



DIIS WORKING PAPER 2016: 9

Eric Komlavi Hahonou

**STABILIZING NIGER:
THE CHALLENGES OF BRIDGING
LOCAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL
SECURITY INTERESTS**

Eric Komlavi Hahonou

Associate Professor
komlavi@ruc.dk

DIIS Working Papers make DIIS researchers' and partners' work in progress available towards proper publishing. They may include documentation which is not necessarily published elsewhere. DIIS Working Papers are published under the responsibility of the author alone.

DIIS WORKING PAPER 2016: 9

DIIS · Danish Institute for International Studies
Østbanegade 117, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark

Tel: +45 32 69 87 87

E-mail: diis@diis.dk

www.diis.dk

ISBN 978-87-7605-842-5

DIIS publications can be downloaded free of charge from www.diis.dk

© Copenhagen 2016, the author and DIIS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STABILIZING NIGER: THE CHALLENGES OF BRIDGING LOCAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY INTERESTS

Introduction.....	2
International Security Intervention in Niger.....	4
Niger in the Post-Gaddafi Regional Security context	5
Mutual interests and Western Extra-territorial Sovereignty.....	8
EU: Ensuring stability in Niger and Europe	9
France: Between Clientelism and Neo-Colonialism.....	10
Conclusions	11
Recommendations	11
References.....	13
End notes.....	14

INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates international security intervention in Niger, a key country in western strategy against global Jihad and trans-border activities (including criminal activities and migrations toward Europe). A few actors, in particular France and the EU, but also the US, dominate international intervention in Niger. Their main objective is to secure their own strategic, economic and political interests by strengthening the Nigerien authorities through direct intervention and capacity building activities. For western states reinforcing state security institutions and stabilizing elite rule constitute the only realistic path to defend their own interests. The report suggests that international support of Nigerien security forces could be counter-productive for the re-establishment of state authority and legitimacy in the long-term. Brutal repression and violation of human rights in the name of state security has already severely undermined the legitimacy of the Nigerien government.

The fate of international security intervention in Niger is important for Danish interests. Compared to Nigeria, Mali, Libya or even Chad, the Republic of Niger appears as an island of relative peace in a much troubled Sahelian region. Therefore in the eyes of international western actors Niger is of paramount importance to regional stability. Furthermore, the Danish state has invested considerably resource in aid to Niger. The Danish aid to Niger started in 1974, and Niger became a priority country in 2011. Denmark supports the agricultural sector, water and sanitation, good governance and 'stability'. The latter includes preventive efforts directed against radicalisation and conflict prevention (expected ca. 100M DKK annually 2014-2018). In addition Niger is covered by the Danish Sahel-initiative (125M DKK in 2013-2017), which aims to strengthen conflict resolution and counter violent extremism and organised crime. Decades of development collaboration could be jeopardized if Niger descends into large-scale open conflict.

This working paper is based on fieldwork in Niger in October 2014 and June 2015. Interviews have been conducted with EU agencies, bilateral partners, NGOs, state institutions and government officials, and key informants (civil society activists, hometown associations, religious organisations, and neighbourhood watch groups). In 2015 alone, 22 interviews were conducted in Niger. In addition a dozen informal interviews with key actors and a few observations have been conducted.

The first section of this paper outlines the stabilisation policy of France and the EU in Niger. The second section analyses the specific security challenges faced by Niger and external security actors in the post-Gaddafi regional context, with a special focus on the Diffa area where a crisis situation emerged in early 2015. The third section examines France and the EU's interlinked strategies to stabilise Niger to secure their interests (primarily uranium, counter-terrorism, and control of migration to Europe). The interests of European actors and the Nigerien government converge, to some extent. Yet, as I argue, while the immediate priority is to secure the country by military intervention and capacity building of national security forces, donors should also focus on promoting lasting social change to counter the conditions, which produce insecurity for people. The last section

concludes on the interdependency between external and internal actors and reflects on the potentially counterproductive effects of a narrow understanding of security and stability as well as the possibility of collaborating with non-state security actors.

