

## Manifestations of asymmetric security threats in the African Sahel region and their repercussions on the stability of the countries of the region

مظاهر التهديدات الأمنية اللاتماثلية في منطقة الساحل الأفريقي وتداعياتها على استقرار دول المنطقة

## Manifestations de menaces sécuritaires asymétriques dans la région africaine du Sahel et leurs répercussions sur la stabilité des pays de la région

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### ملخص:

ترتكز هذه الدراسة على الجانب الجيوسياسي لمنطقة الساحل الإفريقي وخصوصيتها التي تتجلى في كونها منطقة تجمع في فضاءها الكثير من التهديدات والتوترات الأمنية المختلفة (اجتماعية وسياسية وعسكرية واقتصادية)، الأمر الذي جعل من الصعب على الحكومات المركزية لدول الساحل السيطرة على هذه الأوضاع، فضلا عن غياب التنبؤ بمساراتها المستقبلية. وتمثل التهديدات اللاتماثلية أخطر مظاهر عدم الاستقرار وانعدام الأمن على شعوب المنطقة، بما في ذلك الإرهاب، والجريمة المنظمة، والهجرة غير الشرعية... إلخ، وتظهر أغلب هذه التهديدات بطبيعتها في شكل حلقة واحدة مترابطة ذات مخارج متعددة، تشكل جميعها مصدر قلق خطير يهدد أمن وسلامة الفرد واستقرار المجتمع والدول المجاورة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التهديدات الأمنية؛ التهديدات الأمنية اللاتماثلية؛ الساحل الأفريقي.

### Abstract:

This study is based on the geopolitical aspect of the African Sahel and its peculiarity, which is reflected in its being a region based on the pillars of various security threats and tensions (social, political, military and economic), which makes it difficult for the central governments of the Sahel countries to control these situations, as well as Absence of prediction of its future paths in light of the unclear neighborhood policies of some of its leaders, as well as the absence of predicting its future paths. Asymmetric threats represent the most dangerous manifestations of instability and insecurity for the peoples of the region, including terrorism, and organized crime, illegal immigration... etc., most of these threats by their nature appear in the form of a single interconnected episode with multiple exits, all of which constitute a serious concern that threatens the security and safety of the individual, the stability of society and neighboring countries.

**Keywords :** Security Threats; Symmetrical Security Threats; African Sahel region.

### Résumé:

Cette étude se base sur l'aspect géopolitique du Sahel africain et sa particularité, qui se reflète dans le fait qu'il s'agit d'une région fondée sur les piliers de diverses menaces et tensions sécuritaires (sociales, politiques, militaires et économiques), ce qui rend difficile pour les gouvernements centraux des pays du Sahel de contrôler ces situations, ainsi que l'absence de prédiction de ses trajectoires futures à la lumière des politiques de voisinage peu claires de certains de ses dirigeants, ainsi que l'absence de prévision de ses trajectoires futures. Les menaces asymétriques représentent les manifestations les plus dangereuses d'instabilité et d'insécurité pour les peuples de la région, notamment le terrorisme, le crime organisé, l'immigration clandestine... etc., la plupart de ces menaces de par leur nature apparaissent sous la forme d'un seul épisode interconnecté avec de multiples issues, qui constituent toutes une préoccupation grave qui menace la sécurité et la sûreté de l'individu, la stabilité de la société et des pays voisins.

**Mots clés :** Menaces de sécurité ; les menaces de sécurité asymétriques ; le Sahel Africain.

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## Introduction :

The African Sahel region is one of the most important and complex security areas, and one of the most structurally weak and security-disordered areas as a result of several factors and historical and emerging conditions, as European colonies inherited a heavy burden of internal crises such as the crisis of identity and national integration, and new problems such as delayed development, the spread of organized crime and the growth of the phenomenon of terrorism And the consequent deterioration of the security situation and instability in the region and its negative repercussions on it and its peoples .

The African Sahel region faces renewed forms of asymmetric security threats and challenges, and the war in Libya and Mali intensified, giving it high sensitivity and continuous escalation, and helped by the nature of the many countries in the region that suffer from poor control over their borders, which facilitated the process of penetration, in addition to the fragility of the internal political situation. Social and economic countries of the region.

