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Securitisation initiatives and the lingering security challenges in Sub-Saharan Sahel region: An appraisal

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ABSTRACT

Security in the Sahel region has traditionally been studied through a realist prism, emphasising military concerns and the pre-eminent influence of great powers in shaping local security concerns. The paper reviews the securitisation initiatives in Africa's Sahel. It specifically explores Buzan and Waever's 'securitisation' framework to re-evaluate securitising discourse and the contemporary initiatives of the EU, France and the U.S.A. in the Sahelian States. Its main observation is that the central security actors in the Sahel have over the years paid less attention to the securitisation of threats in the region. The paper provides indicators of successful securitisation, which includes but goes beyond speech acts. It underscores the reality that though the securitisation of Africa's Sahel has helped to legitimise the 'war on terrorism', it has very little to offer for Africa's development problems. The paper posits that securitisation, though a laudable initiative, does not sufficiently address root causes of terrorism, which are not military but social and economic. It thus recommends a holistic approach to addressing the security challenges in the Sahel; which must include: providing increased safe access for those who want to work in the West while also assisting to create economic prospects and opportunities in the region.

KEYWORDS

Securitisation; terrorism; EU; Sahel region; intervention; militarisation

Introduction

The Africa's Sahel as Bernardo Venturi rightly observed has become for EU and other actors an area of experimentation on the security–migration–development nexus. The Sahel in recent years has been in the global spotlight due to famines, terrorism, anti-state rebellions, and arms, drugs and human trafficking.¹ It would be recalled that the collapse of the Gaddafi regime allowed terrorist groups to gain prominence in the Sahel region and created the vacuum for the increase in the number of refugees, smugglers as well as increase in violent Islamic militant activities in the region.² Consequently, the region finds itself in the securitisation era. Indeed, as a mechanism for ensuring peace and security in this region, the war on terror in the Sahel presented the general framework legitimising the hard securitisation of the region. This begs the question: Has securitisation been able to offer enough panacea to

Africa's development problems? It is possible to analyse how 'securitization works by examining official programs, laws and statements'.³ The securitisation act is nevertheless successful having convinced a more restrictive audience on the 'existential nature of the threat'.⁴ It is thus being emphasised here that internal priorities should not divert from the pivotal objectives of eradicating poverty in this region.

This paper will thus examine instances of securitising discourse in the context of the Sub-Saharan-Sahel region, official statements, programmes by the U.S.A., EU and France. The relevant structural factors underlying security will be discussed in addition to their role and implication. With these developments in mind, the paper draws attention to the fact that: Behind the legitimacy of threat in the Sahel region, by extension – the French interventions, United States Counter Terrorism initiatives, and EU Sahel initiatives lies a successful process of securitisation; but securitisation, though a laudable initiative does not address the root causes of terrorism and insecurity, which are not military but social and economic. Thus, the securitisation of Africa-Sahel has helped legitimise the 'war on terrorism' which has moved the focus toward a 'risk/fear/threat' project, but has done very little to offer for Africa's developmental problems.⁵ Rather, we see the rollback of advances made with regard to human rights, democracy and respect for the rule of law.⁶ The implication/consequence of the process of securitisation is the growth and increase of an external military presence in Africa which over time becomes institutionalised. The greater the domestic and external intervention, militarisation and securitisation, the higher the probability of a power struggle between the forces of destabilisation/insecurity – terrorists and rebels – and those of military security promotion – the U.S.A. France, EU, and incumbent African regimes.⁷ The unfolding consequence and/or action-reaction pattern between state actors and terrorist/rebel groups could be represented this way.

The unfolding consequence and/or action-reaction pattern between state actors and terrorist/rebel groups in Africa could be described in such a situation where the effect of terrorism follows the asymmetric impacts of counter-terrorism, and the implication and consequential effect of the latter defines the increase of external military presence in Africa, the consequence of which is securitisation. The greatness of the impact of securitisation leads to a higher probability of increased terrorism occasioned by power struggle between the forces of destabilisation/insecurity and those of military security promotion and as a result, define the increase in militarisation and securitisation. Consequently, the current situation in the Sahel region could be seen as a combination of increased militarisation and securitisation.⁸

This paper applies the concept of audience from the securitisation theory perspective or 'classical Copenhagen version of securitization'. Though Waever's concept of audience is disputable, he deserves an appreciation for making one thing very clear that: 'the audience does not have to be "the public" or "the people", it can be the relevant group that needs to be convinced', with no obstacles or exclusions on who that group may be.⁹ This argument explicitly persuades readers that audience means 'relevant audience' or 'lead actors' rather than the general public.

Guided by this theoretical framework, this study contends that the securitisation initiative of the Sahel needs to be legitimate in the 'eyes' of the United States Congress, French parliament and the Council of the European Union. Ultimately then, the conceptualisation of legitimacy of this paper lies in the intersubjective conception of norms and values between these three. By examining these three, this paper does not contend that other audiences have not impacted the legitimisation dynamics.

There are, a range of challenges to the application of securitisation theories to the non-Western world. Whilst a number of scholars have undertaken such efforts, we must also be conscious of such issues. Thus, pertinent question(s) that deserve attention in this paper include:

- (i) How can securitisation theory help in understanding the legitimisation of the French interventions, United States Counter Terrorism initiatives, EU Sahel initiatives, and speeches on threat magnification in the Sahel? and
- (ii) How can securitisation address the root causes of terrorism in the Sahel, which are not primarily military but social and/or economic?

For the purpose of advancing a preliminary evaluation concerning the tension and the processes of securitisation generates in the Sahel, the paper would therefore define the Sahel region vis-a-vis the conflict dynamics in the region. There is no internationally accepted definition of the 'Sahel' or the 'Sahel-Saharan' region. Geographic definitions of the Sahel region vary. Each organisational actor (AU, EU, the U.S.A., United Nations, etc.) defines the region differently according to its own needs, strategy, interests and perceptions. For example, United Nation Integrated Strategy (UNISS)¹⁰ and United Nations Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UNPP)¹¹ see it as encompassing West, Central and North African countries. To the European strategy¹² for the Sahel, the Sahel-Saharan region springs from the very West through to the Red Sea while the EU¹³ External Action Service¹⁴ sees it in a narrow sense as encompassing four or five Western and/or Central African countries, specifically to suit her common approach and strategy.

Similarly, in its Senate hearing in 2009 the U.S.A. clarified what it understood constitutes the Sahel region. Noting that the region covers those territories on the southern border and directly to the south of the Sahara Desert. It stresses that for the purpose of U.S.A. counterterrorism, it includes parts or all of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal.¹⁵ In view of the above, and while the geopolitical dynamics that define the Sahel can hardly be grasped without reference to the broader Sahara region that contains it, this study follows the definition by Luis Simon et al.¹⁶ and the Norwegian Refugee Council¹⁷ which states that

referring to the space delimited by the Mediterranean Sea in the north, Mauritania and Senegal on the Atlantic Ocean in the west through parts of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan to Eritrea on the Red Sea coast in the east and Chad in the south, as the 'broader Sahara' geopolitical region within which the Sahel is inserted.

To facilitate this analysis, the paper draws upon a number of initiatives in the Sahel by the U.S.A., the EU, France and selected official speeches (Figure 1).