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY INTERVENTION IN NIGER

'For the short term, the solution is military, but for the long term it is development.'ⁱ

Since the collapse of Gaddafi's regime in Libya in 2011 and the subsequent spread of insecurity in the Sahel, the idea that security is a precondition for development has gained ground among ruling elites in the Sahel. As Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou, put it in the abovementioned statement, the overarching objective of security necessitates both short and long term solutions. However, the quotation also suggests that tensions exist between short and long term measures of stabilization. Finally, this statement is also a call of the President of Niger for financial and military support from Western donors, who have been playing an increasing role in security provision in Niger.

In the recent years, Niger's bilateral (e.g. France, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Japan, China, USA) and multilateral development partners including the EU and the UN have increasingly integrated security and development strategies within a broader stabilization strategy that applies to the so-called *Sahel G5* (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger), led by France, the US and the EU. The stability of Sahel G5 is of utmost strategic importance not only for the entire region of West and North Africa, but also for Europe and the US. Since Niger is geographically situated in between conflict affected countries, external security actors see its stability as key to both regional and global security. The eruption of the Malian conflict in 2012, the ongoing crisis in Libya and the insurgency of Jihadi group Boko Haram in North-Eastern Nigeria raised concerns about Niger's 'sandwich situation' among external actors who fear that armed groups such as Al Qaida in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State affiliated armed groups (ex-Boko Haram) will install a safe base on Nigerien territory, much of which is not fully controlled by state institutions. It is feared that they could use these bases to generate revenue by controlling illegal flows of goods, money and people and key resources (oil, uranium), which could fund their terrorist activities.

For Western security actors the weakness of the Nigerien security services is a major concern. This has put an onus on enhancing the capacity of state security services, providing training and funding for border control, countering violent extremism and radicalisation, and preventing irregular migrations toward Europe. Despite pledging to address both development and security problems for the populations of Niger, the stabilization and the tightening of Nigerien security have clearly been the priority.

NIGER IN THE POST-GADDAFI REGIONAL SECURITY CONTEXT

The collapse of the Libyan regime of Muhammad Gaddafi in 2011, led to an unexpected destabilization of the Sahel region that profoundly affected Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Nigeria. The return of a number of mercenaries hired by the Gaddafi regime to their countries of origin dramatically changed local, national and regional conflict dynamics. In Mali, it resulted in a new Tuareg rebellion in the North claiming self-determination. This was followed by an upsurge of religious armed groups (including groups affiliated to AQIM) and a military coup against the regime of President Amani Toumani Touré. In Niger the return of former mercenaries from Gaddafi's army was relatively well managed, but there were fear of a spill-over of the Malian conflict into Niger. So far, this has not happened on a broad scale.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram benefitted from the access to thousands of weapons originating from the Gaddafi regime's vast caches. As a result, Boko Haram was able to take control over a vast part of north-eastern Nigeria. Since the beginning of 2015, the jihadi group has been conducting attacks against both military and civil targets in Niger, Cameroon and Chad. In March 2015, Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant group and renamed Boko Haram as 'Islamic State, West Africa province'. Although a Multinational Joint Task Force authorised by the AU was created in January 2015 it has not been able to effectively counter Boko Haram. Nigerien military sources reported that Boko Haram's recent attacks in Diffa (south-eastern Niger) were conducted by Diffa residents and not by foreigners. This observation caused much surprise and led to a critical reflexion on the ways the Boko Haram threat had been tackled so far. Although military intervention and border-control remain cornerstones of the strategy it was acknowledged that they could not stand alone.

Despite its deadly attacks against civilians, Boko Haram still recruits militants in Niger as well as in neighbouring countries. It is therefore imperative to better understand the roots of the conflicts and the way the insurgent group recruits members. So far, the strategies used to counter the group have been a combination of increased intelligence gathering and military intervention. However, the adherence of youth to Jihadist groups is increasingly becoming a concern for external actors, including the US.

