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NIGER CONFLICT INSIGHTS

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The purpose of this report is to provide analysis and recommendations to national, regional and continental decision makers in the implementation of peace and security-related instruments. The opinions expressed in this report are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies.

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SITUATION ANALYSIS

FIGURE 1. COUNTRY PROFILE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION	HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HDI)ⁱ	GDP PER CAPITA
22.4M	INDEX: 0.377 RANK: 189/189	\$1,745
NEIGHBOURS	LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (YRS)	RECS
ALGERIA BENIN BURKINA FASO CHAD, LIBYA MALI NIGERIA	62.0	AUTORITÉ DU LIPTAKO-GOURMA CEN-SAD CONSEIL DE L'ENTENTE ECOWAS G5 SAHEL UEMOA

ⁱ United Nations Development Programme. (2020). Human Development Reports-Niger. Human development indicators. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NER>

With a vast arid and landlocked territory of 1,267,000 km², Niger represents a strategic junction in the Sahelo-Saharan strip.¹ It shares borders with seven countries both in the Sahel and Saharan regions majorly affected by security threats such as violent extremism, organised crime and multi-nature local conflicts. These growing cross-border security threats gradually spill over to Niger and tend to shake its precarious stability. Two-thirds (77%) of Niger's territory is covered by desert lands unfavourable for farming and several other economic activities necessary for survival while its 22.4 million population is forecasted to approximately double in the coming 23 years.² As the country is located in one of the hottest regions worldwide, challenging ecological conditions seriously minimise its economic potential that deeply relies on the informal sector representing 75% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).³ By way of risk factors, the economic and climatic hurdles foster socio-economic vulnerabilities affecting Niger's citizenry and paving a path for parallel economic systems as low income does not allow the state to appropriately respond to the survival needs of its people. Since the early 90s, Niger's democratisation process has been enamelled by recurrent political divergences, armed insurgencies and inter-communal struggle to access and control natural resources.⁴ The country experienced four

military coup d'états, numerous mutinies, five changes of constitution as well as disbandment of the constitutional court.⁵ The combination of these developments left the country internally fragile.

Currently, Niger is grappling with violent extremism and trans-boundary crimes which are cross-cutting security concerns shared with its neighbours including Mali, Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, Burkina Faso and Benin. Niger has historically had consistent mining resources, particularly gold and uranium. The country was ranked among the worldwide uranium top producers in 2019.⁶ However, oil discovery in Niger is relatively recent. Besides, the growing interest of criminal and terrorist groups in mining activities at Niger's borderlands fosters ground for covetousness and revival of local tensions that the state has been struggling to contain for decades.⁷ This poses a question of where Niger, with various internal vulnerabilities, is heading in an unstable region.

This report aims at scrutinising the risk factors for peace and security in Niger so as to provide strategic options to defuse both the internal and external security turmoil.

Niger's vast and quasi-arid territory is a significant factor

1 The World Bank. (2017, November 28). Republic of Niger priorities for ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity. Systematic country diagnostic. Page 1.

2 République du Niger. (2016). Stratégie de développement et de sécurité dans les zones sahélo – sahariennes du Niger. Page 20.

3 République du Niger. (2016). Ibid. Page 20.

4 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI. (2020). Country Report-Niger. Page 4.

5 Perspective monde. (2010, février 18). Renversement du président Mamadou Tandja au Niger. Retrieved from <https://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMEve?codeEve=1297>

6 Uranium Maps and Statistics. (2019). Wise Uranium Project. Retrieved from <http://www.wise-uranium.org/umaps.html>

7 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Managing Trafficking in Northern Niger. Africa Report N°285. Page 1.

CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

that constrains its potential for development. About 88% of its soil is prone to erosion with low capacities of retention (water and organic matters).⁸ A majority of Niger's lands does not allow productive agriculture to ensure sustainable internal food security. As such, most of Nigeriens are at risk of precarious living conditions given that agricultural and livestock activities engage more than 80% of the workforce and account for at least 40% of its GDP.⁹ This contingent vulnerability fosters stiff competitions among and between diverse groups over scarce resources, especially over the 12% fertile lands concentrated in southern Niger.¹⁰ In due course, environmental constraints carry the potential to disrupt social cohesion as tensions among and between herders and farmers, for instance, could escalate due to a range of reasons which are either identity-based or strategic. In addition, poor governance which is an important Achilles' heel of Niger leaves the country fragile.

Although poor governance in Niger is embedded by environmental factors that undermine productive capacities, the negative impacts of rampant corruption that plagues the Nigerien public administration are not negligible. In fact, Niger is among countries with a high perceived level of corruption in their public sectors; it ranks 120 out of 180 countries.¹¹ A basic comprehension could suggest a weak social service delivery system throughout the country. The high perception of corruption that Nigeriens have about their public administration could also mean that there are multiple frustrations nurtured among the citizenry and risks of fragmentation between groups depending on who is neglected and who is privileged. The ingrained corruption also paves way for criminal cartels to infiltrate the public administration and neuralgic bodies of the political apparatus.

Currently, organised crime appears to be among the major threats to Niger's stability. The phenomenon is not new; it has been problematic for decades in the country's quasi-uninhabited and poorly governed septentrional part.¹² Yet, it tends to deteriorate due to the proliferation of terrorist groups in the unsteady Sahel region, perceived as excellent partners in crime.¹³ Beyond ensuring security on trafficking routes against cash, terrorist groups inversely view cartels as partners able to provide strategic support either in community leverage or in planning and executing cross-border deadly attacks comparable to those occurred in Inatès and Chingodiar.¹⁴ In that context, a new trend emerged in 2016 following the death of Cherif Ould Abidine, a prosperous businessman and shadowy kingpin trafficker in northern Niger.¹⁵ Mounting clashes between diverse small groups of traffickers over uncontrolled trafficking routes and shares of the vacant market are being noticed in the region.¹⁶ An increasing tendency toward militarised trafficking is, therefore, of concern. Robberies and armed attacks of trafficking convoys carrying drugs, arms and minerals such as gold prompt groups to seek means of protection, notably weapons.¹⁷ This would beget bloodshed that state officials are striving to defuse through intricate arrangements with traffickers. The broad availability of small arms (legal and illegal) is an important enabling and sustaining factor for both organised crime and violent extremism.¹⁸ Hence, there is a need for strategies to entrench actions aiming at controlling the circulation of small arms and light weapons.