Based on the foregoing, this study examines the issue of asymmetric security threats that have grown increasingly as a result of changes in the international system in the post-Cold War period, and the emergence of new non-traditional factors that directly affected the Sahel region and the stability of its states. Therefore, the study tries to answer the following problem:

**How did asymmetric security threats affect the instability of the African Sahel region?  
What are the main repercussions for the countries of the region?**

To answer this question, the following main hypothesis was formulated:

**The stability of the African Sahel region is linked to the ability of central governments to confront the widespread asymmetric security threats within it, as well as the extent to which they leverage shared development to mitigate their repercussions.**

To better understand the topic, we divided the study into three main axes:

- The first axis: a conceptual introduction to what asymmetric security threats are?
- The second axis: The geopolitical location of the African Sahel region and its strategic importance;
- The third axis: manifestations of asymmetric security threats in the region and their repercussions on the stability of the countries of the region.

In addressing the three axes, a set of approaches was adopted that formed a framework for systematic integration of the study, starting with the descriptive analytical approach, then the geopolitical analysis approach, in addition to utilizing security approaches that analyze the concepts of national and human security and the types of emerging asymmetric threats in the African Sahel region.

## **1- Asymmetric security threats- a conceptual introduction**

The concept of "security" is linked to "threat" in a relationship of mutual influence. To define and interpret the concept of security, the sources of the threat must be identified mainly. The reason for the feeling of danger or threat calls for the need to develop measures and procedures that are compatible with actual or potential threats that aim to achieve security (Ali, 2020, p. 4).

- ✓ The expanded concept of security means “the ability by which the state is able to secure the release of its internal and external sources of strength in various fields, including economic and military ones, in the face of the sources that threaten it internally and externally, during peace and war” ( khalfa, 2018, p. 476). Its aim is to ensure the political, economic and social stability of the state;
- ✓ As for its narrow concept, it includes "special measures aimed at securing individuals within the state against potential threats, and seeking to create the conditions surrounding them to satisfy their basic and complementary needs" (Ali, 2020, p. 4);
- ✓ Strategically, the threat indicates that the conflict of national interests and goals has reached a stage in which it becomes difficult to find a peaceful solution that provides the state with a minimum level of its political, social, economic and military security, in exchange for its weak capabilities to balance external challenges, which may push the parties to threaten to use military force (Metalabi, 2021, p. 141). The analysis of this concept stems from an understanding of the reality of international and regional transformations and their repercussions on the security level, which led to similar shifts in threat sources. Studying the dimensions, types and sources of threats is a necessity in order to define collective strategic action to repel these threats and formulate a common vision to confront them or at least reduce them. of its risks ( Al-Harbi, 2008, pp. 28-29).

The map and forms of security risks and threats have changed from their traditional pattern to a new pattern called "asymmetric threats" Hybrid Threat as an expression of the increasing complexity, dynamism, and continuous development that affects the security phenomenon, analogous threats refer to the traditional pattern of threats that are characterized by a military nature that occurs between states (Ali, 2020, p. 6). Asymmetric threats arise from ambiguity and the inability to identify the enemy, as they involve unequal strength between opposing forces. This type of threat includes economic crime, arms trafficking, transnational terrorism, organized crime, and internal conflicts. These threats are often accompanied by widespread human rights violations and genocide, which are typically found in failed states .

The concept of asymmetric threats emerged due to a significant shift in the structure of security risks—from a symmetrical pattern (based on the balance between parties) to an asymmetrical pattern (reflecting the imbalance between adversaries). This change coincides with the broader transformations taking place in the global order. (Garsh , 2017, p. 258).

