The Danger of 'Undergoverned' Spaces: the 'War on Terror' and its Effects on the Sahel Region

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Introduction

This article aims at a reconstruction of how the Sahel region of Africa has been integrated into the 'war on terror' by security experts and an analysis of the various social implications of the discourse and intervention practices. Applying the arguments of critical geopolitics and the securitisation framework, this contribution will show how the U.S. government operates with a spatial terminology in problematizing the Sahel as an 'undergoverned' space, where terrorist activities, smuggling and illegal migration constitute a threat to international security. It will be asked how these discursive manifestations came to be the dominant interpretation of social reality in the Sahel. The article outlines perceptions and assessments, in short: the political rationality which made the military programme 'Pan-Sahel Initiative' and its broader successor, the 'Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership', possible. It is an investigation into the question of how dominant representations of and actions in the region are embedded within the U.S. global strategy of preemptive action against perceived threats. An analytical lens on space aims at highlighting the entire apparatus that has securitized the Sahel over the last few years. In a remarkably open public policy, U.S. security professionals have made powerful geographical statements about the Sahel region, supported by the use of illustrative maps, reiterating the dangerousness of this area. It will be argued that by generating knowledge about the 'poorly policed Sahel', the U.S. military experts play a decisive role in transmitting the

propositions of the global discourse of the 'war on terror' into practices and, thus, create the field of their own operations.

However, the subsequent interventions have unintended consequences as they aim at strengthening state authorities in a region where distrust against state institutions prevails. It is not the intention of this article to prove which part of the intervention 'caused' which effect on the ground. However, the case will be made that the representation of the region and the subsequent interventions have impacts on how different local actors perceive their role in this power relation. They have done so in a variety of ways. The 'targets' of the interventions, be it governments and their local officials or communities, are able to translate, appropriate or challenge the discourse and its policies. As a consequence, state-society relations and community relations have changed, with ambiguous effects.

Representations of the 'Third World'

Problematisations of geographical or social spaces by hegemonic political players are a common instrument for creating urgency and legitimizing interventions in these spaces. It is part of the geopolitical tradition of Western actors to categorize spaces in the 'Third World' in order to make them manageable. Northern actors construct the problem and, at the same time, offer strategies for its solution. Thus, the production of geographical knowledge can be seen as a political act.

During the Cold War the two superpowers accumulated knowledge about non-European regions in order to help create strong states capable of transforming their 'backward' societies. States in which the assumed modernisation project did not meet the expectations were categorized as 'weak'.[1] After the end of the Cold War the discussion of deficiencies of states in the South was significantly expanded into security politics. During the 1990s two of the

1 For the interplay between knowledge-production and space-production in the Anglophone social sciences see Agnew (1998) and Bilgin/Morton (2002). In the 1950s and 1960s, observation and statistics became the primary means of empiricist knowledge-gathering. The Gross Domestic Product appeared to be the new indicator of development. This was complemented by anthropological studies of cultural habits in the 'Third World'. According to Bilgin and Morton the logic of abstracting the state from its society, from its historical formation and the international context persists to date. Within this logic, large parts of the social sciences keep focussing on observable data on the capacities of agencies. Thus, 'the architecture of modernisation and development theory, including consequent representations of the post-colonial state, has undergone minor modifications and shifts of emphasis, adapting to new conditions and circumstances, while remaining relatively unchanged' (Bilgin/Morton 2002: 65).

most prominent representations of spaces by Western foreign policy actors with regard to the Non-Western World were those of the 'failed' and the 'rogue' state. However, while the main deficiency of the former is most of all seen in the incapability of state authorities to provide basic services or to effectively control their territory, which was interpreted as having mainly internal effects, the latter was believed to pose a direct threat to the international state system by supporting terrorism, violating human rights or through the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Bilgin/Morton 2004: 170).[2] After the 9/11 attacks one characteristic originally assigned to rogue states, namely the accusation of harbouring terrorists, was now attributed to states perceived as weak or failed. The U.S. National Security Strategy, announced in 2002, officially marked the shift towards pre-emptive action within U.S. foreign policy and drew the attention to weak states:

'The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders' (White House 2002: ii).

'America is now threatened less by conquering states than by failing ones' (White House 2002: 1).

The perceived threat makes it mandatory for Western states to engage in weak states as in times of terror no one can afford to ignore these spaces. In a speech at the West Point Military Academy George W. Bush is explicit about the new danger and the steps that need to be taken: 'We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act.' (Bush 2002) It is remarkable that since 9/11, the new threat apparently roots in somewhat diversified geographical spaces as the terms 'weak states', 'failed states' and 'undergoverned regions' are used interchangeably in key policy documents. It has become common sense for Western government authorities to stress the link between such regions, which are perceived as insufficiently governed, and the possibility that they might become a breeding ground for terrorism (among others EU 2003: 8-9; OECD/DAC 2003: 16; USAID/Department of State 2003: 10; White House

2 At the same time, however, 'rogue' or 'failed' states have functional aspects for the West: Their existence makes the justification for action – in order to 'end' the alleged threat – easier. To call states 'weak' or 'failed', on the other hand, allows one to blame internal factors for their deficiencies rather than to take aspects of the global economic structure into account (Jacoby 2005).

2003: 23; Department of Defense 2006: 12). In contrast to the 1990s, when the individual's security in the South rather than state security was the primary addressee of Western policy interventions, it is now the security of the population in the homeland that is at stake when promising to deal with 'troubled' areas:

'German interests are being defended […] at the Hindukush' (the former German minister of defence, Peter Struck, 4 December 2002).
'Canadians cannot be safe in an unstable world, or healthy in a sick world; nor can we expect to remain prosperous in a poor world' (CIDA 2005: 1).
'[T]urning a blind eye to the breakdown of order in any part of the world, however distant, invites direct threat to our national security and wellbeing. […] For as well as bringing mass murder to the heart of Manhattan, state failure has brought terror and misery to larges swathes of the African continent, as it did in the Balkans in the early 1990s. And at home it has long brought drugs, violence and crime to Britain's streets' (Straw 2002: 1).

Recently the ambitious characterisations of deviant statehood by Western players (such as weak, rogue, failing, failed, collapsed, problematic, dissolving, anaemic, captured, aborted, shadow states and those under stress, etc.) have given way to a more amorphous conceptualisation of 'dangerous places'. External and internal security are seen as inherently linked and the challenges have to be addressed by the 'whole-of-government'-phalanx of Western security, foreign policy and development actors.[3]

Consequently, not only foreign policy agendas had to be adjusted. Different policy fields have since been expected to act in a 'coherent' way towards states perceived as 'fragile'. An illustrative example is the modification of Western development policies. In a process which started in the 1990s with an integration of conflict prevention, all major development agencies in the Western world have since incorporated security-related aspects (Duffield 2001; Hönke 2005; Beall et al. 2006; Klingebiel 2006). In order to secure funding by their governments they now even designed concepts on how development assistance can support the fight against terrorism (USAID 2002; AusAid 2003; U.S. Department of State/USAID 2003; Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004; CIDA 2005; DFID 2005).