Since the beginning of the insurgency in 2009, attacks by Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria and on the islands of Lake Chad have forced an estimated 150,000 people to flee across the border to Diffa. In February 2015, new assaults occurred in Diffa town prompting the government to declare the region in state of emergency. Then in April 2015 the Jihadi group attacked Niger's army at Lake Chad's Karamga Island. Niger's military suffered heavy losses (at least 48 soldiers were killed and 46 others were missing). These attacks caused several thousand Nigeriens to seek shelter in the city of Diffa. In the process crucial food production activities were seriously disrupted. Since the region is dependent on the trade with Nigeria (import of oil, export of smoked fish and red peppers, etc.) and suffers from perennial food shortages, this sparked a severe humanitarian and economic crisis in this region.

In response national and international NGOs as well as UN organisations intervened through humanitarian and development aid. For its part the Nigerien government reacted with heavy repression and military interventions, and by forcefully removing civilians from areas where military operations were undertaken.

Since Niger's government declared Diffa in a state of emergency the *Forces de Défense et de Sécurité du Niger* (The Defense and Security Forces of Niger, DSF) have arrested and imprisoned some 1,100 suspected militants. Furthermore, as many attacks were perpetrated on motorbikes the DSF overreacted by confiscating and burning civilians' motorbikes in the city of Diffa. There were reports from Niger's National Commission for Human Rights of civilian's homes being raided by security forces, and of innocent people being arbitrarily arrested and tortured. In addition, the government's ban on the sale of fish and red pepper has compounded crisis in this area. This heavy-handed military response left the population of Diffa even more vulnerable and possibly more receptive to Boko Haram's anti-western and anti-government ideologies (see text box).

Both donors and Nigerien actors have been concerned over the government of Niger's ways of handling insecurity, which seems to repeat the same errors as Nigeria's government. The seriousness of the humanitarian situation, the human rights violations carried out by the army and new severe restrictions of press freedom contradict the stated objectives of donor policies. However, in the context of looming (presidential, legislative and local) elections in 2016, there is a consensus among donors that the Nigerien state must be stabilized in order to avoid a potential collapse of the country. As one high-ranking foreign diplomat said, with regards to human rights violation carried out by government security forces in Diffa: "We don't do what we ought to do!"ⁱⁱ.

The donor community, thus, is facing a dilemma: How can external actors simultaneously compel the government of Niger to respect human rights and fight effectively against a common adversary? For the time being there is a tacit acceptance of the status quo, wherein the DSF and the army in search for terrorists repress local populations indiscriminately.

However, these concerns should be taken seriously because the behaviour of the Nigerien security forces undermines the legitimacy of the government and even the state's. In combination with widespread corruption and the neglect of provision of public services for Niger's poorest, this has paved the way for the emergence of new security providers including community-based and Islamic organisations, such as the Izala (Hahonou 2015).

Non-state security actors

In Niger, security services are provided by a range of non-state actors in areas where the state security provision has been seen as rather inefficient. In remote rural areas, pastoralists often organize themselves to protect their herds or prevent competing groups to conquest pastoral areas. These alternative security arrangements could be seen as a re-activation of precolonial forms of security that have never totally been replaced by the state. Such organisations often take the form of armed groups and ethnic or clan-based militias. Furthermore, the state's inability or unwillingness to provide security for ordinary people has given rise to community-based organisations (not unlike in eastern Congo) but also to faith-based security organisations, such as the Izala. The latter are becoming increasingly visible as service providers. They are important to mention because their emergence in the field of security provision often pronounce more profound, political agendas of social transformation in Niger, and in particular in the practice of Islam and the relationship between the state and its citizens. While some Nigeriens see the reformist movements as one of the most serious threats to the security in Niger, others see them as a possible path toward a reform of Nigerien society and politics. It appears, though, that they are increasingly viewed as legitimate security providers, especially in the eyes of the poorest, but also some middle-class civil servants who actively engage with them. Their discourses offer a cohesive and integrated vision of society that proposes a return to a moral life and the rule of Islamic law, and as such they open a path to Islamic citizenship.