Theoretical framework/conceptualisation

Securitisation: A conceptual definition

The concept of securitisation as highlighted earlier is generally associated with the Copenhagen school of security studies, which is generally associated with Ole Wæver,¹⁸ Buzan et al.,¹⁹ and with other scholars and researchers. Ole Wæver first defined securitisation in 1995²⁰ in reference to the discursive construction of threats. 'Discursive construction of threat' here as explained by Buzan et al.²¹ entails a process whereby an agent presents and prioritise an issue as 'security' and claims a need for and a right to treat it by 'extraordinary means'. Securitisation can thus

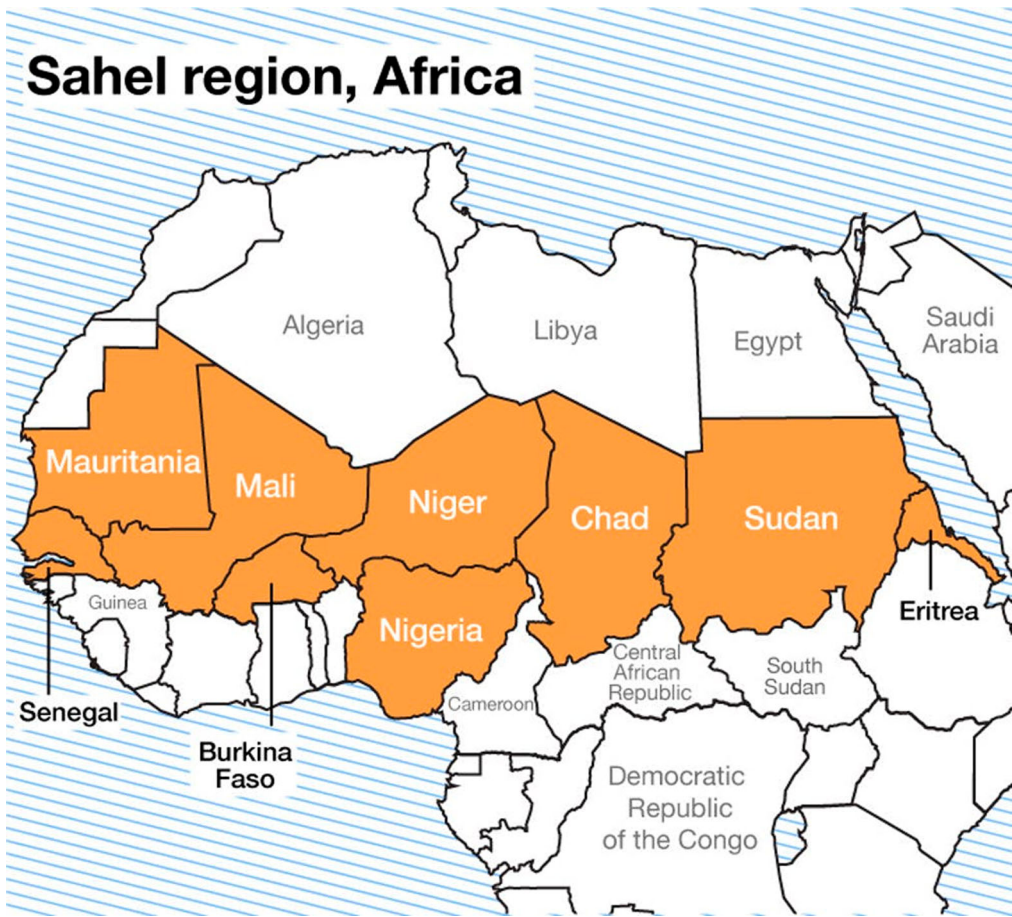


Figure 1. The Sahel Region. Source: 'Sahel Region, Africa'. *The Conversation*. February 28, 2017. The Conversation/Zenobia Ahmed, CC BY-SA.

aptly be explained to be the process by which state actors transform subjects from regular political issues into matters of 'security': this enables extraordinary means to be used in the guise of security. Security and threats as argued by Wæver are not an objective matter. Instead, security discourse is characterised by the endeavour of which actors construct issues as threats to security, and granting an issue utmost priority. In essence, the issue is a verbal construction and presented as an existential threat. A prerequisite is that the issue of concern has to be accepted by a relevant audience in order for political leaders to be suspended from normal politics and enabled to take the emergency measures needed.²² Following this notion, security is a form of negotiation between speaker and audience, though significantly conditioned by the extent to which the speaker holds a position of authority within a particular group.²³ According to Wæver, a successful securitisation tends to involve the articulation of threat, 'only from the specific place, in an institutional voice, by elites'.²⁴

The theory of securitisation

When defining how and when something becomes a security issue, a divergence of views between realist and constructivist approaches emerges. Scholars within the securitisation

field are thus divided between the Copenhagen School and the PARIS school²⁵ While the former takes securitisation as a given empirical fact, the latter considers it the result of a politically motivated social construction, whereby a security threat becomes such if it is labelled accordingly.²⁶

Securitisation theory observes that sometimes in a democracy the government must justify the suspension of normal politics to the public.²⁷ One of the earlier stated facilitating condition was that, a securitising actor should hold a position of authority. It has become clear now that the study rotates around the U.S.A., France and the EU governments, a class of political elites that hold positions of authority and importantly are relevant to speak of security.²⁸ Thus, if the Sahel region is securitised in the U.S.A., France and in Europe in general (which are regarded as democratic), we should be seeing securitising moves from government officials – a rhetorical justification of why intervention, for instance, is the only way to remove the threat emanating from the region.

It is imperative to note that securitising actors are not limited to the political class, they include security professionals such as the police, intelligence services, customs, immigration services, border guards and the military, all these play an important role in defining the security landscape. They function in a field of security branded by competition over the 'right' knowledge, over the threat and other risks, as well as rivalry over the 'right' solution²⁹ which include competition over increase in security budget by security chiefs. There are also functional actors such as the media, academia, non – governmental agencies, individuals and think tanks who help to frame storylines about the existentially threatening nature of an issue, they can influence the dynamics of the field of security but do not have the power to move an issue beyond politics, as they create the divide between 'us' and 'them'.

The Copenhagen School (CS)

The Copenhagen School came into prominence in the early 90s with research undertaken by academics Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute. This School of thought conceptualised securitisation as a speech act that emerges from the inter-subjective construction of security threats to a referent object. According to Wæver,³⁰ the speech act is performative as it is intended to achieve a specific objective. By this, discursive politics between the securitising actor and the audience influences the construction of a security threats to a referent object according to this school.³¹ In other words, the speech bears certain actions, hence, it is illocutionary.

Originally developed by Ole Wæver, the concept of securitisation in an attempt to circumvent the debate between the objective and subjective claim of threat, the Copenhagen school came up with the argument associated with the speech act, where the fundamental issue is not if threats are real or not, but the ways in which certain issues (troop movements, migration, or environmental degradation) can be socially constructed as threats. According to the Copenhagen School, therefore, the fundamental mechanism of securitisation is the *speech act*, meaning that 'by labeling something a security issue it becomes one'.³² A *securitizing actor* by stating that a particular *referent object* is threatened in its existence claims a right to extraordinary measures to ensure the referent objects survival.³³ The issue is then moved out of the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, where it can be dealt with swiftly and by extraordinary means, without regards to normal rules and regulations of policy making.³⁴

Ole Wæver and his Copenhagen colleagues point out that, security qualifies as securitisation when securitising speech act needs to trail a specific rhetorical structure, derived from

war and its historical inferences of survival, urgency, threat, and defence. By labelling something as 'security', an issue is sensationalised as one of the supreme priorities.

However, the epistemological arrangements of the Copenhagen School have been criticised in two ways. First, critics argue that theorisations of the School remain incomplete, as discursive politics explains how security threat emerges but stop short of illuminating the actual processes involved in the intersubjective construction of those very same threats. They view speech acts as the actions between the securitising actor and the audience, which goes beyond the illocution of a securitising actor.³⁵

PARIS School (PS)

PARIS here is an acronym for Political Anthropological Research for International Sociology.³⁶ This school of thought argues by contrast, that securitisation is both a speech as well as a pragmatic act. While the Paris School in general still sees a security utterance as a central feature of securitisation, they have extended it beyond mere security utterances, to include the practices through which security is exercised and the particular tools that allow for transformations within securitising practices.

Balzacq³⁷ in this regard explains that the historical, socio-political, and economic conditions of a particular state according to the PARIS school may influence the nature of the 'speech act', securitising actor, the audience, in addition to their actions on issues such as counter-terrorism and migration.

Bigo³⁸ identifies the developing nexus of internal and external security in relation to the securitisation of migration within the EU: The police overtakes missions outside a sovereign's territory, while the military increasingly encroaches internal security. In such an interpenetrated security field, different security professionals and institutions struggle for influence (i.e. funding and priority), while the field as a whole struggle against other societal fields to maintain its position of overarching importance which it holds due to the existential nature of the threat it is answering. According to Bigo,³⁹ they use their 'expert security knowledge' to define a threat that needs to be answered hence, they are 'semi-autonomous'. Such a securitisation from both the internal and the external angle can result in what Bigo tagged a constant 'governmentality of unease', that allows for the security field to define the threats it answers itself. In its power of defining threats, the security sector is under the constant legitimisation of battling 'existential threats', therewith freeing it of the auspices of democratic accountability. Bigo thus extends securitisation beyond the speech act or pragmatic act onto field practices of different agencies and the way in which securitisation is applied in the material world.