The most important characteristic of these asymmetric threats is that they are non-country and cross-border, as they are no longer geographically defined as a result of the global tide, and the most important characteristics of these threats ( Belhadj, 2021, pp. 97-98):

- ❖ it is of a non-military nature;
- ❖ It is issued by non-state actors, which makes it difficult to determine its source.
- ❖ It affects the security of all actors and references (regions, countries, societies, individuals);

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- ❖ Vulnerability, as a result of the wide spread of the interests of international parties across the world and due to the nature of technological developments. The interesting thing is that the major powers with their great potential are the most vulnerable parties and are affected by any threats, even if they are imaginary.
  - ❖ It initially takes the form of "danger" before it becomes a threat, as the latter is usually defined and causes direct harm. The danger takes on a vague, ambiguous dimension, which is not measurable and doubtful other than the threat.

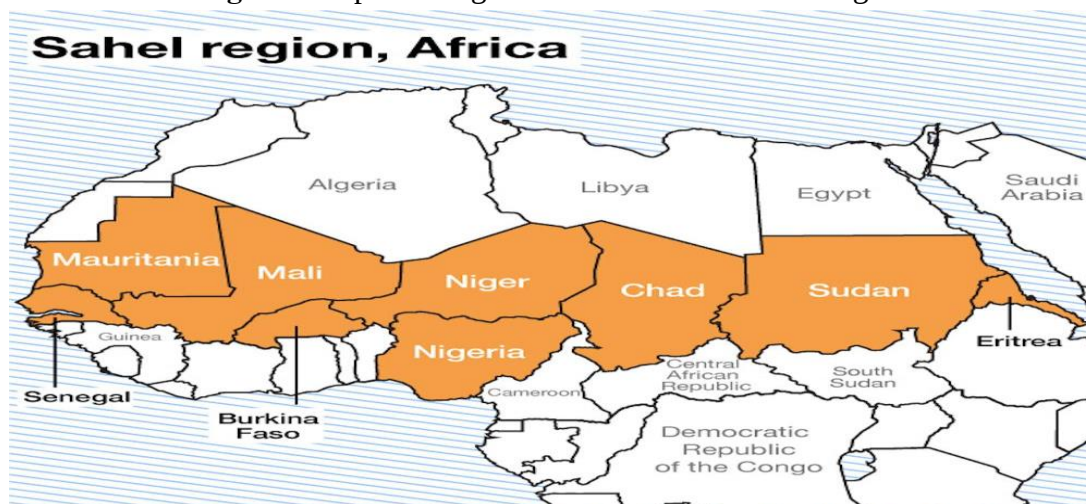
Barry Buzan believes that the African Sahel region and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa have always posed a challenge to theories of international relations as well as to the approach to security vehicles, as going back historically to almost 20 years ago, we find that the region was and still suffers from a group of threats, on top of which are: wars, famine, epidemics, Displacement of populations on a large scale, repressive practices of the ruling regimes and environmental pollution, so that the region has become a model "Hobbesian" stand-alone (Chouadra , 2018, p. 50).

## **2- The geopolitical location of the African Sahel region**

The spatial dimension in the geopolitical determinant pushes towards drawing and defining the pattern of international relations and affects the patterns of international interaction to take cooperative or conflictive dimensions or a mixture between them ( Allaq & Boulemshawar, 2019, p. 212). The researchers faced difficulty in defining the spatial dimension of the African Sahel region, and the disagreement between them was about defining the geographical scope and formulating an accurate and specific definition of the region, as a result of the geostrategic dynamic nature that characterizes the region, which prevented the establishment of agreed borders (Ali, 2020, p. 5). The identification of The group of countries or political entities formed for it according to the multiplicity of criteria and foundations adopted in this regard. So agree geographical standard, The African Sahel region includes all parts of the Greater African Sahara region, to include it All countries that make up its territory extensions geography for desert African Grand whether these included Recent all The territories of these countries are Niger, Mali and Mauritania Or included part of it as the countries of Arab Maghreb, The geographical scope of the African Sahel region expands according to the relevant social criterion The tribal and ethnic composition of the region's population, thus including all geographical areas extending across the desert. Grand, inhabited by a group of tribes, End most notably the Tuareg (Memmad , 2019, p. 105).

The scope of the African coast has also been determined based on the ethnic problems and crises that it is aware of, and it includes Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Sudan, which is known as the arc of crises, and the term African coast is often used to denote the countries that fall under the "committee." between countries to combat drought CILSS ( boubouche, 2017, p. 16).

