide that primarily reflects an ethnic distinction between lighter-skinned, often Arabized populations in the north and darker-skinned populations in the south.⁸

The Sahel region is considered a band with two characteristics: an annual rainy season and heavy rainfall concentrated in August. It covers all or part of 12 countries, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea: Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti.⁹

So the Sahel referred to the area between the Maghreb and the “Bilad as Sudan”, the country of the blacks. The boundary between two tectonic plates, each with its own distinctive and characteristics acquired over a long period of time, the Sahel lies at the crossroads of two warring geopolitical camps. As the border between the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa, the Sahel ensures the transition from Mediterranean North Africa to sub-Saharan black Africa.¹⁰

Given the interests of countries in the region, each state has developed its own perspective on the Sahel. Algeria, for instance, has adopted a strategic approach rooted in its role as a regional actor and its extensive geographical depth, including shared borders with Mali, Niger, and Mauritania. Algeria places particular emphasis on neighboring countries facing non-traditional security threats such as terrorism and organized crime namely Chad, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso. The focus is especially on the so-called “field countries” (Mali, Mauritania, and Niger), due to their potential use as launchpads for attacks targeting Algerian territory. In response, these countries, in cooperation with Algeria, adopted a unified strategy to confront the prevailing security challenges. This collaboration culminated in the establishment of the Joint Operational Staff Committee (CEMOC) on April 21, 2010, headquartered in Tamanrasset. CEMOC coordinates military operations within an operational zone (a desert strip approximately 1,956 kilometers long and 933 kilometers deep) stretching from Adrar Bouss in Niger in the east to Chegga in Mauritania in the west, crossing the Tigargar and Tadékh Mountains in Mali.¹¹

1.2.2- The formes of Organized Crime in the Sahel.

Organized crime in the Sahel represents an asymmetric threat, characterized by its complex nature, diverse forms, and the difficulty of identifying its actors and geographical reach. Common manifestations include drug trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, arms trade, and money laundering. The Sahel has become a hotspot for organized criminal networks. As noted by **Wolfram Lacher**, the region diverges from the conventional UN definition of organized crime, as criminal activity here often takes on a transnational character and is closely intertwined with terrorism. These connections aim to generate quick profits and sustain the financial operations of armed groups active in the area. Notably, the smuggling of Moroccan cannabis and cocaine, as well as kidnapping for ransom (which has grown significantly since 2003) are key examples. Furthermore, much of the trade across the Sahel-Saharan corridor consists of illicit goods, facilitated by informal arrangements and the complicity of corrupt customs and security officials.¹²

Several factors, both external and internal, have contributed to the growth of organized criminal groups in Africa in general and the Sahel in particular, particularly in the area of drug trafficking. These factors can be summarized as follows:

- a. The global expansion of the drug trade and the security policies implemented to combat it have led to increased law enforcement and judicial pressure on transnational trafficking networks, especially as the European market grows. In response, traffickers and local

actors seek alternative routes and methods to transport drugs from production to consumption regions.

- b. **Geographical factors:** The close proximity of South American production zones to Africa, combined with weak maritime and aerial surveillance in certain areas, creates an ideal environment for traffickers, offering high mobility and safe havens. This has fostered collaboration between transnational and local criminal groups in the Sahel, who have expanded their activities to include related crimes such as human and arms trafficking.
- c. **Historical factors:** The legacy of decolonization resulted in states with artificial borders, uniting ethnically and culturally fragmented populations. These divisions have frequently caused internal conflicts and tensions, undermining national unity.
- d. **Institutional factors:** Fragile public institutions—hampered by limited resources, corruption, and politicization of law enforcement and judicial systems—impede efforts to combat trafficking. Low salaries promote corruption, granting traffickers partial impunity, sometimes even involving high-ranking officials. Corruption at top levels prioritizes profit maximization and risk reduction by exploiting local opportunities in exchange for facilitating criminal networks' operations.
- e. **Economic factors:** Underdevelopment, pervasive poverty, unequal income distribution, and limited educational and employment opportunities drive many individuals toward drug trafficking, which offers financial rewards far exceeding typical earnings.¹³
- f. The tribal nature of many Sahelian societies, where allegiance to the tribe often takes precedence over loyalty to the state. This is evident among groups such as the Tuareg, Bambara, Songhai, and Hausa. Such dynamics undermine national cohesion and weaken state authority, leaving governments unable to effectively fulfill their responsibilities. Criminal organizations exploit these vulnerabilities, taking advantage of the state's absence or weakness, as well as the widespread despair resulting from poverty, marginalization, and harsh living conditions. Moreover, high unemployment, low wages, and limited economic opportunities in many Sahelian countries have driven numerous individuals (especially youth) to join organized crime networks in pursuit of quick financial gain.¹⁴
- g. The changes that have occurred in the region since 2011, including the crisis in Mali, stem from the return of Tuareg fighters to Mali following the fall of the Gaddafi regime. This was accompanied by the near-total collapse of state institutions, widespread chaos, insecurity, and a massive proliferation of weapons.¹⁵

