

Mercenarism and Mercenaries in the African Sahel

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Abstract:

This research, based on reviewing relevant literature, explored and discussed mercenarism and mercenaries in the Sahel region. The findings were that, mercenary and mercenarism are deeply rooted in African societies, have steady presence in recent high-profile conflicts with a rise of private military companies providing military services for hire, and where Chad, Niger, Libya, Mali and Nigeria, States of Diffa in southeastern Niger and Agadez in the northern Niger, and the gold mining areas in northern Niger, were the main sources and routes of mercenaries in the Sahel region, in addition to those brought from outside the Sahel region by private security companies such the Turkish International Defense Consultancy Company “SADAT”, and the Russian Wagner. Mercenarism and mercenaries have relinquished the sovereignty of the Sahelian countries in favor of costly security and defense, weakened the existing security institutions by draining resources and worsening the security coverage, increased the availability and perceived need for military services; encouraged militant and criminal groups to generate revenues to fund clandestine activities, increased socio-political instability and severity, undermined the state-building projects and governance processes. The research suggested redressing driving factors of mercenary and mercenarism in the Sahel by adoption of the “Great Green Wall Initiative” of the UNCCD.

Keywords: mercenarism, trans-Saharan routes, tribal overlap, private military companies, negative performance

الارتزاق والمرتزقة في منطقة الساحل الأفريقي

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المستخلص:

استند هذا البحث إلى مراجعة الأدبيات ذات الصلة، وبحث وناقش ظاهرة الارتزاق والمرتزقة في منطقة الساحل. وخلصت النتائج إلى أن الارتزاق والمرتزقة متجذران بعمق في المجتمعات الأفريقية، ولهما حضورٌ ثابت في الصراعات الأخيرة البارزة، مع تزايد الشركات العسكرية الخاصة التي تقدم خدمات عسكرية بالإيجار، حيث كانت تشاد والنيجر وليبيا ومالي ونيجيريا، وولايات ديفا في جنوب شرق النيجر وأغاديز في شمال النيجر، ومناطق تعدين الذهب في شمال النيجر، المصادر الرئيسية ومسارات تسلل المرتزقة في منطقة الساحل، بالإضافة إلى المرتزقة الذين جلبتهم شركات أمنية خاصة من خارج منطقة الساحل، مثل شركة الاستشارات الدفاعية الدولية التركية "سادات"، وشركة فاغنر الروسية. لقد تخلى المرتزقة عن سيادة دول الساحل لصالح الأمن والدفاع المكلفين، وأضعف المؤسسات الأمنية القائمة باستنزاف الموارد وتدهور التغطية الأمنية، وزاد من توافر الخدمات العسكرية والحاجة الملحوظة إليها؛ وشجع الجماعات المسلحة والإجرامية على توليد الإيرادات لتمويل الأنشطة السرية، وزاد من حدة عدم الاستقرار الاجتماعي والسياسي، وقوض مشاريع بناء الدولة وعمليات الحوكمة. واقترح البحث معالجة العوامل الدافعة للارتزاق في منطقة الساحل من خلال اعتماد مبادرة الجدار الأخضر العظيم لاتفاقية الأمم المتحدة لمكافحة التصحر. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** المرتزقة، الطرق العابرة للصحراء، التداخل القبلي، الشركات العسكرية الخاصة، الأداء السلبي.

1- Introduction

The Sahel region stretching for 5000 kilometers from Senegal's Atlantic shorelines across to the Red Sea (Figure 1) comprises of one of the world's harshest climates from dry and semi-arid Saharan desert climate in the north to humid and tropical conditions in the south. The Sahel is trapped in a vicious cycle of conflict, resource scarcity, and environmental threats, political instability and civil unrest, and amongst which is mercenary and mercenarism.

Google Scholar and Research Gate were used for peer-reviewed literature using the major key words to collect information and evidence to highlight mercenary and mercenarism in the Sahel region, as well as the official sites of organizations, local, and international newspapers which produced useful references for this research to explore and discuss its topic.