**Fig.1. A map showing the countries of the Sahel region**



**Source:** (Suleiman, 2014)

The African Sahel region shrinks and expands according to the geopolitical bets of the competing major powers in the region. For example, the United States of America adopts a broad concept for the region, which includes the belt extending from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the east (Dalaa , 2014, p. 175). Its area is estimated at three million square kilometers, between the 12th latitude°22 -°As for France, it adopts the narrow concept of the region, which is due to its historical influence during the colonial era and its political, economic and cultural ties to it. It is the same concept that we find in the strategies of the European Union through various reports, as it focuses on three countries: Mauritania, Mali and Niger (Dalaa , 2014, p. 177).

And it appears through all academic research that there are basic central countries, or it can be said that they are the countries in the heart of the African coast, which are: Chad, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, and other countries that can be described as the countries periphery of the center, which are: Algeria, Libya and Mauritania, and if they are expanded, they include West African countries in the south. Through these concepts, the borders of the African Sahel region emerge as a geopolitical field that has assumed great geostrategic importance (djeddai & Zitari , 2020, p. 19).

The Sahel and Sahara region is related to an area in which newly formed states have emerged and inherited their borders from external parties in which the internal ethnic, political and sectarian formations varied, floundering in low levels of development, as the United Nations reports for the year 2012 mention, for example, that nearly 16 million inhabitants of the Sahel suffer the specter of famine In addition to 8 million of them in need of urgent aid and the danger resulting from drought and scarcity of rain, and in addition to these low levels of development in the region, other elements appear and grow that support the continuation of security problems, such as political instability, as the region witnesses many successive coups and collective armed conflicts that arise as a result of competition Electoral processes or confrontations between opposing religious and ethnic groups (Maslouh, 2014, p. 12).

The nature of the conflicts in the region changed and took the form of high-intensity crises that transcend national borders and considered as very hybrid conflicts between internal, ethnic, religious and economic stakes. And weapons, given the fragility of these countries on the social level makes their ability to deal with these growing dangers difficult, especially in light of the growing economic and energy ambitions, as well as the geo-strategic calculations of the major powers lurking in the

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region (djeddai & Zitari , 2020, pp. 29-30). Geopolitical data indicates that the African Sahel region, due to its specificity, has turned into an ideal strategic retreat space for crossing various forms of organized crime, illicit trade, the proliferation of arms trade, and others ( Allaq & Boulemshawar, 2019, p. 213).

### **3- Manifestations of asymmetric security threats in the African Sahel region and their repercussions on the stability of the countries of the region**

The security situation in the world has witnessed increasing fragility due to the qualitative change in the nature of relations between countries after the Cold War period and new problems that go beyond the issue of sovereignty have become known as asymmetric security threats due to their complexity and intertwining. These threats have increased in the African regions and the African Sahel in particular, covering the region Vast, arid and barren, with a very low population density, as it constitutes an archipelago of dispersed population groups affected by the problem of borders with neighboring countries and transient threats to them, which has turned large parts of them into havens for terrorist groups, a market for illegal trade and a hotbed for organized crime, and we will focus in this axis on the most prominent Manifestations of asymmetric security threats and their repercussions on the stability of the countries of the region.

#### **3-1- Terrorism in the African Sahel and the phenomenon of kidnapping for ransom:**

##### **3-1-1. The challenge of the spread of international terrorism in the region:**

What regional organizations such as the African Union failed to achieve, and what the joint committees, bilateral agreements and mutual visits did not succeed in achieving, the terrorist movements in the Maghreb countries and their extension in the Saharan coast and south of the African coast succeeded, which became a great deal of coordination and cooperation in launching attacks and exchanging experiences, The entire region turned into a new arena of confrontation between Al Qaeda and its local extensions, and between the existing regimes and the involvement of the United States of America and the West in their support (Bouibia, 2018, p. 313).