MUTUAL INTERESTS AND WESTERN EXTRA-TERRITORIAL SOVEREIGNTY

Since the era of global terrorism started in the Sahel a high degree of mutual dependency has developed in the field of security governance between Niger and its traditional development partners (bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies). Both sides are well aware of this:

'Our states don't have the capacity to secure the country against terrorist organisations. We have mutual interests. That is where the technical and military cooperation steps in. But we generally lack sufficient manpower, funding and necessary equipment, you know... In fact, Niger is waging a war for France, Nigeria, and the Chinese.'ⁱⁱⁱ

Niger's stability has become a major concern for external actors who have initiated a number of programmes in Niger and the Sahel region to strengthen security governance. So far, despite a number of incidents and sporadic terrorist attacks in the country, the DSF together with their Western allies have been able to contain attacks and intrusions of foreign groups and to avoid a generalization of terror and violence.

EU: ENSURING STABILITY IN NIGER AND EUROPE

The EU is a relatively new actor in the field of security provision. In 2003, the EU adopted a Common Security and Defence Policy, which provided an institutional framework for the launching of military, police and crisis-management missions to restore peace in Africa and elsewhere (Bromley, 2014: 133-4). In Niger, the EU intervenes through the Delegation of the European Commission (the executive body of the EU) and a programme called *EUCAP Sahel Niger*, which is a civilian mission. Officially, the European Commission's main objective is the stability of Niger with a special focus on improving the management of border regions. EU's main funding instrument remains the European Development Fund (EDF). But as many of my interlocutors affirmed, EU's financial tools and means are very limited. Therefore defence-related expenses are bilaterally covered by member states.

Following the military coup against Mamadou Tanja's regime in February 2010, the EU held back € 100 million intended for development aid to Niger. Such decision had devastating consequences for highly aid-dependent Niger. The impact was however mitigated by the implementation of the EU's Sahel strategy. This regional strategy, which involved Mali, Mauritania and Niger, was allocated over € 660 million to the region under the 10th EDF (2007-2013). In the framework of its Sahel strategy, the EU further mobilised additional financial resources for development and security related projects worth € 167 million.

In principle, EUCAP should provide activities that answer the needs expressed by Nigerien partners. Yet, in practice, EUCAP proposes a range of training sessions that matches the profile of EUCAP's experts in Niamey, and the DSF simply agrees. In other words, the supply defines the demand rather than the other way around. According to EUCAP experts, this constitutes a challenge when it comes to implementing a collaborative approach, as it leads to a lack of ownership by trainees and by governmental institutions.^{iv} This problem is compounded by the absence of a coherent national security strategy. Despite repeated requests by the EU and a number of member states to entice the government of Niger to formulate a strategy, no action has been taken in this direction.

Although the EU is being criticized by various actors for pursuing its own interests in supporting security governance in Niger, there is a general understanding that the government of Niger and the EU need one another. Another critique highlights France's domination of EUCAP Sahel in Niger. Some European experts even argue that EUCAP-Sahel Niger 'is a French mission under European flag'.

FRANCE: BETWEEN CLIENTELISM AND NEO-COLONIALISM

As Niger's former colonial power, France occupies a particular position in Niger. To a great extent, French influence over Niger's economy, politics and military domain reflects the tight ties that have been maintained after Niger was granted its nominal independence in 1960. But France is also highly dependent on Niger, which is a major supplier of the uranium used in the French nuclear power system. French military interventions in Mali and Niger, respectively, in early 2013 serve as a reminder of the "role of *gendarme*" that France plays in its former colonies. France justifies its intervention by referring to Niger's (and other Sahel countries') lack of capacities to counter terrorist threats.

