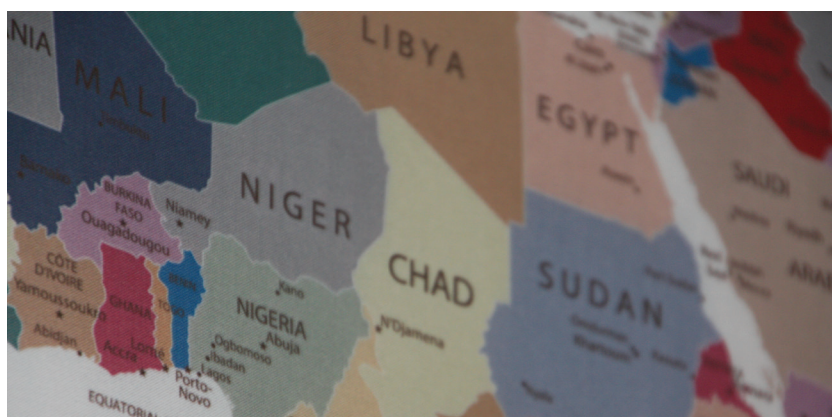


# The Niger-Libya Border: Securing It without Stabilising It?



**Mathieu PELLERIN**

November 2018

**Ifri** is a research center and a forum for debate on major international political and economic issues. Headed by Thierry de Montbrial since its founding in 1979, Ifri is a non-governmental, non-profit organization. As an independent think tank, Ifri sets its own research agenda, publishing its findings regularly for a global audience. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, Ifri brings together political and economic decision-makers, researchers and internationally renowned experts to animate its debate and research activities.

**Policy Center for the New South**, formerly OCP Policy Center, is a Moroccan policy-oriented think tank based in Rabat, Morocco, striving to promote knowledge sharing and to contribute to an enriched reflection on key economic and international relations issues. By offering a southern perspective on major regional and global strategic challenges facing developing and emerging countries, the Policy Center for the New South aims to provide a meaningful policy-making contribution through its four research programs: Agriculture, Environment and Food Security, Economic and Social Development, Commodity Economics and Finance, Geopolitics and International Relations.

The opinions expressed in this text are the responsibility of the author alone.

*This study has been carried out within the partnership between the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri) and Policy Center for the New South.*

ISBN: 979-10-373-0016-4

© All rights reserved, Ifri, 2018

#### **How to quote this document:**

Mathieu Pellerin, “The Niger-Libya Border: Securing It without Stabilising It?”,  
*Notes de l’Ifri*, Ifri, November 2018.

#### **Ifri**

27 rue de la Procession 75740 Paris Cedex 15 – FRANCE

Tel.: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00 – Fax: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60

Email: [accueil@ifri.org](mailto:accueil@ifri.org)

**Website:** [ifri.org](http://ifri.org)

# Author

**Mathieu Pellerin** has been an Associate Fellow at Ifri's sub-Saharan African Centre since 2010. His research focuses on political and security dynamics in the Sahel. He has also conducted research on behalf of research centres or international organisations (World Bank, European Union, etc.) in Mauritania, Libya, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso or Senegal. In the Sahelian region, he more specifically studies rebel movements in Mali and Niger, jihadist groups, the smuggling economy in the Sahel, drug trafficking, mining issues or even trajectories of radicalisation.

Since June 2015, he has also been working for the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) as a political advisor on the Sahel. He was *International Visitor* to the US State Department in 2013 for the topic *Counter-terrorism and security issues*.

# Abstract

Often described as an “ungoverned area”, the Niger-Libya border is nevertheless at the centre of major economic, political and security challenges. Both the Libyan authorities and the Nigerien state are struggling to establish tight control over this particularly isolated area. However, local actors who live there are making their own modes of governance, based on individual and so far, barely institutionalised relationships. These local forms of regulation provide states in the sub-region and their international partners with the opportunity to consider the possibilities of indirect administration. The current priority appears to be for outsourced forms of security, as the agendas of these actors are geared towards anti-terrorism and the fight against so-called irregular immigration. Indeed, this area is nowadays facing unprecedented militarisation, raising a key question: does excessive militarisation not risk producing more insecurity than it fights in the medium or long term? The stability of this border area is partly based on maintaining economic, political and social balance which risks being challenged by a purely security-based approach. Designing a holistic governance of security requires states being able to arbitrate sovereignly on the cornerstone of long-term human security.

# Table of contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>NORTHERN NIGER IN THE FACE OF THE AFTERMATH OF THE LIBYAN CRISIS</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Managing the shocks of the Libyan crisis in Niger     through a fragile peace architecture</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Balance of power between Tubus and Tuaregs     along the Niger-Libya border area</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>ENSURING A SMOOTH REGULATION OF BALANCES IN THE BORDER AREA</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Artisanal gold-mining: the last socio-economic safety valve     in the cross-border area</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>The criminalisation of transporting migrants and its consequences</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Democratised trafficking and new competition</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>WHAT GOVERNANCE OF CROSS-BORDER SECURITY?</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Europeans in search of a Meharist solution</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Defining a security governance model</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	<b>30</b>

# Introduction

At first sight, the Niger-Libya border area is far from the political dynamics which are played out in the capitals of both countries. The nomad communities living in Agadez, Dirkou, Ubari, Sabha, Murzuq and Kufra remain relatively marginalised from the political games of alliances that operate nationally. The weakness of state institutions outlines an area often considered as “ungoverned.” In fact, it generates its own modes of governance *via* community-specific regulatory mechanisms and builds interdependencies between authorities and communities combined with social relationships, the formal and informal economy, but also sometimes through political connections.

This area is full of economic interests and raises security issues. For Niger, the importance of the Agadez region has been summed up for a long time by uranium production. Since 2014, artisanal gold-mining in Djado, Tchibarakaten and in other areas of the Air Massif has been a major issue for the authorities. In Libya, the Sharara and Al-Fil oil wells, like the aquifers which feed the *Great Man-Made River* pipeline from Sabha, come under strategic interests. The area is largely deserted by the National Defence and Security Forces (FDS) and remains a preferred corridor for drugs, arms or human trafficking groups. Similarly, the area is also coveted by jihadists in search of alternative sanctuaries to northern Mali and northern Libya where they are under increasing pressure. These issues are generating increasing attention from both countries’ central governments, states in the sub-region, but also from the international community. These actors have tried various attempts at regulation, intended to secure the border area, without necessarily worrying about stabilising it permanently.

This paper is interested in how these kinds of regulation operate in northern Niger and along the Niger-Libya border. It will review how the impact of the Libyan crisis was managed in northern Niger in 2011, but also its recent upheavals, particularly the Tubu-Tuareg conflict in 2015. It will then proceed to analyse the upheavals caused by the gold boom, the disruption of migration networks and the exponential and evolving development of trafficking networks, but also how these upheavals are integrated by local and national actors. Finally, it will examine the institutional projects that have been started – but never finished – since 2011 in building security governance along the Niger-Libya border.

# Northern Niger in the face of the aftermath of the Libyan crisis

Presidents Mahamadou Issoufou and Idriss Deby Itno were among the first to warn of the danger that the Libyan crisis could present for regional security. The presence of Tubu and Tuareg, but also Arab communities on both sides of the Niger-Libya border, with armed actors who served in Muammar Gaddafi's army among them, has always been a factor of instability in the Sahara. Seven years after the outbreak of this crisis, the aftermath is still being felt.