By implication, therefore, the Paris approach as Njoku and Romanuk⁴⁰ observe, provides platforms from which explanatory measures can be deployed to fully comprehend the nature of the audience, and factors that may influence the audience's acceptance or rejection of a securitising moves by the one seeking to securitise. According to scholars like Balzacq⁴¹ and Cote (2016)⁴² the Copenhagen School's normative approach of understanding the various concepts on securitisation results in an approach unsuitable for empirical studies. Hence, the Paris School developed further the concept of securitisation of the Copenhagen School in two ways. Firstly, it has extended the conception of a speech act to a pragmatic act that pays due attention to audience, context and rhetoric. Secondly, the PS moved beyond the securitising utterance itself to include both the security field in which different security agents struggle to securitise a particular issue to obtain better funding and higher importance, and the tools through which securitisation is exercised.

Wilkinson⁴³ on his part, criticises both the Copenhagen and Sociological Schools for propagating Western-oriented epistemology of securitisation theory. The nature of their orientation or Western focus raises questions on the applicability of securitisation theory outside the West.

Other overviews of securitisation theory include, Huysmans,⁴⁴ it critically discusses the idea of securitisation, and also links securitisation theory to the concept of 'security complex' and the multiple sectors of security, Balzacq Thierry,⁴⁵ draws on securitisation and speech act theory, Emmers Ralf,⁴⁶ provides examples on how to apply securitisation theory empirically, Buzan et al.,⁴⁷ outline the concept of securitisation that follows a specific grammar and rhetorical structure, as well as its dynamics in the military, political, economic, and environmental sectors, McDonald Matt, points out some limits of the approach of securitisation theory, noting that its definition is too narrowly conceived. Similar critique was noted by Peoples, Columba, and Nick Vaughan-Williams.⁴⁸

Wæver,⁴⁹ discusses normative implications of securitising issues, Williams,⁵⁰ provides an assessment of the foundations of securitisation. Abrahamsen,⁵¹ analyses the securitisation of the African continent by former Prime Minister Tony Blair; noting that interactions with Africa had shifted from the category of 'development/humanitarianism' toward the classification of 'risk/fear/threat' in the framework of the 'war on terrorism'. Similarly, on the Sahel, Lotfi Sour,⁵² noted the 'steady build-up of foreign military and intelligence forces in the Sahel in line with US and European attempts to counter the spread and threat of radical Islamist'. While Daria Davitti and Anca-Elena Ursu,⁵³ argued that 'Securitising the Sahel Will Not Stop Migration'. Guilherme Ziebell de Oliveira and Nilton Cesar Fernandes Cardoso,⁵⁴ including Conteh-Morgan,⁵⁵ analyses the process of securitisation on the African continent in the twenty-first century following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the U.S.A. Stating that the threat perception that emerged after 9/11 fuelled new forms of securitisation which resulted in the framing of relations with the African continent as matters of national security and took the form of arming African states. Agnes Wanjiru Behr⁵⁶ argues that, 'the securitization of Africa has changed academic discourse in several ways by broadening the concept of "security" and its role in reshaping the relationship between the continent and global powers'.

The implication is that the politics of terrorism and counterterrorism is about threat amplification and that the representational violence caused by attacks is out of proportion to the amount of deaths it is responsible for. This threat magnification demonstrates the exceptionality of the threat, which, in turn, requires urgent and extraordinary responses. Thinking of the Sahel region in this way is not only detrimental to the deliberative process but also limits the understanding of terrorism and the Sahel region in generally.

To some extent, both schools can be seen as complementary: security is not only about exceptional measures but also about the perpetration of practices – enacted for instance by security arm – that makes security measures operable and normal. The two schools, however, have different understandings of the political process. And – more relevant for this analysis – they capture different ways in which issues are subtracted from open democratic debates.⁵⁷ While the Copenhagen School outlines how appeals to security can bring about exceptional measures, without regards to normal rules and regulations of policy making, the Paris School shows how issues are transformed into security issues outside the political debate, and security practices are implemented without a clear formulation of the threat. Both can provide relevant insights on the implications of securitisation initiatives and the lingering security challenges in Sub-Saharan Sahel region.

Securitisation of the Sahel by the U.S.A., France and the EU

The analysis of this section is to investigate the U.S.A., France and the EU as securitising actors in the Sahel region. However, before investigating the securitisation moves by the three actors, it would be useful to provide an overview of the presence of the alleged apprehension of the actors on terrorist organisations targeting European and American interests and citizens in Africa/Sahel region. As the actors view the situation not just as threat to the security of the States and individuals in the region, but also as threats to them and more broadly as a threat to the Western way of life.

With the above-overview of the geographical framework of the Sahel region in mind, it is pertinent to state that the instability in post-Gaddafi Sahel has unarguably affected other countries, ultimately resulting to social and political crises, triggered by the inflow of refugees and weapons out of Libya, heading to surrounding countries, such as Niger, Nigeria and Mali, whose stability was already precarious. The increase in the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria, Niger and other countries as well as the current conflict in Mali which started in 2012 and the role of the Tuareg during the uprising in Mali, drew its trigger from the aftermath of the death of Gaddafi in Libya. These instances continued to have massive impacts on the Sahelian population and States,⁵⁸ as well as broader regional implications due to the flow of refugees and weapons including the spillover effects of insecurity, ultimately resulting to regional conflict dynamics.⁵⁹

Following the rise of terrorists' groups such as: the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) – which is a militant jihadist organisation in the Maghreb and West Africa formed by the merger of Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, Al-Mourabitoun and the Saharan branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.⁶⁰ It is the official branch of Al-Qaeda in Mali, after its leaders swore allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri⁶¹; the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara which is a militant jihadist organisation in Mali formed on 15 May 2015 as the result of a split within the militant group of Al-Mourabitoun, with more sympathisers from the Gao Region⁶² near Ménaka⁶³; Ansarul allegedly founded by Malam Ibrahim Dicko, is a militant Islamist group active in Burkina Faso and in Mali. Following his proselytisation in Burkina Faso's Soum province, it is rumoured that Dicko travelled to northern Mali, where he met and trained alongside Amadou Koufa, the purported leader of the al-Qaeda-aligned and Fulani-dominant Macina Liberation Front (MLF) militant group⁶⁴; and, Boko Haram, the terrorist group based in northeastern Nigeria, which is also active in carrying out deadly activities in Chad, Niger and northern Cameroon (Lake Chad Basin area).⁶⁵ The apprehension of the U.S.A. and the EU that these terrorist organisations targets European and American interests and citizens in Africa presented the region not just as threat to the security of the States and individuals in the region, but also a threat to the U.S.A., Western Europe and more broadly as a threat to the Western way of life. This is to state that the securitisation of the Sahel region affects the societal terrain as well as the military and the political terrain, in this case African-Sahel.

Counter-terrorism programmes in the Sahel, from PSI to TSCTP: The U.S.A. as a securitising actor

Terrorism has been a major challenge and threat to peace in the U.S.A. and indeed in the entire world. As Rychovská⁶⁶ noted, terrorism remains 'the key threat for international peace and security'. Arguably, the U.S.A. and the world have suffered several terror attacks with the worst being 9/11.⁶⁷ The post 9/11 attack initiated strategic policies for the U.S.A.

Just two months after 9/11, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) held a briefing on 'Africa, Islam and Terrorism'.⁶⁸ The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) issued a special report on 'Terrorism in the Horn of Africa'.⁶⁹ The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) promptly produced series on the national security implications on the rising importance of Africa in the war on terror.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) reported about the need of a comprehensive security-development approach to underdevelopment in Africa.⁷¹ Following the above, it is unarguable that immediately after 9/11, the claim about Africa being synonymous with terrorism and insecurity acquired political weight through the endorsements of the above institutions.⁷² Similarly, following the portrayal of Africa as a threat and as a continent developing into a terrorist haven with reference to the threat emanating from the continent, the DoD noted that: 'Extremists were exploiting areas struggling with resource scarcity, weak national institutions, poverty and inexperienced militaries ... endemic imbalances in the distribution of wealth, ... disenfranchised youth'⁷³; and 'adversaries who take advantage of ungoverned space and under-governed territories from which they prepare plans, train forces and launch attacks'.⁷⁴ The State Department stated that, 'Africa today is a plagued with challenges, such as poverty, disease, terrorism, and instability that all together pose critical risks for US interests'.⁷⁵ In the end, just about every African issue became linked to security.⁷⁶ Numerous publications across disciplines showed that Americans' concern about the threats posed by terror greatly increased with 9/11.⁷⁷ According to Royce E.R., in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2001, 'this hearing will be titled Africa and the War on Global Terrorism ... It is clear that in the fight against terrorism no region can be ignored, and that is especially true of Africa'.⁷⁸ This beacon on the question: Why is securitisation seen as an accessible solution?