8 The World Bank. (2017, November 28). Ibid. Page ix.

9 The World Bank. (2017, November 28). Ibid. Page 1.

10 Organisation des Nations Unies. (2012). Guide pratique pour la prévention et la gestion des conflits liés à la terre et aux ressources naturelles. Groupe inter-agences pour les actions préventives. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/fr/land-natural-resources-conflict/pdf/publications/land-conflict.pdf>

11 The Fund for Peace. (2020). Fragile states index annual report 2020. Page 7. Retrieved from <https://fundforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/fsi2020-report.pdf>

12 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Managing Trafficking in Northern Niger. Africa Report N°285. Page 6.

13 Assanvo, W., Dakono B., Thérooux-Bénoni, L.-A., & Maïga, I. (2019, December). Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma. Institute for Security Studies (ISS). Africa report no. 26. Page 9.

14 Le Monde & Agence Française de Presse. (2020, January 13). Au Niger, l'armée subit ses plus lourdes pertes à Chingodiar avec 89 soldats tués. Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/01/13/au-niger-l-armee-subit-ses-plus-lourdes-pertes-a-chingodiar-avec-89-soldats-tues_6025664_3212.html

15 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 6. Cherif Ould Abidine was a prosperous businessman, founder and owner of 3 major Nigerien Companies: (2STV transport company, SST transport and hydrocarbons, and Mahmoud BTP operating in construction and public work). Additionally, he was an important figure of the PND-S-Tarraya party (the current ruling party). The prosperity of his companies is strongly linked to fraudulent large public procurements facilitated by his political ties.

16 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 6.

17 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 6.

18 De Tessières, S. (2017, March). Measuring illicit arms flows. Small arms Survey. Retrieved from <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP1-Niger.pdf>

The intricate arrangements that the government nurtures with traffickers are akin to a *laissez-faire* approach to help avoid generalised clashes with security forces, and between groups drawing on communal lines.¹⁹ Yet, such arrangements allow traffickers to grow and become wealthy to an extent they can have ties in political parties and subsequently among government officials depending on which party is ruling. Some facts on the ground suggest connivance between security forces and traffickers.²⁰ At

least two hypotheses could help to comprehend such a situation: the relatively low pay (salary), compared to the African average salary scale, that fosters greed among security forces, on the one hand, and the political ties with traffickers, on the other.²¹ In addition, the current terrorist threat, nurtured by income from organised crime-related activities, seems to prompt the state's military procurement which gradually takes an important part of the national annual budget since 2015 while the citizenry's purchasing power remains obviously low.²²

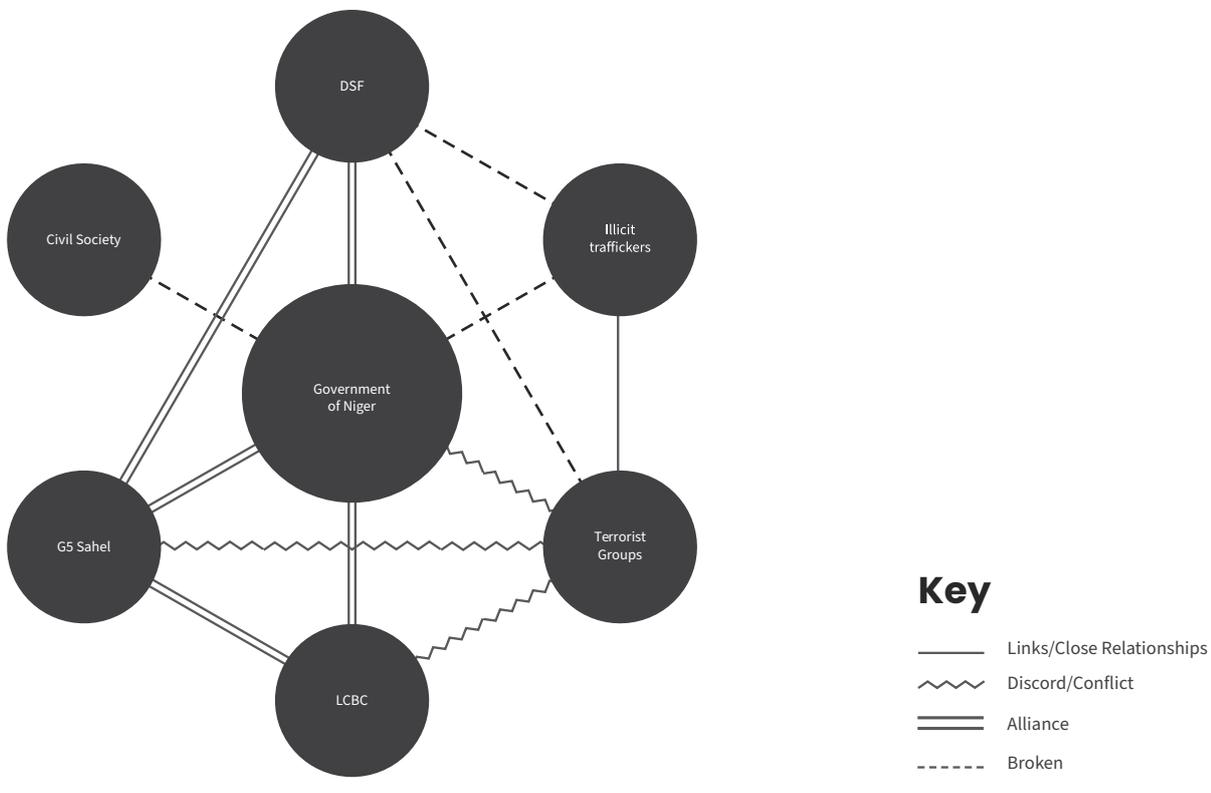
19 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 6.