## Managing the shocks of the Libyan crisis in Niger through a fragile peace architecture

Niger has been affected by the Libyan crisis, but in a much less harsh way than Mali was. First of all, this can be explained by the recent and violent end of the Niger Movement for Justice's (MNJ) rebellion in 2009, which convinced a number of fighters not to take up arms again, whereas in Mali the seeds of a new rebellion were already present<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, nearly 200 armed Nigeriens, including some former rebels such as Aghali Alambo, Amoumoune Kalakouwa or Mohamed Korey<sup>2</sup>, left Libya in 2011 to take refuge in Niger. Although, this generally went smoothly, it is partly due to the peace architecture hastily improvised by President Issoufou, who was invested in April 2011, in the middle of the Libyan crisis. Several elements of this architecture, which is continuously being consolidated and adjusted, should be mentioned. First and foremost, it is based on the involvement of the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace<sup>3</sup> (HACP), whose original role was to implement the 1995 peace agreement, that has

---

1. M. Pellerin and Y. Guichaoua, "Faire la paix et construire l'État. Les relations entre pouvoir central et périphéries sahéniennes au Niger et au Mali", ["Making Peace, Building the State. Relations between Central Government and the Sahelian Peripheries in Niger and Mali"] *Étude de l'IRSEM*, No. 51, 2017; S. Pézard and M. Shurkin, "Achieving Peace in Northern Mali", RAND, 2015.

2. Interview with an ex-fighter who returned to Niger in 2011, September 2018.

3. More information on the website: [www.hacp-niger.org](http://www.hacp-niger.org).

been expanded to win “hearts and minds” in fragile areas, which includes Agadez. High-level political backing (the Nigerien presidency) and extensive support from the international community ensure it has the resources to fulfil its ambitions<sup>4</sup>. This architecture is based just as much on representation of the Tuareg community at the highest level with the current Prime Minister, Brigi Rafini<sup>5</sup>, and the co-option of a significant number of former rebel leaders, first and foremost of whom is Amoumoune Kalakouwa, Advisor to the Prime Minister. Rhissa Ag Boula is also a key actor in this new architecture, as Advisor to the President, and then from 2016, as Minister attached to the Presidency. These actors with the support of their respective networks and other co-opted advisors, therefore took care to identify and integrate leaders who had returned from Libya to Niger into the state apparatus and who were able to maintain the social peace<sup>6</sup>. This played a part in substantially increasing the number of officials and advisors attached to Nigerien institutions. In 2015, estimates were between 2,000 and 3,000 actors attached to the Presidency, the Prime Minister’s office, the HACP, the National Assembly or even the Economic and Social Council, most of whom came from the north<sup>7</sup>. Although, some actors operate in organised crime, the imperative for short-term security has resulted in both the Nigerien authorities, as well as the international community showing – *as a minimum* – tolerance towards them.

The added value of these actors is not “to sit in an office in Niamey” to quote the words of a Nigerien senior official, but on the contrary to be on the ground. This co-option system, set up by the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS-Tarayya) and continually extended since 2012, has therefore quickly allowed an informal intelligence network to be established which starts in the field and goes up to the highest authorities. In the Aïr Massif, any suspicious individual or any unknown vehicle is subject to information feedback from local leaders, who then refer it to high-ranking officials who belong to this network, and/or the intelligence services<sup>8</sup>. The collected information is not limited solely to Niger, but extends to Algeria, Mali and especially Libya. Family relationships and business interests have always enabled the Nigerien authorities to be informed about the dynamics in the nearby vicinity. With the fall of Gaddafi and the insecurity which prevailed in Libya post-2011, this urgency was most keenly felt and these shadow advisors were all the more sought

---

4. M. Pellerin and Y. Guichaoua, “Faire la paix et construire l’État”, *op. cit.*

5. M. Pellerin, “La résilience nigérienne à l’épreuve de la guerre au Mali”, *Actuelle de l’Ifri*, February 2013. ICG, “Niger : un autre maillon faible dans le Sahel ?”, *Africa Report*, No. 208, September 2013.

6. Interview with a Nigerien Minister, Niamey, June 2017.

7. Interviews with different institutional actors, 2016-2018.

8. Interview with a Nigerien security services officer, February 2017.



after. In the spring of 2011, this information network allowed the Nigerien authorities to identify a convoy from Libya carrying a large amount of Semtex<sup>9</sup>. Finally, this information can bypass the official intelligence services of the Directorate of Territorial Surveillance (DST) and the General Directorate for Documentation and External Security (DGDSE)<sup>10</sup>. This collection system remains imperfect which explains why attacks like the one in Agadez in June 2013 could occur. This system, often just summed up as a search for buying social peace, was called into question in 2016 when a wave of dismissals of these advisors was carried out. The objective was to keep only the really effective actors, and so clean up the public finances, a repeated request by technical and financial partners.

The economic impact of the 2011 crisis is nevertheless still being felt. It has had a significant impact on cross-border trade between Libya and Niger, whose flows have witnessed a sharp downturn since then. Before the Libyan crisis, two convoys of about 100 vehicles from Libya supplied the city of Agadez each week with staple commodities and fuel<sup>11</sup>. The scarcity of these products since 2011, coupled with the end of Libyan subsidies, has hit Agadez's economy hard and caused high inflation. A large part of the flows was redirected to Algeria where the same smuggling networks are active, but Operation Serval drove Algeria to close its border with Niger in February 2013, threatening Agadez with commercial strangulation. Traders in staple commodities had import licences imposed at the In Guezzam border crossing once every two weeks when several hundred trucks returned to Niger to supply Tahoua and Agadez. Many actors have ceased trading, particularly those working in the resale of used cars from Tamanrasset to Agadez. At least 300 young Nigeriens were unemployed without receiving any support measures. One of them, who became a waiter in a hotel in Agadez in 2015, is one of the few to have been able to find work in the formal economy: "All my friends, who I worked with at the time, are now unemployed<sup>12</sup>." A formal economy that cannot compete with the profits generated from these smuggling activities<sup>13</sup>. The profits made were about CFA francs 400,000 per vehicle and per rotation between Tamanrasset and Agadez. Some then tried – in vain – to refocus their business to the Libyan border, but the burgeoning trade in stolen vehicles has been almost monopolised by the Tubus since 2011.

---

9. Interview with an officer from the Nigerien FDS, June 2016.

10. Interview with a member of the Nigerien intelligence services, September 2018.

11. Interview with an economic actor in Agadez, September 2018.

12. Interview with a former used car dealer between Algeria and Agadez, January 2016.

13. A. Hoffmann *et al.*, "Migration and Markets in Agadez: Economic Alternatives to the Migration Industry", Clingendael Institute, October 2017.

In Kawar, the situation is just as – if not more – worrying because of chronic under-investment by the authorities and their partners, while the population has increased since 2011 and the Tubu community has become stronger economically and militarily. The Kawar communities expressed strong demands<sup>14</sup>, which resulted in 2016 in the founding of a rebel movement, the Movement for Justice and the Rehabilitation of Niger (MJRN). Negotiations were begun with the Nigerien Minister of the Interior on several important topics: the reintegration of armed elements from the movement, the reopening of the Djado gold-mining site, the establishment of Bilma as a department within the region, compensation for environmental damage caused by oil exploration at Agadem by the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), as well as social and economic action in the departments affected by oil exploration<sup>15</sup>. The divisions within the movement between the founder, Adam Tcheke, and his Chief of Staff ended this rebellion and negotiations are ongoing with the latter to establish conditions for handing over their arms to the Nigerien authorities<sup>16</sup>. Also, Ander Koreai, a former sympathiser of the MJRN and a former officer in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of the Sahara (FARS), is aiming to lead a still nascent “political-military” movement, the MPRD (People’s Movement for the Revolution of Democracy<sup>17</sup>) from southern Libya. The general climate seems favourable to the foundation of protest movements. The public policies which are destabilising the area’s economy (closure of the Djado site and criminalisation of transport of migrants) have naturally driven several hundreds of young Nigerien Tubus to go to southern Libya, in groups of bandits, traffickers or *katibat* (companies). The dismissal of the leader of the Djado canton, which was decided on 28 September by the Ministry of Interior, sparked condemnation within the community. Against a background of open conflict between the Tubus and Awlad Suleiman at Sabha since February 2018<sup>18</sup>, the fact that the Minister of the Interior belonged to this Arab tribe made some Tubu leaders say that he would be biased, although no objective fact seems to corroborate this accusation for the time being.