As a result of increased terror attacks in the U.S.A. analysts contend that this resulted in increased securitisation of migration, portraying migrants as terrorists and threats.⁷⁹ Consequently, in his first days in office, the former U.S. president – Donald Trump issued an executive order announcing a ban on some countries from entering the U.S.A. He asserted that the move was intended to keep the U.S.A. safe, claiming immigrants were a threat to the country's security.⁸⁰ Presidential Proclamation 9645 added restrictions on Chad,⁸¹ while on 31 January 2020, the Trump administration announced the expansion of the travel ban on more countries. This ban only affects certain visas for residents in countries which include Nigeria. Scholars of securitisation continue to argue that, portraying a group of people such as immigrants to have being constituting a threat, is another textbook example of securitisation.⁸²

The study conducted by CATO institute in 2016 looking at terrorists' attacks in the U.S.A. from 1975–2015 revealed from 1975 throughout 2015, of the 3,252,493 refugees allowed entry and to settle in the U.S.A., only 20 were terrorists representing 0.00062%. The same study revealed that of these 20 terrorists, only three of them were able to plan successful attacks killing three people. None of these three refugees came from any country which is being securitised.⁸³ The above is an indication that securitisation of migrants and refugees vis-à-vis migrants being portrayed as terrorist or a threat in the U.S.A. is to a greater extent erroneous. However, it is pertinent to note that, on 20 January 2021, President Joe Biden issued a proclamation revoking the Trump travel bans.⁸⁴ Similarly, pro to the Trump administration migration from the Sahel had not been a central security issue for the U.S.A.

In a twist of tagging other region like African-Sahel as home to terrorist groups that poses threat to the U.S.A., Albert Ford explains that, of the 418 who are accused of jihadist terrorism-related crimes, since 9/11, majority of them accounting to 85% were either U.S.A. citizens or

were legal American residents, while more than a half of them were America born citizens.⁸⁵ Congressional hearings held after 9/11 on the subject of Africa stressed security risks emanating from the African continent.⁸⁶

A striking feature of post-9/11 U.S.A. Africa policy is the increase in military assistance, including military training programmes, regional counterterrorism operations, and the creation of a U.S. military command centre. Military assistance programmes are funded and administered primarily by the Department of Defence (DoD) with some contribution by the Department of State and the CIA.⁸⁷

Four major programmes have been created since the 9/11 attacks in strategic regions on the continent through direct military-to-military engagement exercises,⁸⁸ which are:

- the Collective Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA);
- the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI);
- the East Africa Counterterrorism Initiative (EACTI); and
- the Maritime Security Initiative in the Gulf of Guinea.

The U.S.A. launched its small-scale counterterrorism policy in West Africa and the Maghreb Pan-Sahel Initiative in late 2002, folding it into a larger Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) from 2005.⁸⁹ The goal of TSCTI is to 'counter terrorist influences in the region and assist governments to better control their territory and to prevent huge tracts of largely deserted African territory from becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups'.⁹⁰ The chronology and development over time saw Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) developed in 2002 by the U.S.A. European Command to enhance the counterterrorism capacity evolved to Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) in 2005 and to Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) in 2008 incorporated with the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM).⁹¹ Apart from this laudable project of promoting regional security, stability and prosperity in Africa's troubled zones, AFRICOM in its mission statement also emphasises the advancement of U.S.A. national interests. Gilbert, Uzodike and Isike⁹² after a critical evaluation of AFRICOM posit thus:

AFRICOM was unilaterally created for the furtherance and consolidation of US strategic state-centric security interests but packaged in human security paraphernalia for the twin purposes of credibility and acceptability by African statesmen. AFRICOM is the pragmatic instrumentality through which America seeks to maximize its three-fold foreign policy objectives in Africa: fighting terrorism, securing alternative sources of oil especially from the Gulf of Guinea, and checkmating the rising profile of China on the continent.

Whilst, TSCTP could be seen as a multi-agency effort to support diplomatic, developmental, and military activities geared towards combating the spread of Islamic extremism in nine countries, namely: Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal and Nigeria (Burkina Faso was added in 2009) and is led by the Department of State's Africa Bureau, key agencies include the Department of State (DOS), the U.S.A. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Department of Defense (DoD).⁹³ Military operations are managed under the project entitled Operation Enduring Freedom – Trans Sahara (OEF-TS).⁹⁴ The U.S. government clearly accepts that there is not a military-only solution to extremism and terrorism in the region and the TSCTI aims to be 'a more comprehensive approach to regional security',⁹⁵ with other parts of the U.S. government playing a role. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs Theresa Whelan has said that: 'the U.S. Agency for International Development, for example, will address educational initiatives; the State

Department, airport security; and the Department of Treasury efforts to tighten up money-handling controls in the region'.⁹⁶

In November 2009, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson in a testimony before the Senate Committee of Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Africa stated that ... the purpose of TSCTP is to identify and mobilise resources throughout the interagency to support sustained efforts to address violent extremism in the region.⁹⁷ The evidence thus shows that the events of 9/11 had become a major feature of Americans' national frame of reference for security. For legislators, the heightened sense of vulnerability among Americans created a clear cost/benefit ratio: if they opposed measures about security and terror, they would lose political capital.⁹⁸

According to Ole Wæver, if a problem is 'securitized', the act tends to lead to specific ways of addressing it: threat, defence, and often state centred solutions. This explanation essentially takes the U.S. government and military statements at face value. As the original PSI press release says, the initiative will: 'support two U.S. national security interests in Africa: waging the war on terrorism and enhancing regional peace and security'.⁹⁹ One major question could be raised on this point though. What evidence linked the four original PSI states to international terrorism when it was first announced in 2002? For example, it is pertinent to note that, during this period Mali was a democratic State regarded as one of the most politically and socially stable countries in Africa.¹⁰⁰ A Congressional Research Service report titled Africa and the War on Terrorism from January 2002 does not mention any of the four countries,¹⁰¹ nor are any of them mentioned in the 2001 Patterns of Global Terrorism report published by the State Department/Homeland Security,¹⁰² the first Patterns of Global Terrorism published after the 9/11 attacks. In 2002 the only obvious connection between any of the PSI countries and al-Qaeda was one senior al-Qaeda figure, Abu Hafs al-Mauritani.¹⁰³ Critics such as, Toby Archer and Tihomir Popovic argue otherwise, they posit that the PSI/TSCTI can be considered a grab for the region's natural resources – oil. Stressing that PSI/TSCTI aims at stability and security in the region and of course this means that it is easier for energy companies to do business.¹⁰⁴

Toby Archer and Tihomir Popovic¹⁰⁵ posit that, 'before the creation of AFRICOM the securitization of Africa was already happening due to programmes and initiatives such as the PSI/TSCTI'. They further argue that, 'The securitization of the Sahara carries with it important risks in itself', stressing that. 'A U.S. Africa command aimed to carry out counter-terrorism operations in Africa, will likely further the securitization of the Saharan region'.¹⁰⁶ This trend is clearly visible in the U.S.A.'s involvement in the trans Saharan region. The U.S.' Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI), and its predecessor the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), is focused on non-state actors operating in the area, not on the activities of the states themselves that comprise that region.

As noted by Lt. Col. John E. Campbell¹⁰⁷ that: '... by placing too much emphasis on the military might actually hinder the process of state building'. As a result, he argues in effect that instability in Africa due to weak states should not be securitized, a process clearly described by Ole Wæver that: If a problem is 'securitized', the act tends to lead to specific ways of addressing it: threat, defence, and often state centred solutions.¹⁰⁸ As argued above, the construction of terrorism in this region has been predominantly in a military frame. There are risks that in militarising these issues the results might actually be the opposite of those intended – that U.S. military involvement, particularly when not backed up with development aid and diplomatic initiatives, will lead to increased radicalisation and will necessitate further intervention.¹⁰⁹ The U.S. military presence may well be counterproductive and be an agent of instability in African-Sahel.