20 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 12.

21 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI. (2020). Country Report-Niger. Page 7.

22 Stockholm International Peace Institute (SIPRI)'s military expenditure database 1949-2019.

FIGURE 2. ACTORS MAPPING



Despite Niger’s relative stability in an unstable region, actors having capacities to trigger or defuse conflicts in the country are diverse. These actors could be classified either as internal or external.

Internal actors

Internal actors, inexhaustive though, include Niger’s Government, defence and security forces, illicit traffickers and terrorist groups.

The Government of Niger

Niger’s Government is the leading body of the state. It includes the President of the Republic, the government (team of ministers) and all the administrative institutions.²³ The current government comprises a 22-party coalition dominated by the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS) - Tarayya, with 75 seats at the parliament. It relies on two other major parties: the Patriotic Movement for the Republic (MPR-JAMHURIYA),

with 13 seats, and the National Movement for the Social Development (MNSD)- Nassara with 20 seats, to ensure an absolute parliamentary majority.²⁴ Yet the government remains exposed to risks of collapse. Among the risks is the gradual infiltration of criminals into the governing body due to a (structural) high dependence of political parties on business communities to access funding for their daily and electoral activities.²⁵ Intricate connections between traffickers and political parties have plausibly led to the current circumstances threatening state stability and integrity. In addition, the inability of the government to satisfy the needs of its citizenry constitutes an important weakness. Notwithstanding that the current government initiated a multidimensional development plan (Renaissance Programme 2011-2035) to reduce social gaps and poverty by 2035, there still is huge work to be done. Currently, poverty culminates at a rate of 76.9% among the Nigeriens in a context of scarce availability of resources.²⁶

23 République du Niger. (2010). Constitution de la VIIème République. Articles 46-82.

24 Inter-parliamentary Union (2020). Data retrieved from https://data.ipu.org/node/124/elections?chamber_id=13476

25 Quote from an international expert of terrorism and organised crime in West Africa and central Sahel. December 2020.

26 Bertelsmann Stiftung (BTI). (2020). Country Report — Niger. Page 3.

In spite of the challenges it is facing, the government controls the security forces and nurtures relative peaceful relationships with the citizenry through the local elites who are the long arms of the state allowing governmental outreach in remote areas. Inversely its connections with trafficking networks remain highly risky.

Defence and Security Forces (DSF)

Defence forces of Niger designate the National Armed Forces (NAF). Their major role is to ensure the defence of Niger's territorial integrity against any external threat. The NAF are estimated at 25,000 active personnel expected to double in the coming five years.²⁷ Niger's armed forces show resilience in fighting against the existing threats, peculiarly violent extremism. The decline in terrorist attacks in the Diffa region since 2017 could be an indication of their resilience although recent escalation of Boko Haram's attacks is noticed in the region. In addition, Niger's territorial integrity seems to be majorly secured compared to its neighbouring countries particularly Mali and Burkina Faso. However, NAF have recently become victims of deadly sporadic attacks in the Tillabéry region. The security forces which consist of the police, the gendarmerie and other paramilitary forces collaboratively ensure peace and security according to their respective legal duties.²⁸ Generally, NAF and security forces nurture peaceful relationships with local populations throughout the country. However, the gradual intrusion of state apparatus by cartels may negatively influence the army and it may be utilised as a tool to protect illicit activities, which is drastically opposed to their legal missions.

Besides, the army is a major actor to monitor, peculiarly because of growing frustrations that seem to emerge among troops probably over under-equipment and low salaries, among other issues. Discontentments between Nigerien troops and high-ranked officers are underlined by diverse sources. Troops have for long accused top officers of embezzling finance dedicated to the procurement of equipment.²⁹ This carries a potential risk of mutinies at the least, and coup d'état mounted by low-ranked officers. Knowing the history of coup d'états in Niger (1974, 1996, 1999, 2010) and comparable cases in the region (the 2012 coup d'état in Mali and 2002 rebellion in Côte d'Ivoire), a similar scenario should not be neglected.³⁰ In fact, in December 2015, President Issoufou claimed that certain members of the regular army attempted a coup.³¹

27 Radio France Internationale. (2020, November 30) Niger: les effectifs de l'armée vont doubler d'ici cinq ans. Retrieved from <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20201130-niger-les-effectifs-de-l-arm%C3%A9e-vont-doubler-d-ici-cinq-ans>

28 République du Niger. (2010). Constitution de la VIIème République. Art 99.

29 Abdoul-Razak Idrissa (2020, March 3). Scandale au Niger: où sont passés les milliards destinés aux troupes antijihadistes ?VOA. Retrieved from <https://www.voafrique.com/a/scandale-au-sein-de-l-arm%C3%A9e-au-niger/5312989.html>

30 Perspective Monde. (2020, November 11). Niger. Politique intérieure. Retrieved from <https://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMHistorique-Pays?codePays=NER&langue=fr>

31 Larccher, L. (2015, December 12). Tentative de coup d'État au Niger.

His declaration was followed by waves of arrestations among the military and civilians. Hence, the spectrum of instability could come from the army.