The phenomenon of terrorism remains at the forefront of these asymmetric threats in terms of the degree of danger, as the region sits on a vast and sprawling area that is difficult to control in terms of security, and its topography needs intensive study to know the centers and points of presence of the terrorist organizations deployed in it, in addition to the lack of experienced military forces in the Sahel countries to confront The danger of those active organizations in the region (Jamaat al-Tawhid and Jihad in West Africa, Movement for Unity and Jihad, Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb, Ansar al-Din Tariq Movement) (Zeggagh & Mansouri, 2014, p. 62), These terrorist organizations have found in the fragility of the region, the absence and weakness of both state institutions and the surrounding regional forces, the peculiarities of the region that are predominantly Bedouin and pastoral, drought, desertification and poverty are essential factors in making the region a headquarters and a starting point for its various operations in the world (Dalaa , 2014, p. 150). The emergence of terrorist groups coincided with the discovery of many underground resources: gold, petroleum, uranium, iron and precious stones... in all the countries of the African Sahel, especially Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and Mauritania ( Rizik, 2020, p. 394).

Mali is considered the most dangerous region in the West African Sahel region, especially in its northern part and its borders with the rest of the neighboring countries, which is currently known as the "Tora Bora Desert", and it can be called a desert within the Greater African Desert, and extends from the Tenzoft race that penetrates Algeria, Mali and Mauritania to the west. To the Tibesti Mountains in northwest Chad, and from the valleys south of the Algerian Al-Ahqaar Mountains in the north to the borders of the Niger River (meaning that it is an area that extends through the countries of Niger, Mali, Algeria, and Mauritania). The area of the triangular area is estimated at about 720 Km<sup>2</sup> (Attia, 2014, p. 89).

This region, with its diverse terrain and rugged paths, was an ideal place for various terrorist acts, as terrorist organizations, led by the so-called "Abdel-Razzak Al-Bara", used it to hide German and Austrian hostages in 2003. It is also a safe haven for the rebels. The biography of the terrorist "Mokhtar Belmokhtar" is summarized, every story activity the terrorist in the South The Algerian And countries the coast African, He is considered the first to survive, as a responsible man from the armed group and then the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat for at least 12 years (Attia, 2014, p. 90).

One of the biggest repercussions of the terrorist phenomenon on the Sahel region is the growing intensity of international competition in the region in parallel with the increase in the American and French strategic aspirations towards the region, as terrorism has become a pretext for external interference in the sovereignty of the coastal states. AFRICOMUS, which is still looking for a suitable African country to embrace it, after it failed to persuade Algeria to fulfill this request, and the proposal is also confirmed by the French military presence in the region (Zeggagh & Mansouri, 2014, p. 62). On the other hand, the Western media machine sought to crystallize some of the reasons and pretexts that would make intervention in the region legitimate. For example, the Wall Street Journal published The Wall Street Journal An article dated October 06, 2001, under the title "Solution to the Problem of Terrorism: Colonialism," in which I stated that there is no alternative for the West but to wage war against countries that have consistently supported terrorism (Attia, 2014, p. 92).

**Fig.2. A map showing the spread of al-Qaeda in the African Sahel region**



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**Source:** (Busch, 2013, p. 5)

### **3-1-2. A phenomenon of kidnapping for ransom:**

The increase in kidnappings for ransom is closely related to the growing presence of terrorist organisations in the coastal region which was his main driver, Since the mid-1990s, the phenomenon of kidnapping foreign nationals has emerged from time to time for political or financial purposes.

In February 2003 it was kidnapped 32 European-A in southern Algeria; seventeen of them were released on Algerian soil, while the hostages were released the remaining 15 are in northern Mali after six months of captivity. The kidnappings were carried out by an Algerian rebel group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, which in early 2007 changed its name to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb ( Anadolu agency , 2021).

In December 2007, members of Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb killed four 04 French tourists in southern Mauritania. In early 2008, a series of kidnappings began in the region, and by April 2012, 42 foreign nationals were targeted, 24 of whom were released, while five hostages were killed or captured. The kidnapping sites included southern Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Niger, as well as northern Mali, but in all cases The hostages were taken and released in northern Mali by al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and the kidnappers focused on citizens of countries that were known to be willing to negotiate ransom payments (Lacher, 2012, p. 8).

