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Mohamed, in the last report, the briefing you gave to the Security Council, you wrote and spoke of, and I quote, 'a worsening security situation in the entire Sahel'. You elaborated and spoke about banditry, terrorism and inter-communal violence, but you also mentioned some progress on the governance side and democracy building. However, you basically concentrated on the worsening security situation pointing to Mali and Burkina Faso in particular. My question is, could you give us a little bit more detail on the specific kind and the magnitude of the security challenges in that region and also try to tell us what organizations like the G5 Sahel or Operation Burkane or the UN mission in Mali, can actually do?

Mohamed Ibn CHAMBAS

There are two areas to keep in mind here. First of all, there is Sahel and then the Lake Chad Basin area, which are facing specific threats from terrorism and violent extremism. As a result of the situation and the activities of terrorist groups in the north of Mali, which has descended to central Mali and is now spilling over into Burkina Faso and Niger, we are now witnessing what we characterize as a deterioration in the security situation in the Sahel region. There is evidence of this in the now almost daily attacks by terrorist groups in Mali, of course, particularly central Mali. This has also triggered inter-communal conflict, because of the skilful way the terrorist groups have infiltrated certain communities leading to an unfortunate characterization of the entire community as supporters of terrorism. Therefore, we see the very unfortunate attacks, for instance, between the Peuhl communities and the Dogon. Of course, this has flowed initially into the west of Niger, into the provinces of Tillaberi and Tahoua, which are also increasingly witnessing the very active presence of these terrorist groups. Recently, and this has caused the entire region to wake up to this challenge, we have also seen the terrorist phenomenon in the Sahel descending into Burkina Faso, which has otherwise has been seen to be a fairly stable and strong country and a buffer between the Sahel and the coastal states, which is indeed descending into instability with regular attacks. While we have been here, two days ago, there was an attack near Fada N'gourma which is quite far south and one of the biggest cities in Burkina Faso, a bit outside the Soom and Sahel regions. It is a crossroad city linking many of the countries such as Benin, Togo, Ghana and in fact, it is a major regional highway to Niger. When cities like that come under threat then you can see that this phenomenon is expanding.

In general, that is the threat in the Sahel, which is particularly linked to terrorist groups that have been known to exist in the north of Mali that have declared links with international terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda, Islamic State, etc. In the Lake Chad Basin it is a slightly different story. You could talk of a home-grown terrorist group, which Boko Haram is, having come out of Borno state in the north east of Nigeria. Initially it affected six north eastern states of Nigeria and then it spread into Cameroun, Chad and the south of Niger, for example, in Diffa county. Although it was seen as maybe just a fluke, it has shown resilience. In the campaign that brought Buhari, the current President to power, his strength and I think the perception was that as a former military man, with a tough reputation from those days of military government in West Africa, he would take on and defeat Boko Haram. Recently Boko Haram celebrated its 10th anniversary and it is more or less the fifth year of the government of President Buhari. It has not been very easy to fully contain Boko Haram. It remains effective in Borno state, though I should say there has definitely been some progress. Before, there were at least six states in the north east that were under threat and today Boko Haram's influence and effectiveness has been reduced to Borno state. That is definite progress. Certainly, even in Cameroun and Chad we have seen that its influence and effectiveness has been reduced to just predatory attacks on communities, villages, etc.



In both cases, the response of the region has been on the one hand the creation of the G5 Sahel as a community of countries facing this existential threat from terrorists and violent extremist in the Sahel. They have been able to organize so as to try to address the phenomenon in a comprehensive way, more or less along the lines of what the UN advocates. That is that it should be a total approach, not just a security approach, but also addressing the root causes, such as poverty, exclusion and what Professor Robert Dossou talked about, the governance deficit. In some of the countries because the territories are so huge, whether you are talking about Mali, Niger or Chad, the government itself, the question of state capacities are so limited that its presence has not been felt in some communities. Let us face it, there has also clearly been some discrimination and negligence and just not the right attitude to some communities in the past. All of this needs to be attacked at the same time as we seek to address the poverty and the lack of basic socio-economic infrastructure with schools, education, provisions for women and youth, particularly generating youth employment. G5 Sahel has this comprehensive approach, as well as seeking to set-up a force to fight terrorism, on which the UN's position has been very clear. The Secretary-General and all his advisors have recommended that this needs the support of the Security Council and we still hope it will come around to authorising direct support to this force.