The French security services argue that France's special and historical ties to Niger justify its leading position among EU member states. 'We possess an advantage that other cooperation agencies don't have: continuity. Since 1962, we have French special advisers at the highest level of the state apparatus. Our technical assistants are totally embedded and immersed in Nigerien security services'.^v

Indeed, as it is suggested in this quotation, France collaborates as much as it competes with multilateral and other bilateral donors in providing training to the DSF, especially in sectors with high visibility. However, the extent to which France uses EU institutions and means to establish its political influence in Niger and protect its economic interests remains an open question.

The bulk of the French troops are positioned in Agadez region to counter smuggling in the northern part of the country (contraband, drugs, weapons, suspected members of terrorist organisations) and to secure the uranium mines in Arlit and Imuraren. The mines are exploited by French company Areva in collaboration with Nigerien state owned companies Somaïr and Cominak. Areva pays tiny royalties for Niger's uranium—an estimated 5.5 percent of its market value (Burgis, 2015). France also intervenes in the field of development with a small security-related development project in Agadez region that involves 40 Tuareg ex-fighters and 20 widows of soldiers, and a number of more traditional programmes (water supply, education, health, electricity) mainly in the Niamey area.

Since 2011, the relations between French and Nigerien ruling elites have been particularly tight.^{vi} However, many observers including civil society organisations (in France and Niger), Nigerien opposition parties and even members of the donor community in Niamey are increasingly critical of the way in which Areva presents the alliance as a win-win situation, of the management of insecurity in Diffa (human rights abuses, arrest of civil society activists, etc.), and of Niger's ruling elites allegiance to France. The alliance between France and Niger's ruling elites allows the former to protect its investments while it guarantees the stability of the latter at the head of the Nigerien state. The tacit acceptance of the human rights violation carried out by Nigerien government and DSF should be seen in this light. The absence of sanctions against the government of Niger translates the accountability of Niger vis-à-vis France to the detriment of human security and long term development perspectives for Niger.

CONCLUSIONS

Since 2011, Niger has evolved from a highly aid-dependent country to a highly security-dependent one. This new development for Niger has also affected the situation of Western actors, which have become increasingly dependent on Niger. The former cannot secure their interests (uranium, migration control, counter-terrorism strategies) without this key regional ally. The latter (the poorest country in the world) cannot secure its population and territory without massive external support. As a result of foreign intervention, the expansion of violent conflicts from neighbouring countries to Niger has been relatively limited and contained so far. However, the efforts devoted to short term military and humanitarian response have also diverted attention from long term developmental perspectives. While Western actors focus on stability (i.e. national budget balance, security, political continuity of the ruling party) and promote state-building, human rights abuses are common, especially in Diffa region, and state legitimacy is being compromised in a region where the central state never had much influence. In a context of a long trend of quasi-absence of public services in this particularly marginalized region, the excessive responses by the DSF to terrorist attacks have aggravated the state's lack of legitimacy, and so has the repression of critical voices by the government. This has already led to the rise of non-state security actors, but it may also fuel more radical and violent movements. Despite growing domestic disapproval, the President's close political ties with the US and French militaries allow the government to feel protected and to resist domestic calls for reform in the field of security governance, and the governance of the country more generally.

For western external actors it is worth considering if their platform of collaboration should be broadened to include the emerging non-state security providers who hold more legitimacy among many of Niger's poorest.

Although donors are aware of power and human rights abuses, they find it difficult to do more than reprimanding the government since a suspension of budgetary support to Niger would undermine the government and consequently threaten the stability of Niger. This form of accountability vis-à-vis external allies raises concern about the legitimacy of the government at the national level. The growing contestation around the management of security issues by the government is becoming a source of concern in the context of the upcoming 2016 presidential elections (along with legislative and municipal elections) in which incumbent Mahamadou Issoufou is set to seek a second term. It might even become a new source of instability.