- Illicit Drug Trafficking.

Drug production and abuse constitute a global issue, affecting nearly every society and imposing significant social and economic costs. International and national efforts to combat this phenomenon (including prevention, awareness campaigns, and addiction treatment) exceed \$120 billion annually. According to a 2000 United Nations report, drug trafficking accounts for approximately 8% of global trade. The nature and scale of drug trafficking vary from country to country, depending largely on the structure of their economies. Economically, drug trafficking creates significant challenges, particularly in calculating a nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), due to the difficulty in estimating revenues generated from illicit drug activities. These proceeds often fund other criminal enterprises, further entrenching organized crime within regional economies. Drug trafficking continues to be the most

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lucrative criminal enterprise, with its global market estimated at approximately \$320 billion annually. In 2009, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated the annual value of the global cocaine and opiate markets at around \$85 billion and \$68 billion, respectively. These staggering figures underscore the immense financial power of drug trafficking networks, which use their profits to fuel other forms of organized crime and corruption, further destabilizing already fragile regions such as the Sahel.¹⁶

Africa's Sahel region has emerged as a key transit point for various drugs traveling from South America to Europe, serving as a strategic hub for cocaine trafficking. The most alarming aspect of this trade is the vast revenue it generates: over the past decade, cocaine trafficking across the Sahara has been valued at approximately €15 billion. Although cocaine is not produced in Africa, around 40 tons are trafficked annually through the Sahel and West Africa, with an estimated worth of €1.8 billion. Since the late 1990s, South American cocaine networks have utilized maritime routes to Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone, then moved shipments through Sahel countries and Morocco, before reaching European markets, between 2004 and 2009, the Sahel region witnessed a dramatic increase in cocaine seizures, highlighting its growing role as a transit corridor for drug trafficking from Latin America to Europe. Seizures surged by over 1,466.67%, rising from 3 tons in 2004 to 47 tons in 2007. However, by 2009, the quantity had declined by more than half (-55.32%), suggesting a shift in trafficking routes or methods rather than a reduction in activity. This trend underscores the extent to which the region has been integrated into global drug trafficking networks..¹⁷

Between 2005 and 2007, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that approximately 14% of the cocaine arriving in Europe in 2008 (approximately 20 tonnes, worth \$1 billion) transited through West African countries. Most cocaine destined for Europe first arrives in one of the coastal countries (Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Benin, and Ghana) and is then transported by plane or ship. Cocaine is also transported to Europe by air cargo via West African national airports. The airports of Bamako, Niamey, and Ouagadougou are among the air cargo hubs, some of which transit through Algiers. These routes remain active, as confirmed by the figures for seizures made at these airports in 2011 and 2012. Mauritania also became a major transit country for air, sea, and land transport during the period 2007-2008, with two shipments of cocaine seized at Nouadhibou and Nouakchott airports in 2007: the first weighing 360 kgs and the second 830 kgs. However, seizures declined in subsequent years, which may be attributed to the emergence of new routes used by traffickers and criminal organizations to transport their drugs to Europe.¹⁸