By reiterating that the 'undergoverned' spaces of the Sahel are exploited by terrorists, the U.S. military creates urgency for a regulating intervention. Taking problematisations of geographical and social spaces into account

3 Inter-agency and inter-department efforts, labelled whole-of-government-approaches, were especially developed for dealing with 'fragile states'. This concept is advanced by the Australian government, the U.S. government and by the OECD/DAC.

when analysing the integration of Africa into the 'war on terror', allows a broader insight into the political rationalities which motivate foreign policies towards these spaces.

The Spatialisation of Danger

In critical social theory there are two interlinked frameworks which help to understand the political implications of the notions of space. Building upon a broad range of materialist and poststructuralist works (as e.g., Harvey 1989; Soja 1989; Lefebvre 1991), critical geopolitics scholars argue that geographical knowledge constitutes a political category (Agnew/Corbridge 1995; Dalby/Ó Tuathail 1998). In this context, the various perspectives of securitisation have shown how social phenomena – which allow the inclusion of spaces – can be declared a serious threat. Both approaches imply that spaces are socially produced. For a long time, however, the notion of space was identified with the territorial state. This equation was foundational for the discipline of International Relations. And, in turn, states claimed authority to be the main narrator of space and territory (Ó Tuathail 1996). The expansion of social order from the sixteenth century onwards was linked to the fabrication of spatial order. During the time of evolving statistics, statehood and conquest, the 'blank spaces on the globe succumbed to the sovereign authority of governmental institutions and imperial science, the surface of the globe appeared for the first time as a system of "closed space", an almost completely occupied and fully charted geographical order' (Ó Tuathail 1996: 15). The key questions within classical geopolitics, that is, the spatializing of global politics, were: 'Who does this space belong to' and 'In what way is "their" space different from "ours"' (ibid. 16). In order to understand the focus on territoriality, the aspect of control is crucial. According to Sack, territoriality involves a form of classification by area; it furthermore contains a form of communication (to establish the boundary, e.g., by setting up a sign stating a possession or exclusion); and finally, territoriality involves an attempt at enforcing control over access to the area and to the things within it, i.e., that transgression will be punished (Sack 1986: 21 ff.). Territory therefore inherently includes a relation of violence in so far as the monopolisation of the use of force within a designated territory is part of Max Weber's famous definition of the state (Neocleous 2003: 102). The reluctance in mainstream International Relations Theories to go analytically beyond the imagination of a compartmentalized, state-centred world provoked Agnew to argue that it finds itself in a 'territorial trap'. He accused the mainstream approaches of being ahistorical and of taking for granted the state-territorial spaces as fixed units of secure sovereign

space. Furthermore he refused to accept the territorial state as existing prior to and as a container of society (Agnew/Corbridge 1995: 83 f.).

In the 1990s critical political geographers started to analyse the functioning of geographical knowledge 'as an ensemble of technologies of power concerned with the governmental production and management of territorial space', termed 'geo-power' by Ó Tuathail (1996: 7). They shifted the focus from fixed and given spaces towards representations of space, that is, the system of classification and meaning of spaces conceptualized by experts, including scientists and urban planners.[4] Focusing critically on the production of geographical knowledge by experts and institutions is a politicizing act as it questions the often familiar and unchallenged assumptions of such manifestations. Critical political geographers build upon Foucault's works on the interplay of power and knowledge and on his concept of governmentality (Foucault 1980: 119, 2006a, 2006b). Foucault analysed the broad range of the 'arts of government', which include more than regulating efforts by the state. These strategies are more broadly understood as structuring the field of actions of the subjects (Foucault 2000: 341). Based on political rationalities, they are made possible by problematisations and expertise of a certain phenomenon, which are then being 'translated' into political programmes (Rose/Miller 1992: 177-83). Governmentality constitutes:

'a discursive field, within which the exercise of power is being 'rationalized'. This happens through the elaboration of terms and concepts, the specification of objects and boundaries, through the supply of arguments and rationales, etc. A political rationality thus allows to propose a problem and offers particular strategies for the treatment and the solution of this problem. […] These programmes not only express wishes and intentions, but define an implicit knowledge' (Lemke 1997: 147).[5]

Thus, it is the strategies of government which render such political programmes operable (Rose/Miller 1992: 183).

Critical political geographers aim at replacing essentialist notions of space with a focus on practices and representations. In contrast to the explanatory

4 Critical geopolitics scholars refer specifically to the works of the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991[1974]) who was one of the first to argue that space is a social product.

5 My translation. Original quotation in German: '[Regierung bezeichnet] ein diskursives Feld, innerhalb dessen die Ausübung der Macht "rationalisiert" wird. Dies geschieht durch die Erarbeitung von Begriffen und Konzepten, der Spezifizierung von Gegenständen und Grenzen, durch die Bereitstellung von Argumenten und Begründungen etc. Eine politische Rationalität erlaubt also, ein Problem zu stellen und bietet bestimmte Lösungs- und Bearbeitungsstrategien an. […] Diese Programme drücken nicht nur Wünsche und Absichten aus, sondern definieren ein implizites Wissen.'

problem-solving tradition they work genealogically. They challenge the sayings of 'wise statesmen' and draw attention to broader culturally embedded expressions in administration, the academia and popular culture (Dalby/Ó Tuathail 1998: 1-14). Drawing from Dodds, Allen illustratively points out that 'in this vein, the practice of foreign policy making, for instance, appears as primarily a collection of scripts which combine various coded geographical assumptions and descriptions about "faraway" places which are then used to narrate geopolitical events and legitimize a particular course of action' (Allen 2003: 102).

Foreign policy makers do not simply accumulate 'objective' knowledge about particular regions. They have used this to declare these spaces dangerous in order to create the urgency to take action. This process was termed securitisation. The dealing of U.S. government authorities with the whole Sahelian region during the past years is a striking example. Applying this perspective, categorizing regions as 'failed states' or a 'breeding ground for terrorism' has proved to be a securitizing practice insofar as it has allowed for the establishment of interventions into theses spaces in order to regulate them. Based on a constructivist approach, the concept of securitisation assumes that the term security does not necessarily need a referent object but is socially constructed. Securitisation is therefore a political decision to conceptualize an issue in a particular, security-centred, way. Participants of such a discourse problematize a certain issue and consequently assign 'existential threats to a referent object, [generating] endorsement of emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise apply' (Buzan et al. 1998: 5). This notion has been criticized for its focus on existential threats and exceptional measures (Abrahamsen 2005).[6] In contrast to that, Didier Bigo stressed that the securitizing process works continuously in everyday (discursive and non-discursive) practices in the field of security agencies. Linking external and internal security, transnational experts create a 'continuum of threats and general unease' as they semantically relate different phenomena such as migration, drug trafficking and terrorism (Bigo 2002: 63 ff.). In this vein the process of securitisation involves the capacity of security professionals to claim what security is and to establish a code of practice for a regulation of the issue. In short, it is a technology of government (Bigo 2000: 194 ff.).