France security initiatives in Sub-Saharan Sahel: The securitising actor

While to terrorists the U.S.A. may be seen as the source of what they call moral decadence and economic exploitation, similarly, to terror groups, France is seen as an evil. As France has positioned itself as a standard measure of western secular liberalism and the claim of being a champion in defending human rights.¹¹⁰ ISIS has taken responsibility for attacks against France, referring to it as 'Spiteful French' and a great enemy of ISIS's existence.¹¹¹ There is no doubt that France's self-given responsibility of being a champion in fighting terrorism left the country seen as terrorists' top enemy.

This section of the study will present the qualitative analysis of the extracted data through the lens of securitisation. It is clear that this section of the study rotates around the French government.

France, the coloniser of a number of African countries in the Sahel is considered the sole provider of legitimate security in its former colonies. Africa accounts for 3 per cent of France's exports and remains an important supplier of oil and metals – uranium from Niger is particularly strategic for energy security as about one-quarter of France' electricity production depends on it. Therefore, any course to undermine France' business and influence will require its attention. Understandably, France exerts a level of influence in Sub-Saharan Africa that it cannot command anywhere else within the world.¹¹² The meaning of 'securing' and what is to be 'secured' are questions that are rarely explored.¹¹³

To this end, the first part of this section would present the qualitative analysis of the extracted data from French White Paper of 2008, and 2013 French White Paper on Defence and National Security (the section is limited to both White Papers due to the limit of this paper) through the lens of securitisation. How was Africa/Sahel securitised in the French White Papers?

The French 2008 White Paper on Defence and National Security claims that

'Africa's problems have a direct impact on France's interests in the shape of illegal immigration, religious radicalisation in Muslim areas, and the emergence of fundamentalist sects ... , terrorist groups claiming allegiance to Al Qaeda, the emergence of new drug routes, illegal arms trafficking, proliferation networks, money laundering, and health risks. The Sahel strip, from the Atlantic to Somalia, may be considered to be the geometrical focal point of these interlocking threats and, in that sense, calls for specific vigilance'¹¹⁴

The 2008 French White Paper introduced in its Defence and National Security Paper National Military Strategy with reference to the security problems, risk and growth of terrorism emanating from the African continent: 'Africa will be at the forefront of the French prevention strategy over the next fifteen years'; 'The security problems of African countries are of concern, both directly and indirectly, to France and Europe, be it the risks of regional or inter-ethnic conflict, the growth of terrorism in Sahel-zone states or the perils that threaten their stability'; 'France therefore wishes to maintain its presence in Africa, but the conditions, purposes and organisation of this presence must change'.¹¹⁵ One major question could be raised on this point though. What evidence linked the Sahel to any major international terrorism when the French White Paper on Defence and National Security was first announced in 2008? For example, it is pertinent to note that, during this period Mali was a democratic State regarded as one of the most politically and socially stable countries in Africa.¹¹⁶ Probably the assistance the former Chad President needed from France to quell rebellion in Chad might have linked the Sahel to be cited in the 2008 document. Chad under Déby, for example, trusted heavily in French military assistance to maintain and boost its power since the 1990s, it aided Déby in

quelling rebellions in 2006 and 2008¹¹⁷ and this assistance deepened following the Mali crisis of 2012.¹¹⁸

French intervention in Mali would not have been necessary, had it not been for the intervention in Libya in 2011. As Idahosa et. al. argued, 'had Western governments foreseen the possible consequences of toppling the government of Libya, there might have been no need to rescue another one (Mali) from disaster'. In support of the French Government intervention in Mali, the 2013 French White Paper on Defence and National Security states that

the external intervention of our forces responds to a triple objective: ensuring the protection of French nationals abroad, defending our strategic interests and those of our partners and allies, and exercising our international responsibilities.¹¹⁹ France intends to have military capabilities enabling it to act in priority areas to its defence and security: from the Sahel to Equatorial Africa.

The portrayal of the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa as a threat to France and Western interest has support of the 2013 French White Paper on Defence and National Security and thus, by implication, of the French people. The document directly and usually without qualification have endorsed the claims about fragile or failed Africa States and terrorist threat:

The level of threat remains extremely high ... Terrorist threat appears to be evolving and spreading geographically. Against a backdrop of fragile or failed States, terrorist groups are operating in hitherto safe regions where they latch onto local conflicts and attempt to radicalise them; this is happening in the Sahel – Sahara region as well as in northern Nigeria ... by directly targeting Western interests.¹²⁰

Having previously claimed that fragile or failed States create safe region for terrorist groups to attack Western interest, the 2013 French White Paper on Defence and National Security claims that the Sahel and part of Sub-Saharan Africa 'are regions of priority interest for France due to ... the issues at stake and the threats confronting them'.¹²¹

The second part of this section would present the qualitative analysis of the extracted data on the intervention of the French Government in Mali through the lens of securitisation, focusing on the case of the French Operations Serval and Barkhane in Sahel. How was the French intervention in Mali securitised?

To observe the transformation of an issue into a matter of security, one of the major conditions is: assert that the securitising actor needs to hold a position of authority that is recognised by its audience. The securitising actor in this section, the French government has an evident legitimacy to speak of security. Roe¹²² asserts that in liberal democracies, politicians are elected, among other things, to voice such concerns on behalf of the larger public. On the international scene the French government represents France and is therefore viewed as legitimate, France remains for instance one of the five nations in the United Nations Security Council.¹²³

The French Government had called on the United Nations stating that 'we can intervene' and the 'the time has come' for international community to once again 'take its responsibility'.¹²⁴ This call for the international community to act would later be translated into resolution 2071,¹²⁵ were the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to open the way for the deployment of an international military force. Following the UNSC resolutions that allowed for international military operations in Mali to provide a framework for African countries to intervene, it as a result, potentially created an opening for France to send its military too. On the 10th of January, the interim President of Mali formulated an official request of intervention¹²⁶ to François Hollande and France. The UNSC resolutions and this letter provide the backing to the French operations in Mali, by extension the Sahel. However, it is pertinent

to note that, the French Government had assured and insisted that it 'will not intervene militarily',¹²⁷ leaving this responsibility to African nations.

Consequently, the French Military operation nicknamed 'Operation Serval' was launched in Mali in January 2013. Following the drawdown of Operation Serval then came a new dimension of the operation by France tagged 'Operation Barkhane' stationed in N'Djamena, Chad, aimed at being a long-term counterinsurgency operation in the region. The Operation supports the G5 Sahel armed forces in their actions in fighting and preventing terrorists and non-state armed groups and the reconstitution of its sanctuaries in ungoverned territories in the Sahel.¹²⁸ 'Operation Barkhane', has 4500 soldiers deployed to support the Sahel member state militaries in train and equip missions and bilateral joint actions. Critiques are of the view that the evolved Operation – 'Operation Barkhane', has not stimulated states to build up their own militaries and that radicalisation cannot be prevented by the use of force alone, which Operation Barkhane lacks.¹²⁹

According to Charbonneau,¹³⁰ the binaries of war and peace, and of intervention and sovereignty, are no longer opposites, but blurred into an emerging 'new normal' of permanent military intervention. Ultimately, France has constructed regional counterterrorism governance, the construction of a regional counterterrorism governance or militarisation is shown to circumvent the fundamental questions about Malian peace, state sovereignty, and nationhood.

France's interventions in Mali and the wider Sahel appear to mark a new departure in French military policy in terms of the approach to multilateralism, the regionalisation of the response, and the levels of violence deployed.¹³¹ According to Félix Tanvé,¹³² a group of French researchers points out the economic necessities the country has kept with Sahel as a major motivation behind the interventions¹³³; Others have also argued that behind the intervention is a certain 'tacit agreement' between France and certain African nations.¹³⁴ An agreement where in exchange for the provision of military support, France gets to showcase the strength of its armed force, ultimately allowing the European Nation to keep a certain prestige and relevance in international relations.¹³⁵ For example, the status of French forces in Mali is governed by a status of forces agreement between France and Mali, which was signed in Bamako on 7 March 2013, and at Koulouba on 8 March 2013 (the France-Mali SOFA)¹³⁶ and in 2014.¹³⁷ Pursuant to this agreement, during the deployment of French troops in Mali,¹³⁸ French troops are obligated to abide by the domestic law of Mali but have a degree of immunity from prosecution by Malian authorities.¹³⁹ Thus, French security policy is not solely about fostering peace and security, but about constantly sustaining and restructuring French power. This is not to contend that French security policy is all hypocrisy.¹⁴⁰ For example, the drawdown of Operation Serval, was a pretext by the French government to increase its military foothold in the region.¹⁴¹ According to Richard Reeve,¹⁴² the strategic failures of French intervention, is its ability to use superior conventional forces to repulse a conventional offensive and recapture territory in Mali, but has not been able to hold the ground against asymmetric and unconventional tactics of dispersed terrorists. Consequently, French intervention and operation in the region reflect a tactical rather than a strategic defeat.