Very quickly, if we shift back to the Chad Basin countries, they have also made an effort in setting-up what is called a multination joint task force. The four countries have contributed troops, and I would say they are even been a bit more advanced than the G5 Sahel, which is still a work in progress in a way. The MNJTF has actually been operational with support from Force Barkhane, which is deployed in the region, but also from the EU in particular, but also partners such as the US, France, and the UK, which have provided bilateral support. Nigeria's role there has to be acknowledged with the initial grant of USD 100 million.

There is that effort to deal with the problem in the security sense, but for me the most significant thing is the acknowledgement of the need to address the root causes of this phenomenon of violent extremism and terrorism. As in the Lake Chad Basin you now have a regional stabilization strategy, which addresses not just the security aspects but is also looking at how we ensure the objective of sustainable development. SDGs are actually part of the national programmes, decentralized to these regions where we are seeing high levels of poverty, low literacy rates, lack of health and other basic facilities that need to be there.

To give it a regional *chapeau*, we have recently seen ECOWAS convene a summit on 14 September with West Africa as a whole together with Sahel and it is significant for this summit, Cameroun, Chad and Mauritania were invited. It is safe to say this is no longer a problem of the Sahel countries and Lake Chad Basin countries alone, it is a problem that even threatens coastal states and countries like Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin are saying that they would like to join hands in tackling this phenomenon and ensuring a truly regional approach in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

Volker PERTHES

What I understand you are saying is that the root causes, of course, are not terrorism and Jihadism but governance, poverty, lack of sustainability in development. However, if I understood your interventions at this conference yesterday and the day before correctly, you were basically saying that the Europeans and the Americans should engage as strongly, and as I understood militarily, as they do in Syria and Iraq. Is that actually your recommendation?

Mohamed Ibn CHAMBAS

Some people would be less diplomatic and say that until the Libya problem is solved, what we are doing in West Africa and the Sahel is maybe just putting a bandage on the wound. They will argue strongly and in fact some of the heads of states in the regions often say, that they told them to be careful about Libya and you did not listen. Perhaps, as Colin Powell would say, 'you broke it, you fix it'. Frankly, until Libya is stabilized, there is a capable state there and it does not become so that these groups have free reign with their different supports. That is the concern of Sahel and West African states. It is true that if you look at governance issues and the neglect of past governments, particularly military governments in Nigeria, it is no secret that the military governments were led by people from the north, who frankly did not do enough. Should it be the case that you go to Borno and the literacy rate is less than 50%? That is not acceptable today that there are not enough schools and you can repeat that whether it is the extreme north in

Cameroun, in Chad or in the areas of Burkina Faso where you see this phenomenon. There are certain clear patterns and 60 years after independence that level of poverty should not still persist, but it is the reality. We should not forget the aspect of women who have not been enrolled in school, the fertility rates are still too high, whether in Niger or Mali. All these issues need to be dealt with, but we also have to understand that today, the groups that are fighting there are aligned to international terrorist groups, to Al Qaeda or Islamic State. The Islamic State West African Province is claiming attacks in Niger that led to the deaths of Americans and in the north east of Nigeria in Borno state, they are now saying that one of the factions of Boko Haram is now fully aligned with Islamic State West Africa Province. There are those internal factors with governance issues that need to be dealt but our concern is also that these groups are aligned with international terrorist groups. That is why we say that we are not seeing the same vigour of fervour with which these nefarious groups were taken on and defeated in Iraq and Syria, but we need it from the international community.

Volker PERTHES

Thank you and also for already making the connection to the next theatre we will be moving to and also reminding us of the Pottery house principle which here seems to be redefined in a way that whoever breaks Iraq and Libya may become responsible for the Sahel and West Africa. The connection to the Mashreq, the region east of the Mediterranean is clear and you laid it out, if only by the movement, the migration of terrorists who have lost their space, their territorial dominance in parts of Iraq and Syria.