Although heavily discussed in the field of securitisation, critical scholars in International Relations Theory have shown the interplay between the construction of danger and the politics of identity (Dillon 1996; Campbell 1998).[7]

6 For further critical accounts see McSweeney (1996); Huysmans (1998) and, from a materialist perspective, Neocleous (2000).

7 Critics accused Buzan et al. of their half-hearted constructivism, as they would treat the results of a social construction (such as identity) as an objectively given and thus retain an objectivist and realist view (McSweeney 1998).

Through the mobilizing politics of securitisation the object (dangerous people or places) is clearly identified, homogenized and certain characteristics, values and behaviours are assigned to it. This labelling is of central importance to the discursive construction of threat. The process of securing provokes the question of who is being secured and who remains 'outside'. Insecurity can thus be seen as the necessary condition for security. Calls for security have to refer to the danger which threatens this security (Neocleous 2000). Through politics of identification, securitisation includes a moral agenda. It aims at legitimizing the actions taken to eliminate the threat. By doing so, it closes the ranks in the 'homeland' and mobilizes public support for – like in our case – the 'war on terrorism' (Abrahamsen 2005: 65). At the same time it draws a line between *our* place and *their* spaces. Since *they* are presented as posing an external threat, the spaces on the 'dark side of globalisation'[8] cannot be ignored. These spaces therefore have to be engaged by different strategies, such as inclusion of the willing and containment of the ones considered as the most problematic (Rose 1999: 240 ff.; Abrahamsen 2005: 70; Hönke 2005). Africa's integration into the 'war on terror' is a showcase illustration of the engagement of such 'problematic' spaces.

Africa's Integration into the 'War on Terror'

After a brief episode in the early 1990s during which the continent was more or less ignored, Northern policies towards Africa began to focus on the resolution and prevention of violent conflicts (Duffield 2001). While at this time weak or failed statehood was still mainly described as a problem for the population in the affected regions, these spaces were soon integrated into the global discourse of the 'war on terror'. The terrorist attacks in East Africa in 1998 and 2002 as well as the proximity of the 'failed' state Somalia to the Arabian Peninsula alerted the U.S. to re-engage on the continent. At the same time it became known that the reliance of the U.S. on African oil was increasing. Today 15 percent of the oil imported by the United States comes from Africa. Some years from now every fifth imported barrel is expected to originate in Africa (Goldwyn 2005).[9]

Therefore, in order to prevent an influx of terrorists into Africa, an international 'Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa' was established in

8 Label used for 'weak states' in a USAID document (USAID 2005: v).

9 Klare and Volman compare the attention the continent has recently attracted in Washington with the developments in the Caspian region in the 1990s. In the Caspian region as well as in (West) Africa they identify a 'trajectory of ever-expanding U.S. military involvement' where oil reserves and an alleged terrorist threat form the key determinants for the U.S. engagement (Klare/Volman 2006).

Djibouti in 2002. Along with French, Spanish and German troops, 1,700 American soldiers are monitoring the Red Sea and the Somali borders. However, the effectiveness of this force was doubted from the very beginning, as weapons continue to reach Somalia. In reaction to the second severe terrorist attack on the Paradise hotel near the Kenyan coastal city of Mombasa in November 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush set up the 'Eastern Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative', funded by the State Department with U.S.$ 100 million over five years.

Engaging the Sahel Region

Around the same time the U.S. European Command of the U.S. Armed Forces (Eucom) was trying to persuade the Department of State that a similar counter-terrorism initiative is needed in another part of Africa as well. A region that was actually recovering from instability and that had no known links to international terrorism: the Sahel. The political rationality of the 'Pan Sahel Initiative' and its reproduction by the media constitute an illustrative example of how security experts problematized a whole geographical region in order to pave the way for an expansion of influence and control. Within several months this diverse region was represented as a space where terrorists, arms dealers and human traffickers roam freely and where, therefore, 'this nation has to act', to paraphrase U.S. president Bush's justification for pre-emptive action. It was thus securitized. Jeremy Keenan estimates that around 3,000 journalistic articles were published in the twelve months after the hostage-taking of thirty-two European tourists in 2003, reproducing the narrative of the Sahel as Africa's lawless and dangerous 'Wild West' (Keenan 2005: 622; *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 December 2005).

Based on the few deviant voices, I will trace the rationalities of this discourse and its transformation into concrete interventions. These strategies have severe ramifications within the region insofar as they have enabled political actors in the region to appropriate, to instrumentalize and even to shape the discourse and interventionist policies to a certain extent. The militarisation of the region, which aimed at strengthening the capabilities of the governments in regions where state authorities have only limited influence, threatens to have unintended effects.

The official trigger for the engagement of the U.S. in the Sahel region may be seen in the hostage-taking of thirty-two European tourists in Southern Algeria by the 'Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat' (GSPC) in 2003, an action that Eucom's then Deputy Commander Charles Wald considered a 'blessing in disguise' (Village Voice, 31 January 2006). As after the end of the Cold War most of the conflicts Eucom was dealing with simply faded away, Eucom had to find new challenges in order to justify the resources

it is being allocated. That is why a State Department official once called Eucom's new activities in Africa 'a hammer looking for a nail' (ibid.).

In 2002, the year before the hostage-taking, a conflict between Eucom and the State Department over the appropriate U.S. policy towards the Sahel region was developing. The State Department had reservations against Eucom's aggressive military strategy, and particularly against the proposed aerial bombings against militants in northern Mali. The U.S. embassy in Mali strongly warned against the radicalizing effects those strikes against what were believed Arab nomads rather than terrorists would have (ibid.). The plans were dropped, but after the hostage-taking in spring of 2003 a slightly altered counter-terrorism programme, the Pan-Sahel Initiative, could take off. The main goal of this operation was to enable the militaries of Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad to effectively control their whole state territory and to prevent cross border movements of 'illicit arms, drugs, goods and people' (Eucom Interview 2005). Eucom acted as an agenda-setter in 'putting the Sahara on the map as a new front in the war on terror' (*BBC World Service*, 8 and 15 August 2005).[10] And despite the fact that the Department of State officially established the PSI, it was Eucom's public policy machinery which was able to mobilize the media by reproducing the argument of 'an ungoverned Sahara as a breeding ground for terrorists':

'They're there for a purpose, whether it's looking for real estate or recruiting or looking for arms, whatever it is, we know there's a preserve. It may be small but it's a bad indicator. […] It's an area we think is becoming appealing potentially for terrorist organisations or individuals to operate with semi-impunity. […] It has a lot of expanses of open area that are conducive to terrorist operations or sanctuary' (Eucom's former Deputy Commander, General Charles Wald in Associated Press 2004).

In the West, one can receive attention for Africa – beyond humanitarian issues – particularly by referring to security interests. While security issues always were part of the Northern engagement with the South, 9/11 changed the weighting of phenomena such as migration, arms proliferation, disease, and terrorism. They are now represented as interconnected problems on the same scale of 'risks of open borders', which therefore, so the implication, have to be addressed by the same means of intervention. Within the predominant 'war on terror' the military – as we can see not only in Eucom's engagement with the Sahel – has a special role to play.