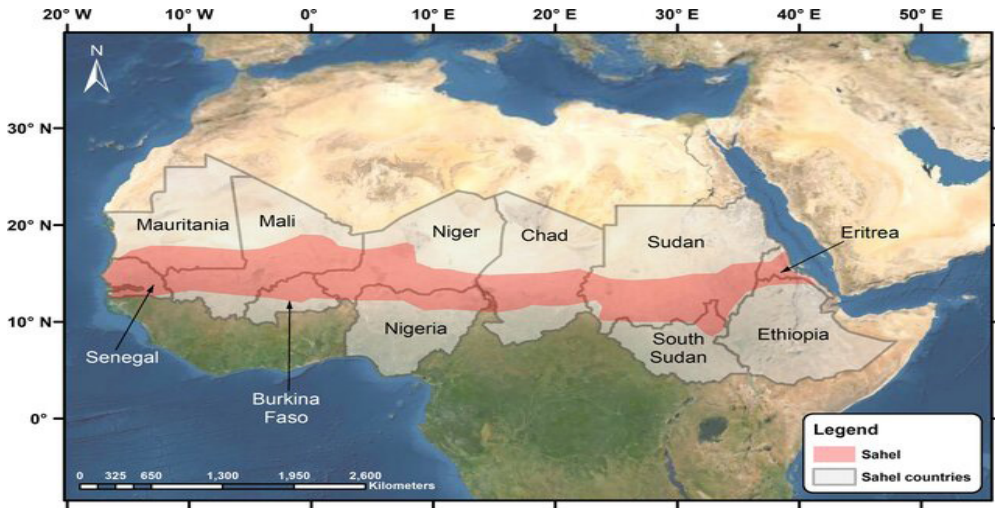


Figure 1: The Sahel region and countries

Source: Al-Saidi et al. 2023

2- Theoretical concepts

There are problems with the meaning of the word mercenary, especially about its legal measures to be taken against mercenaries (Coady, 2008). It is a highly subjective, imprecise and politicized term which in common usage is "intended to function as a descriptive category of combatant, denoting certain unique or transhistorical properties" (Ettinger, 2014), where there are ambiguities either by "assumptions about mercenary character and performance which stem from an idealized picture of the relationship between citizenship and military obligation in the twentieth century or by the romantic illusions created by popular culture" (Taulbee, 1998). Regardless of that, mercenary is defined by ADF STAFF (2022) as "anyone working in a military or security context outside of a state military or police institution", and to "individuals who sell their services to fighting forces or causes as freelancers and they take part directly in hostilities . . . , they are not nationals or residents of territories controlled by parties in the conflict and are not sent by nonparty nations as members of their armed force".

Throughout the recorded history mercenary soldiers have appeared as central players in organized warfare in the Western world (Taulbee, 1998), where the Persia's King Xerxes I is said to have employed Greek fighters in 484 B.C. (ADF STAFF.2022), and in the Great War between Greece and the Persian Empire (France, 2008), and throughout the High Middle Ages, as far as the Renaissance, mercenaries were an established, accepted and often lauded profession (Barrett, 2021). Their presence has generally originated from the desire of Kings in medieval western countries to form a formidable and large army (Erwin, 2024). In these countries, mercenary is known by different terms such as Balearic Slingers and Aegean Bowmen in the early Roman Empire, Landsknechts in medieval Germany, and in Hessian in America and Condottieri in Italy (Erwin, 2024). These medieval European mercenaries are often seen as impediments to state formation because European monarchies found them expensive and difficult to control (Lower, 2017).

Mercenaries include many types such as auxiliaries who are "fighters organized differently than regular military forces and might consist of troops from foreign or allied nations that serve another nation at war and local fighters recruited to serve with colonial troops". There are private military companies which are the more modern version of what commonly are called mercenaries and they are legal entities, unlike true mercenaries (ADF STAFF.2022), and in accordance with the rules of international law, cannot be considered mercenaries (Kalman, 2013), are widely perceived as legitimate because they are no longer implicated in the anti-mercenary norm (Petersohn, 2014), and the action of a privately contracted soldier is not in general morally praiseworthy and should not be encouraged in an ethically oriented society (Patrick, 2006).