For exemple Mauritania plays a pivotal role in the Sahel region, as cannabis is imported from the north. There are two routes: the first begins in the north of the country and reaches northern Niger. The second, called the "Route of Hope," heads south, connecting Nouakchott with Bamako, Niger. On September 4, 2011, a drug convoy carrying 3,289 kgs of cannabis resin was intercepted there. These routes are likely also used to smuggle cocaine, circumventing the strict controls of Togo and Benin.¹⁹

Furthermore, it is impossible to estimate the quantity transiting through the Sahel countries, as smuggling networks are active in many countries, starting with those in West Africa. In 2012, the amount of cocaine transported through this region was estimated at around 18 tons, with a total value of \$1.25 billion. This demonstrates the fragility of the

countries in the region, as well as the penetration of organized criminal networks active in drug trafficking from South America to Africa, and then to Europe.²⁰

Hashish is also a popular commodity, along with cocaine and heroin, in the Sahel and West African countries. In 2007, a smuggling route was discovered, starting in Morocco, crossing Mauritania and Mali, then Niger and Chad, to Sudan and Egypt, and then the Gulf States. The quantities seized also illustrate the extent to which the region has become a hub for drug trafficking groups, and the potential repercussions for regional stability.²¹

- Human Trafficking.

In response to growing of this threat, the United Nations adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, as a supplement to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. This protocol aims to strengthen international efforts to combat human trafficking by promoting prevention, protecting victims, and ensuring the prosecution of traffickers.

Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.²²

Human trafficking is defined as the enticement of persons, through the threat or use of force, fraud, or deception, into forced labor or slavery. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in post-conflict situations, with refugees and people displaced from their home countries often being targeted by traffickers. Human trafficking is an international criminal activity in which men, women, and children are subjected to sexual or labor exploitation. Although figures vary, in 2005, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that approximately 2.4 million victims were trafficked, generating approximately \$32 billion in profits for traffickers. However, the ILO's more recent and accurate estimates of global trends in forced labor indicate that the scale of the problem is much greater. In Europe, human trafficking, particularly of women and children, for the purpose of sexual exploitation generates more than \$3 billion annually, affecting 140,000 people and claiming up to 70,000 victims each year.²³

It has been documented that around 5,000 women from West African and Sahel countries—especially Nigeria—have been trafficked to Europe for sexual exploitation. The profits generated from this trafficking are estimated to exceed \$200 million.²⁴

The Sahel region is witnessing a sharp rise in human trafficking, particularly involving women and children, who are exploited for sex, forced labor, and the illegal trade of organs. Countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan, and Libya, along with several West African nations including Gambia, Ghana, Togo, and Benin, are among the hardest hit by this growing crisis. Estimates suggest that around 200,000 children have been trafficked across these areas. In 2007, a high-profile case emerged involving a French

organization in Chad, accused of attempting to abduct 103 children from Darfur under the false pretense that they were orphans, with the intention of smuggling them into France. The situation escalated to the point where the French president at the time had to intervene diplomatically. This case underscores both the severity of human trafficking in the Sahel and the cross-border nature of such criminal networks.²⁵

For instance, the number of trafficked children in Mali is estimated to be between 10,000 and 20,000 child, while in Nigeria the figure is around 4,000 child, and in Libya, it exceeds 1,200 child. These children are often trafficked toward destinations in Europe or the Gulf States, following three main routes: the first runs through Mauritania and Algeria to Europe; the second via Morocco to Spain; and the third from Mali through Algeria and Tunisia to Italy. The trafficking of a single child is estimated to generate profits ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000, while trafficking a woman can yield up to \$50,000. These high profits have fueled the alarming spread of the trade. The impact of this phenomenon is far-reaching, constituting a blatant violation of human rights and freedoms, inflicting severe physical and psychological harm, and undermining the health, security, and stability of the countries affected.²⁶

- Migrant smuggling:

