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Expansion of Instability in the Sahel Region

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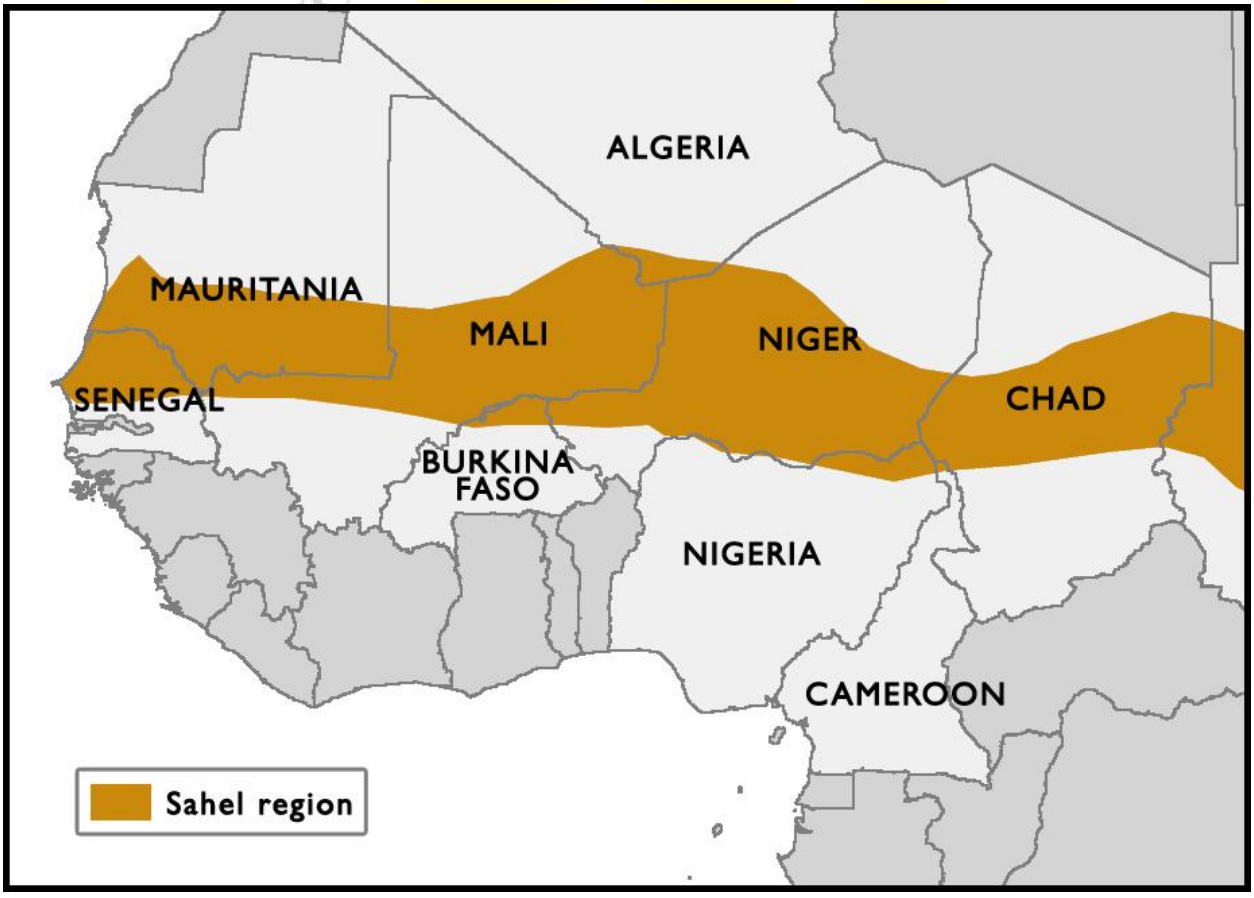

Since the advent of human society, humans have been confronting a number of predicaments, most notably, the security issues. The recent security predicaments -as the classification of security has widened now- which are generating instability in the

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world, includes, food insecurity and real-time insecurity, that is, state security. Africa and more precisely the Sahel region is not an exception. Sahel region which contains 10 countries, has been confronting a number of security issues which have triggered instability in the region. Terrorism, droughts, famines, and rapid population growth, are the most imperative security problems persisting in this region, which have bolstered instability in the region.

Sahel is a region in the north-central and western Africa, which spreads from the Sudan to the Senegal. It formulates a provisional zone between humid savannas to the south and the Sahara desert to the north. This region is comprised of the portions of northern Senegal, northern Burkina Faso, extreme south of Algeria, Central Mali, southern Mauritania, extreme northern part of Nigeria, southern and central Sudan, Cameroon, Eritrea, South Sudan, and extreme northern portion of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the classification of Sahel region is rather based on the climate, instead of grounding on the classification of stringent international borders. Moreover, it is an economically very fragile and poor region, as most of the countries of this region have been declared as fragile states – which means low-income states with weak and fragile state structure- by the World Bank.

9/11 Attacks and Sahel

The region of Sahel became imperative in the eyes of the western states and in the eyes of the western policy makers after the advent of 9/11 incident. Back then, in 2003, Washington Post reported that Bush administration declared the Sahel region as the

second front in the so-called global war on terror. Why Sahel region enticed the western policy makers after the attacks of 9/11 is not an onerous question, rather, it is crystal clear that the presence of diverse terrorist groups and weak states -states of this region were incapable of coping with these groups by their own- attracted the western states toward this region.