Mercenaries have deep roots in African warfare when the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II is said to have used more than 10,000 mercenaries in the 13th century B.C. (ADF STAFF.2022). African

Traditional Religion has mercenaries that can be deployed to assist in the curbing of the activities of these enemy powers. Such mercenaries as witchcraft, medicine, masquerades, secret cults and the like can provide the needed panacea for ensuring peace and security in the global world (Okeke, 2021).

The label ‘mercenary’ became in Africa in August 1962 when “the Katangan Minister of the Interior passed a U.N. road-block manned by Indian troops and cursed them by shouting across the barrier, Mercenaries, mercenaries!” (Grundy, 1968). There have been a steady presence of mercenaries in Africa selling their services in high-profile conflicts (ADF STAFF.2022), and with its re-emergence in the mid-twentieth century, a new system of international relations found it necessary to regulate this break-out from the state’s monopoly on violence (Barrett, 2021), and in the last decades of the twentieth century there was a rise of private military companies, organized as international corporations and providing military services for hire (Adams, 2002).

3- Mercenarism in the Sahel

Historically, mercenaries were in small groups in Africa (<https://www.islamist-movements.com/69955>), between 50 and 500 per intervention assigned to short, sporadic missions (<https://news.tn/posts>), and from the twelfth century to the sixteenth all of north African regimes recruited European fighters (Lower, 2014), particularly Muslim rulers who frequently hired Christian mercenary soldiers to defend them and bolster their armies (2014). The influence of mercenary movements became greater during the sixties and seventies due to turbulent security situations and recent developments in the continent (<https://www.alnilin.com/12856958.htm>), and when many of the newly independent African states were targets of external and internal attempts (<https://roayahnews.com>). The numbers of mercenaries have increased significantly in recent years where Libya alone, for example, hosted around 20,000 foreign mercenaries in 2020 (<https://www.islamist-movements.com/69955>), Central African Republic supported around 2,000 in

2022 (<https://www.islamist-movements.com/69955>), and Mali had approximately 1,645 in 2023, and similarly, Mozambique, Sudan, and Burkina Faso hosted many of them (<https://news.tn/posts>).

The use of the services of private security companies has spread widely in the African continent (<https://www.alquds.co.uk>), whose tasks range from providing advice to direct combat participation, to military training, however, most of these elements are involved in drug smuggling, gold and diamond trafficking, and are behind illegal immigration convoys (<https://www.independentarabia.com/node/610615>).

The most famous and widespread of these private security companies is “Wagner” company (<https://www.alquds.co.uk>), which has carried out various military and security activities in Mali, Libya, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Angola, Madagascar, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Chad, the Central African Republic, and the Republic of the Congo (<https://www.alquds.co.uk>). Wagner has rather hosted other Russian private security companies such as “RSB Group”, “Moran Security Group”, and “Patriot Group” (<https://www.alquds.co.uk>) which have, under the auspices of the Russian state, expanded their operations in the Sahel region (Faulkner et al. 2024).

4.3. Sources and paths of mercenaries in the Sahel

European Christian mercenaries were a source frequently hired by North African Muslim rulers during the medieval period, the twelfth century, and the sixteenth. The majority, though, were of humbler origin, fighting men who found a lively market for their services in the decentralized, fiercely competitive political environment of the late medieval Maghreb (Lower, 2014). At those times, the African rulers and merchants were generally in a position of equality or superiority in their relations with Europeans (Sharman, 2024). In 1967, there were European and Katangese mercenaries who revolted in Congo (Rich 2019), and also in the case of Biafra, Foccart networks provided mercenaries and arms dealers to Biafra (Rookes et al. 2021).

There are main sources of mercenaries across the Sahel region, some of them were controlled by Berber nomads such as the Tuareg, as part of their control on trade routes (Aning et al. 2014), where mercenaries have engaged with rebel groups and local population into trafficking activities (Figure 2).