Illicit Traffickers and Terrorist Groups

Illicit traffickers are mostly community members, especially in northern Niger, who undertake illegal business activities such as smuggling drugs, arms, gold and trafficking migrants, among others.³² They nurture intricate relationships with the government based on informal and tacit accords. In turn, the government uses those so-called agreements to keep violence entrepreneurs at bay. Traffickers endorse the game as keeping the environment safe is suitable for business.³³ They also extend their scope to business communities, which highlights the fact that key traffickers are generally prosperous businessmen such as Cherif Ould Abidine.³⁴ Nigerien security forces are often said to be co-opted to protect convoys for cash.³⁵ Notwithstanding that this may be part of the informal accords with state officials or a manifestation of criminal ties within the governmental apparatus, such collaboration remains tricky and risky for the state's long-term stability. More so, traffickers' connections with terrorist organisations alongside borderlands urge the need to counter the phenomenon in order to guarantee Niger's stability. In addition, the emerging clashes between trafficking groups due to the increment in drugs and gold convoys robberies may exacerbate rivalries and prompt a militarised illicit economy in Niger.³⁶ That would, in turn, threaten the informal agreements they have concluded with the government to minimise bloodshed and prompt the proliferation of criminal groups in Niger. Thus, illicit traffickers and terrorist groups (both potential spoilers) and especially, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGIS) whose cells are active at borderlands with Mali, constitute serious governance and security challenges in Niger.

Nigerien Civil Society

Nigerien civil society (NCS) appears to be a potential game-changer in Niger's volatile political landscape. Since the early 2000s, several formal thematic-oriented collectives have emerged. Among these collectives are the *Collectif des Associations Pastorales du Niger* (CAPAN), *Plateforme Paysanne* (PFP) and *Réseau des Organisations pour la Transparence budgétaire* (ROTAB). The CAPAN,

La Croix. Retrieved from <https://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/Monde/Afrique/Tentative-de-coup-d-Etat-au-Niger-2015-12-18-1394672>

32 Soumahoro, M. (2020). Community Engagement in Fighting Transnational Organised Crime in the

Liptako-Gourma. Institute for Peace and Security Studies. Policy brief. Page 3. Retrieved from <http://ipss-addis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Policy-Brief-Community-Engagement-in-Fighting-Transnational-Organised-Crime-in-the-Liptako-Gourma-2772020.pdf>

33 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 12.

34 Quote from an international expert of terrorism and organised crime in West Africa and central Sahel. December 2020.

35 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 12.

36 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 6.

as a frame for concertation among herders, was created in 2000 by eight associations. It aims to coordinate and harmonise herders' advocacy strategy both at local and national levels. The CAPAN was legally recognised by state authorities following the order no. 133/MI/DGAPJ/DLP of April 29, 2003. It currently comprises 72 herders' associations with branches in Niger's eight administrative regions.³⁷

The ROTAB, created in 2006, aims to struggle for transparency in Niger's public affairs, especially in mining industries. The organisation encompasses 12 associations sharing a common global vision which is to ameliorate the living conditions of the Nigerien citizenry.³⁸

The *Cadre de Concertation et d'Actions citoyennes* (CCAC) is a larger civil society platform that emerged in 2017 to protest against human rights violations in Niger.³⁹ It led the 2018 protests to bring down the national finance act that it considered socially unfair. Cancellation of disproportionate tax-related advantages granted to mining, telecommunication and oil companies, reduction in government's standards of living and necessary allocation of important resources to basic social sectors were also demanded.⁴⁰ CAPAN, ROTAB and CCAC substantially influence the Nigerien socio-political dynamics through concerns they raised about the soaring cost of living and democratic construction.⁴¹ Thus, the Nigerien civil society constitutes a serious check with the ability to monitor and prompt reforms of anti-democratic governmental actions and decisions. However, NCS has weaknesses such as opacity in management, bias based on political acquaintances and favouritism, financial dependence. All these factors hamper their efficiency and credibility. Additionally, most of Niger's unquantifiable CSOs are largely informal.

External Actors

External actors play variable roles in Niger. Whilst Islamist militants threaten Niger's stability, the G5 Sahel and Lake

Chad Basin Authority's Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) work towards fostering peace.

The G5 Sahel

The G5 Sahel is an inter-governmental organisation created on February 16, 2014.⁴² It features five Sahelian countries including Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and Mauritania. It seeks to implement policies following the peace and development continuum sustained by democracy and good governance for mutual benefits among its member-states.⁴³ In that context, the G5 Sahel set a joint force (JFG5) that aims to combat violent extremism and illicit trafficking in the Sahel. Its actions particularly focus on the Liptako-Gourma, a three-border area spanning Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, which is a sensitive and strategic point preyed on by extremist groups and traffickers. Thus, it jointly intervenes with NAF in the Tillabéry region in light of its mandate. Considering the insufficient number of Nigerien troops with respect to the size of the territory, the Joint Force could be a means to reinforce military strength in Niger's borderlands, especially with Mali and Burkina Faso. Yet, its influence on peace and security in Niger and the whole Sahel region remains low.

The Lake Chad Basin's Commission and Their MJTF

The Lake Chad Basin's Commission gathers the Lake Chad Basin States (Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad and Niger).⁴⁴ The States created the MJTF which under its current form, with a contribution of Benin, is commissioned to pool resources against terrorist factions that threaten all five countries.⁴⁵ The MJTF led several military operations (2015-2019) that brought considerable dividends.⁴⁶ Those operations helped stem Boko Haram's proliferation in 2015 and 2016. Operations in 2017, 2018 and 2019 highly contributed to reverse Boko Haram's gain, freed captured civilians and facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid.⁴⁷

However, the effectiveness of the MJTF has suffered misunderstanding over priorities.⁴⁸ The MJTF's states reveal reluctant to cede command to the force and lack sufficient resources to ensure sustainable funding. In this particular context, vital procurements are generally delayed. An improvement of the force and better coordination would benefit all five states, including Niger.