---

14. End of mission report by the NGO Muzuri (run by Bougoudi Wardougou Issa) in the Tesker, N’Gourti and Bilma departments from 9 to 29 August 2017.

15. Interview with a Tubu leader from Niger, September 2018

16. *Ibid.*

17. Interview with Ander Koreai, September 2018.

18. Interview with a Tubu leader, June 2017.

## Balance of power between Tubus and Tuaregs along the Niger-Libya border area

One of the main, widely documented, impacts of the Libyan revolution in the south of the country was a reversal of the balance of power between the Tubu and Tuareg communities. As a result of their revolutionary commitment, the Tubus extended their influence in the smuggling and trafficking networks in southern Libya, but also in northern Niger. The closure of the Algeria-Libya border accentuated a dynamic redirection in trade flows towards the Niger-Libya border which undeniably benefited them<sup>19</sup>. This change in the balance of power actually redefined the areas of influence between the two communities with the Tuaregs having been driven back to the west on both sides of the border. From the area of the three borders and the Salvador Pass up to the Nigerien border crossing at Toummo, the border is now entirely under the influence of or controlled by Tubu groups, who claim to be from the Quatrun Security Committee and the different *katibat* leaders, including Cherfeddin Barkay, Rajeb Wardougou or Allatchi Mahadi<sup>20</sup>. This reversal of the balance of power was also accompanied by a discourse of mutual hostility between the two communities, with the Tubus seeking to present themselves as a bulwark against terrorism, which the Tuaregs would be the first actors of, because of their close contact with *Fajr Libya*<sup>21</sup>, often (wrongly) accused of being close to jihadist groups. The presence of French forces in Madama and their dealings with the Tubus accentuated this rivalry and led to widespread discontent on the part of the Tuaregs, which was formally communicated in a statement in *Le Monde* in September 2015<sup>22</sup>. This support, which could have been carried out *via* the United Arab Emirates, may have gone so far as arms deliveries, as several sources maintain, in favour of Barka Wardougou<sup>23</sup>. It is in this context that in September 2014, a trivial incident about control of a service station in Ubari plunged the two communities in southern Libya into a war which lasted until February 2016.

---

19. F. Wehrey, "Insecurity and Governance Challenges in Southern Libya", Carnegie Endowment, March 2017

20. J. Tubiana and C. Gramizzi, "Les Toubous dans la tourmente : présence et absence de l'État dans le triangle Tchad-Soudan-Libye", *Small Arms Survey*, November 2017.

21. R. Murray, *op. cit.*

22. F. Bobin, "Selon les Touaregs libyens, la France joue un rôle trouble au Sahel", *Le Monde*, 16 September 2015.

23. Interview with a member of a Tubu armed group in southern Libya, September 2018.

A peace agreement sponsored by Doha – however deemed biased in this conflict since it supports *Fajr Libya* which supported the Tuaregs in Ubari – allowed peace to return to these two communities in southern Libya. The strength of this mediation was due to the absence of government parties. Despite Algerian, Chadian and Nigerien requests, Qatar refused to include these parties in the process<sup>24</sup>. This success was also due to a revival of the 1893 agreement – known as the Midi-Midi Treaty – which systematically condemned the use of force between one or another community. The Tuaregs agreed to come down from Mount Tende in exchange for access to basic services authorised by the Tubus in Ubari and the basis of an agreement which was then supported by the tribal leaders of each community in different locations in the south of the country. The non-payment of the *diya* and the lack of redevelopment of the city of Ubari remain obstacles to overcome in order to consolidate this process<sup>25</sup>, although the adoption of a plan for the affected places by the government in Tripoli provides hope for settlement of this issue in the future. The monitoring of the implementation of the agreement is ensured by the Arab community, Hassawna de Brak Shati, perceived as neutral by both parties and which constitutes an intervention force in Ubari (nowadays largely withdrawn<sup>26</sup>).

Both communities have been co-existing smoothly ever since. Although the territories of each one is indeed distinct, and the Libyan Tuareg groups rarely venture into Tubu fiefs (Quatrun and Murzuq), nonetheless co-operation logics exist between armed groups from each community. In Ubari, both communities divided the checkpoints with the help of the Hassawna tribe<sup>27</sup>. According to several sources, discussions are starting between the two communities about securing the oil wells or fighting against irregular migration<sup>28</sup>. Both communities are not however immune to inter-individual incidents which could cause tension at community level. The resurgence of acts of banditry (particularly kidnappings), which is probably not unrelated to the reduced migration flows, has had the effect of reducing traffic on some roads like that from Sabha to Quatrun up to the Nigerien border. At the initiative of the Tubus, who are suffering economically from this decline in road usage, both communities therefore agreed in Sabha in July 2018 on the implementation of a mutual assistance protocol in the event of a security

---

24. Interview with one of the organisers of the process, September 2018.

25. J. Tubiana and C. Gramizzi, “Les Toubous dans la tourmente : présence et absence de l’État dans le triangle Tchad-Soudan-Libye”, *Small Arms Survey*, November 2017.

26. R. Murray, *op. cit.*

27. Interview with a Tubu activist based in Murzuq, September 2018.

28. Interview with a Tubu political leader based in Tripoli, September 2018.

incident<sup>29</sup>. This protocol was used for the first time on 18 September 2018 following the kidnapping of Tuaregs by a Tubu group. After ten days of detention, Tubu leaders managed to get the hostages released without paying a ransom<sup>30</sup>. Some are seeking to extend this arrangement to the city of Ubari. The strength of the agreement between the two communities was also put to the test after a fatal quarrel between a Tuareg and a Tubu that occurred on the night of 11 October 2018 in Ubari. The Tubu and Tuareg security courts in Ubari, made up of elders from each community, took action to successfully prevent any community over-reaction.

The question remains what was the impact of the Doha-sponsored peace process in Niger. Although, the conflict was always localised in southern Libya without ever extending to Nigerien territory, the fears were real in the Agadez region and there was potential to spread based on the number of Nigerien Tubus and Tuaregs involved in the conflict in southern Libya<sup>31</sup>. The different peace tools at Niger's disposal, namely the Agadez Regional Peace Committee, chaired by Mohamed Anako and different leaders (including tribal and religious) helped to ease tensions. The engagement of the Djado and Dirkou district leaders, the involvement of Tuareg and mixed Tuareg/Tubu figures, like the former Minister and current Member of Parliament, Mano Aghali, resulted in major awareness campaigns in each community, including actors from Libya<sup>32</sup>. At the same time, several criminal actors in each community were arrested, as they were accused of damaging the good relationship. The fear was particularly felt during the fights in Sabha in July 2015 which caused a peak in tensions in Agadez. The Tubus largely fled the city for fear of being the target of reprisals by the Tuaregs, before the governor of Agadez and the Regional Council undertook a series of meetings to ease tensions<sup>33</sup>. An actor involved in these discussions testified to the fact that most of the actors present initially wanted Agadez's involvement in the conflict<sup>34</sup>.