10 Eucom is responsible for the coordination of the U.S. forces in Europe, large parts of the former Soviet Union and Africa, with the exception of East Africa, the Horn, Egypt and Sudan.

Through an extraordinary public relations policy Eucom disseminated their authoritative knowledge about the terrorist threat originating in the Sahel and the military way to its solution. The perpetual rhetoric of the uncontrolled Sahel and the action needed to counter this supposed threat was escorted by an extensive use of maps, aiming at illustrating the dimensions of the problem. These maps are indicative manifestations of the political rationality within U.S. security circles. They categorize and simplify whole regions and create urgency to take action.

Mapping the Threat

It is commonly expected that maps provide guidance and orientation in representing geographical areas. They have long been considered as adequately describing territories, as 'mirroring' spaces. However, geographers early on acknowledged that maps are simplifying devices – as indeed they have to be since they face the challenge to collapse three-dimensional spaces into a two-dimensional form. Such simplifications necessarily have political implications. As Harley puts it: 'Maps are too important to be left to cartographers alone' (2001b: 149). Maps constitute value-laden images and are deeply involved in the relations of power and knowledge. Harley reminds his readers to look '[…] not through the map at the world it depicts but inwards or backwards to its maker and outwards or forwards to its readers' (quoted in Andrews 2001: 6).

In fact, cartography has played an important role in state-making from the seventeenth century onwards. Rulers of the emerging states after the Peace of Westphalia needed to negotiate and mark their territories. During the Imperial Age maps became powerful tools in establishing borders, claiming ownership of various territories across the globe. As Mark Neocleous put it: The map as an illustration for identity, sovereignty, and legitimacy within a demarcated space 'became the perfect symbol of the state' (Neocleous 2003: 119). The map in its political functionality creates and constructs a reality rather than representing it, using the techniques of selection, omission, simplification, classification, creation of hierarchies, and symbolisation (Harley 2001b: 163; Neocleous 2003: 120). Maps serve the project of the modern state in collecting information about space and transforming it into an object of political knowledge by classifying and generalizing landscapes – similar to the role statistics have in gathering data on the state population. Neocleous has pointed to the mystifying effects of maps. By omitting authorship and interest and by pretending accuracy and actual facts, the map is naturalizing: Borders become accepted, violence is obliterated and – through the reiteration of the own map – emotions towards the homeland are activated (Neocleous 2003: 123).

In our context, the mechanisms of silencing constitute the most important feature as empty spaces on maps are deliberate positivist statements (Harley, summarized by Andrews 2001: 13). Harley identified various ways of silencing in maps: A space can be described as empty and information can deliberately be withheld. Here he refers to the omission for certain reasons like 'x has […] properties that render it unsuitable for inclusion in this map' (ibid. 14). Neocleous reminded us that the Oxford English Dictionary describes 'off the map', as something 'obsolete' and even 'out of existence' (Neocleous 2003: 121).

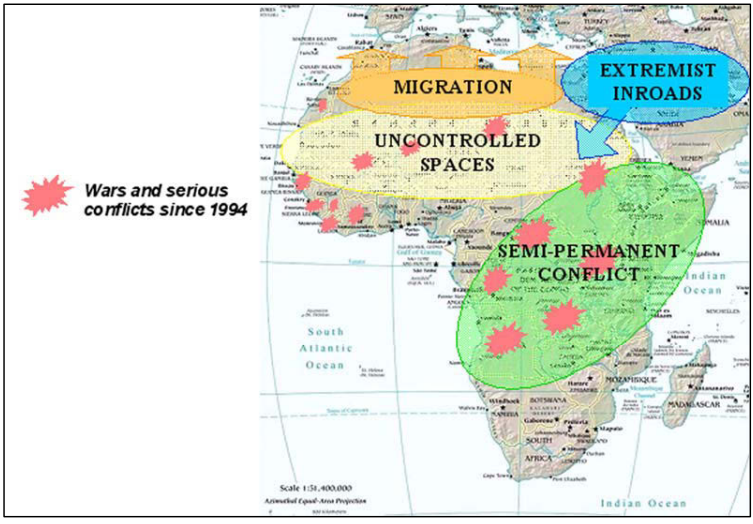
Therefore, maps are political and at the same time '[de-socialising] the territory they present. They foster the notion of a socially empty space' (Harley 2001a: 81). However, in deconstructing the map, Harley identified possibilities to challenge the hegemonic representations: 'By dismantling [a text, a map] we build' (Harley 2001b: 168). In his conclusion he stresses the need for alternative actions: 'If we can accept intertextuality then we can start to read our maps for alternative and sometimes competing discourses' (ibid.).[11]

The securitisation of the Sahel region by U.S. military experts was accompanied by the extensive use of visual aids. The selected maps below were applied at Eucom-workshops to illustrate the urgency of the Pan Sahel Initiative.[12]

11 The need for a 'cognitive mapping' in order to stay capable of political action in a capitalist system was famously raised by Jameson (1984: 83 ff.)

12 The shown maps were used at Eucom workshops within the programme of the Africa Clearing House, which is a discussion forum on security issues in Africa. Map 1 was created by The Economist but was used by Eucom.

Map 1: Africa's key problems



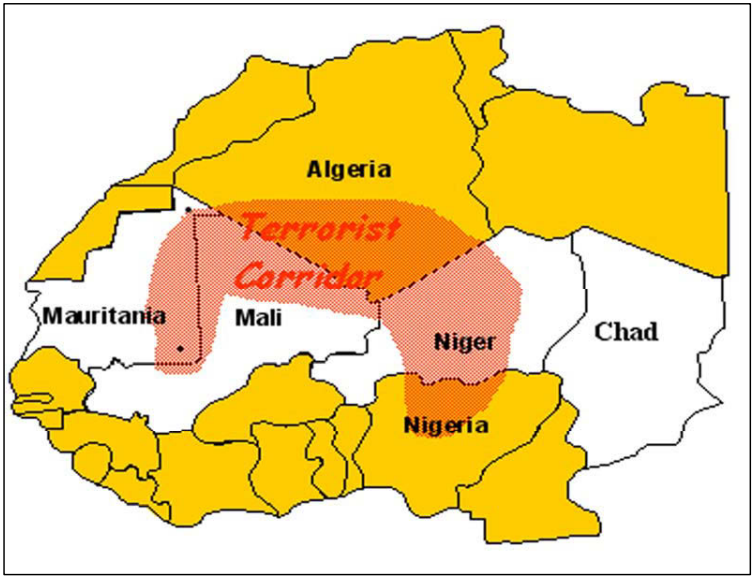
Source: Eucom

Map 1 gives a simplified overview of Africa's presumed key problems. Almost the whole continent seems to be under severe stress and is dominated by four features: conflict, uncontrolled spaces, extremism and migration into Europe. According to Eucom, U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan 'squeezed' terrorists out of these regions into Africa as the 'extremist inroads' from the Arab peninsula show. This 'squeeze-theory' was used on a regular basis by the U.S. military to claim a link between terrorism in the Middle East and Africa.[13] A 'semi-permanent' conflict belt stretches from Somalia in the northeast across Central Africa to Angola in the southwest. Interestingly it includes relatively peaceful regions like Tanzania and Kenya. The whole Sahel area consists of 'uncontrolled spaces', from which there is a massive flow of migration across North Africa into Europe. During the last three years Eucom officials have been very active in the public realm to share their characterisation of the region. They continually depicted the Trans-Sahara region as 'vast empty spaces', 'remote expanses', as 'ungoverned', 'under-governed' or 'poorly policed' regions. The first two characteristics strengthen our perception of the Sahara as a blank space on the globe, a mysterious region we have insufficient knowledge about. It is a region which is not yet classified. However, the latter descriptions applied by Eucom have somewhat clearer implications. These are normative attributions smoothing the way for an active – and