37 CAPAN. (2020). CAPAN : Collectif des Associations Pastorales du Niger. Retrieved from

<http://capan-niger.e-monsite.com/#:~:text=Le%20Collectif%20des%20Associations%20Pastorales,unes%20par%20rapport%20aux%20autres.>

38 World Coalition against the Death Penalty. (2020). ROTAB Niger. Retrieved from

<http://www.worldcoalition.org/fr/ROTAB.html>

39 Tcherno, H. B. (2020). Le Niger sous Issoufou : Contester la loi des finances conduit en prison. Brennpunkt. Issue Nr. 302. Retrieved from <https://www.brennpunkt.lu/en/article/le-niger-sous-issoufou-contester-la-loi-des-finances-conduit-en-prison/>

40 Business and Human Rights Resource Centre. (2018, September 9). Niger : Des dirigeants de la société civile arrêtés lors d'une manifestation contre la loi de finances jugée antisociale et très favorable aux entreprises de télécommunications. Retrieved from <https://www.business-humanrights.org/fr/niger-des-dirigeants-de-la-societe-civile-arretes-lors-d-une-manifestation-contre-la-loi-de-finances-conso%20C3%A9r%20C3%A9e-comma-antisociale-et-tr%20C3%A8s-favorable-aux-entreprises-de>

41 Alou, M.T. (2016). Niger : la société civile face aux mutations sociopolitiques. Centre Tricontinental. Page 2. Retrieved from https://www.cetri.be/IMG/pdf/2016_mta_niger_societe_civile_13852.pdf

42 G5 Sahel. (2014). Présentation du G5 Sahel. Retrieved from <https://www.g5sahel.org/presentation>

43 G5 Sahel. (2014). Ibid.

44 International Crisis Group. (2020, July 7). What Role for the Multinational Joint Task Force in Fighting Boko Haram? Report 291/Africa. Page i.

45 International Crisis Group. (2020, July 7). Ibid. Page i.

46 International Crisis Group. (2020, July 7). Ibid. Page i.

47 International Crisis Group. (2020, July 7). Ibid. Page i.

48 International Crisis Group. (2020, July 7). Ibid. Page i.

CONFLICT DYNAMICS

The 2011 elections that took place after the 2010 coup d'état, were notably hailed as generally fair, transparent, well-conducted and peaceful by ECOWAS and the EU delegates who observed the process from the campaigns to the run-off.⁴⁹ It was reported that 49.22% of the 6.7 million registered voters expressed their suffrages at the ballot boxes.⁵⁰ As no candidate secured the required majority in the presidential polls, run-off elections were organised on March 12.⁵¹ Mahamadou Issoufou, supported by the *Mouvement Démocratique pour l'Emergence du Niger* (MDN-Falala), was then elected with 58.04% of the votes.⁵² In addition, the new ruling coalition set an alliance with smaller parties to secure an absolute majority at the parliament. President Mahamadou then vowed to ameliorate the living conditions of Nigerien citizenry and materialised his political promise by elaborating the ambitious multi-sectoral "Renaissance" programme.

Unfortunately, since 2015, Niger has been experiencing instability that prevents a homogenous implementation of development programmes in all the eight administrative regions. On the one hand, security threats that spilled over to certain regions (Diffa and Tillabéry) prevented adequate executions of development projects while, on the other, resources allocated to other regions were certainly mobilised to address the security turmoil. Despite the difficulty in the implementation of his electoral promises mainly due to growing security threats that cought Niger in a pincer movement and the weak capacity of the country to generate necessary incomes, President Mahamadou was re-elected for a second term of 5 years in 2016.

The 2016 elections, contrary to those of 2011, were enamelled by tensions.⁵³ Opposition parties gathered in a 23-party Coalition for the Alternative 2016 (COPA 2016) jointly led by MODEN/FA-Lumana Africa of Hama Amadou and the MNSD-Nassara of former Prime Minister Seyni Omar vigorously contested the results from the ballot boxes.⁵⁴ The COPA 2016 claimed the ruling party was the culprit for several irregularities and massive fraud.⁵⁵ The validation of the preliminary results of the first round by the constitutional court exacerbated tensions among the opposition parties and they immediately withdrew from the second round of presidential elections demanding that parliamentarians representing parties in COPA 2016 cease

activities in the National Assembly.⁵⁶ In spite of tensions, President Issoufou was elected anew with a landslide victory of 92% of the votes in the run-off elections.⁵⁷

Although the major parties, including the ruling party, drew their electoral strategies on social and economic development as well as the promotion of rule of law and democracy, little has been achieved in that regard.

Niger is prey to transnational organised crime in its northern part and tends to be suffering a gradual state criminalisation. Drug and gold trafficking as well as migrants smuggling are of concern. These illicit activities were ingrained in social lifestyles as a means of survival.⁵⁸ This is due to state withdrawal from a large portion of northern Niger and strained relationships with Tuareg communities who manifested their grievances over the unfair management and distribution of state resources through a series of insurgencies.⁵⁹ The Nigerien state relies on (informal) agreements with criminal factions as a means of conflict management. This strategy is quite efficient as Niger managed to minimise violence resulting from organised crime-related activities.⁶⁰ However, such kind of approach could have negative repercussions on Niger's politics and stability. The seizure of state power and political parties by traffickers or their proxies could aggravate political rivalries as the main interest would be about grabbing market shares instead of national priorities. State apparatus might be used to protect and nurture shadowy economic networks for personal interests. That may render Niger's institutional bases fragile and turn the country into a criminal state.

The pressure exerts on Niger by the EU appears to be another source of destabilisation. Disrupting trafficking in Niger, a core priority in the EU's strategy regarding Niger, could upset the already strained local conflict management systems. The migrant smuggling ban of 2015 issued by Niger's state authorities under EU's pressure shook arrangements with traffickers.⁶¹ Certainly, the recent mining boom absorbed the then idle individuals but taking further aggressive steps to address organised crime in Niger would be counter-productive. If such activities are considered as profoundly reprehensible for European governments, that point of view is not locally true as analyses show that local communities consider organised crime-related activities as a means of survival.⁶²

49 Inter-parliamentary union. (2011). Niger National Assembly. Elections in 2011. Retrieved from

http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2237_11.htm

50 Inter-parliamentary union. (2011). Ibid.

51 Inter-parliamentary union. (2011). Ibid.

52 Inter-parliamentary union. (2011). Ibid.

53 Interparliamentary Union (2020). Ibid.

54 Interparliamentary Union (2020). Ibid.

55 Interparliamentary Union (2020). Ibid.

56 Interparliamentary Union (2020). Ibid.

57 Interparliamentary Union (2020). Ibid.

58 Soumahoro, M. (2020). Ibid. Page 2.

59 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page i.