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in particular was able to obtain a ransom reached \$6 million in one case and made tens of millions of dollars since 2006, and collected an estimated \$70 million in ransom payments between 2006 and 2011. The organization and its splinter groups managed to kidnap Westerners in Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, Mali, Morocco, Libya and Tunisia, and recently helped some of its affiliates in Nigeria carry out kidnappings in northern Nigeria. For example, it kidnapped seven foreigners on February 16, 2013, and executed them on March 9, 2013, after which Boko Haram kidnapped A French family of seven (including four children) in Cameroon on February 19, 2013 and then transferred them to Nigeria until They were released On April 18, 2013, after paying a ransom of three million US dollars (Onuoha & Ezirim, 2013).

Political motives to spread terror played a limited role in the kidnappings and hostage-taking carried out by terrorist organizations in the region, until the available evidence indicates that the release of all Western citizens was secured through the payment of ransoms, in addition to that in some cases Mali or Mauritania released Prisoners linked to terrorist organizations (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb or the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), sometimes rescue attempts or refusal to pay the ransom led to the killing of the hostages (Lacher, 2012, p. 8).

Kidnapping for ransom has turned into a very lucrative industry which has allowed al Qaeda to become a terrorist organization political force And a large military in the Sahel and Sahara region and.

From the available information, it is concluded that the income generated by Al Qaeda, the Unity and Jihad Movement in West Africa, and the mediators associated with them from kidnappings, is likely to have reached between 40 and 65 million dollars since 2008, most of which was paid by Western governments at the same time, causing repeated hostage-taking In exposing tourism in the African

Sahel region to collapse and thus reducing job opportunities and profit outside criminal activity (Lacher, 2012, p. 9).

### **3.2- The growing influence of organized crime in the region:**

there are many aspects of organized crime\* In terms of its nature, forms and objectives, as it combines different patterns of illegal trade such as arms trade, drug trade, human trafficking, money laundering, and in view of the political, economic, social and security reality in the African Sahel region, we see an exacerbation of these phenomena with their various dimensions that directly affect the national security of states and thus Regional and international security (djeddai & Zitari , 2020, p. 34).

Organized crime led by smuggling networks has become a real threat to the countries of the region, especially since these networks have become characterized by a large institutional structure linked to active external parties, and their growth constitutes a source of instability, especially in the border areas (Ali, 2020, p. 12). These organized networks continued to operate in the African Sahel through the ancient passages, Which the region was known for because of the absence of state authority for a long period of time, but it can be considered that the nature of the state helped to a large extent in the spread of this type of criminal activities due to the weakness of its legal and judicial apparatus, the spread of corruption in the authority apparatus and among the coastal communities, and this situation led to the population of the region To give allegiance to organized crime gangs or rebels in order to benefit from the financial income of their smuggling activities and obtain protection.

#### **3.2.1- The Illegal arms trade:**

Africa is one of the largest recipients of small arms in the world, as this type of trade is a dynamic business in Africa. The Small Arms Survey report estimated the volume of this trade at 10 to 20 percent of the volume of world trade, so this trade is considered one of the biggest challenges in facing development in African countries and at all levels. The political instability of the countries of the region, the impediment of economic development, the empowerment of criminal groups and the intimidation of societies, and the most important factors that encouraged the illegal arms trade in this particular region, are the following (BuRaib, 2014, pp. 28-29):

- Weak control over arms exports in supplying countries;
- The ability of buyers to use illegal funds or exchange property and calculate its value through the use of diamonds, gold or wood and others.

Rebels and other armed groups are a major source of small arms in the African Sahel region. According to 2006 statistics, the United States of America alone transferred more than \$8.5 million in small arms to African countries. Here we also refer to the most widespread type of arms trade in the Sahel region, which is well known. In the name of the ant trade\_(The Ant-trade), Which is defined as a process in which weapons are purchased legally in one country and then resold illegally in neighboring countries through small batches sometimes, and they are smuggled at once due to the smallness and ease of transporting them across borders, and they are widely spread in Chad, Niger, Mali and their environs (BuRaib, 2014, p. 30).