13 See for example Stars and Stripes, 11 January 2004 or Washington File, 23 March 2004.

military – engagement, regardless of the actual presence of internationally operating terrorists in the region. This pattern of levelling and homogenizing the diverse space of the Sahelian Sahara, supported by the illustrating maps below, deliver an easy-to-grasp classification of the proposed area of operation.

Map 2: The terrorist corridor in the Sahel region

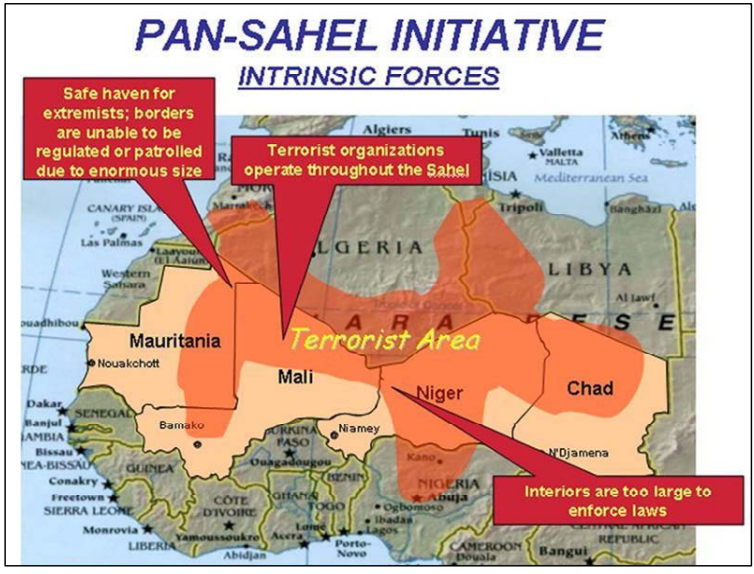


Source: Eucom

On map 2 the whole Sahel region is not only uncontrolled, but forms a terrorist belt reaching from Mauritania across Mali, southern Algeria and Niger into northern Nigeria. In map 3 this belt is expanded even further to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in the northwest. Remarkably – with the exception of Senegal, but including Libya – safe havens for extremists can be found in all the countries the successor of the PSI, the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorist Initiative, will later operate in. According to this map, terrorists are now believed to 'operate throughout the Sahel'. This strategic manifestation of an increased threat is needed to justify the broadening of the counter-terrorism initiatives. In map 3 geopolitical arguments are applied to illustrate a situation that illustrates urgency: 'Interiors are too large to enforce laws' or 'borders are unable to be regulated or patrolled due to enormous size'. Again, geographical size is self-explanatorily related to an absence of order and to terrorist activity. With the expansion of the PSI, Eucom offers another solution to the 'problematic' of the Sahel. The illustration tells us that the fight against terrorism demands cross-border operations, whereas the goal of the Trans-Saharan Counter-

Terrorism Initiative is to reinforce national borders and to control movements on the ground. The solution for the transnational problem is – at least publicly – still seen in the effective nation-state.

Map 3: The expanded terrorist area



Source: Eucom

Broadening the Intervention

The Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), as the initiative is being called after the most recent renaming, is an inter-agency programme, formally led by the Department of State. Apart from the State Department, it involves the Military, the Treasury Department, the Justice Department and the development agency USAID (*New York Times,* 10 June 2005). A certain part of its budget will be managed by USAID. As part of the U.S. State Department USAID has always been an integral pillar of the U.S. foreign policy. Since the 9/11 attacks, however, the convergence of development and security politics has been intensified. Applying the 'whole-of-government'-approach within the counter-terrorism initiative TSCTP, USAID's goal is to 'create a "line" past which the spread of Islamic extremism stops from entering into sub-Saharan West Africa' (USAID 2006). USAID focuses on supporting local governance and on the establishment of a conflict early warning system. Aware of the reservations against an American presence in the Sahel region,

USAID has additionally set up a TSCTP-programme to support marginalized parts of the population in Mauritania, Chad and Niger.

Despite its repeated denial to establish permanent bases in Africa, U.S. president Bush announced in February 2007 the establishment of a 'unified combatant command for Africa' (Africom), a step that reflects the growing strategic interest and the preventive policy approach of the U.S. in Africa.[14] However, U.S. officials were quick to stress that the new command is more than a pure military affair. It is rather seen as a showcase for the now fashionable inter-agency approach and will deal with 'humanitarian assistance', 'disaster relief' but will 'have the responsibility to do whatever military operations that the secretary of defense and the president direct' (DoD 2007). The aim of Africom, according to Pentagon officials, is to 'prevent problems from becoming crises and crises from becoming catastrophes' in light of 'poor governance, wars and population pressures' and 'natural threats' (American Forces Press Service 2006). At the same time, however, the Pentagon insists that the establishment of Africom does not mean an expansion in numbers of combat troops permanently based on the continent (DoD 2007).

'The long war' as the 'war on terror' has been dubbed, rather requires rapid (re-)actions in different parts of the world. To meet the challenges of 'irregular' warfare by non-state actors, the U.S. prefers to aim for temporary basing rights. Often, 'bare-bone facilities' (Klare/Volman 2006: 302) like airstrips or warehouses are sufficient for use in a prompt time frame. In the Trans-Sahara region the U.S. Department of Defence has access to airfields or ports in Algeria, Mali, Senegal, Gabon, Morocco and Tunisia (ibid. 303).