This imperviousness of the Agadez region to the southern Libyan conflict deserves greater research, but a certain number of explanatory factors can be suggested. The first is both communities' history in northern Niger, marked by relationships of solidarity and still governed by a non-aggression pact concluded more than a century ago. All that remains of these ancestral relations, is a caravan trade of bartering between Agadez

---

29. Interview with an actor involved in the negotiation of this protocol, September 2018.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Interview with a leader in Agadez, September 2018.

32. Interview with different actors involved in these mediations, September 2018.

33. Interview with a leader in Agadez, September 2018.

34. Interview with a former rebel group member in Agadez, September 2018.

and Bilma and many intermarriages<sup>35</sup>. These relationships even resulted in a joint rebel commitment in the 1990s and more timidly in 2007<sup>36</sup>. Actually, no conflict occurred between the two communities, except for clashes between Tubu and Tuareg shepherds at Tesker (Zinder region) in 2002 and 2003. The second factor is that the communities have far more differentiated territories in Niger than in Libya, since the Tenere desert naturally makes a border between the Aïr Massif, where the Tubus are in the extreme minority, and Kawar where very few Tuaregs live. It is markedly different from Libya and the co-existence of both communities in the cities of Ubari, but also Sabha. This has an impact in terms of trade and trafficking. In Libya, where they partly share the same territory, the risk of competition is high, as we saw in the outbreak of the conflict in Ubari. In northern Niger, both communities are more interdependent in terms of trafficking. In short, the Tuaregs need the Tubus to carry drugs to Libya, Chad and Egypt, while the Tubus need the former to bring it from the West (Mali). The Tuareg networks are often partners of the Tubus in the resale of used cars or fuel from Agadez to the south (Niamey and Mali, etc.). These business interdependencies reduce the risk of conflict. Although, some groups of Tuareg traffickers have crossed the border secretly, without the Tubus' consent, mainly to reach Qatrún, generally the handover of goods to the Tubus takes place at the border<sup>37</sup>. This balance could be challenged if the Tubus came to have commercial claims in the Aïr Massif.

However, since 2011 the discourse has been more community-based. The Tubus are regularly singled out in Agadez, either for their purported lack of discipline in driving, which has led to a number of fatal accidents in the city, or rather for their alleged tendency to “flaunt their money arrogantly<sup>38</sup>.” The fact that the Tubus are wealthy, allows them to marry Tuareg women and causes some disapproval among the Tuaregs, as access to marriage is increasingly complicated in the Sahel. In 2015, the broadcast of a video showing a young Tuareg woman from Agadez boasting about having had a relationship with a Tubu sparked a wave of indignation. Several cases of kidnapping of Tuareg women also occurred between 2013 and 2015, causing fierce arguments between young people from each community<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, it cannot be excluded that social events can inflame relations between the two communities. As regards security, many incidents – including clashes between traffickers – are presented in Agadez

---

35. Interview with an ONG official in Agadez, September 2018.

36. FARS, led by Barka Wardougou, was involved very surreptitiously in the 2007 rebellion. Read F. Deycard, *Les rébellions touarègues du Niger*, thesis, 2011.

37. Interviews with several economic actors in Agadez, including a trafficker, February 2018.

38. Interview with a Tuareg activist in Agadez, January 2016.

39. *Ibid.*

as involving the Tubus, whereas the reality is more complex and these incidents often hide the settling of scores also involving Tuaregs and Arabs. Similarly, emphasis is often placed on conflicts between natives (Tuaregs) and Tubus at the artisanal gold-mining sites, such as Tchibarakaten, whereas ownership disputes actually occur between and even within all communities<sup>40</sup>. Various existing consultative frameworks (like the Regional Peace Committee) are specifically used to avoid communitarianism developing.

---

40. *Ibid.*

# Ensuring a smooth regulation of balances in the border area

The governance of the border area in Niger, which is typical of the indirect administration of peripheral areas, is largely based on economic or political actors affiliated to the government, who in return are rewarded with certain “rights.” This mode of governance contradicts the theories that consider these areas as “ungoverned<sup>41</sup>.” However, these regulatory mechanisms are fragile, as they are based on individual relationships that may be easily challenged, both within communities and at central state level. Therefore, they are cyclical and temporary solutions which should be supplemented in the long term by institutional reforms.

## Artisanal gold-mining: the last socio-economic safety valve in the cross-border area

From Sudan to Mauritania, the Sahel is facing a real boom in artisanal gold-mining. At the Niger-Libya border, this gold boom started in 2013 in the Kouri Bougudi area, three-quarters of whose territory is in Chad and the other quarter is in Libya. Although the massive presence of Zaghawa gold miners in the Chadian part of this area is worrying, on the Libyan side, the site is almost exclusively occupied by Tubus (with a Sudanese or even Tuareg workforce) and controlled by the Tubu *katibats* from southern Libya. Murzuq is a logistics hub for mining this gold<sup>42</sup>. Discoveries were then made in spring 2014 at Djado, near to the French base at Madama, and created a sub-regional rush mainly dominated by the Sudanese (already experienced and equipped) and the Chadians (Djado is near the Chadian border). This massive foreign presence quickly became uncontrollable and was accompanied by growing insecurity, leading to the closure of the mine in early 2017 with a major deployment of the Nigerien armed forces (FAN)<sup>43</sup>. The closure, which was presented as temporary, is

---

41. J. I. Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

42. ICG, “How Libya’s Fezzan Became Europe’s New Border”, *Middle East and North Africa Report*, No. 179, July 2017.

43. M. Pellerin, “Beyond the ‘Wild West’: The Gold Rush in Northern Niger”, *Briefing Paper*, Small Arms, June 2017.



still dragging on. At the Dirkou Forum in April 2018, however the authorities promised the imminent reopening of the site<sup>44</sup>.

Hence, the Djado miners left the gold site, although minor clandestine mining continues<sup>45</sup>. The majority of the foreign actors returned to Libya, Chad and Sudan, while some have remained in the Bilma department, alongside most of the Tubus who operated the site. The natives, starting with the Tuaregs who embarked on the adventure at Djado, retreated to gold-mining sites in the west of the Agadez region, particularly at Tchibarakaten (Taghraba site), which was discovered in July 2014, and then to the Aïr Massif where several sites were discovered, including Amzeguer near Tabelot<sup>46</sup>. Since August 2018, Chadian army operations against the Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic (CCMSR<sup>47</sup>), supported by operations against groups of artisanal gold miners in the Kouri Bougoudi area, have driven a part of these miners to take refuge at Tabelot's artisanal gold-mining sites<sup>48</sup> where foreigners, including Sudanese, operate. The ownership of the gold mines at Tchibarakaten and Amzeguer are still the preserve of prominent Tuaregs, but also Arabs, and to a lesser extent Tubus. Many of them are former rebels, elected representatives or economic actors (including traffickers), a particularly sensitive situation for the Nigerien authorities<sup>49</sup> to manage as it is the only dynamic sector in a depressed economic climate: redundancies by Orano (formerly Areva) for economic reasons; the closure of the Azelik Mining Company (Somina); reduced cross-border trade flows since 2012; several thousand unemployed actors in the migration economy; and partial redirection of trafficking flows.

This is the reason why, despite the threats made in 2016 by the Nigerien government, in fact there has never been any question of closing these two sites which absorb the growing frustrations of the people of Agadez. Instead, artisanal mining has been formalised by the Ministry of Mines with small quarry permits gradually granted to the most influential operators<sup>50</sup>. More than 70 operators may already be beneficiaries of these permits, hence regularised in their right to exploit the Saharan sub-soil<sup>51</sup>. However, there is resistance to the regulatory framework obligations: sale of gold which is subject to licensing; ban on the use of dynamite; payment

---

44. Interview with a participant at the Forum, September 2018.

45. Interview with a Nigerien Tubu actor, September 2018.

46. E. Grégoire and L. Gagnol, "Ruées vers l'or au Sahara : l'orpaillage dans le désert du Ténéré et le massif de l'Aïr (Niger)", *ÉchoGéo*, 2017.