Is a well-organized criminal business that moves people worldwide through networks and routes controlled by organized crime groups. Migrants often purchase a "smuggling package," with the quality of their treatment directly linked to the price paid. Along these routes, migrants frequently suffer human rights abuses—they may be robbed, raped, beaten, held for ransom, or even abandoned to die when smugglers face heightened risks. Many smugglers show no regard for migrants drowning at sea, dying of dehydration in deserts, or suffocating in containers. This trade generates billions annually: in 2009, it earned approximately \$6.6 billion from smuggling 3 million migrants from Latin America to North America, while the previous year saw 55,000 migrants smuggled from Africa into Europe, generating \$150 million.²⁷

The smuggling of migrants by sea from West African countries to Europe, the Americas, and Asia has declined, as traffickers increasingly use alternative routes through Libya and Algeria or resort to land and air smuggling with forged documents. Profits of networks operating in this area reached \$100 million in 2011, down from \$155 million in 2010.²⁸

- Arms smuggling and trafficking:

The Sahel region's ethnic, racial, and internal conflicts have fueled political instability, turning it into a hub for the trade and smuggling of various weapons, both light and heavy. Many smuggled arms originate from Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, China, and other African countries. A significant portion enters legally, facilitated by widespread corruption and bribery within government and military institutions. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Africa is home to approximately 100 million small arms—8 million in West Africa alone—and about 100,000 weapons circulate within the Sahel region.²⁹

What further exacerbates the threat of this form of organized crime is the distinct tribal and ethnic composition of the Sahel countries, coupled with separatist movements in several of these nations—such as the Tuareg rebellions in Niger and Mali, the Darfur conflict in

Sudan, and ongoing instability in Chad, Mauritania, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone.³⁰

Terrorism is both an aggravating factor and a catalyst for arms smuggling. The intensification of this issue in the Sahel region, combined with how easily terrorist groups operating there—such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the region's most significant threat, and its affiliated brigades—are supplied, has resulted in arms shipments crossing into Mali and Nigeria from smuggling networks and ending up in the hands of terrorists. Consequently, smugglers, under the protection of these terrorist groups, are able to move their goods with complete impunity.³¹

According to some reports, the widespread availability of weapons enables terrorist organizations to secure funding for their operations and generates profits for organized criminal groups involved in arms trafficking, as well as extremist factions. This situation has been exacerbated by increasing political instability in the region since the events of September 11, 2001, and the Arab Spring revolutions—especially following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, which resulted in a massive leakage of weapons. It is estimated that between 10,000 and 20,000 assault rifles were smuggled from Libya into Mali at the onset of the Libyan crisis, and these weapons were subsequently used to carry out the military coup in Mali on March 22, 2012.³²

In 2010, the illicit arms trade was estimated at between \$200 and \$300 million, representing 20% of the global legal trade. Moreover, the direct or covert intervention of major powers in the conflict, or the incitement of neighboring countries to intervene to serve their interests, is considered a major factor in the increased circulation of small arms and light weapons.³³

2-The Implications of organized crime on Algerian national security.

The activities of various organized crime groups in the Sahel region have had a direct impact on neighboring countries, including Algeria. The geographical proximity and deep interconnection with the region have amplified the repercussions on Algeria's security across multiple dimensions.

2.1- Security and Political Implications.

The alliance between terrorist groups and organized criminal networks involved in smuggling has transformed traffickers into vital sources of funding and supplies for these terrorist organizations. In return, terrorists provide protection and support to smugglers against their rivals, securing and safeguarding their routes. Some terrorist operations have had the covert aim of facilitating smuggling activities—for instance, the attack in late June 2010 in Tin Zaouatine (Tamanrasset), which resulted in the deaths of 12 Algerian border guards. Claimed by Al-Qaeda, this assault was intended to enable the covert smuggling of seven quintals of processed cannabis into Algeria. This incident adds to a series of assaults on customs personnel, including the 2006 assassination of 13 customs officers in El Menia by Salafist militants, as well as armed attacks on border guards in Bechar State—an area known as a drug trafficking corridor between Morocco and Algeria.

Drug trafficking has emerged as a major security threat in Algeria, especially as the country has become a transit hub for various narcotics destined for North Africa and Europe.