There are sources and paths of mercenaries include Chad, the north, east and west Niger (https://www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2023/5/10), and areas of tribal overlaps between Chad and Niger which provide mercenaries of the tribes of Tebu, Quraan, Kalembu, Borno, Arabs, Mahamid, Fulani, Hausa, and Tuareg who also overlap in Libya, Mali and Nigeria (Olesch, 2024. Also, Diffa State in southeastern Niger on the border with Chad, and Agadez State in the northern Niger which extends north to the Libyan and to Algerian borders, and west to the border with Mali serve as States of recruitment of mercenaries (https://www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2023/5/10), who were used to set out to Libya, Chad, and Niger during the rise of opposition and rebel movements.

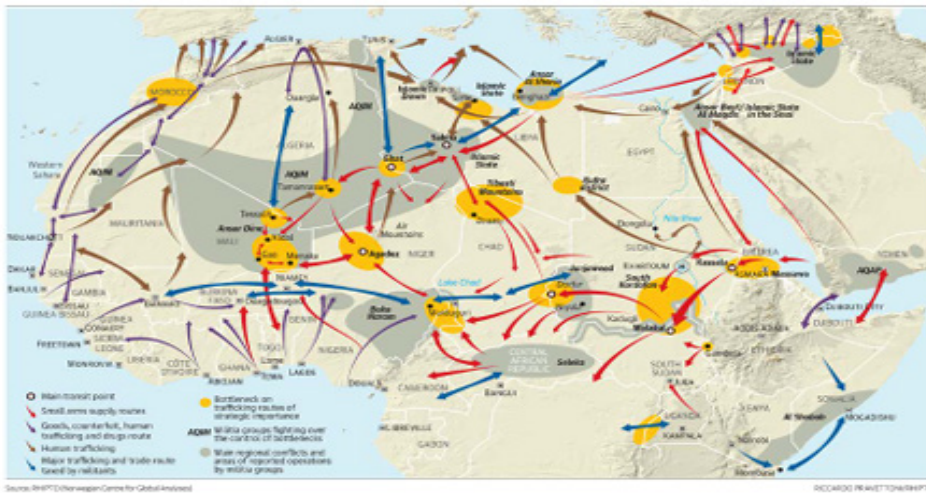


Figure 2: Trans-Saharan trafficking
Source: Medessoukou et al. 2018

The gold mining areas in northern Niger, where there are operating French and Chinese companies (<https://www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2023/5/10>), are areas of recruitment of mercenaries distributed in the Sahel region. They include Tabet region to the north of Agadez; Amzghar region and "Tibra Katan" to the northeast of Agadez; the Nigerian-Algerian border; the Taarabt area in the border triangle between Niger, Mali and Algeria; the western region on the borders of Niger and Burkina Faso; and the Tiragouiti area in western Niger. There are also recruitment hotspots in the north of the Republic of Mali, where extremist movements represent a center for recruitment operations from the Tuareg and Fulani present in this region extending north to the Algerian border.

There are groups of former fighters as mercenaries who were in Libya and belong to the northern regions of the Republic of Mali who became involved in artisanal mining and criminal activities, and became bandits or organized gangs crossing the borders and they become vulnerable to recruitment by those who cooperate with Khalifa Haftar in Libya and the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan. In the case of the war of April 2023 in Sudan, the Chadians mercenaries are the most important elements coming to military work with the Rapid Support Forces due to tribal overlap, shared common culture with western Sudan, ease of movement into Sudan, and the presence of social incubators. (<https://www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2023/5/10>).

The United Arabs Emirates finance mercenary recruitment operations in Kidal region which is Located in the middle of the Malian desert in the northeast and bordering Niger and Algeria, from which paths and roads start to southwest Libya, northern Niger and Chad, Gao City in northeastern Mali, and Ossongo region in northern Mali, as well as areas around Timbuktu and the traditional gold mining areas in the north. Besides that, Boko Haram movement provides cross-border military mercenaries

from northeastern Nigeria, Niger and Chad who were recruited in the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan.