60 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page i.

61 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 4.

62 Soumahoro, M. (2020). Ibid. Page 1.

Niger's fragile situation is further strained by social protests over the growing cost of living. The 2018 generalised protests showed how fragile the social stability in Niger remains. Some of the reasons for the internal turmoil could be linked to tax increment imposed to generate income aiming at supporting security and defence-related expenses. Military expenditures have been relatively growing during the last 10 years. It is, therefore, critical to balance security needs and the citizenry's demand for better living conditions. The 2019 and 2020 Inatès and Chingodiar deadly attacks highlighted the urgency to further equip Nigerien troops but state authorities should seek further financial resources to avoid upsetting an already weakened internal context. In fact, in 2019, a motion of non-confidence was introduced by 35 Members of Parliament (MPs) from opposition parties against Prime Minister Brigi Rafini's government for his ineffective strategy to counter violent extremism, among others.⁶³

Furthermore, the upcoming election of 2021 may be negatively influenced by the current social turmoil as political parties could use it to their advantage. More so, the infiltration of criminals into the state apparatus may lead to a particularly violent socio-political arena due to the current political open ground.

Civil society may appear as a game-changer considering the strength it shows in balancing and checking political actions in Niger. This is illustrated by its capacity to mobilise the citizenry around critical issues related to the amelioration of living conditions. The example of 2018 highlighted above (see the paragraph on civil society in the internal actors' section) indicates how civil society organisations (CSOs) could bend political decisions to the interest of the people. In that sense, CSOs could be an important socle for the regulation of state actions. To materialise this opportunity, Nigerien CSOs should diversify and privilege independent funding sources and effectively track political and business entrepreneurs in their leadership.

In sum, Niger cannot currently be classified as a country in crisis. However, the country remains under alert due to the growing infiltration of organised crime into its socio-political spheres and the terrorist threats that are intertwined. In addition, the internal turmoil over poor living conditions is among the main concerns that need to be carefully addressed.

63 Lassaad, B., A. (2019, June 6). Niger : motion de censure contre le premier ministre Brigi Rafini. AA. Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/niger-motion-de-censure-contre-le-premier-ministre-brigi-rafini-/1514306>

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT RESPONSES

The African Union (AU)

AU's role in Niger has been limited to electoral observation. In that vein, AU observed the 2016 general elections in Niger.⁶⁴ Its electoral observation mission (MOEUA) comprising 40 members from 20 African countries was deployed in Niger for about two weeks to monitor the country's general elections.⁶⁵ The mission was deployed in light of the African relevant elections-related instruments including the African Charter on Democracy, the OAU/AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa and the AU Guidelines for the African Union's Electoral Observation and Monitoring Missions, among others. Yet, the number of observers deployed was little to entirely cover such a vast territory.⁶⁶ Thus, the data collected may not have been sufficient to thoroughly assess transparency and fairness considering the fact that the 2016 general elections were enamelled by riots that contested President Issoufou's victory. In fact, this could probably be explained by budgetary concerns. However, further efforts should be made for more efficient and impactful electoral observations.

ECOWAS

ECOWAS played a role in humanitarian interventions. In 2018, it donated 6,528 tons of grains to the Nigerien state authorities in the aftermath of the severe floods that affected the country.⁶⁷ The donation amounted to 56 million Euros obtained through the EU funded Regional Food Security and included 3,028 tons of maize, 500 tons of sorghum and 3,000 tons of millet.⁶⁸ Although state authorities vowed to identify the persons in need and dispatch the items to alleviate the then food security crisis, no guarantee of transparency was given.⁶⁹ A monitoring system of the aid distribution seemed to be lacking. Thus, ECOWAS could not ensure effective distribution to the persons in need. Funding of such initiatives by the EU indicates the institutional dependency of ECOWAS on external support to achieve its missions.

Additionally, ECOWAS deployed an electoral observation mission in Niger during the general elections of 2016.⁷⁰ The mission comprised 130 observers from all ECOWAS member-states (except Niger) and was led by Liberia's former (acting) president, Amos Sawyer.⁷¹ It systematically excluded members from the ECOWAS court of justice, the council of the wise and the parliament, necessary to ensure impartiality and transparency.⁷² The deployment of the mission was made in line with the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. It aimed to guarantee credible, free and transparent elections in Niger. Observers were deployed in all regions of Niger for an effective national coverage that AU's mission failed to achieve, even though this could reflect an application of the principle of subsidiarity.⁷³ The mission hailed Niger's 2016 elections as free and fair despite multiple violence and protests (instigated by opposition parties) that enamelled the electoral process. Their objective to ensure free, transparent and credible elections, thus, partly failed although preliminary results were approved by the Nigerien constitutional court.