Securitisation theory observes that sometimes in a democracy the government must justify the suspension of normal politics to the public.¹⁴³ One of the early stated facilitating condition is that, a securitising actor should hold a position of authority, a political elite that holds a position of authority and importantly is relevant to speak of security.¹⁴⁴ Thus, if the Sahel region is securitised by France which is regarded as democratic, we should be seeing securitising moves and speeches from government officials – a rhetorical justification of why intervention,

for instance, is the only way to remove the threat emanating from the region. For example, the France's defense minister, Florence Parly, noted that, the Sahel operation was crucial to EU security, by eliminating a haven for terrorist organisations.¹⁴⁵ In the same vein Stephanie Sanok Kostro and Meredith Boyle¹⁴⁶ argue that, France's military presence in the Sahel region of Africa is prompted by perceived terrorist threats and risks to French and European interests.¹⁴⁷ Researchers such as Schmidhaussler and Niemann¹⁴⁸ have argued that both politically and economically the Sahel is strategic for France and Germany (both European states), as well as the U.S.A., especially as they view the region as posturing a probable threat to their own security and as a source of migration and terrorism.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, the French's defense minister, Florence Parly, noted that, the Sahel operation was crucial to EU security, by eliminating a haven for terrorist organisations (this was the point of no return, as well as the solution provided). Equally, the former French prime-minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, as noted by Davitti and Ursu,¹⁵⁰ stated that, 'The stability of the entire Sahel region is threatened – and thus the stability of Europe'.

Legitimising claims about the Sahel: The EU as a securitising actor

The geopolitical interests of EU Member States in the Sahel have long lead to interventions aimed at the securitisation of the region that can be traced to the early post-colonial period. It is worth noting that the EU has one way or another contributed to the development of the Sahel region. However, in the wake of recent instability, the waves of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, travelling through North Africa and southern Europe, continues unabated. This is not unconnected with the close proximity of the Sahel region to Europe as well as increased linkages between criminal and terrorism elements. As such they constitute a potentially more troubling and dangerous springboard for international terrorist activity,¹⁵¹ especially after the fall of some centres of powers like Libya, Syria and Iraq, fact that clearly hasn't escaped IS and al-Qaeda's attention. This thus necessitated attention and a more integrated European political response.¹⁵²

To this effect, this section would present the qualitative analysis of the extracted data from EU 2011 Sahel Strategy, Regional Action Plan (2015) and the different EU council conclusion through the lens of securitisation. How was Sahel securitised in the EU Sahel Strategy documents? Is the Sahel Strategy more about Securitisation or Development?

Following the rapid and serious deterioration of the security situation in the Sahel and notably the kidnapping of European nationals, the Foreign Affairs Council of 25th October 2010 invited the High Representative (HR) to draw up, in association with the Commission, a strategy on the Sahel, in response to which a Joint Communication by the Commission and the HR was presented on 08 March 2011 (COM(2011)331). In the address of the Council of the European Union 3041st FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting on 25 October 2010,¹⁵³ it argues that the Sahel region 'cross border threats such as terrorism and organised crime ... unresolved internal conflicts and the weakness and fragility of the States concerned, constitutes a growing challenge for the stability of the region and for the European Union'. The Council identifies the terrorist as legitimate security threats, able to export threats to EU.

Similarly, EU Strategy for the Sahel emphasising the scope of threat further argues 'the risks that arise from the proliferation of arms in the region', and stressing that it is 'the problems facing the Sahel' as well as the 'increasingly impact directly on the interests of European citizens' (EU 2011 Strategy for the Sahel¹⁵⁴).

In the same vein, the Sahel Strategy with reference to the security problems, potential of threat and attack on the EU citizens emanating from the Sahel region emphasized that

An urgent and more recent priority is to protect European citizens and interests, preventing Al-Qaida in the Maghreb (AQIM) attacks and its potential to carry out attacks on EU territory, to reduce and contain drug and other criminal trafficking destined for Europe, to secure lawful trade and communication links (roads, pipelines) across the Sahel, North-South and East-West, and to protect existing economic interests and create the basis for trade and EU investment. Improving security and development in the Sahel has an obvious and direct impact on the EU internal security situation.¹⁵⁵

In view of the above, identifying the threat as a risk for the 'entire' European citizens/community, the EU 2011 Strategy for the Sahel seeks to universalise the challenge posed by the risk of the proliferation of arms; it appeals to the empathy of his European/international audience. It also points out the economic necessities the Union has kept with Sahel as a major motivation behind the Strategy. The Strategy also states that, 'It also strengthens the EU's own security'.¹⁵⁶ Likewise, improving security and development in Sahel has an obvious and direct impact on protecting European citizens and interests and on the EU internal security situation.¹⁵⁷ Officials tend to wave off concerns saying that the security of the EU and EU citizens, the state security of EU partners in the region and the human security of individuals and communities from the Sahel region is all the same thing, but the 'devil will be in the detail' – particularly in the implementation choices made by the EU and how these will link to form a coherent (or incoherent) whole. The emphasising scope of 'terrorism', with specific mention of AQIM and the keyword 'Western targets' in the Sahel Strategy, stating that 'The security threat from terrorist activity by Al-Qaida in the Maghreb (AQIM), which has found a sanctuary in Northern Mali, is focused on Western targets'.¹⁵⁸ The implication is that the politics of terrorism and counterterrorism is about threat amplification and that the representational violence caused by attacks is out of proportion to the amount of deaths it is responsible for.

The securitising actor has to declare a referent object that is existentially threatened and a securitising move will be facilitated if the threat is already perceived as dangerous. To this end, x-raying the EU Sahel Strategy – 2011, it is observed that security is mentioned 55 times, development – 44 times, on the other hand, EU/Europe is mentioned 54 times while Sahel – 42 times. From the above, observation, it is revealed that the document is more targeted towards the protection of EU's interest than that of the Sahel's and that the document is more of security than that of development.

X-raying the EU Sahel Strategy – Whose Security or Development?

Key Word	Number of Times Mentioned
Security	55
Development	41
EU/Europe	54
Sahel	42

Thus, it is worth noting that, the security concern to reduce the increase migratory pressures towards EU countries is one of the most obvious underling reasons for debates concerning EU migration policy centres on the securitisation of migration, refugees and asylum to the fight against drugs, terrorism, assistance in criminal matters,¹⁵⁹ as its policy has the tendency of discussing migration primarily as a security issue.¹⁶⁰

The second part of this section is to xray the EU Sahel Strategy Regional Action Plan 2015–2020 through the lens of securitisation. In response to violent extremism, radicalisation, illicit trafficking and terrorism in parallel with challenges of extreme poverty and fragile governance in the Sahel, the Council adopted in 2011 its Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel... The Strategy was revised and discussed during the Foreign Affairs Council in March 2014 and suggested developing a new Regional Action Plan (RAP) for the implementation of the Strategy.¹⁶¹

The Council of the European Union¹⁶² saw the Sahel developing into extremely volatile region. The security situation of the Sahel region remains extremely volatile... Migration pressure is mounting, with serious implications both for the countries in the region and the EU. The EU Sahel Strategy Regional Action Plan 2015–2020 agreed, 'The enhancement of security in the region through the fight against terrorism, illicit trafficking, radicalisation and violent extremism, remains the key objective of the EU'.¹⁶³ Also noting that

given the proximity of the Sahel to the EU and its immediate neighbourhood, it notes the need, in order to better tackle cross-border issues, to explore further a common space for dialogue and cooperation between the Sahel, the Maghreb and the EU in relevant sectors such as security and migration.¹⁶⁴