The Turkish International Defense Consultancy “SADAT”, which centers its activity in Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Tunisia, Ethiopia, and other countries (<https://epc.ae/ar/details/brief>), is transferring Syrian mercenaries from Libya to Niger, in conjunction with Russia’s continued deployment of forces there (<https://www.alhurra.com/syria/2024/05/09>), especially after its involvement in training militias affiliated with the Government of National Accord since November 2019. “SADAT” is expected to expand its activity to support religious unrest and conflicts, subversive activities and political assassinations, and to feed radical revolutionary ideas in conflict areas on the African continent (<https://epc.ae/ar/details/brief>). There is about half a million African soldiers developed in Europe, where most of them fought in the French army, have been brought to the Sahel region (Koller, 2014).

4- The performance of mercenarism in the Sahel

Mercenary is a dangerous vocation (Nicholas, 1994), and brutal (Petersohn, 2014), not loyal to a specific party, but to whoever pays more (<https://www.alnilin.com>), therefore, it is endangering Africa (<https://www.sudaress.com>), by contributing to making civil wars (Petersohn, 2014), which threatens regional and international security (<https://www.alnilin.com>), and world peace and fragility of peace-building (Erwin, 2024), weakened the existing security institutions by draining resources and worsening the security coverage, and increased the availability and perceived need for military services (Leander, 2005), all of which made a burden on the socio-economic costs of military activity on people threaten the sustainability of conservation areas (Annecke et al. 2016). Mercenary activities in Africa encouraged militant and criminal groups which have generated huge revenues for them criminals which are utilized to fund clandestine activities such as the control of Berber nomads of the Sahara trade routes which enabled them to negotiate alliances with local communities using

their economic and military superiority (Aning et al. 2014).

Private military interventions in Africa undermined the state-building project and injected an inflammatory element into the governance process in weak states of the continent (Musa, 2002), relinquished the sovereignty of the countries in favor of costly security and defense that could have been carried out by citizens instead of hiring a staff closer to mercenaries than an institutional framework aimed at security and defense (<https://www.alquds.co.uk>), exploited the African sphere for intelligence purposes and are closely linked to the Western powers that used to colonize the countries of the continent (<https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2015/04/l>), since they perform extremely dangerous functions, including ensuring the safety of Western oil companies in Africa, securing mining equipment, and preserving the safety of many Western companies operating in Africa (<https://www.alquds.co.uk>), increasing the oppression of peoples and some regimes which have become involved in “mortgaging the independence of their countries and the sanctity of their entities in favor of Western security companies, which have become a burden on already weak budgets and have expanded their influence in strategic sectors in these countries, especially the oil and mining sector” (<https://www.alquds.co.uk>), and that the presence of both mercenaries and private military and security contractors increases its severity (Petersohn, 2014).

Wagner’s forces and its partners are destabilizing the Sahel, through “wanton human rights abuses, rapacious resource extraction and covert disinformation efforts that meddle in the internal politics of the countries where they operate” (Clarke, 2023), involved in many conflicts (Olech, 2024), which have secured economic assets and trained local armies in Africa (Rohan, 2022), and they operate in a context characterized by the complete absence of a law regulating their activity, such that they have begun to dictate their terms to the countries of the continent (<https://www.alquds.co.uk>). Their activities are, furthermore, not limited to security and military missions, but also undertake the “illegal looting of essential resources such as gold and diamonds,

and facilitate their smuggling routes, thus reaping an unlimited share of financial returns in exchange for these services” (<https://www.alquds.co.uk>).

5- Discussion

The United Nations has defined the use of mercenaries “as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination” (del Prado, 2017), and therefore, the issue of commercial soldiering is the pejorative usage of the term ‘mercenary’ as a synonym for ‘venal’ (Lynch et al. 2008). Despite of that, mercenary is not a phenomenon that predates the emergence of the modern state and the system of states, but its own existence is grounded within them (Riemann, 2021), and was considered not only a natural but often an honorable activity (Hovhannisyan et al. 2022). Therefore, a clear evaluation of mercenary performance requires avoiding a priori presumptions that automatically relegate all employment of mercenaries to the status of a second best option (Taulbee, 1998). This made an argument on some positive performance of mercenary such as that it served to solve specific problems (Hovhannisyan et al. 2022), helped to end civil wars quickly without increased bloodshed (Petersohn, 2014), and while military intervention may provide short to medium terms gains, these have to be weighed against the likely medium to long term financial and socio-economic costs of military activity on people (Anneck et al. 2016), and that performance of Wagner’s outperformed the French intervention in territorial gains, geographical spread of operations, and reduction of civil unrest which challenge prevailing assumptions about mercenaries’ ineffectiveness (Swed et al. 2024).

