El mohtaref journal of sports Science Social And Human Science

Vol (13) N° (03) (2026)
P 644–650

Search information

Received 09-05-2026
Accepted .20-10-2026.

Printed ISSN: 2352-989X
Online ISSN: 2602-6856

THE ALGERIAN SECURITY APPROACH IN THE AFRICAN SAHEL:

A FORWARD-LOOKING VISION

Nabila Salek

[1] University of Batna 1(Algeria),

nabila.salek@univ-batna.dz

ABSTRACT

The African Sahel is among the regions of the world experiencing the most severe state collapse, security breakdown and insecurity, with negative consequences for its population. The region has become a major source of problems that are often associated with the absence of minimum living standards, the weakening or absence of the state, and economic and social vulnerability, particularly social insecurity. These conditions frequently produce an identity crisis, which in turn fragments society and, consequently, the state, leading to state failure in both security and social terms. In this context, Algeria, as a strategic actor in the region, seeks to adopt a clear security doctrine in view of the serious negative repercussions that instability or threats in the Sahel may have on the southern flank of its national security. Its aim is to find effective and balanced solutions to the problems arising from insecurity in the Sahel, which directly threatens Algerian national security across seven dimensions: societal, economic, cultural, political, military, environmental and health security.

Keywords: The Sahel; security doctrine; national security; strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Algeria occupies a strategic position and a vital place in the Sahel, enabling it to play a major role in managing conflicts and crises at the regional, continental and Arab levels. It has sought to consolidate this role by adopting a set of principles and foundations governing its relations with the outside world, in light of its strategic location and its influence in resolving issues, particularly those concerning the African Sahel.

The Sahel is one of the geopolitical areas attracting the attention of regional and international actors. Over the course of its history, it has faced numerous threats arising from several factors, most notably the strategic importance of its geographical location and the availability of economic resources, which have intensified foreign competition; the impact of ethnic conflicts; the fragility of political structures and systems; and the global dimension of security challenges. These factors have ushered in a new phase requiring joint action based on a pragmatic approach to confronting security threats. This entails shifting the level of analysis from the general to the specific—from the principle of universal solutions to universal threats, toward African-led solutions to African threats, particularly in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa.

Algeria has sought to establish a balance between its national security interests, particularly counterterrorism, and the protection of human rights, by developing a strategic link between these two priorities. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, this paper addresses the central question of how effective the Algerian security approach is in achieving balance in the Sahel, and which key security variables must be considered when designing a forward-looking strategic vision. The paper is organized as follows:

First: Principles of the Algerian security doctrine.

Second: Algeria’s security architecture in the Sahel.

Third: A forward-looking vision for the Algerian security approach in the Sahel.

2. Principles of the Algerian Security Doctrine

A security doctrine serves as a guide through which political leaders formulate a state’s security policy, both domestically and internationally. This is the basis for the relationship between security doctrine and foreign policy. The influence of security doctrine has grown because it provides the organizing principles that help state officials define their country’s geopolitical interests and establish priorities among them. It also helps the state respond to visible and emerging threats and challenges over the short, medium and long term. In this

way, it provides security actors with a coherent theoretical framework of ideas that supports the achievement of national-security objectives[1] .

The general orientation of Algeria's security doctrine derives from principles rooted in non-interference in the affairs of other states. This was evident in Algeria's response to the Libyan crisis, in which a revolution led to a change in the nature of the regime with support from NATO. This position is grounded in legal and constitutional principles that define the core duties of Algeria's security institutions as protecting and preserving the sovereignty and borders of the state.

The crisis-prone Sahel faces several security dilemmas, five of which are particularly significant[2] :

• The difficulty of building viable states in the region;

• Weak national identity and the growth of ethnic conflicts;

• Fragile economic structures, which may generate hard and soft threats that can spill over into Algeria;

• Weak political performance; six coups had reportedly occurred in Mauritania, Mali and Niger;

• The spread of various forms of crime and new forms of structural violence.

These new forms of violence are reflected in United Nations reports estimating that 30–40 percent of hard drugs pass through the region. The Sahel is also described as the world's second-largest market for small arms. An earlier estimate in a Small Arms Survey report associated with the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva put the number of small arms on the African continent at approximately 100 million. Some 80 percent of the weapons in circulation were said to originate in conflict zones in West Africa and to reach Algeria through Mali and Niger.