How can this form of intervention be conceptualized while integrating a spatial perspective? From a transnational lens, PSI and TSCTP can be described as flexible types of 'transterritorial deployments' (Latham 2001: 72). As Latham has illustratively shown, such transterritorial deployments differ from other forms of transboundary formations such as arenas and networks. Transterritorial deployments can be defined as purposeful placements of an external entity (unit, representative, organisation) into a local context in which they keep their external identity by retaining strong links to the context from which they are deployed (ibid. 75 ff.). Following Latham, these deployments differ in scope and time, that is, they can include a broad or a narrow agenda (annexation of a territory vs. an expedition or a humanitarian relief operation), and they can be temporary or permanent (military campaign vs. religious missions). As shown above, with the expansion of the PSI into the TSCTI/TSCTP the scope of the deployment was broadened. On the one hand, this reflects a

14 Africom will then be responsible for the whole continent with the exception of Egypt, which will remain under the responsibility of the U.S. Central Command. Africom is supposed to be fully operational by September 2008.

more comprehensive notion of security among policy-makers after 9/11, which requires action of the full-range of government. On the other hand, an intensified engagement influences the social impact in the particular region. Short and narrow deployments such as the Pan Sahel Initiative have the greatest 'situational power', as Latham calls it. They focus on a narrow area of concern, a situation such as a famine, a refugee crisis or, as in our case, a perceived security threat by terrorists in the Trans-Sahel. By doing so, people, discourses and resources are drawn into this concrete situation and power emerges from the delimited focus of the operation: 'It is the power not to have to take on responsibility entailed by these powers over and within society. It is the power to enter and withdraw relatively flexible from situations' (ibid. 82). This reflects to a certain extent the military strategies within the 'long war'.

For many people in the Sahel the biggest concern is the militarisation of the region by the U.S., who aims at expanding often autocratic state structures. The presence of foreign or national military is encountered with distrust, as state actions were considered the source of violence and arbitrariness in the past. Publicly branded as a 'hot spot for terrorism', people fear that the economic marginalisation will aggravate as long as their region is dealt with as a security problem.

It can only be speculated why exactly the PSI expanded into the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership, which also includes economic and development policies. To broaden the agenda of a transterritorial deployment usually means less flexibility, more responsibility for the local context and more interaction with people on the ground. Following the goal of the U.S. government, which is to prevent the spread of extremist thoughts into the region, gaining trust of the local people seems to be a necessary condition. 'Winning the hearts and minds' may, however, be feared to result in the imperial endeavour of a permanent management of these societies, a direction that is being discussed as 'trusteeship'. It is defined as the governance of territories by a mixture of transnational actors, including strong states, multilateral organisation, non-governmental organisations and domestic authorities (Fearon/Laitin 2004: 7 ff.)

Troublemakers in the Sahel?

It is beyond the scope of this contribution to assess the actual terrorist threat by Islamists in the Sahel. In fact, there are confusing and divergent statements coming from the region. Even reports resulting from long field works did not come to a decisive conclusion (ICG 2005a; Mc Govern in *BBC World Service*, 8 and 15 August 2005). Suffice it to say that in the beginning of the 1990s, the region was in a state of recovery: The brutal civil war in Algeria and the Tuareg rebellions in Mali and Chad came to an end, extremist groups were dis-

persed and tourists started to rediscover the region. The overall level of security in the countries improved. However, according to Keenan's analysis, this period came to an end shortly after with the advent of the Pan-Sahel Initiative (Keenan 2006: 270 ff.).

For the U.S. government the kidnapping of the European tourists in Southern Algeria in 2003 was proof of the presence of Islamist terrorists in the Sahel, namely the GSPC, a splinter group of the Algerian Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA). However, several organisations, journalists and experts articulated doubts about the alleged acuteness of this threat. Keenan is convinced that the Algerian military intelligence services lured the Americans into the region by infiltrating the GSPC in order to rid the country of the international pariah status it had had in the 1990s and to attract foreign investments and military equipment: 'Probably 90 percent of the Saharan population, as far as I can make it out, just know that the word GSPC now is a name for the Algerian intelligent services. And there is a lot of truth in that' (Keenan in *BBC World Service*, 8 and 15 August 2005).[15] The Algerian military service Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS) has some experience in manipulating different groups. Former Algerian militaries made allegations that during the civil war the infiltration of armed rebel groups was a deliberate strategy of escalation of the DRS in order to undermine popular support for the Islamists (AI 2006: 8).

Since the hostage-taking of the European tourists in 2003 Algerian authorities and Eucom officials have been quick to stress this link between armed groups operating in the Sahel and al Qaeda, a claim that remains questionable until today.[16] In 2004 the U.S. State Department added the GSPC to its 'Terrorist Exclusion List'. However, at the same time the then U.S. ambassador to Mali, Vicki Huddleston, said that the Algerian GSPC did not constitute a threat in the region any longer (Faath 2005: 8). Yet, General Wald rated the risk of terrorism in the Sahel at '100 percent. They have already had terrorism in the Sahel region. It is a matter of how bad it could get' (Wald in *BBC World Service*, 8 and 15 August 2005). U.S. officials are unclear about whether terrorism already 'breeds' or 'could breed' in the region. Even Eucom admits that there is a dispute on whether the Sahel is a breeding ground or could become one (Eucom interview 2005). Within the paradigm of 'preemptive action' within U.S. foreign policy, the level of threat needs to be sustained in order to justify interventions and tough security measures. The secu-

15 In the same line see Le Monde diplomatique, February 2005.

16 For the ongoing dispute even amongst academics see the various articles in the special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 2007, 25 (1). Despite GSPC's self-proclaimed and widely reported merger with al-Qaeda, its character and role in Algeria remain ambiguous. See *Washington Post,* 5 October 2006.

ritisation of the Sahel and its persistent representation as a region characterized by the lack of governance, illegitimate cross-border trade and rising extremism gives a striking example. Thus, it does not matter whether terrorists are active in the region or whether 'roaming' people are affiliated to al Qaeda. It is sufficient to refer to the pure probability in the future, that is, to claim that the threat 'may materialize'. As Charles Wald put it: 'They are not necessarily al Qaeda but they'd like to be with al Qaeda and they have to be addressed' (Wald in *BBC World Service*, 8 and 15 August 2005).

Militarisation, Marginalisation and Discontent in the Sahel Region

Despite the relatively narrow scope of the U.S. counter-terrorism initiatives in Northern Africa, they deeply affect local settings. Conceptualizing spaces as empty or undergoverned are, as critical cartographers have shown, strong manifestations of political rationalities. They delimit spaces and assign certain characteristics to a territory. On the maps discussed above, the whole area of the Sahelian Sahara region is shown as an 'uncontrolled space', which is at the same time translated into instability and a threat to global security. The labelling of people of the Sahara as susceptible to terrorist activities constitutes an influential knowledge about this space which allowed for the counter-terrorism initiatives to be established. Yet, according to critical scholars, it was these interventions – aiming at fostering security – which have resulted in an increased instability within the affected countries:

'[…] far from furthering political stability, security and democracy, Washington's ill-conceived policy has taken North Africa and much of the Sahel – a region which is considerably larger than the entire USA – into a dangerous spiral of increased authoritarianism and repression, increased regional instability and insecurity, increased popular resentment of both Washington (anti-Americanism) and their own regimes and the increased threat of militant extremism' (Keenan 2006: 271).

There is no doubt about the fact that certain actors in the region, foremost state authorities, welcome the international counter-terrorism engagement as they profit in various ways from its presence. In a report, indicatively entitled *Islamic Terrorism in the Sahel – Fact or Fiction?*, the International Crisis Group, states: 'It is […] apparent that actors on the ground in these four countries [Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad – J.B.] are poised to use American fears of an Islamist threat to benefit financially and/or politically in ways that recall the manipulation of Cold War politics by many African governments' (ICG 2005a: 2).