#### **3.2.2- Drugs smuggling**

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The Sahel region knows a growing drug trade after the region turned into a transit center for hard drugs such as heroin and cocaine coming from Latin America to Europe. 75 kg of cocaine on the Algerian-Malian border (Tanzaouatene region) (boubouche, 2017, pp. 32-33), The same office estimated that about 14%Of cocaine enters Europe through West Africa, where it is transported either by air, land, or sea, and therefore we find airports such as Bamako, Niamey, and Ouagadougou among the most prominent air freight centers to Europe, some of which pass through the Algerian capital, and these routes are still active given what you confirm. Seizures during 2011 and 2012 at the same airports (BuRaib, 2014, p. 31).

Terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, are allied to provide armed escorts to cocaine smugglers across the African Sahara in order to provide them with a financial resource, as stated by the US administration's counter-terrorism official, Matt Levitt, when he emphasized that "increasing quantities of drugs are reaching the market." In Britain and Europe from West Africa through the areas under the control of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and under the protection of the organization... Therefore, the leaders of this organization and their allies are also criminals in addition to being terrorists (BuRaib, 2014, p. 35).

Thus, drugs constitute a major threat to the countries of the Sahel region, especially in the economic aspect, in addition to its scourge in the social aspect, as its abuse has spread widely among young people, which makes it a major cause of the spread of many cross-border diseases, as the multiple use of one injection facilitates the transmission of HIV among addicts. It has spread beyond borders to constitute a cross-border security threat targeting the health security of countries (BuRaib, 2014, p. 36).

### **3.3- The Dilemma of illegal immigration in the region:**

The problem of illegal immigration has always been linked to the crises and problems known to the African continent in general and the Sahel region in particular, such as the spread of poverty, armed conflicts, civil wars, terrorism, in addition to environmental threats such as drought and other multidimensional challenges that the African Sahel region is witnessing, which drives its people, especially the youth group. to the option of illegal immigration as an alternative to escaping from their troubled homelands.

Illegal immigration has today become a worrying factor for countries, whether receiving or sending, and even transit countries. In terms of security, illegal immigrants are likely to commit crimes, acts of violence, and even terrorism as a result of poverty and harassment, and they are often exploited by armed groups such as Al-Qaeda, and the repercussions of the influx of immigrants affects the socio-cultural demographic structure of the receiving countries, especially when the immigrants adhere to their culture, which affects the social and cultural security. As for the economic aspect, the specialists liken the illegal immigrants to a sponge that absorbs development because the encroachment of the poor in large numbers increases the burden of unemployment and increases the level of competition among citizens. The receiving state and illegal immigrants, which generates turmoil within the state (Metalabi, 2021, pp. 144-145).

The pace of illegal immigration towards North Africa and Europe increased throughout the nineties of the last century. For example, Algeria managed to stop about 6,000 clandestine immigrants between 2002 and 2006, compared to only 150 immigrants between 1990-2002. The United Nations Refugee Organization estimated that in 2004, 120,000 immigrants tried Secret crossing the Mediterranean, including 35,000 from sub-Saharan countries, and the United Nations estimates the annual rate of the number of secret immigrants aspiring to reach the European bank from Africa at about 300,000 people annually, about 200,000 of whom succeed, while the other 100,000 fail to reach their goal (Zarif, 2016, p. 18).

Illegal immigrants are often exposed to the lurks of gang members who work to exploit them in illegal and immoral acts such as cross-border prostitution, which has spread widely benefiting from technological development and globalization. terrorist operations or armed robbery and others ( boubouche, 2017, p. 39).

The region has also become a cheap market for human trafficking, including children and women, to exploit them in all forms. Children are recruited in armed conflicts and smuggled operations are carried out along the African Sahel region. Many studies indicate that child smuggling is often towards Europe and the Arab Gulf states from sub-Saharan regions through Algeria and Mauritania, or via the Morocco-Spain line. The value of smuggling a child through these regions is estimated at 10 thousand dollars, and 50 thousand dollars per woman, knowing that from 3800 to 5000 women and girls are smuggled annually from West Africa to Europe, with a total value estimated at \$228 million in profits for human smugglers in the region (Zarif, 2016, p. 21).