The G5 Sahel

Since the deadly attacks on their headquarters in 2018, the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel (JFG5) had suspended military operations.⁷⁴ The force was then restructured and Oumarou Namata Gazama, a Nigerien commander was appointed. Operations were subsequently resumed in 2020. From October 1 to 10, an operation was led by the G5 Sahel in Madama (northern Niger).⁷⁵ Machineguns, pistols, grenades, anti-tank rockets, several boxes of small calibre ammunition as well as watching gadgets were seized.⁷⁶ Earlier, on October 4, the Nigerien battalion of the G5 Sahel intercepted a 4x4 vehicle coming from Libya. Sniper weapons equipped with laser and ammunitions were loaded in the car. The five individuals conveying the illicit material were subsequently arrested.⁷⁷

64 The African Union. (2016, February 21). Arrival Statement - Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in the Republic of Niger. Press release. Retrieved from <https://au.int/fr/node/21006>

65 The African Union. (2016, February 21). Ibid.

66 The African Union. (2016, February 21). Ibid.

67 ECOWAS. (2018, August 8). ECOWAS shows solidarity with Niger through the donation of food items. Retrieved from <https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-shows-solidarity-with-niger-through-the-donation-of-food-items/>

68 ECOWAS. (2018, August 8). Ibid.

69 ECOWAS. (2018, August 8). Ibid.

70 CEDEAO. (2016, February). Élections Présidentielles au Niger. Communiqué de presse. Retrieved from <https://www.ecowas.int/elections-presidentielles-au-niger-2/?lang=fr>

71 CEDEAO. (2016, February). Ibid.

72 CEDEAO. (2016, February). Ibid.

73 CEDEAO. (2016, February). Ibid.

74 BBC. (2018, June 29). Une attaque du QG du G5 Sahel fait six morts au Mali. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/44655942>

75 Jeune Afrique. (2019, October 18). G5 Sahel : la force militaire reprend ses opérations et réalise une « importante saisie d'armes au Niger. Retrieved from

<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/844330/politique/g5-sahel-la-force-militaire-reprend-ses-operations-militaires-et-realise-une-importante-saisie-darmes-au-niger/v>

76 Jeune Afrique. (2019, October 18). Ibid.

77 Jeune Afrique. (2019, October 18). Ibid.

These recent successes tend to turn the appointment of the Nigerien commander into hope after several months of standby.⁷⁸ However, the JFG5 Sahel's operations remain sporadic with little impact. The force lacks financial means, equipment and adequate training although some countries including France and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) promised to donate an aggregated amount of €420 million.⁷⁹

The European Union (EU) and the United States of America (USA)

As a prominent partner of Niger, the EU focuses its interventions on migration and organised crime. The EU tends to pressure the Nigerien state authorities to overcome migration and crime-related activities in Niger.⁸⁰ The 2015 ban on migrant smuggling issued by Nigerien state authorities was a result of the EU pressure.⁸¹ Although these actions officially led to the worsening of security threats in the Sahel and Niger, it was merely to the actual benefit of European states considering that such interventions prevent criminal “sanctuarization” (with the potential to threaten Europe) and allow control on strategic migration routes. The EU, in due course, tends to ignore the local context characterised by informal conflict arrangement systems between the state authorities and crime actors (traffickers); and privilege aggressive approaches.⁸² As such, the EU's approach in Niger could be considered as risky as it strains local conflict mitigation tools that would in turn foster a probable collapse of Niger. The EU needs to adapt its response to the local constraints and mobilise the local potential to implement a smoother method.

The USA's bilateral collaboration with Niger is essentially military. This is manifested by the United States Africa Command (US Africom) support to Niger's forces aiming to reinforce the capacity of the country's armed forces in fighting security threats. The US Africom support to Niger's Armed forces concretely comprises training and equipment. Such a strong and globally healthy military cooperation is an important asset for Niger in its counter-terrorism strategy. More so, the US Africom started operating MQ-9 Reaper drones for surveillance and tactical support as well as troop transportation aircraft from its airbase 201 established in Agadez (Northern Niger).⁸³

78 Jeune Afrique. (2019, October 18). Ibid.

79 VOA. (2019, January 20). La force du G5 Sahel reprend ses opérations. Retrieved from <https://www.voaafrrique.com/a/la-force-du-g5-sahel-reprend-ses-operations-/4750854.html>

80 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 11.

81 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 22.

82 International crisis group. (2020, January 6). Ibid. Page 19.

83 Oriana, P. (2019, November 1). US Begins Drone Operations Out of New Niger Airbase. Military.com. Retrieved from <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/11/01/us-begins-drone-operations-out-niger.html>

SCENARIOS

Best Case Scenario

State criminalisation would be undermined by a strong political will from the Nigerien state authorities and their partners. This would need concrete actions on the ground that allow flexibility. State authorities should consider the local constraints and mobilise local potential to respond to the current issues related to security, crime and migration. Smooth changes in state-criminal relationships should also compulsorily occur to avoid any bloodshed. Alternatives such as agricultural production and irrigation enhancement in arid regions should be facilitated to provide a decent livelihood to the entire citizenry, but particularly to rural remote zones that are more in need. This would help to minimise growing resentments over the increasing cost of living and the (eventual) subsequent feeling of marginalisation among citizens.

Most Likely Scenario

The current situation in Niger may persist as adequate responses are lacking. The infiltration of criminals into the state apparatus will continue having fertile ground due to the complacent arrangements that state authorities are nurturing with organised crime entrepreneurs. Deadly sporadic attacks may keep occurring in the Diffa and Tillabéry regions although the military tends to reassert ground over extremist groups. The gradual degradation of the regional context could accelerate the realisation of such hypothesis. Internally the government will be struggling to balance social discontent over the cost of living and military emergencies. Moreover, the current environmental constraints will not facilitate the state's task as food insecurity would remain to be among Niger's Achilles' heel that crystallises North-South social disparities.

Worst Case Scenario

Niger's collapse is quasi plausible in this prospect. The infiltration into the state by criminal entrepreneurs would turn the country into a lawless territory with limited statehood. Political competitions may turn into a struggle among and between factions to control market shares. This could occur in the context of the 2021 upcoming electoral race. Besides, extremist groups may endorse the game, knowing that they are currently targeting Niger to strategically position themselves in the Sahel-Sahara strip. In due course, the state's capacities would be weakened in handling social demands over the amelioration of citizen's livelihood and the humanitarian situation would seriously degrade. Additionally, the discontents nurtured among the country's military troops may increase the probability of at least mutinies or coup d'états, which have a high potential to jeopardize Niger's stability.

To the State of Niger

Foster ground for the development of licit sources of livelihood as alternatives to criminal activities locally perceived as means of survival. This would particularly help to weaken traffickers' communal leverage and have the advantage to be smooth although it may be lengthy.