The mercenaries were main factors in structural violence and wars in post-independence Africa (Olesch, 2024) due to accumulated political instability (Olivier, 2017), caused by great powers which have condemned the region to long-term instability (Shalin, M,

2023), by an initiated interests of a ‘mercenary system’ of local players and post-colonial private nutshell (Rookes et al. 2021), which led to negative reconfiguration in weak states to meet the challenges of mercenarism and mercenaries (Medessoukou et al. 2018), and terrorism and extremists’ activities which became out of control of its political elites (Medessoukou et al. 2018). And, here, most of the so called ‘collapsed states’ are extreme cases of the complex and contradictory processes of state–making and unmaking (Musa, 2002), where the norms of military practice develop, spread, gain acceptance, and become internalized (Fitzsimmons, 2009), in previous situations of colonial authorities imposing their systems’ acceptance among African deliberately relaying on the Church (Azevedo, 2017), because the colonial conquest was “almost entirely conditioned and realized by local factors and initiatives (Erick, 2002), where norms of military practice develop, spread, gain acceptance, and become internalized (Fitzsimmons, 2009).

The great powers see the Sahel as a laboratory where they can freely deploy militarized geopolitical strategies with self-serving goals (Shalin, M, 2023). Since the 2000s the EU has used African conflicts as “laboratories” to develop its Common Security and Defence Policy and to mature its profile as a security actor (Pye, 2024), and to develop cooperation with African partners to constantly monitor Russia’s proactive foreign policy (Olesch, 2024), and this has led to the involvement of France in the Sahel region (Medessoukou et al. 2018), which used minimal force to produce satisfactory outcomes in order to influence intra-state conflicts and maintain security agreements with African states (DeVore, 2019). Also, the African continent has emerged as landscape on which Chinese and USA power must be negotiated where mercenarism is one of the mediating forces between them (Aning et al. 2014), where the globalization of the economy made

governments increasingly outsourcing to the private sector security and a number of functions considered as the prerogative of the State (del Prado, 2017).

The weakness of most African countries and the fragility of their military institutions have, perhaps, encouraged the use of the services of private security companies (<https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2015/04/1>), where their rise has been greeted with something close to loathing by various political entities and international actors, notably some elements of the United Nations, and such corporations are an accommodation to the reality of the Post-Cold War world, generally act in the interests of states, present little danger to even weak states and, for the most part, contribute to stability rather than threaten it (Adams, 2002).

The private military companies have spread widely in the African continent (<https://www.alquds.co.uk>), since mercenaries are a trans-historical occurrence (Riemann, 2021), and their expansion is rather than a diminution of the coercive and violent capacities of states (Whyte, 2003), in the presence of arms brokers and local warlords who are the principal actors in illegitimate resource appropriation in Africa (Musa, 2002), particularly there are connections between African conflicts, the extraction of minerals in presence of armed opposition groups in many African countries (Abdel-Fatau et al. 2000), and in situations of sustained growth of the markets for private military security companies (Leander, 2005), which operate in a grey area and become difficult to distinguish them from those who work on behalf and control of the state monopoly.