**Fig.3. A map showing the routes of illegal immigrants towards Europe**



**Source:** (Chouadra , 2018, p. 49)

The above map shows the main paths of illegal immigrants from the Sahel and Sahara region towards North Africa and from there to Europe across the Mediterranean Sea, and their arduous and risky journey passes through several stages. They initially reside in local cities during the journey in order to work and collect some sufficient money to continue the journey, and preferred areas theirs are Cameroon, Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, and upon their arrival in the city of Agadir in Niger, they take two directions, some of them take the way of the oases in the north-east of Libya, while the destination

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of others is to the vast city of Tamanrasset, especially Tenzawatten region, and then they turn to the coastal interior of Algeria, and others continue their way. To Morocco and from there to Spain, and some of them prefer the northern and eastern coasts of Algeria to migrate to Italy (Chouadra , 2018, p. 49).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Through what was presented in this research paper It turns out that The African Sahel region suffers from many problems and is shaken by repeated bouts of violence in the form of border disputes, separatist movements, rebellions and military coups. Fragility, state failure, closure, and even corruption.

All these factors and others created the ideal place for the emergence, growth and spread of asymmetric cross-border security threats, and a safe haven for international terrorist organizations and a base for their operations. Organized crime spread, arms and drug trade grew, and illegal immigration and human trafficking spread.

The spread of cross-border security threats in the region had serious implications for the national security of the countries of the region, not only because these threats could extend deep into the national territory of neighboring countries across their borders, but more dangerous than that is that some external parties find a justification for intervention in the region under the pretext of fighting terrorism and organized crime. and others.

Faced with the complexity of this type of threat, there must be more speed to adapt to it by addressing the new combinations of tactics used by the threatening actors and deterring them, and increasing economic and smart sanctions against them. There is no doubt that any single country cannot face these challenges. Therefore, the combined efforts of the countries of the region must be combined at the level of inter-coordination or at the level of structural reforms of economies, in addition to the need for political reform.

In general, Asymmetric security threats pose a major challenge to the stability of the Sahel region, which suffers from political, economic, and security fragility, making it a fertile ground for the spread of unconventional threats. Below are the key implications of these threats on the region's stability :

##### **a) Escalation of Terrorism and Violent Extremism**

- Terrorist groups such as \*Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)\*, \*Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS)\*, and \*Boko Haram\* are active in the Sahel, exploiting security vacuums and porous borders .
- These groups capitalize on social grievances and poverty to recruit local fighters, intensifying violence and undermining state-building efforts .

##### **b) Rise in Ethnic and Sectarian Conflicts**

- Asymmetric threats, including ethnic militias and local armed groups, fuel intercommunal violence (clashes between Fulani herders and farmers in Mali and Niger... )
- This leads to social fragmentation, increased internal displacement, and refugee flows to neighboring countries .

**c) Expansion of Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking**

- The region serves as a hub for arms smuggling, drug trafficking (particularly cocaine from Latin America to Europe), and human trafficking .
- Collaboration between terrorist groups and criminal networks provides them with financial and military resources, complicating counterterrorism efforts .

**d) Erosion of State Sovereignty and Weak Governance**

- Governments lose control over large territories to armed groups, as seen in northern Mali and border areas of Niger and Burkina Faso .
- Weak security institutions and corruption undermine public trust in the state, fueling rebellion and violence .

**e) Deepening Humanitarian and Economic Crises**

- Persistent violence has displaced millions
- The destruction of infrastructure and agriculture

**f) Foreign Interventions and Geopolitical Competition**

- International forces, such as France's former \*Operation Barkhane\* and the \*UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)\*, have faced criticism for inefficiency or bias .
- Growing competition among global powers (Russia via \*Wagner Group, the EU, and China) to expand influence further complicates the security landscape .

**g) Climate Change as an Aggravating Factor**

- Desertification and resource scarcity trigger conflicts between herders and farmers, which armed groups exploit for recruitment.

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