Develop and implement a transparency framework to prevent the infiltration of criminal entrepreneurs into the state apparatus. This should be implemented in line with the ECOWAS additional protocol on democracy and good governance, the African Charter on Democracy as well as the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption.

Implement concrete endogenous measures adopted recently so as to sustain their reach out strategy in the Tillabéry region. Failure to do so would lead to an over-intensification of military-centred approaches that showed limited impacts throughout the Sahel during the last decade.

Implement existing mechanisms to effectively track the use of the national budget for defence and equipment of the military forces. This may help to reduce the growing discontentment of troops against army officers and help achieve better results on the securitization ground.

To the AU and ECOWAS

Undertake actions to support Niger in fighting organised crime and violent extremism. This may be manifested through technical assistances in implementing programmes that aim to mitigate risks of conflicts and foster licit means of resilience. Supporting Niger in developing equitable investment frameworks to strengthen formal economy in their northern part could be a starting point. This should be done in light of the respective constitutional acts of the AU and ECOWAS that are solidarity and economy prone.

Elaborate an aid monitoring system to minimise the risks of diversion by potential criminal entrepreneurs that may have infiltrated the state apparatus. Aid diverted never serves those who are in need. Thus, the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption should be thoroughly implemented in Niger through the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA), for example.

To the G5 Sahel

Enhance actions against transnational organised crime in Niger while playing it carefully. Although conflict arrangements of the state with criminal entrepreneurs and local communities might have several negative repercussions on the consolidation of statehood, they have certain advantages that keep Niger away from a potential criminal bloodshed. The JFG5 should not adopt methods that may brutally upset those arrangements.

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1960–2020

1960 - Niger becomes independent; parliament elects Hamani Diori president.

1968-1973 - Severe drought devastates Niger's livestock and crop production.

1974 - Hamani Diori overthrown in the military coup led by Lt-Col Seyni Kountche.

1987 - Ali Seybou, the armed forces' chief of staff, succeeds Kountche who dies of a brain tumour.

1989 - A new constitution brings Niger back to civilian rule, but under a one-party system; Seybou re-elected president.

1990 - Rebellion by Tuareg people in the north begins.

1992 - New constitution allowing multiparty elections ratified.

1996 January - Ousmane ousted in a coup led by Col Ibrahim Mainassara, who bans all political parties.

1996 May - New constitution giving the president increased powers approved in a referendum; ban on political parties lifted.

1999 August - New constitution reversing the increase in presidency's powers approved in a referendum.

2002 August - Soldiers mutiny in the east and the capital demanding the payment of wage arrears and better conditions. The rebellions are put down.

2005 July - International Court of Justice awards Niger most of the river islands along its disputed border with Benin.

2007 August - Government declares alert in the north, giving the army greater powers to fight Tuareg rebels who have staged deadly attacks over the past six months.

2008 June - Police arrest former Prime Minister Hama Amadou on charges of embezzling state funds.

2009 April - Government and Tuareg rebels of the Movement of Niger People for Justice (MNJ) agree to end hostilities after talks in the Libyan capital, Tripoli.

2009 May-June - President Mamadou Tandja suspends the constitution and assumes emergency powers after Constitutional Court rules against his plans for a referendum on whether to allow him to seek a third term.

2009 August - Much-criticized referendum endorses a new constitution which allows President Tandja to rule for three more years and gives him broader powers.

2009 October - Opposition boycotts election meant to replace the parliament that President Tandja dissolved to avoid attempts that block his constitutional changes. Mr Tandja's supporters win overwhelming victory over independent candidates.

2010 February - President Tandja is ousted in a coup and a senior army officer, Col Salou Djibo, named head of a military government. The African Union suspends Niger.

2010 - Military junta appoints a transitional government led by a civilian prime minister, Mahamadou Danda.

2010 October - New constitution adopted to restore civilian rule approved in a referendum.

2011 March - Mahamadou Issoufou wins presidential elections.

2011 May - Former President Mamadou Tandja, who was ousted in the 2009 coup, is released from prison after charges of misappropriating public funds are dropped.

2013 May - Suicide bombers stage separate attacks on military barracks and a French-run uranium mining site in the north. The government blames al-Qaeda-linked militants.

2014 May - A man is sentenced to four years in jail in the first-ever conviction for slavery in the country.

2015 February - Niger agrees to contribute to a regional force to fight Boko Haram militants.

2015 November - Opposition leader Hama Amadou is arrested on his return to the country a year after fleeing to avoid child-trafficking charges. He is later approved as a candidate for the forthcoming presidential polls.

2016 March - Mahamadou Issoufou is re-elected in a run-off election boycotted by supporters of his opponent, Hama Amadou.

2016 September - The US confirms that it is building a military base that is capable of deploying drones against militants in the central city of Agadez.

2017 March - State of emergency declared in western areas bordering Mali following attacks blamed on militants linked to the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa.

2017 October - Three US commandos on a joint patrol with local troops are killed in an ambush near Tongo Tongo.

2018 - Unrests against the finance bill which critics said unfairly increases cost of living for the poor people.

2019 December - 71 Nigerien soldiers assassinated during a deadly attack led by ISGS in Inatès (Tillabéry region).

2020 January - The deadliest terrorist attack undertaken by suspected Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) claims the lives of 89 soldiers in Chinegodar (Tillabéry region).

2020 August - Terrorists kill 8 humanitarian agents, 6 French citizens and their two Nigerien collaborators.

Peace and Security Reports

Although key continental and regional institutions have their own early warning reporting systems, policy making within these institutions also benefit from a number of analytical and periodic reports generated by think tanks and research institutes. The Research Unit at IPSS provides brief and critical analyses of the state of peace and security in different African countries as well as critical appraisals of interventions by various African actors. The reports will cover African countries showing positive signs as well as those undergoing negative developments.



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