Moreover, other factors due to which, nowadays, this region is under the attention of international news agencies and policy makers, includes, escalating insecurity and unstable political situation. Recently in 2015, terrorist attacks in Mali, further raised the concern of western countries and the international community towards this region. This region is the home to various and diverse kind of terrorist organizations, including, al-Qaida in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al-Dine, al-Murabitoune, and the Macina Liberation Front (FLM). Due to the presence of such resilient terrorist groups, the security situation of this region is deteriorating day by day and this insecurity is the most imperative cause of instability in the Sahel region.

Food Insecurity

As aforementioned the foremost reason due to which instability persists in this region includes food insecurity and state insecurity (Terrorism etc.). Other reasons due to which instability persist in this region include the fragile economy and rapid population growth. Nevertheless, in order to analyze that to what extent food insecurity is resilient in this region, the fact that a major drought struck the region in 1970, which caused the deaths of several hundred humans due to famine, is more than sufficient. Another severe drought hit this region in 2012 which brought roundly 18.7 million people at the peril of food insecurity. The most imperious causes of food insecurity in this region include the environment of this region, rapid growth in population, deforestation, land degradation, overgrazing, continuous cropping, inconsistent and reduced rainfall, and dependence of agriculture -of this region- on these rains. Consequently, food insecurity is a major cause of instability in this region, and this food security is the root cause of other insecurities and other instabilities as well.

Economic Instability

Apart from food insecurity, another factor which is bolstering instability in this region is economic instability, which is persisting in most of the countries of this region. The economy of this region is very much fragile and unstable. The main reason due to which economy of this region is fragile is that approximately 45% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Production) in several countries of this region is dependent on agriculture. And as aforesaid, the agricultural sector in several countries of this region is relatively under-developed, is dependent on natural rains, the appropriate irrigation system is absent, use of low-quality fertilizers and seeds is a common practice. Consequently, such a high level of dependence -of the 45%- of GDP on agriculture, and, moreover, the under-developed agricultural sector is the most imperative reason due to which economy in several countries of this region is fragile. Apart from this, other factors due to which economy of this region is fragile and weak includes the rapid growth of population and scarce resources, poor governance, corruption in the official sector, and the presence of weak institutions – which are unable to overcome the challenges, which these weak economies have to confront-.

Political and Security Instability

Historically, Sahel region has been an unstable region, as it was under the colonial rule of France from the 19th century to 1960′ s, after the termination of colonialism in this region new entities or states came into being with their own diverse identities in the presence of diverse demographic realities. Two factors have always played an

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imperative role in bringing political and security instability in this region, which are, terrorism, and absence of democratic culture.

As far as undemocratic culture is concerned, two examples are preeminent in order to portray this culture.

1) Mali: recent military coup in March 2012, and another one in 1990′ s.
2) Niger: 50 years till independence, four coups, two armed rebellions.

These two examples best portray the intensity of the political instability present in the countries of this region. Apart from the military coup, other factors which are causing political instability in other countries of the region -apart from Mali and Niger- include the presence of powerful terrorists and rebellion groups, weak institutions, weak and fragile economy, unemployment, corrupt and weak governments.

As far as Terrorism is concerned, as aforementioned this region is a hub of several types of terrorist organizations. The imperative reason due to which terrorist organizations perceived it tranquil to install their basis here, is the presence of weak state structures. Moreover, other factors due to which it became effortless for the terrorists to strengthen their grip in this region include, poverty, radicalization, use of religion as a tool, unemployment, and separatist movements. Nevertheless, if the question arises that why terrorism has bolstered in this region in the recent era, then, there is only one

answer, that is, Libyan revolution. The revolution in Libya has further exacerbated the already deteriorated security situation in this region. Due to the presence of porous borders between the countries of this region, armed rebels and terrorists have been effectively able to attain arms from Libya and consequently, have been able to strengthen their footing.

Conclusion

It is not less than a reality that the classification of "Security" has been widened as the world has progressed in science and technology, human security and food security has become an imperative part of the classification of security. Nevertheless, real-time security, that is, state security is still the most imperative type of security which states try to and have to attain, as it is impossible to attain other types of security, that is, food security and human security, firstly, without attaining state security. Consequently, when a state is inept to ensure state security, then, the state cannot also indemnify other types of security, and as a result, instability is inevitable in that country. Sahel region is not an exception, states in the Sahel region are unable to assure the state-security, due to which these states are also inept to ensure other types of security, and consequently, the states of Sahel region have been captured in an unremitting nature of instability paradox.

Way-Forward

There is always a solution for every problem in this world, and Sahel region is not an exception. Despite the presence of all the paradox, difficulties, instabilities, and troubles, still, there is optimism for advancement in the region.US, China, and other western countries are already applying effort in order to bring stability in the region. Nonetheless, there are few gaps in the policy of these states as well – which are applying their effort for an improved Sahel region- hence, there are few steps which should be taken into account in order to bring stability in the Sahel region.

- A stable and prosperous Sahel region cannot be attained by only employing efforts on one factor, instead, a synchronized approach towards security, political stability, development and humanitarian challenges, should be applied.
- As long as, the security situation in Mali and Libya does not improve, till then, overall enhanced security situation and stability in the Sahel region cannot be attained
- More attention should be given to eradicate the prolonged food security in the region in order to ensure stability.
- It is very important to place a cap on the rapidly booming population, as it the root cause of several other problems, which in turn produces instability in the region.
- Education sector should be revamped on the urgent basis, particularly, it should be made tranquil for the females to attain education.

- Lastly, but most prominently, state security should be ensured, as all other types of security and instabilities are linked with it. In order to ensure state security, the international community should provide its full support to eradicate the menace of terrorism from the region.

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