The Russian mercenaries have become involved in many African conflicts as a long-term strategy of the Kremlin to pursue its interests to benefit from cooperation at the state level and engaging mercenaries which are maintained by Wagner Group (Olesch, 2024) which has evolved into a shadowy network of mercenaries

deployed throughout the globe (Clarke, 2023) by providing arms and logistics to countries shunned by US sanctions (Rohan, 2022), such as Sudan where Wagner trained Sudanese armed forces (Wulf, 2024), and has outperformed the French intervention in territorial gains, geographical spread of operations, and reduction of civil unrest (Swed et al. 2024), when the military coup in Niger at the end of July 2023 rushed to demand the departure of French soldiers and the latest developments reached the point of Russian forces entering Air Base 101 (<https://www.alhurra.com/syria/2024/05/09>), which is expected to backfill US positions if US forces withdraw from Niger (Karr, 2024), and will create opportunities for expanded Russian and Iranian cooperation with Niger (Karr, 2024), simultaneously with Wagner's presence with over 1000 fighters in the Central African Republic (Wulf, 2024). The security-focused approach of the French intervention has resulted in anti-French sentiment that was exploited by the Wagner Group to implement an even security-oriented approach to solving violence, poverty, and other Sahelian struggles (Shalin, M, 2023). The United States have served to cast a new "scramble for Africa" (Covey, 2017), which has been more enhanced by the international security paradigm generated by the 9/11 attacks (Medessoukou et al. 2018), where there was great power competition and geopolitical rivalry on the Sahel region and the interplay between the end of the French military intervention in Mali and Burkina Faso and the entrance of the Wagner Group to Mali (Shalin, M, 2023). The current Russia's engagement on Africa seeks to break the diplomatic and economic isolation imposed by the West, to reassert its own relevance on the international stage as the champion of the new 'polycentric world', and to advance its geo-strategic ambitions in mining, energy and military presence in key areas, such as the Red Sea and the Mediterranean (Caprile et al. 2024).

The private military companies as civilian, is not assigned to fight

in armed conflict, is not integrated in the armed forces of the state and does not hold a continuous combat function and thus is not eligible to participate directly in hostilities on behalf of the parties to the conflict (Erwin, 2024). Regardless of that, private military companies have maximized profits by staying in conflicts longer and the prevalent opportunities in conflict create an incentive for companies to deliver optimal service and terminate hostilities in Africa, often cycling through the same personnel, activities and intentions under different names, and embedded incursions with militaries against government opponents (Kadlec, 2023), and also exacerbated problems in Africa which represents a new form of 'mercenary' outfits (Gumedze, 2007), as they operate in a legal gray area and often undermine the state's monopoly on the use of force.

Great efforts were exerted to combat mercenarism in the presence of a strong international norm against it (Liu et al. 2017), which has led states to devise a definition that indicated what they found problematic about mercenaries, and differentiated mercenaries from other actors (Percy, 2007). There is also, an institutionalization of a new international norm of state control over Nonstate violence in the international system which helped to decline mercenarism (Thomson, 1990). Also, international bodies such as the United Nations Special Group on Mercenaries and conferences adopted a treaty article on the status of mercenaries (Burmester, H.C. 1978), and they confirmed that, the nature of modern conflicts and the involvement of private security and military companies in them undermine the implementation of multilateral treaties (<https://roayahnews.com>). There is also the African Union Treaty on the Elimination of mercenarism in Africa, and the United Nations International Convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries (<https://roayahnews.com>), besides the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing

and Training of Mercenaries in 1989 which works to control this phenomenon (del Prado, 2017). The Organization of African Unity (1963–2003) and later, the African Union (since 2002) have developed regional legal frameworks which addressed key gaps in international law (Omorogbe, 2022),

These efforts have been hindered by international restrictions placed upon mercenaries such as protection under international humanitarian law (Fallah, 2006), an a state's neutrality, the right of peoples to self-determination, freedom of movement, and anti-mercenary norm grounded in moral objections (Liu et al. 2017). The United Nations International Convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries has not been ratified by the UN Security Council (<https://roayahnews.com>). The strategy of the African Union is undermined by the lack of adequate engagement with a new form of mercenarism, private military companies and the definitions of mercenaries (Omorogbe, 2022), which are not identified with private military company which do not meet the mercenaries' criteria as provided for in Article 47 of the 1977 Protocol (Erwin, 2024). Here, and although the use of the private military companies and mercenaries has long attracted criticisms (Fabre, 2010), and that private military companies are illegal under the existing regime governing international armed conflicts (Ojwang, 2011), there is nothing inherently objectionable about mercenarism (Fabre, 2010), and the right of a nation State to use them is part of a larger debate over national sovereignty versus international law (Anurag et al. 2022). It was considered that, abandoning the mercenaries is sometimes represented as a positive break with the medieval past that accelerated European progress into the modern political order of states and standing armies (Lower, 2017).