Recommendations

Donors and partners of the Nigerien government should focus more on issues of legitimacy and long-term perspectives.

Security provision is a crucial dimension of state building, but it is not the only sector that requires sustained efforts to build the fragile legitimacy of the Nigerien state. The process of state-building in Niger is intimately related to the capacity of

the state to provide a range of public services in ways which support its legitimacy. It is particularly important to envision a coherent, long-term strategy that addresses the underlying causes of insecurity. “Stabilisation” is not synonymous with maintaining the status quo and external actors should consider how to promote meaningful social change and political reforms to defuse potential violent conflicts and recruitment for violent groups like Boko Haram.

The case study of Niger raises two specific points of interest for the Nigerien government and its partners:

- a) They should reconsider the policy towards non-state security providers in both urban and rural areas (e.g. reformist non-violent movements and ethnic militias). Their increased importance points to the lack of everyday security provision by state forces. In addition non-state security providers often articulate political and social grievances that should be taken into account. Therefore they should not necessarily be treated as enemies of the state, but rather as potential forces for positive social change.

- b) They should consider focussing on the issue of corruption in security sector reform: Corruption in Niger pervades all sectors of public services including the security sector. Sectorial reforms require a real political commitment to formulate a national strategy to create a legal framework, and to enforce new service norms (see DIIS Policy brief ‘Corruption, insecurity and border control in Niger’, February 2016). If not sanctioned by justice, human rights abuses, predatory behaviour and extortion will continue to weaken state legitimacy and reinforce the divide between the state and Nigerien rural populations.

REFERENCES

- Aning Kwesi, E., Okyere, F. & Abdallah, M., 2012. *Addressing Emerging Security Threats in Post-Gaddafi Sahel and the ECOWAS Response to the Malian Crisis*, ", Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Training Centre, Policy Brief.
- Brachet, J., 2005. Constructions of Territoriality in the Sahara: the Transformation of Spaces of Transit. *Stichproben. Vienna Journal of African Studies*, (8), pp.237–253.
- Bromley, M., 2014. The European Union. In I. Olawale & E. Sköns, eds. *Security Activities of External Actors in Africa*. Solna: SIPRI and Oxford University Press, pp. 131–148.
- Burgis, T., 2015. *The Looting Machine: Warlords, Tycoons, Smugglers, and the Systematic Theft of Africa's Wealth*, London: William Collins.
- Darbon, D. (2001) 'De l'introuvable à l'innommable: fonctionnaires et professionnels de l'action publique dans les Afriques', *Autrepart* 20: 27–42.
- Owen, O. (2013) 'Positions of security and the security of position: bureaucratic prebendalism inside the state' in W. Adebani and E. Obadare (eds), *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: critical interpretations*. New York NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

END NOTES

- i* Public statement, Mahamadou Issoufou, President of Niger, Niamey, April 2013.
- ii* Interview, high-ranking diplomat, Niamey, June 2015.
- iii* Interview, high-level Nigerien official, Niamey, June 2015.
- iv* EUCAP staff argues that DSF officers are mainly interested by the daily allowances received for each training and by building their cv.
- v* Interview, French Embassy in Niamey, June 2015.
- vi* The close connections between French and Nigerien elites might well be illustrated by the number of visits paid by high officials in Paris and Niamey. The President of Niger visited France in January 2015 after the bomb attack at Charlie Hebdo and came back again in June 2015. In 2014, the President of the French Republic came in Niamey, then Prime Minister a few months later. This was followed in 2015 by a visit by the Minister of Defence in early January, then the Foreign Minister in February and the Interior Minister in May, only to name the most important. Moreover, following a request of the government of Niger in July 2015, Antoine Anfré, French Ambassador in Niamey, was suddenly replaced because he was too critical vis-à-vis the lack of transparency of the looming 2016 elections.