EU Sahel Strategy Regional Action Plan 2015–2020 further emphasised that, 'stability of the Sahel is a key interest for the EU'.¹⁶⁵ 'The security situation in the Sahel has a regional character'.¹⁶⁶ Stressing that the 'EU's focus around four domains highly relevant to the stabilisation of the region, namely prevention and countering radicalisation, creation of appropriate conditions for youth, migration, mobility and border management, the fight against illicit trafficking and transnational organised crime'. It further emphasised that 'the three Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Missions in the Sahel have been adapted to the political priorities of the EU, irregular migration and related smuggling and trafficking'.¹⁶⁷

The EU coordinates the approach within three CSDP missions: EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger with a strengthened regional approach. The missions include training, advising, as well as direct support to security forces with the ultimate objective of reinforcing respective national capacities. In the move to tackle the 'refugee crisis', part of the EU response is the decision to reconfigure one of the implementing apparatuses of the Sahel Strategy – the EUCAP Sahel Niger, and to repurpose it to be restrictive on migration flows.¹⁶⁸ EUCAP Sahel Niger, launched in 2012 and has broadened its operations to include a greater focus on migration in addition to its goal of strengthening Niger's border security and police capacity.¹⁶⁹ Arguably, EU policies have sugarcoated the securitisation of migration and intensified military intervention in the Sahel.¹⁷⁰ Consequently, the securitisation of migration might turn mutually disadvantageous for both the Sahel and the EU. Thus, by being present in the region, international actors change political calculations, arrangement, and structures.

As the Council of Europe reiterated in its 2019 meeting that the Sahel is a strategic priority for the EU and its member states.¹⁷¹ Tackling the instability of the African continent is a major concern for EU member states, as they are experiencing its repercussions in terms of illegal immigration, drugs, arms and human trafficking, terrorism and organised crime.¹⁷² The EU Global Strategy (EUGS) states also that the EU 'will invest in African peace and development as an investment in its own security and prosperity'.¹⁷³ The main document that regulated the EU-Africa relations up to 2020 was the Cotonou Agreement (2000) with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries,

which grew out of the Lomé Convention (1975–2000), the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) signed by 80 African and European Heads of State.¹⁷⁴ The central objective of the Cotonou Agreement which expired in February 2020 was to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty and to contribute to the gradual integration of ACP countries into the world economy.¹⁷⁵ Did it achieve its objective before its expiration? Your guess is as good as the authors of this research.

Furthermore, the EU and its member states support the operationalisation of the G5 Sahel Joint Force with €147 million funding already allocated.¹⁷⁶ The total development cooperation support from the EU and its member states to the G5 Sahel countries amounts to €8 billion for the period 2014–2020. The EU provides long-term assistance to the Sahel mainly through the EU trust fund for Africa (through which €930 million has already been mobilised), and the European development fund and has for the period of 2014–2020 allocated €628 million for Burkina Faso, €542 million for Chad, €664 million for Mali, €160 million for Mauritania, and €686 million for Niger. The EU is also a major humanitarian donor, with more than €250 million allocated to G5 Sahel populations over the past two years.¹⁷⁷

In the end, just about every Sahel issue became linked to security. Did the claims about radicalisation and terror in the Sahel have validity? Daria Davitti & Anca-Elena Ursu¹⁷⁸ argue that, ‘Despite the declared primary focus on stabilising the region, prioritising the clamping down of migration may in fact result in further destabilisation of the area’. The EU justifies its engagement in the region, by directly linking stability in the Sahel to the security of the EU. ‘The stability of the entire Sahel region is threatened – and thus the stability of Europe’, explained the former French prime-minister Jean-Marc Ayrault. Policymakers consider that the EU is endangered by two perils originating in the Sahel, namely the spread of radical armed groups and the potential increase in EU-bound migration flows. The conflating of these two distinct dynamics (i.e. terrorism and migration) in the current political discourse highlights the direct link that EU governments make between these separate issues, and explains partially why securitisation is seen as an accessible solution. The evidence thus shows that the Sahel and its challenges had become a major feature of the EU’s national frame of reference for security.

This paper would briefly examine few speeches of EU leaders through the lens of securitisation. The theory offers a framework to observe how securitising actors, through their speech acts, aim at convincing a target audience to accept the claim that an issue is threatening enough to deserve immediate and extraordinary action.¹⁷⁹ Jean-Claude Juncker, in his 2017 speech at the Defense and Security Conference Prague, states that,

‘In defense of Europe’, ‘Soft target terrorism as seen in the tragic and devastating scenes ... show the lengths that barbaric terrorists will go to in a futile attempt to break us and destroy our way of life We must protect ourselves from this new phenomenon.’¹⁸⁰

The grammar of the security speech act is obvious. They point to the existentially threatening nature of the Sahel, a point of no return (emphasis is mine).¹⁸¹ The increase in the deployment of U.S., EU and French troops in the Sahel support the claim of the security threat of the Sahel to the West. Consequently, we have a case of successful securitisation.

Noticeable examples of securitising moves of the region can be found in speeches of different western leaders, such as that of former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who had described Africa as a ‘scar on the conscience of the world’,¹⁸² also in Juncker’s speech,¹⁸³ he stated that ‘In defense of Europe, “Soft target terrorism as seen in the tragic and devastating scenes ... show the lengths that barbaric terrorists will go to in a futile attempt to break us and destroy our way of life We must protect ourselves from this new phenomenon’ (this was the presentation of the nature of the threat and establishment of a regime of truth).

The EU justifies its engagement in the Sahel region, by directly linking stability in the Sahel to the security of the EU. For the Council of Europe and European leaders, the heightened sense of vulnerability among Europeans created a clear cost/benefit ratio: if they opposed measures about security and terror, they would lose political capital.

Securitisation of underdevelopment

It is imperative to note how underdevelopment discourse should be constructed as a threat to the economic development and poverty eradication of the Sahel region. The discourse should also be instrumental in shaping a policy for development and its implementation as well as the strategies for stabilising the Sahel be inspired by the objective of tackling poverty in the area.

The securitisation theory explains that securitising actors develop an argument 'about a threat' and designate the threat as the referent object.¹⁸⁴ Examining development discourse through the analytical framework of securitisation theory. This study takes it further to examine the securitisation of underdevelopment through the poverty discourse. In this context, poverty is not the referent object; rather, underdevelopment is, and underdevelopment is constructed as a threat to the peace and security of the region. The situation in the Sahel has worsened significantly in the last ten years, especially in the area of security. The region is faced with economic fragility and the insecurity are also almost certainly driven by the region's lack of economic and social development. Great swathes of land have fallen into a vicious cycle where poverty and insecurity are mutually reinforcing.¹⁸⁵

Past and present day reality bear eloquent testimony of extreme poverty that characterises the Sahelian states of Africa.¹⁸⁶ Indeed, poverty and gross underdevelopment throughout the region is a key contextualising aspect of security and development dynamics as well as the international, regional, and national responses to those dynamics. The countries in the region Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, including Nigeria are basically classified by the United Nations as LDCs. There are currently 48 countries in this category, most of them in Africa. The classification is based on three criteria: low income per capita, a lack of human capital (health, education), and substantial economic vulnerability – a factor driven in part by the magnitude of the exogenous shocks suffered by these countries regardless of their economic policy, and in part by their level of exposure to these shocks. In the Sahel, both magnitude and exposure are particularly high.¹⁸⁷

The referent object is not pre-given or pre-defined. Securitising actors – particularly the powerful political leaders construct and decide the threat discourse to a referent object.¹⁸⁸ They prioritise and project the designated threat as a security challenge. As a result, securitising actors – 'those who make claims about this security' can claim, legitimise and use any means, both democratic and undemocratic instruments to safeguard the referent object.¹⁸⁹ Despite the lack of an explicit inference, some argue that overseas development assistance (ODA) has been strategically linked to securitisation.¹⁹⁰ In 2002, in his address at the UN conference, President George W. Bush averred that the fight against poverty is not an end in its own. Rather, it is intended to give hope to the poor to resolve terrorism, and it calls for boosting aid and building capacity to secure Africa.¹⁹¹ In other words, a connection is made between insecurity and poverty, and security becomes anchored in the development of African states to eliminate the threat of terrorism.¹⁹² Former Prime Minister Tony Blair once remarked that intervening in Africa to avert suffering would alleviate a 'scar' on the world's conscience.¹⁹³ Debatably, the securitisation of Africa can alternatively be seen as less of a

matter of conscience than a means of addressing perceived threats to Britain's security and the British way of life.¹⁹⁴ The probable intended end result is removal of the inherent security threat that emanates from such suffering.