47. J. Tubiana and C. Gramizzi, "Les Toubous dans la tourmente", *op. cit.*

48. Interview with a Chadian Tubu, September 2018.

49. M. Pellerin, "Beyond the 'Wild West': The Gold Rush in Northern Niger", *op. cit.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. Interview with a Tuareg actor involved in gold-mining activities, September 2018.

of taxes<sup>52</sup>. The presence of industrial companies (Canadian and Indian) that are already permit holders encroaching on the Tagharaba site is also a concern, although arrangements have clearly been found to facilitate co-existence between them and the miners.

The artisanal gold-mining areas are central to the Nigerien states' peacekeeping arsenal, as already mentioned. The mine owners are or become prominent figures approached by the authorities, who provide a dense network of intelligence gathering in an area historically known to be frequented by drug traffickers and jihadists<sup>53</sup>. Instead of ministries, whose representations are 600 kilometres away in the city of Agadez, these self-same actors provide a semblance of regulation in situ. A management committee for the artisanal gold-mining sites has existed at Tchibarakaten since 2015, chaired by Saley Ibrahim (known as the Boss), by far the largest site operator<sup>54</sup>. He is active in mediations between the miners. A quarrel with informal miners on his permit was quickly settled in 2017 so that the latter continued their operation in exchange for paying a percentage<sup>55</sup>. Other actors have also acted as mediators. In late 2017, a large Arab economic operator in the Tahoua region, who had obtained a small quarry permit, wanted to evict the occupants from their site, which caused serious tension. After the arrest of several protagonists, mediation was set up by a Tuareg leader, which enabled an agreement on operating conditions to be signed by the occupants<sup>56</sup>. In parallel with this community governance tool, the state relies on the presence of 300 members of the FDS around the site to intervene in the event of an armed dispute and to dissuade possible road blockers by providing escorts for groups of miners<sup>57</sup>.

## The criminalisation of transporting migrants and its consequences

The law criminalising the transport of migrants is a revolution in a state where transporting migrants provided a living, as much for the FDS as for communities<sup>58</sup>, but also was part of the socio-economic reintegration solutions considered at the end of the DDR process in 2000. Fighters from former rebel movements could thus use their vehicles for other purposes

52. Interview with a member of the Agadez Regional Council, September 2018.

53. Interview with a Nigerien Minister, June 2017.

54. M. Pellerin, "Beyond the 'Wild West': The Gold Rush in Northern Niger", *op. cit.*

55. Interview with a miner in Agadez, August 2018.

56. Interview with an ONG official in Agadez, September 2018.

57. M. Pellerin, "Beyond the 'Wild West': The Gold Rush in Northern Niger", *op. cit.*

58. J. Brachet, "Manufacturing Smugglers: From Irregular to Clandestine Mobility in the Sahara", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, February 2018; P. Tinti, "A Dangerous Immigration Crackdown in West Africa", *The Atlantic*, February 2018.

and were encouraged to do so by the administrative and customs facilities<sup>59</sup>.

Three years after the commitments made at the Valletta Summit, the Nigerien authorities produced statistical results which satisfied the entire international community<sup>60</sup>. However, no long-term solution was found and the flows are only partially identified. According to an official at an international agency in Niamey, “We don’t know who is going to Libya, simply because we don’t control everyone who passes through the illegal routes<sup>61</sup>.” The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) produces statistics based solely on checkpoints that it has set up in northern Niger, without controlling the flows that bypass them. A leader of a migration network, who ceased operations in 2017, openly asserts: “Business has resumed, but this time we don’t trust those people who make promises to us at all and we will be totally invisible<sup>62</sup>.” The IOM’s official figures even confirm that the Nigerien route is preferred, since 52% of migrants who reach Libya come from Niger<sup>63</sup>. The modes of operation have adapted to this new context. Some networks take advantage of the miners’ movement between Agadez and the various gold-mining sites in the Aïr Massif and at Tchibarakaten to mix migrants in with them, who are then transported to Libya. Similarly, some migrants are registered by transport companies as Nigerien to travel to Libya legally<sup>64</sup>. The most organised networks with greater resources (now equipped with Hilux Tundra models) conduct their operations in total secrecy. Not only does this raise the price of migrant transport, which has increased fivefold since 2016, but it also necessarily brings migration actors and traffickers closer together. Several drug traffickers have recently invested in this activity because of its new profitability<sup>65</sup>. One of the actors interviewed admits to now mixing migrants and shipments of Tramadol in the same convoy<sup>66</sup>. This trend leads to an increased risk for migrants and there is a growing number of migrants abandoned in the desert<sup>67</sup>.

---

59. Interview with Mohamed Ewanghaye, an official at the HACP, September 2018.

60. A. Y. Barma, “Migration illégale : le Niger assure le job, selon l’OIM”, *La Tribune Afrique*, 17 October 2017.

61. Interview with a UN organisation official in Niamey, August 2018.

62. Interview with a former smuggler, September 2018.

63. OIM, *Libya’s Migrant Report*, July-August 2018.

64. Interviews with actors and observers of the migration phenomenon, August and September 2018.

65. Interview with a member of the Agadez Regional Peace Council, September 2018.

66. Interviews with a trafficker, February and September 2018.

67. The first months of 2018 raise concerns about a new increase. J. Tubiana, C. Warin and G. M. Saeneen, “Multilateral Damage: The Impact of EU Migration Policies on Central Saharan Routes”, Clingendael, 6 September 2018.

Although the migration flows seem to be increasing, this is due to the slow and inadequate responses provided by international partners. As Andrew Lebovich highlights in a recent report on European policies in the Sahel, these are fragmented and fail to co-ordinate security and development<sup>68</sup>. With regard to the migration issue, the only visible answers on the ground are security-related with the arrest of 282 migration actors and the seizure of nearly 350 vehicles<sup>69</sup>. The lack of awareness prior to application of the law is regretted by all the local actors in Agadez. *To the contrary*, although the Project to improve the Management of Migration Challenges (PROGEM), implemented by German technical co-operation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit – GIZ), supports local and regional authorities to improve social cohesion and access to basic services disrupted by the influx of migrants, only one project to retrain migration actors has been implemented to date. Yet, its pilot phase, which only closed recently, sparked criticism. The first is that the Plan of Action for Rapid Economic Impact in Agadez (PAIERA), funded by the European Union and implemented by HACP with non-governmental organisation (NGO) partners (Karkara and CISP (Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli [International Committee for the Development of the People])), does not target vehicle or home owners who represent the major actors in these networks in Agadez. According to the survey carried out by the municipalities and the Regional Council, out of the 6,565 migration actors identified, 1,255 own vehicles and 151 houses<sup>70</sup>. Similarly, this pilot phase of the project only covered 8% of cases received, whereas 80% of actors identified as migration actors (or 4,747 people) have not made an application. As for the selected cases, some believe that the beneficiaries may have “nothing to do” with the smuggling networks, but may benefit from political or family relationships that have enabled them to be kept on<sup>71</sup>. The second phase of the project is pending validation. In the meantime, economic pressure has been increasing in Agadez with the arrival of around 2,000 Sudanese, mainly from southern Libya<sup>72</sup>, attracted by the promises of protection issued (unwittingly) by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The international agencies fear that this will encourage other migrant

---

68. A. Lebovich, “Halting Ambition: EU Migration and Security Policy in the Sahel”, ECFR, September 2018.

69. Data for April 2018. Interview with an FDS officer in Niamey, September 2018.

70. Local names for accommodation for migrants. People also speak about “ghettos”.

71. Interviews with several political and voluntary sector actors in Agadez, August and September 2018.

72. Interview with a UN organisation official in Niamey, September 2018.

communities, trapped in Libya, to come in their turn to Agadez, creating an exceptional humanitarian emergency<sup>73</sup>.