Algeria is concerned with safeguarding its own stability, having endured a devastating ten-year war of attrition against what is known as terrorism—a period Algerians call the "Black Decade." At the same time, it must contend with developments in Africa, where fragile political and economic structures can transmit crises and state failure across borders, thereby threatening Algerian security. [3]

3. Algeria's Security Architecture in the Sahel

Algeria seeks to prevent security threats and risks originating in the Sahel, a region marked by recurrent crises. This requires it to make use of the region's geopolitical, economic

and security characteristics to strengthen ties across multiple fields. The Sahel's geopolitical position makes Algeria a gateway between the region, Africa and Europe. At the same time, the considerable length of Algeria's borders with the Sahel leaves it persistently exposed to security risks.

Southern Algeria covers a vast geographical area characterized by difficult desert terrain. It is not easy to control this territory solely through regular border-guard forces. The security danger in this area is comparable to the threat posed by armed terrorist operations carried out in the rugged mountainous areas of northern and central Algeria. The Algerian Ministry of the Interior reportedly recorded the presence of migrants from more than forty African nationalities in Algeria, some of whom were involved in illegal activities such as irregular migration and the smuggling of weapons, drugs, tobacco, gold and other goods[4] .

The region also experiences a wide range of conflicts and disputes. Political instability has become a recurring feature of the continent, as demonstrated by military coups and escalating social conflicts fuelled by economic crises, accompanied by successive waves of political violence, separatist movements and intensifying regional ideological tensions[5] .

Under these circumstances, any security approach that disregards the regional dimension and fails to establish a comprehensive cooperation strategy is unlikely to be effective. This is particularly important given the possibility that an ISIS-style model could spread in the Sahel, where many states face fragile security conditions, open borders and territory vulnerable to infiltration. The deteriorating security situation in Libya has further heightened Algeria's concern and made it more necessary than ever to address Sahel security seriously.

As part of efforts to lead regional action among Sahel states and mount a decisive collective campaign against Al-Qaeda, Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and Mauritania adopted a security plan in 2009. The plan was based primarily on establishing a regular military force of 25,000 troops drawn from the armed forces of the five states, working alongside tribal militias present in the desert, including Tuareg, Arab and Black African communities. The force was intended to support implementation of the plan and strengthen government control over international borders in the region. The initiative followed extended military meetings among representatives of the five countries' general staffs in Tripoli, the Libyan capital, in the weeks preceding the announcement. [6]

4. A Forward-Looking Vision for Algeria's Security Approach in the Sahel

Following the events of 11 September 2001, President Bouteflika succeeded in restoring Algeria's position as a partner of the United States and Europe in the campaign against what came to be known as terrorism. In return, the administration of President George W. Bush

agreed to sell Algeria military technology, including night-vision equipment, to fight armed groups. This indicated that Algeria was no longer viewed internationally merely as a "French problem."

The kidnapping of European tourists in early 2003 was a turning point that led Washington to consider Algeria a potential new strategic regional ally. In 2004, US special forces went to southern Algeria to train, equip and assist national forces in fighting the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat. The Algerian army subsequently took part in several military exercises organized by the US military and NATO, as well as in the Pan-Sahel Initiative to combat terrorism, which later evolved into the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative.

US–Algerian security cooperation helped bring an end to the isolation Algeria had experienced during the 1990s and contributed significantly to changing the earlier character of Algerian-French relations. Algeria emerged as an arena in the war on terrorism where US and French interests clearly converged, even while Paris and Washington exchanged criticism over the war in Iraq. In the new geostrategic environment during Bouteflika's presidency, Algeria was unexpectedly portrayed as part of an "axis of good" opposed to an "axis of evil." According to diplomatic sources, Algeria hosted a US presence in the Tamanrasset area in the south to protect oil facilities, although political leaders from both countries repeatedly denied this presence. Algeria also denied sponsoring the African military command planned by the US Department of Defense and known as AFRICOM. [7]

The new crisis affecting most African states appears difficult to resolve and makes it necessary to reassess Africa's geopolitical reality and design a proactive national security strategy that takes account of the following developments:

Experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia have, according to the article, shown that foreign intervention can become closely and functionally intertwined with organized criminal groups. Algeria's particular experience lies in its domestic counterterrorism efforts and its conviction that foreign intervention fuels crises rather than resolving them. At the March 2011 summit in Algiers, Algeria brought together seven African countries concerned with the region and proposed a roadmap calling for stronger coordination without submitting to external intervention or pressure, as illustrated by the dispute over French involvement in ransom payments. The roadmap also called for intelligence and security coordination mechanisms and the launch of development projects, including through the NEPAD initiative.