Mauritania's government adapted to the discourse of the 'war on terror' most avowedly. Its performances aimed at confirming the perception of the Islamist threat that has dominated U.S. foreign policy since 9/11 (Jourde 2007: 87 ff.). The government of former President Maaouya Ould Taya construed the coup attempts of 2003 and 2004 as evidence for the existence of international terrorism within his country, although the plotters came from Mauritania and to a certain extent even from within the Mauritanian military. He overstated the internal Islamist threat and played down internal political cleavages (ICG 2005b). In April 2005 the government carried out a crackdown on Muslim leaders and in June it declared to have found evidence related to the GSPC. The U.S. government agreed with the assessment of the government of Taya in underlining that the biggest threat to Mauritania allegedly came from outside forces (*Associated Press*, 25 June 2005). The government quickly blamed Muslim fundamentalists for an attack on a Mauritanian border post near Lemgheyti in June 2005, where twenty-four people lost their lives.

However, opposition media and international experts claimed that several important questions remain unanswered.[17] Firstly, it is unrealistic that the GSPC would launch such a large scale attack just a few days before the beginning of the region's largest military manoeuvre, the United States-led Operation Flintlock, in which 4,000 troops including 1,000 U.S. soldiers took part. Secondly, why were over twenty vehicles, which the rebels allegedly used for the attack, not spotted by plane or satellite surveillance? Thirdly, why did the first soldiers at the scene, the Algerians, offer no assistance to the wounded? And finally, why did the government deny access to the wounded in the hospital? Additionally, experts on the ground doubt that the GSPC even has the capacity to carry out such a large attack. However, the most important question is what should be the reason for GSPC to attack Mauritania, as members of the group took refuge and received medical treatment in Mauritania earlier on? It rather seems to be the case that it was convenient for the government to blame the GSPC. At that time, human rights violations, widespread corruption, a growing inequality and frustration, particularly among people from the south who did not feel sufficiently represented in the state apparatus, was soaring in Mauritania. Several scholars are convinced that Ould Taya's tactics of securing support by constantly stressing an external terrorist threat to the country, proved to be successful for a considerable time (Jourde 2007: 77-78). The International Crisis Group argued that 'the Ould Taya government's anti-terrorist rhetoric accompanied by repressive actions appears to be primarily a convenient device for not tackling acute political problems' (ICG 2005a: 16 and 2005b).

17 See for the following BBC World Service, 8 and 15 August 2005.

Ould Taya's reign was ended by a coup d'état on 3 August 2005. Parts of the Mauritanian military under the former head of national security, Colonel Eli Ould Mohamed Vall, seized power while the president was abroad. Having known Ould Taya's rule, the international community remained largely silent in their reactions to the coup – despite their initial support of his politics. In a referendum in June 2006 the elaboration of a new constitution and the schedule for the transfer of power back to civilian rule were approved by an overwhelming majority of the Mauritanians. With the parliamentary and presidential elections held in November 2006 and March 2007, respectively, the military so far stuck to its promise.[18]

Temporarily, the coup had a subduing effect on the counter-terrorism initiatives in Mauritania. The U.S., who had trained Mauritanian soldiers in the PSI and in Operation Flintlock under the old government, put the training on hold and reassessed the political development. Today, however, the U.S. have arranged the reintegration of Mauritania into their 'International Military Education and Training Program' in 2007.

The main profiteer of closer ties to the U.S. seems to be Algeria. Due to the brutal massacres of the Algerian army in the civil war following the annulment of the 1992 elections, which the Islamist party FIS would have won, the country became an international outcast. The Army, the Military Security DRS and various militias committed large scale human rights violations in the name of 'fighting terrorists'. It was not until the Bush administration gained power that the economic and political relationship between the U.S. and Algeria under Abdelaziz Bouteflika as president were revived. Since 9/11 this relationship also involves the military and intelligence sectors (Faath 2005: 5). The Bouteflika government managed to convince the Bush administration that the two countries were fighting against the same extremist enemies and, therefore, should foster a symbiotic relationship. Since then, U.S. authorities have acknowledged the Algerian 'experience' in fighting terrorists. As members of the U.S. military stated, the United States can learn a lot from Algeria about fighting enemies in sparsely populated desert areas (Eucom interview 2005). Reversely, on a visit to Algeria, then U.S. defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld said that 'they need some things and we have things we can help with' (*New York Times*, 13 February 2006). In 2002 the Maghrebian countries were included in the U.S. Anti-Terror Assistance programme.

18 In March 2007 Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, a former minister under Taya who lived in exile, was elected new president of Mauritania. At this stage, it is too early to predict Mauritania's future foreign policy. However, the fact that Abdallahi was seen as a 'consensus' candidate and that he was backed by the army makes a certain continuity in the relationship with the West highly probable.

Since then, the U.S. have multiplied their military and non-military aid to Algeria. Despite the still opaque role of the Algerian DRS[19] within the intra-Algerian conflict and the ongoing human rights violations, in the two years of 2005 and 2006 Algeria was permitted to buy military equipment from U.S. companies ('commercial sales') for more than U.S.$ 500 millions (Volman 2006; Department of State/USAID 2007: 734). Additionally, the European Union made Algeria one of the priority countries in their counter-terrorism assistance (Council of the EU 2005). Still, the dependency seems to be mutual. Keenan believes that the Americans rely on Algerian intelligence in the region, as they themselves lack capacities on the ground (Keean in *BBC World Service*, 8 and 15 August 2005). Some sources even claim that Algerian and U.S. military are jointly carrying out anti-terror operations across the Sahel, which is, however, constantly denied by the U.S. military (ibid. Eucom interview 2005). The close military relationship between Algeria and the U.S. is expected to have strengthened the notorious security establishment in Algeria. Despite the decrease in violent acts, a culture of impunity and torture still holds reign in the country. Keenan summarizes that the militarisation of the region has reinforced 'cleavages between ruling elites, protected by their security establishments, and the "unrepresented many"' (Keenan 2006: 271). Local Tuareg in the southern part of Algeria complained that since the Algerian government won the U.S. as their partner, the local state authorities – including the police and the DRS – act even more repressive against members of the opposition and civil society. This led to a widespread violent outbreak in the southern city of Tamanrasset in July 2005. There are allegations that state agents provoked these riots in order to prove 'extremist activity' in the region (Keenan 2005: 635).

In Mali an instrumentalisation of the 'war on terror' by the government was not performed as blantantly as in Mauritania. However, the extended counter-terrorism initiative has become a symbol for fostering the North-South divide in the country. While the government profits from both the international funding and the partnership with the West, Northern leaders are suspicious of a strengthened central government at a time when decentralisation is supposed to gain ground.

According to some scholars, the widely circulated and reiterated representation of Northern Mali as 'ungoverned' and the subsequent materialisation of the counter-terrorist rhetoric, undermines a trust-building co-operation between the government and the population in Northern Mali and is more likely to facilitate a destabilisation of the region (Gutelius 2007: 66 ff.). The U.S. military states that Mali is one of the most difficult cases within the TSCTP.