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This vulnerability stems from Algeria's proximity to drug-producing regions like Morocco and drug transit zones in sub-Saharan West Africa, compounded by widespread political and security system weaknesses and corruption across many African countries, as well as Algeria's challenges in securing its extensive borders. Consequently, Algeria faces significant security risks, as evidenced by numerous drug seizures and the dismantling of smuggling networks by various security agencies.

According to official statistics, the quantities of drugs confiscated annually by specialized forces have risen sharply, particularly concerning cannabis resin, cocaine, and psychotropic substances.

Table: Quantities of drugs seized during the period 2009 to 2022.

Drug type	Cannabis resin (kg)	Cocaine (g)	Psychotropic substances (tablet)
2009	74 643,38	1 026,36	90 630,00
2010	23 041,60	1 177,72	304 319,50
2011	53 323,09	10 901,02	262 074,00
2012	157 382,64	174 821,70	937 660,00
2013	211 512,77	3 790,49	1 175 974,00
2014	181 942,90	1 245,63	1 050 612,00
2015	126 685,77	88 287,40	637 961,00
2016	109 089,13	59 099,41	1 072 394,00
2017	52 609,91	6 279,41	1 201 792,00
2018	31 936,39	671 887,09	1 807 843,00
2019	55 133,42	315 759,40	2 085 923,00
2020	88 702,58	32 353,83	6 045 289,00
2021	71 439,42	512 965,07	5 267 694,00
2022	58 258,03	61 844,90	11 351 813,00

Source: National Office for the Fight against Drugs and Drug Addiction, Annual Report for the years 2009-2022, at: www.onlcdt.mjustice.dz/ (adapted by the researcher)

The table shows that, when comparing the quantities seized in 2009 and 2022, cannabis resin decreased by 21.95%, falling from 74 634 quintals in 2009 to 58 258 quintals in 2022—a reduction of 16 376 quintals. In contrast, the quantity of hallucinogenic pills increased dramatically by over 12,425.45%, soaring from 90 630 pills in 2009 to 11 351 813 pills in 2022, an increase of 11 261 183 pills.

The cocaine seizures also rose sharply, from 1 026.36 grs in 2009 to 61 884.90 grs in 2022, marking an increase of 5 925.65%.

These figures indicate that Algeria is increasingly flooded with hard drugs such as cocaine and hallucinogenic pills, as reflected by the quantities seized and the alarming upward trend.

Furthermore, during the first half of 2025, Algeria experienced an unprecedented upsurge in organized criminal activities, particularly in the area of drugs of all kinds. According to army statistics, the quantities of cocaine, processed cannabis and hallucinogenic tablets seized during the first half of 2025 also increased significantly, with 663 kg of cocaine, more than 24,000,000 hallucinogenic tablets and 171.2 quintals of processed cannabis seized.³⁴

When comparing the quantities seized in the first half of 2025 to those confiscated throughout 2024, the numbers are strikingly similar: 663 kg of cocaine in just six months of 2025 compared to 575 kg in the entire year of 2024. A similar trend is observed with hallucinogenic pills, with 24,545,495 pills seized in 2024 and nearly the same amount in only the first half of 2025. This indicates a serious threat to Algeria's social security, especially since the primary targets are young people—the foundation of any society. The widespread consumption of drugs of all kinds poses a significant risk of internal instability.

Although the border with Morocco has been closed since 1994, smuggling networks have developed new routes south towards northern Mauritania and then northern Mali, with Timbuktu being a starting point north towards southern Algeria, in order to avoid the closed border between Algeria and Morocco, or to Libya via northern Niger, and from there to the Balkans and Europe, or to the Levant via Egypt and Sudan via Chad. In addition, the facilities provided by some tribes in the region, such as the Berbesh and Techna of the Tuaregs of northern Mali and Niger, for the benefit of smuggling gangs, as well as the cover provided by terrorist groups present in northern Mali (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), have contributed significantly to the increase in drug trafficking operations in a way that has begun to negatively affect community security in Algeria.³⁵

Regarding migrant smuggling (illegal immigration), which is considered one of the most significant threats to human and societal security in the Sahel, due to its inextricable link with various types of organized crime, especially human trafficking and smuggling, in addition to the various health, social and economic impacts that accompany it, the management of waves of illegal immigration in the Sahel presents us with two types of it, one of which seems to be internal and the other external to Europe, which has grown, especially at the beginning of the millennium, because its route shows us that it is exported from: Niger, Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad, Somalia, Senegal, Mali, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Congo, Sudan, and all this towards Algeria or Morocco with the aim of reaching Europe.