Consequently, the securitisation of Africa has changed academic discourse in several ways by broadening the concept of 'security' and its role in reshaping the relationship between the continent and global powers. And yet, in facilitating the process of securitisation, African leaders avoid the real challenge of addressing the roots of human insecurity within their countries and regions. Rather unfortunately, an unintended consequence has been the radicalisation of populations within some states. Following the instability of the state of Libya, for example, and the emergence and increase of terrorist groups, it could be argued that Libyans in neighbouring countries like Niger,¹⁹⁵ etc. and migrants crossing through Libya to Europe are being securitised¹⁹⁶; this risks further radicalisation through marginalisation.

The stability of Sahelian countries and the capacity of their governments to manage social change and resulting tensions have major security implications for migration flows, economic development both for local people and for the broader international community. Securitisation initiative should therefore among other things pay utmost attention to the intersecting and overlapping issues of poverty, security and development of the Sahel.¹⁹⁷ Poverty and unemployment fuel the very elements that securitisation hopes to tackle. Alexandre Bish puts it aptly that widespread poverty and lack of economic opportunities has been shown to push so many into criminal endeavours.¹⁹⁸ Eamonn McConnon on this basis emphasises that securitisation initiative should prioritise poverty/development issues as essential security concerns.¹⁹⁹

The 'war on terror' thus affects diplomatic frontiers, cutting across military, development, economic, and other indirectly affected sectors. Another way of looking at the securitisation of Africa is to see the 'war on terror' as offering a solution to the continent's development problems if the funds are managed well. While variables within countries have major impacts on state security, they should not divert attention from regional and transnational connections to the growing challenge of human insecurity.

'Policing and defence' are used to contain internal as well as external threats.²⁰⁰ Thus, both internally and externally, political leaders have the discretion to frame the discourse of a given problem that induces policy formulation and its implementation.²⁰¹ There should be calls for significant evolutions in the U.S.A., France, the EU and African leaders development policies for the Sahel. They should be robust, aligned with the region's real security challenges, and reflect the diverse realities on the ground. Thus, the strategies for stabilizing the Sahel be inspired by the objective of tackling poverty in the area.

Conclusion

How was Africa/Sahel securitised after 9/11? How was Africa/Sahel securitised in the French White Papers of Defence and National Security, EU Sahel Strategy documents? The securitisation of Africa has changed academic discourse in several ways by broadening the concept of 'security' and its role in reshaping the relationship between the continent and global powers. We considered different documents and speeches in our investigation. The paper argued that, the processes of securitisation can be applied to the Sahel region and that although the general framework of securitisation works, there are different logics at play. Consequently, securitisation of the Sahel region plays a significant role in shaping the Sahel narrative and influencing related policies. The current narrative over-emphasises the link between the Sahel region and terrorism, which ultimately creates a sense of fear regarding the Sahel

without putting into perspective the region's positive contributions. Accordingly, it justifies securitised responses including those heavily focused on the fight against terrorism and border control, putting aside development-related projects that address the Sahel challenges.

Consequently, it could be argued that intervention, militarisation and securitisation could have negative effects in the form of provoking more terrorist or rebel attacks against the U.S.A., France, EU, and incumbent African regimes, because of the formers' determination to win the struggle against state actors. This means it is likely that the greater the presence of external military presence, the greater will be the frequency of terrorist attacks on countries such as Mali, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, among others.

From the forgoing, it is observed that Africa is no longer viewed as a continent in need of development/humanitarian aid but a continent personified as full of risk, threat and fear. Development policies towards Africa have been linked to security in the continent. This has led to institutions and countries reviewing their intentions and linking their interventions/development outcomes to security. It is important to note that when arguing the securitisation of the Sahel, securitisation theorists do not challenge the existence of terrorist groups in the region, or that the groups have not indeed coordinated attacks in the region and against the interests of the U.S.A., EU, and France. The adverse effects of politicising security and threat have negative impacts. Securitisation of Sub-Saharan-Sahel has also led to radicalisation of the African populations by turning Africa into a war zone.

Against this background, securitising the Sahel region has not helped in reducing or addressing the root cause of instability. As securitising migration will do nothing to stem the flow of economic migrants or political refugees, but instead push human smuggling further underground. The authors agree with Andrew Lebovich, that actors in the region instead need a more all-inclusive approach to immigration that includes providing increased safe and legal passages for those who want to work in Europe while also assisting to create economic prospects and opportunities in the Sahel, and West Africa. Strategies for stabilising the Sahel should be inspired by the objective of tackling poverty in the region. The U.S.A., France and EU should therefore: strengthen societies', markets' and states' resilience through durable solutions by investing in job opportunities, education, infrastructure and social protection mechanism, with the objective of making people self-reliant.

It is pertinent to note that, securitisation do not address the root causes of terrorism, which are not just military but social and economic.

Notes

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2. Idahosa and Ilesanmi, 'Conceptualisation of Regional Instability', 10.
3. Mutimer, 'Critical Security Studies', 71.
4. Emmers, 'Securitization', 11.
5. Abrahamsen, 'Blair's Africa', 30; cf. Sour, 'Strategy of Securitisation', 6.
6. Appiagyeyi-Atua et al., 'State Security, Securitisation and Human Security in Africa', 326.
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20. Waever, 'Securitisation', 55.
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22. Kjaer, 'Securitization and the Power Language', 14.
23. McDonald, 'Constructivisms', 72.
24. Wæver, 'Securitisation', 57.
25. Njoku and Romanuk, *Removing the 'Westphalian Straitjacket: Audience in Securitization Theory'*, 3.
26. Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework or Analysis*, 25.
27. Eroukhmanoff, 'Securitisation Theory', 104–9.
28. Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, 'France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel'; Roe, Audience (s) and Emergency Measures.
29. Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, 'France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel'.
30. Waever, 'Securitisation', 57.
31. Njoku and Romanuk, *Removing the 'Westphalian Straitjacket'*, 3.
32. Ole, 'Aberystwyth, Paris, Copenhagen', 13.
33. Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 71.
34. Ibid.
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36. Bigo and McCluskey, 'What is a PARIS Approach'.
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38. Bigo, 'Internal and External Aspects of Security', 385.
39. Ibid., 400–1.
40. Njoku and Romanuk, *Removing the 'Westphalian'*, 4.
41. Balzacq, 'The Three Faces of Securitization', 171–201.
42. Côté, 'Agents Without Agency', 541–58.
43. Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School on Tour in Kyrgyzstan', 5–25.
44. Huysmans, 'Revisiting Copenhagen', 479–505.
45. Balzacq, 'Constructivism and Securitisation Studies', 56–72.
46. Emmers, 'Securitization', 109–25.
47. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 25.
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50. Williams, 'Words, Images, Enemies', 511–31.
51. Abrahamsen, 'Blair's Africa', 30.
52. Lotfi, 'Strategy of Securitisation', 6.
53. Davitti and Ursu, *Why Securitising the Sahel Will Not Stop Migration*.
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59. Idahosa and Bakare, 'Conceptualisation of Regional Instability'.
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70. Lyman, 'Introduction', x.
71. Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Integrating 21st Century Development*, vi.
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75. Mull, *US Africa Command*.
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78. Royce, *Africa and the War on Terror*.
79. Hussain and Bagguley, 'Securitized Citizens', 715–34.
80. Mindock, 'Trump's Travel Ban on Six Muslim-Countries'.
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84. 'Proclamation on Ending Discriminatory'.
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86. Walker and Seegers, 'Securitisation: The Case of Post-9/11', 40.
87. *Ibid.*
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90. Global Security, *Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership*.
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93. Bray, *The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership*.
94. Lotfi, *Strategy of Securitisation in African Sahel*, 6–18; cf. Emily Hunt, *Islamist Terrorism in Northwestern Africa*, 12.
95. Flintlock, 'Secrets in the Sand Part I'.
96. Archer and Popovic, *The Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative*, 44.
97. Idahosa, Degterev, and Abidoye, 'Strategic Fight Against Terrorism', 727–31.
98. Walker and Seegers, 'Securitisation: The Case of Post-9/11', 40.
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