Algeria actively participates in international and regional efforts to combat terrorism, including the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted in 2006 and initiatives against money laundering. These bilateral and multilateral efforts have strengthened states' determination to eliminate this transnational threat. Cooperation has also

provided Algeria with technical expertise to improve its counterinsurgency methods.

These developments have helped legitimize Algeria's campaign against terrorism, which had weakened both the state and society. For the United States, cooperation has provided intelligence needed to combat terrorism worldwide. International terrorist groups share beliefs, tactics and objectives; therefore, dismantling Al-Qaeda, described in the article as an opaque network, requires weakening its various groups and challenging its ideological foundations. Defeating armed organizations from North Africa and the Sahel to Europe depends on supporting local and regional efforts.

Algeria's actions are guided by respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity. For years, it has insisted that its diplomatic mediation respect the territorial integrity of neighbouring states, a principle it regards as fundamental. The article identifies intervention intended to encourage rebellion against the government in Mali as one reason for tensions with the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in the mid-2000s. [8]

Through its security policy, Algeria seeks to establish what may be called institutional structures with specific security mandates, similar to African subregional organizations, so that emerging security developments can be addressed within an organized institutional framework. [9]

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Algeria's security approach requires reassessment that takes the following elements into account:

Preventing other states—including France, the United States and Morocco—from exploiting a perceived Algerian absence in the region to build relationships with local actors whose projects may conflict with Algerian interests. Algeria should therefore make full use of its economic resources in its relations with the countries of the region.

Improving the effectiveness of Algerian security diplomacy so that it reflects the country's standing, geopolitical capacity and historically active diplomacy.

Strengthening information exchange and securing shared borders through effective bilateral and regional cooperation mechanisms to track terrorist groups and hard threats originating beyond national borders.

Reassessing Algeria's security environment from a forward-looking perspective to improve professional capacity amid the country's economic recovery, while strengthening the national defence system through mechanisms that protect Algerian borders from both hard and soft threats.

Recognizing that security in the African Sahel cannot be achieved without a collective regional approach to protecting the highly vulnerable borders shared by neighbouring states. Cooperation should include policing and operational military activities.

Activating humanitarian and preventive diplomacy by making use of Algeria's position on the African Union Peace and Security Council to lead mediation efforts independently of external intervention.

Positioning Algeria as a balancing power, rejecting policies of polarization, supporting legitimate national institutions and promoting the rule of law in neighbouring states.

5. Bibliography List :

1. Abdelkawi Bouhnia, "Algeria's Strategy toward Security Developments in the African Sahel," available at: http://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2012/06/20126310429208904.html. Cited from Francis Sempa, "US National Security Doctrines Historically Reviewed," American Diplomacy, 2003.

2. Abdelkawi Bouhnia, "Algeria and Security Crises in the African Sahel," El Khabar, 15 November 2014, p. 3, available at: http://www.algeriachannel.net/2014/12. Cited from Amhand Berkouk, "Security Dilemmas in the African Sahel and the Algerian Strategy," unpublished lecture, 2012.

3. Bouhnia, "Algeria's Strategy toward Security Developments in the African Sahel," op. cit.

4. Ibid.

5. Abdelkader Rziq El-Mokhadmi, Conflicts on the African Continent: Permanent Decline or Temporary Recession?, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Fajr for Publishing and Distribution, 2005), p. 21.

6. Abdelnour Benantar, "The Mediterranean Dimension of Algerian Security: Algeria, Europe and NATO" (Algiers: Al-Maktaba al-Asriya, 2005), p. 25.

7. Bouhnia, "Algeria's Strategy toward Security Developments in the African Sahel," op. cit.

8. Ibid.

9. Badr Hassan Shafei, Conflict Resolution in Africa: The ECOWAS Model, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Nashr lil-Jami'at, 2009), p. 92.