## Democratised trafficking and new competition

Trafficking in the Sahel has been steadily increasing since the mid-2000s, because of a trend growth in international and regional drug production and the relative weakness of states in the fight against this phenomenon. This has had the effect of democratising access to trafficking, with new networks competing, sometimes very violently.

This democratisation of trafficking networks is particularly noticeable in southern Libya. In the Tubu community, there is a certain tribal fragmentation helped by a loose social organisation, as the *derde* (sometimes called sultan) only has a symbolic role. *De facto*, this leaves community actors with a large degree of freedom of affiliation<sup>74</sup>. The tribal authorities' lack of control is reinforced by the emergence of new actors whose influence is based on their commercial or political advancement. The regular appearance of new leaders of Tubu armed groups in southern Libya illustrate this amply. For example, the case of Bokori Souguimi can be referred to here. He is Barka Wardougou's son-in-law and currently provides security for the El Fil oil well, on behalf of the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the National Oil Company (NOC). Although he maintains relations with other Tubu *katibats*, he is now completely independent<sup>75</sup>. On the Tuareg side, the gradual weakening of the community since 2011, and even more so after the conflict with the Tubus in 2015, has gradually reduced the influence of the Tuareg *katibats*. Nowadays, there is only *katiba* Tende, while the *katibas Tenere* and *Ansar Al Haqq* no longer have an actual presence on the ground. Their fighters remain active individually, engaged in trafficking operations in small groups or attached to *katibats* led by Arabs or Tubus<sup>76</sup>.

This democratisation of armed trafficking groups has been further reinforced in Niger. Although it had generated few significant conflict dynamics up to 2017, the death of Sharif Ould Ghabidine opened up a period marked by strong rivalries between these networks. An Arab, originally from Tassara (Tahoua region) but living in Agadez, the large drug-trafficking network that he headed in Niger, was both sufficiently

---

73. Interviews with several UN organisation officials in Niamey, August and September 2018.

74. Interview with a Tubu leader, September 2018. See also Tubiana, 2018.

75. Interviews with several Chadian and Libyan Tubu actors, September 2018.

76. Interview with a voluntary sector actor in Sabha, September 2018.

inclusive and dominant to prevent competing networks from developing. His sudden death at a PNDS meeting in February 2017, not only started a war of succession, which is not over yet, but has especially whetted the appetite of new actors who operate independently or who aspire, in the name of the Tuareg community, for example, to replace the Arabs at the head of the main drug-trafficking network<sup>77</sup>. The ongoing war of succession, which resulted in several settling of scores even within the Arab community between rival actors from Tassara, also saw clashes between networks led by Arabs and Tuaregs. So, the accusation which resulted in the arrest of Ahmoudou Bady, Elhadji Gamou's son-in-law and a major drug trafficker in Agadez since April 2017, would be linked to the rivalry that his network had with other aspiring successors to Sharif Ould Ghabidine<sup>78</sup>.

However, it is unlikely that these rivalries will lead to community conflicts. Community membership of trafficking networks in northern Niger is indeed clearly far less homogeneous than in southern Libya or northern Mali. Furthermore, clashes and rivalries also occur within the same community, as illustrated by the clash between Tuareg groups when a drug convoy was intercepted in May 2017<sup>79</sup>. The risk of seeing a trivial security incident leading to reprisals is not completely impossible because of the communitarisation in the Agadez region. Up until now, armed conflicts between traffickers have always been settled by the intervention of mediators, whether or not from they come from the world of drug trafficking. In August 2018, an important figure in trafficking in Kidal, came to the Aïr Massif to try to mediate between the networks at loggerheads after Ahmoudou Bady's arrest. Additionally, this same Ahmoudou Bady had also mediated between trafficking and interception groups on his arrival in Agadez in May 2017<sup>80</sup>.

---

77. Interview with several Tuareg actors from Agadez, 2017-2018.

78. Interview with several Tuareg actors from Agadez, June-September 2018.

79. Interviews with several traffickers and civic leaders in Agadez, August 2017-September 2018.

80. *Ibid.*

# What governance of cross-border security?

## Europeans in search of a Meharist solution

The security of the Sahara was always operated by or with the nomadic communities that lived there, seen from colonial times as more suitable, because they were more accustomed to difficult terrain. They then supported the colonial *Meharist* (camel corps) units as soldiers (*goumiers*) and auxiliaries<sup>81</sup>. After independence and especially from the first integration of ex-fighters in Niger in 1995, this security mission was largely entrusted to the National Guard alongside the FAN. In Libya, control of Fezzan in Gaddafi's time, was largely maintained by four main units formed of Malian and Nigerien Tuareg fighters, but also Libyan Arabs. The Tubus were only very marginally represented in one of these four units<sup>82</sup>. As Frédéric Wehrey summarised, "border control in the south, even under Qaddafi, was always patchy, with the late dictator devolving oversight of lucrative smuggling routes to tribes to secure their loyalty<sup>83</sup>." Since 2011, various outsourcing initiatives to secure the Sahel through local armed actors have been considered at the instigation of external forces, whether foreign or from the north of the country for Libya.

The first initiative was the one launched by the former Ambassador of France to Niger, Denis Vène, who together with a group of French senators, invited a large number of nomadic actors (Tubus, Tuaregs and Arabs) from Chad, Libya, Niger, Mali and Algeria to the Senate in May 2013. Among the delegation members were a number of armed actors, former rebel group members, traffickers, or sponsors of trafficking networks. According to one of the members, many of the invited actors expected that these meetings

---

81. C. Grémont, "Tuaregs et Arabes dans les forces armées coloniales et maliennes : une histoire en trompe-l'œil", [Arabs and Tuaregs in Colonial and Malian Armed Forces: A Story in Trompe-l'Œil], *Notes de l'Ifri*, Ifri, 2010.

82. W. Lacher, "Libya's Fractious South and Regional Instability", *SANA Dispatch*, Small Arms Survey, February 2014.

83. [« Le contrôle des frontières dans le Sud, même sous Kadhafi, a toujours été parcellaire, le défunt dictateur ayant toujours délégué la supervision des routes de contrebande à des tribus afin de s'assurer de leur loyauté. »] in F. Wehrey, "Insecurity and Governance Challenges in Southern Libya", *op. cit.*

would not lead to operational arrangements for securing the Sahara areas. The initiative was stopped at the end of 2013, at the request of the highest French authorities according to several sources.

Almost simultaneously, Niger trialled a delegated border management mechanism with Barka Wardougou, the main Tubu figure in southern Libya, until his death in 2016. The purpose of this mechanism, launched in August 2013, was to set up a commission led by Barka Wardougou with two other *katibat* leaders, one Arab and one Tuareg in southern Libya. However, on 3 September a violent clash related to the passage of a drugs convoy led to the taking of several vehicles belonging to the FAN by Tubu traffickers. Although, Barka Wardougou managed to return at least one vehicle shortly afterwards, this incident may have ended this mechanism, even though Barka Wardougou remained in contact with the Nigerien authorities until his death.