19 To date, no public information is available about the mandate and the organisation of the DRS (AI 2006: 7 ff.).

Eucom admits that they do not have an answer as yet to question of how to improve the security situation without destabilizing the region (Eucom interview 2005). Although the 1990s rebellions of the Tuareg in northern Mali were settled in 1996, there is still a high level of frustration amongst the Tuareg. The peace accord included the integration of former rebels into the Malian Army and investment in northern infrastructure (Klute/von Trotha 2000). However, the distrust against the national government persists. Local sources estimate that up to 90 percent of the Tuareg in towns like Kidal are unemployed and do not feel they can participate in development and investment programmes, despite the efforts made by the government to include the northern regions (*BBC World Service*, 8 and 15 August 2005). In fact, marginalisation continues to thrive as poverty remains the most challenging problem (*IRIN*, 14 October 2004, ICG 2005a: 20). Local Muslim leaders fear that hopeless youths could follow everyone who promises an opportunity, and that the dissatisfaction could make people susceptible to join fundamentalist groups who are present in northern Mali.

For many young people the cross-border trade constitutes the only possibility for social advancement. Northern Mali's livelihood depends on the trade across the Sahara. Virtually all products which can be found on the markets in Kidal come from Algeria. On the border there are hardly any customs posts, large parts of the traded goods remain undocumented. Cigarette smuggling is a lucrative business. It is particularly this uncontrolled cross-border movement of goods which worries the U.S. government the most. They fear that smuggling activities contribute to supporting terrorist operations. The primary goal of the U.S. counter-terrorism initiatives is to help the Malian government to effectively control their national borders and to cut-off cross-border smuggling. However, strengthening state structures and reinserting the presence of the Malian Army in the north is a sensitive issue.

Economically, the region has for a long time been a self-help system. In the 1990s, due to the privatisation policy of the World Bank, neglect of the region by the Malian government and corruption of formal markets, Islamic NGOs, coming from Saudi Arabia and Libya, introduced new economic possibilities into the area and made new resources accessible. They established development projects and provided services in areas that Western donors and the government neglected (Gutelius 2006). As there is no alternative for ensuring subsistence, a disruption of informal trade would deepen desperation and frustration. International experts compare this policy with the destruction of the poppy fields in Afghanistan. If one destroys the lifeblood of a region without offering an alternative, then the people may turn towards more ex-

tremist thoughts (Mc Govern in *BBC World Service*, 8 and 15 August 2005).[20] These informal networks offer possibilities for acquiring different kinds of capital for many young people. As David Gutelius put it:

'What the U.S. and its allies have failed to recognize is the multivariate nature of these struggles, which comprise in any case more than cigarette smuggling or other goods thought to fund al-Qaeda. Informal marketing activities are social mechanisms by which communities not only cope with serious environmental degradation and deep social change, but also the shifting formal sector markets over which they have little control and to which they have little access' (Gutelius 2006: 39).

Due to these developments, experts fear a new Tuareg rebellion.[21] An incident in May 2006 gave proof of the volatility of the region. On 23 May, several Tuaregs under the leadership of the former rebellion leader Hassan Fagaga attacked three military bases in Kidal and Menaka and took arms and ammunition. Six people were reported to have died during this action. Afterwards, the attackers demanded increased efforts for the development of the north and a more effective integration of Tuareg into the Malian Army.

Conclusion

The article critically analysed the integration of the Sahel into the 'war on terror' by the various practices of 'problematizing' the region. A spatial perspective on this process shows which kinds of images were assigned to these geographical spaces in order to create the sense of urgency which has legitimized the interventions in the Sahel. After demonstrating the range of techniques used by the U.S. government, the article sought to show how the rhetoric and the subsequent counter-terrorism initiatives affect the social relations in the countries on different levels. The discourse of the 'war on terror', which works rather like a global template, has opened various ways for governments to use its rhetoric to meet their own ends. As critical voices have shown, it is not unlikely that the counter-terrorism initiatives have become a cash cow for governments who know that using the T-word will certainly raise awareness in Washington. Such tactics threaten to render a profound dealing with internal conflicts, such as the marginalisation and exclusion of the population in

20 In November 2006 Mali's application for funding under the U.S. Millennium Challenge Account was approved. The country signed a 'development Compact' and will receive 461 million U.S. $ for irrigation and infrastructure projects by the U.S. government over the next five years.

21 As the Malian professor Aboubacrim Ag Hindi put it: 'The biggest danger in this region is not al-Qaida. It is famine. If the development of these zones is not undertaken, we may see more rebellion there' (IRIN, 14 October 2004).

the remote areas of the Sahel countries, impossible. So far, the expanded security policies in parts of Algeria, Mali and Mauritania have revealed their repressive effects and have resulted in growing frustration which, in turn, may lead to resistance or disengagement among the excluded groups. Finally, a Western policy focusing solely on expanding government control into areas where distrust against the central state prevails, where internal conflicts may flare up again, where the ecological and economic vulnerability is high and, not least, oil resources were recently discovered[22], is on the verge of promoting unintended consequences. However, such a policy reflects the persistence of state-centred views in the North despite the operation of other modes of social control and governance in many postcolonial settings.

With regard to epistemology and methodology, pioneering research aiming at a full understanding of the 'social life of the war on terror' needs to focus on different levels: a thorough textual analysis helps to identify the rationalities of political actors and security professionals about the problematic of 'undergoverned' spaces and populations; a study of knowledge production makes obvious the conditions of its translation and dissemination from the global into the local. Additionally, future research must examine the mechanisms of appropriation of the discourse and its conversion into security practices in the region. Finally, an ethnographic analysis explores the reactions of the problematized groups to the exclusionary policies which deeply affect the social fabric. There is no doubt that hegemonic discourses and subsequent interventions are to different extents translated, internalized or challenged on the ground. An interdisciplinary approach that combines a multi-sited ethnographic with a political-sociological approach, sharing an interest in the analysis of the global topography of security (on a macro level), of the conditions of knowledge production (on a medium level) and of the everyday security practices and reactions to them (on a micro level) can yield a heuristic value in revealing the multifaceted apparatus of the 'war on terror'.

22 There are offshore fields in Mauritania and oil fields in the Tuareg areas in northern Mali and at the border to Niger. Additionally, neighbouring Nigeria is the 5th biggest oil provider for the U.S. Africa will come up for 25 percent of the U.S. oil consumption within the next years. U.S. energy companies have invested 45 billion $ in exploring oil fields, 50 billion $ are due to be invested (ICG 2005a: 26). The former acting assistant secretary of state for African Affairs, Charles Snyder, said: 'It used to be a kind of cruel joke twenty years ago when some of us tried to pretend Africa might rise to the level of a strategic interest, but thanks to the oil deposits we're finding every day in and near Africa, I can say with a straight face 30 percent of our oil will come from there, and I promise you it is a strategic interest' (ICG 2005a: 25).

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