2.2- Socio-economic Implications:

The internal socio-economic situation of Sahel countries has a significant impact on Algeria's security, both economically and socially. Economically, the activities of organized criminal groups severely damage local economies and hinder development in the Sahel's border regions. Their pursuit of illicit profits—particularly through drug and arms trafficking—has serious consequences for individuals and society as a whole. These activities disrupt economic structures, undermine development efforts, and fuel various forms of crime such as corruption, bribery, theft, smuggling, and counterfeiting, thereby increasing pressure on the national economy.

Moreover, migrant trafficking and illegal immigration pose major challenges to the local labor market. According to data from the National People's Army, over 12,000 undocumented migrants (specifically 12,825 migrant) were apprehended in the first half of 2025, the majority originating from Sahel countries. This large migratory influx threatens to alter the social fabric,

particularly in the southern border provinces, and may contribute to rising unemployment among young Algerians. Many of these migrants seek unauthorized employment and are often hired as cheap labor on major construction sites in northern cities, which contributes to the growth of informal employment and the expansion of the parallel economy.³⁶

On a social level, illegal immigration also presents integration challenges due to the cultural and social practices brought by migrants, which often conflict with Algerian values and traditions. Some migrants are involved in criminal activities such as drug trafficking and smuggling, thereby contributing to the normalization of corruption and rising delinquency among young people, many of whom fall into drug addiction. This situation further weakens the social fabric. Additionally, the presence of human traffickers (many of whom are criminals or carriers of infectious diseases) poses an added risk to public health and national security.

Conclusion:

It is evident from the above that Algeria is confronting new asymmetric security threats originating from the African Sahel region, which has become a breeding ground for such threats, particularly organized crime in its various forms. This situation is the inevitable consequence of the regional governments' failure to assert full control over their territories, combined with the social structures and prevailing economic conditions that have facilitated the growth of this phenomenon. These threats also have adverse effects on neighboring countries, including Algeria. Algerian national security—across socio-economic, political, and security dimensions—has been significantly impacted. Algeria's vulnerability is further heightened by its geographic position, its deep ties within Africa, and its extensive borders with several Sahel countries, including Mauritania, Mali, and Niger. The activities of organized criminal groups have effectively turned Algeria into a transit hub for various cross-border crimes, particularly drug and arms trafficking, as well as the smuggling of illegal migrants bound for Europe.

Among the most notable findings:

- The Sahel region in Africa is a crisis zone. Political and security instability have made it a haven for various forms of asymmetric security threats, particularly those related to organized crime.
- The alliance between organized criminal groups and terrorist groups active in the region has increased the severity of this threat. Terrorist groups are now seeking financial resources to finance their activities, while organized criminal groups seek to secure the routes they use to carry out their activities (protecting and securing smuggling routes).
- Algeria suffers from security vulnerabilities along its southern borders, adjacent to the Sahel countries (Mali, Niger, and Mauritania), which makes it bear the negative consequences of these threats due to the difficulty of monitoring its vast borders.

Regarding the study's recommendations:

- Algeria should expand the Security on the Ground Initiative, created in 2010 to combat the threat of terrorism and organized crime, to other countries, such as Burkina Faso and other West African countries, particularly those bordering the Atlantic Ocean. These countries constitute a major hub and transit route for organized criminal groups, particularly those involved in drug trafficking, which receive cocaine shipments from South America by sea or air.
- Adopt comprehensive development cooperation initiatives in various fields, encompassing comprehensive security, not just military, to help these countries establish control over their entire territory and block foreign intervention in the region. This should be done through the Algerian Agency for International Cooperation for Solidarity and Development, created in 2020.

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