From 2014 to 2016, the governance of the Niger-Libya border was not subjected to similar attempts. The presence of Operation Barkhane in Madama since 2014 has played a significant role and the surveillance of this border has in fact been delegated to the French armed forces. Except that the mandate for Operation Barkhane is limited to just fighting against terrorism despite some seizures of drugs and fuel – either involuntarily or considered to be supporting terrorist groups – along the Algerian border up to the Salvador Pass. Currently, although Operation Barkhane has contacts in the main Tubu *katibats* in southern Libya, it is only – for the time being – as part of this anti-terrorist application.

In parallel with this anti-terrorist agenda, where the Tubus have cleverly positioned themselves with Operation Barkhane, the fight against so-called irregular migration creates another international source of revenue and leads to outsourced forms of border security. Although, according to Jérôme Tubiana, the *katiba* Shuhada Um-el-Araneb had already received funds from Ali Zeidan's government to intercept migrants<sup>84</sup> in 2012 and 2013, things intensified from 2016. The Italians increased contacts with and promises of support for several *katibat* chiefs in southern Libya, but to no avail. This was the case with Barka Wardougou in 2016<sup>85</sup>, and more recently with his successor, Rejeb Wardougou known as “Abbay<sup>86</sup>.” Most of these approaches were made by the former Italian Minister of the Interior, Marco Minniti<sup>87</sup>. The contacts made do not necessarily commit his successor, Matteo Salvini, appointed on 29 April

---

84. J. Tubiana and C. Gramizzi, “Les Toubous dans la tourmente”, *op. cit.*

85. *Ibid.*

86. Interview with a former Tubu fighter in southern Libya, September 2018.

87. “Italie : Marco Minniti, l’ancien maître espion et les migrants”, *Le Point*, 2 February 2018.



2018, even if he pursues a similar policy. Additionally, the fact that Italy is relying on the GNA to act in Libya may limit its ability to act. Indeed, the presence of the GNA in southern Libya is for the time being extremely limited<sup>88</sup>. This Italian activism has also created roles, like that of Barka Sedimi, who created the *katiba* Suqur Sahara in August 2017. He set himself up as a guardian of the Niger-Libya border by seizing several vehicles belonging to traders, before his unilateral initiative was rejected by most of the Tubu *katibats*, particularly in Qatrun. After having publicly announced that he was mandated by President Deby in a Whatsapp audio recording, his group was attacked in September 2018 and largely disarmed by a Chadian rebel group in southern Libya.

As for the Tuaregs, they would also be essential in securing the Aïr Massif. In April 2017, Ibrahim Alambo, a former MNJ fighter and Aghaly Alambo's brother, put forward his availability, in an authenticated audio recording, to provide a mission to secure northern Niger against foreigners, who were responsible for insecurity in the area. This offer remained unanswered. Unofficially, some believe that Amoumoune Kalakouwa is already playing such a role in northern Niger, with an official title of Advisor to the Prime Minister. These dynamics concur with the aspirations of the former signatories of the 1995 peace agreements to reform the Saharan Security Units (USS), supposed to integrate people from all the nomadic communities. At the Agadez Regional Peace Committee meeting in August 2016, the re-establishment of the USS was called for as a solution to the upsurge in acts of banditry and drug trafficking in Agadez.

In south-western Libya, the Tuaregs remained relatively active through the *katiba* Tende and especially the 411 Brigade in charge of the borders, which operated in Ubari, Tahala, Laghwenat and Ghat. They could in turn benefit from Italy's interest which seems to have deferred its ambitions in this area. In July 2018, Italy reactivated a bilateral agreement concluded in Gaddafi's time, allowing them to pursue a military presence in the south, which is repeated in the insistent rumours, mentioning the possibility of setting up a base at Ghat. Although Italian diplomats have stated that their actions in Ghat are part of the European "Support to Integrated Border and Migration Management in Libya" programme, the rumours continue to circulate about a future Italian military presence in this border area with Algeria. At the same time, the installation of an Italian military base on the Nigerien side of the border at Madama was approved. Its mandate seems broad, as does its coverage area.

---

88. Interview with a specialist on Libya, September 2018.

Finally, questions remain about the relative freedom granted to an armed group which has been circulating in Kawar since late 2015. Mainly made up of Chadian Zaghawas, but also Nigerien Tubus and Tuaregs, this group led by a deserter Chadian general and formerly based at Wour, aroused strong opposition from the Tuareg community in Agadez. The Regional Council has formally asked the Nigerien army to drive the group away before the communities do so on their own. This group, which has the unique quality of never targeting civilians<sup>89</sup>, may be specialised in intercepting drug cargoes, which could partly explain why it is rejected by some Tuaregs leaders in Agadez. A FAN operation in June near the Tenere well shaft failed, as the Nigerien convoy was subjected to a tense ambush, perhaps by another group other than the one originally targeted. Indeed, a complete lack of transparency surrounds the presence of these armed units which may in fact be organised in different groups, not under the Chadian general. Although no proof exists, some think that this group must benefit from protection to have such resilience; such a mobile group can offer clear benefits to the states in the sub-region and internationally in terms of intelligence or occupying an area against possible groups deemed “hostile”, rebel or jihadist.

## Defining a security governance model

These outsourced forms of securing border areas can only be long-lasting if they are part of an institutional framework on the one hand, otherwise they may not be able to withstand the changes of people. On the other hand, they have to be inclusive at community level so as to not create tensions in a general context of tribal rivalry, particularly in southern Libya. However, both in southern Libya and in Niger, where the initiatives have so far been largely based on individual and short-term logic, nothing points to such a development.

In Libya, the three-headed nature of government on the one hand, and the alliances forged by each one of them with different foreign powers<sup>90</sup>, make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for such a security governance model to emerge in south Libya. The Fezzan is being recovered by the various powers in northern Libya. The influence of *Fajr Libya* and Zintan have already been mentioned as key in triggering the Tubu-Tuareg conflicts in Ubari and Sabha between 2014 and 2016. The influence of the northern rival powers also had an impact, during the recent fighting in

---

89. For example, the group was accused of having stolen 11 vehicles from civilians. In fact, the group siphoned off petrol from these vehicles before abandoning them.

90. K. Mezran and A. Varvelli, “Foreign Actors in Libya’s Crisis”, Atlantic Council and ISPI, November 2017.

Sabha, between Awlad Suleiman and the Tubus in spring 2018. Membership of the 6th Brigade made up of Awlad Suleiman Arabs, initially in the GNA, and then in the Libyan National Army (LNA), has undeniably fuelled the conflict dynamics with the Tubus. even though Marshal Haftar has taken care to stay away from the 6th Brigade, so as not to alienate the Tubu community, which is essential for any security project in southern Libya. The Haftar project to secure the south risks impacting on the local balance again. In August 2018, he appointed Wanis Bukhamada, the Saiqa Force Commander, to lead the LNA's *South Operation Room*, even though at the time he was deprived of the resources originally promised for his mission, and remained based in Jufra. He seemed weakened to fulfil his mandate, namely "to hunt terrorist and criminal groups, foreign mercenaries and to fight against all forms of organised crime<sup>91</sup>." Additionally, Marshal Haftar activated his contacts to expand his influence, including Colonel Ali Chida, the Tubu actor essential to the LNA's ambitions in southern Libya. In 2017, the latter was sent to Sabha to try – in vain – to win the support of the Tubus<sup>92</sup>. An emissary from Marshal Haftar may have recently met the powerful chief of the *katiba* Cherfedine Barkaï to put pressure on him to establish his influence in the south, as affiliation with the LNA may help to draw in a number of Tubu fighters who want to have a salary. However, this will not happen without resistance from the community, which admittedly is divided, but increasingly wary of Marshal Haftar. In addition to the conflict in Sabha, the war in Kufra in recent years between the *katiba* madkahli Subul al-Salam, affiliated to the LNA and made up of Zwaya Arabs, and the Libyan and Chadian Tubu groups, is grounds for ongoing tension between them and the LNA<sup>93</sup>. Finally, the reaction of other forces in the north, including Misrata and Zintan, to Marshal Haftar's offensive in the south of the country must be carefully observed. The latter could indeed involve armed groups and southern communities in a war again between rival forces in the north of the country.

The only way to build a lasting and inclusive governance model is to do it at Fezzan level, by involving the official and tribal authorities, along the lines of the assistance protocol model already mentioned in Sabha. The question is to what extent can communities in southern Libya remain impervious to external influences, especially from the north. On the one hand, there is constant mistrust of the Tuareg and Tubu communities vis-

---

91. "Marshal Haftar Forms an Operations Room for the South Headed by General Bukhamada", *The Libyan Adress*, 10 September 2018.

92. Interview with a Libyan Tubu leader, September 2018.

93. A. McGregor, "Salafists, Mercenaries and Body Snatchers: The War for Libya's South", Jamestown Foundation, 6 April 2018.

à-vis the northern authorities. During the peace negotiations in Ubari in 2015, it was further decided that they should remain at a distance from the recoveries by the northern powers, and instead unite to defend their joint interests, starting with access to citizenship which provides undeniable benefits; the first of these being the obtaining of *raqam watani* (citizen registration number) which ensures integration in the army<sup>94</sup>. On the other hand, precisely the fact that few Tuaregs and especially Tubus are integrated into the army exposes them, in a logic of economic imperative, to agree to work for militias in the rest of the country. Their commitment is therefore scarcely political and mainly financial. The same is true of some southern Libyan brigades, who only rally behind the LNA in the hope of having a supplement to their wages, like the Tende Brigade. However, this brigade does not receive any material support from the LNA beyond the payment of additional wages to those paid by the Ministry of Defence to the military from Tripoli. However, some recruitment dynamics may follow political trends. We noted, for example, a greater presence of Tuareg fighters in some Misrati brigades, like the 301 Brigade, which employs several hundred Tuareg<sup>95</sup>. Similarly, the 411 Brigade, led by an Amazigh, employs a great number of Tuaregs in the south. The alliances remain extremely volatile, and they are even more so with foreign groups, Chadians and Sudanese, who work as mercenaries for the benefit of almost all actors. During the assault on Sabha fort in May 2018, like during the offensive by Ibrahim Jadhraan on the oil field in June 2018, the Chadian fighters linked to the rebel movements were mobilised<sup>96</sup>. However, forces from Misrata and those of Marshal Haftar, who nowadays calls for “mercenaries to be hunted”, also had to use them<sup>97</sup>. This logic of low-cost recruitment of local militia or foreign mercenaries hence exposes the south to recoveries by northern powers.

In Niger, the authorities seem to hesitate between two security governance policies that are not necessarily incompatible on first sight. Officially, no militia is tolerated in Niger and possession of weapons without a licence is punished. Currently, efforts in northern Niger are focused on strengthening the presence of the state and the FDS to control the Libyan border. Niger’s commitment to the fight against irregular immigration allows it to benefit from increased support from international partners. Three major actions have been carried out at this stage: the refurbishment of the runway at Dirkou airport and the setting up of a FAN

---

94. Interview with a participant in the Doha process, September 2018.

95. Interview with a Tuareg who fought in Libya, September 2018.

96. Interviews with several actors belonging to armed groups in southern Libya, September 2018.

97. Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Libya pursuant to paragraph 13 of resolution 2278 (2016), 1<sup>st</sup> June 2017.

barracks and a customs post at Madama, whose installation has been postponed due to the reluctance of some elected officials from Bilma who fear seeing their cross-border business interests threatened<sup>98</sup>. Other infrastructure of this kind is planned later in Dirkou and Iferouane. The authorities are also considering setting up special units to fight against irregular immigration, which could be supported *via* the GAR-SI<sup>99</sup> (Rapid Action Groups–Monitoring and Intervention in the Sahel) project, funded by the European Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF). The stated arrival of Italian military forces, with a mandate to support the FDS in the fight against irregular immigration channels, also promises extra assistance in addition to the material support provided by EUCAP Sahel Niger<sup>100</sup> since 2016.

At the same time, there is a constant temptation to delegate security to local actors. Officially, this is reflected in the Bankilare area (the west of the country) by a pilot project of “proximity policing”, the REGARDS (Risks of Social and Security Destabilisation) project, funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the UNHCR. This project allows for the establishment of action groups for preventive security and self-defence committees. In Agadez, the establishment of municipal police in the municipalities after the last rebellion is part of a similar framework. In the artisanal gold-mining areas in Agadez, like elsewhere (Tillaberi), Vigilance Committees are increasing. We have seen that the Nigerien peace architecture was partly based on armed actors in the northern belt of the country. The question remains as to whether Niger will agree to formalise security co-ordination with nomadic actors, as was briefly attempted with Barka Wardougou. This particularly raises the question of setting up the USS, a question that meets with reluctance from FAN<sup>101</sup>, or even Saharan Tourist Protection Brigades as some call for<sup>102</sup>. These two Nigerien approaches, namely the strengthening of the state presence increasingly supported by foreign armies on the one hand, and community-based security on the other hand, could become increasingly contradictory.

---

98. Interview with an international co-operant in Niger, September 2018.

99. Multi-country action sheet, Rapid Action Groups–Monitoring and Intervention in the Sahel, [www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu).

100. EUCAP Sahel Niger, more information at : [www.eeas.europa.eu](http://www.eeas.europa.eu).

101. Interview with a former Tuareg fighter, July 2018.

102. Interviews with several Nigerien political actors, September 2018.

# Conclusion

Security governance in the Sahel needs to be thought about through the concept of “human security”, which is focused on the understanding of individual vulnerabilities. From this point of view, the question arises whether excessive militarisation does not risk producing more insecurity than it fights in the medium or long term. The militarisation of the Sahel, whether through border control or an increased Western armed presence, is less a demand by the communities than a will imposed from outside. Never has the border area been so militarised. Recent revelations of the establishment of a CIA base in Dirkou, in addition to the largest base ever built by AFRICOM in Agadez, and the transfer of the East G5-Sahel Force Command Centre to Wour in northern Chad, completes the grid of this cross-border area. This foreign presence meets the Nigerien authorities’ interest (financial and strategic) to protect itself against any risk of jihadist penetration or formation of a rebellion, but may potentially go against the communities’ interests.

The smuggling of staple commodities, trafficking and transport of migrants may nowadays represent 90% of the Saharan economy<sup>103</sup>. No initiative to combat this economy can come from the communities which live from it, unless they see an immediate financial benefit or sure guarantees of alternative economic opportunities. Although, for the time being, this international presence creates some sovereigntist reactions calling for the departure of these bases, the situation would be even more worrying if this massive presence came to strangle a trans-Saharan economy that is largely based on illegal flows. The (forced) commitment of Niger in the fight against the migration flows is the first manifestation of such a risk which could weaken the socio-economic and security balance in the north of the country. The Nigerien operation, supported by the Americans, for the arrest of a major Tuareg trafficker at the start of the year was a second one. Yet, community-based security dear to Niger, can only work with the trust of the communities that these measures jeopardise. Designing a holistic governance of security requires states being able to arbitrate sovereignly on the cornerstone of long-term human security.

---

103. ICG, “How Libya’s Fezzan Became Europe’s New Border”, *op. cit.*

# Appendix

## Map of Niger



Source: Éditions Larousse.

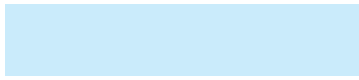
### Map of Libya



Source: United Nations' Map Library.







Institut français  
des relations  
internationales