6- Towards redressing mercenary and mercenarism in the Sahel

The research suggested redressing driving factors of mercenary and mercenarism in the Sahel by adoption of the “Great Green Wall Initiative” of the UNCCD (Figure 3). Firstly, the driving factors were considered as to include climate change, conflict, overpopulation, competition for resources; food insecurity, external interventions, and population and secondly, a justification has been made as being responsible collectively for providing conditions for underdevelopment which consequently initiated mercenary and mercenarism in the Sahel.

Climate change in the Sahel has impacted on the relations between societies and their environment (Raynaut et al. 1997), caused famine and losses of property (Kamrany, 1975), and put millions of pastoralists and agro-pastoral herders in need of urgent help (Ramaswamy et al. 1991), thus worsening the poor living conditions already experienced by people in this region (Adoukpe et al. 2012), has also, transformed ecological balance, caused ecosystems degradation and deformed of policies (Yacouba et al. 2016), retarded agricultural productivity (Kabir et al. 2023), caused resource scarcity leading to migration, emergence of new conflicts (Benjaminsen, 2016), have contributed to decreasing of net migration (Alessandrini et al. 2021).

The level of performance of economic development in the Sahel is low (Yobom, 2020), with a widening gap between exponential available resources and population growth (May et al. 2017), *and its* productivity depends upon a single unpredictable annual rainy season (Cooper, 2018), with high vulnerability to recurring drought and the threat of long-term land degradation (Eaquist et al. 2009), which resulted in drop in grazing areas (Yacouba et al. 2016), contributed into food insecurity and prevalence of poverty (Baba, 2014), low income countries where the most are in the

bottom ranks of the Human Development Index.

The population of the Sahel grows rapidly, where by 2050 they will be more than triple from 100 million to 340 million (Potts et al. 2013). This caused increasing population pressure that has resulted in a breakdown of the fallow system, low crop yields and reduced availability of communal land (Ramaswamy et al. 1991). This is in the presence of a fine-scale population structure and complex patterns of admixture (Tříska et al. 2022), influenced by tribalism and ethnic dynamics (Lyammouri, 2019), and the rooted slavery and abolitionism (Rossi, 2020), and preserve nomadic life and organizational structure (Eric, 2007), which is contradicting the exponentially growing urban populations (Černý et al. 2018). Conflict in the Sahel has been experienced by many countries including the Niger, Mali, Mauritania, and Chad have experienced forms of conflict since their independence in 1960, such as that between black Africans and Arabs (Sebastian, 2019), and rebel of Tuareg in Mali in 1962–64 and 1990–94 (Keita, 1998); violent clashes between sedentary farming communities and ‘Arab’ nomads (Tar, 2006, Rothbart et al. 2016) which can be traced to the 1930s and 1980s (Ted, 2004), and the sustained armed conflict between the armed forces and its allied proxy militia drawn from Arab ethnicity and some armed liberation Movements (Tar, 2006). These conflicts have disrupted the sensitive ethnic and political balances (Yehudit, 2013), livelihoods of the population (Brottem, 2020). The resource- based conflict is associated with responses to development policies (Signe et al. 2022), resource allocation (Benjamin, 2011), unequal development (Hassan, 2010), disparities of wealth distribution derived from scarce resources, farmland expansion (Oyama, 2014), agricultural encroachment that obstructed mobility of herders and livestock (Benjaminsen et al. 2011), and States’ policies that have resulted in marginalization of pastoral nomads (Asseburg, 2013).

The international intervention in the Sahel retarded national and local development by enhancing dependency on aids, and opens doors for external interference in a State's sovereignty, particularly when colonial and postcolonial state's hegemony have undermined the full development of competing forms of space production in the Sahel.

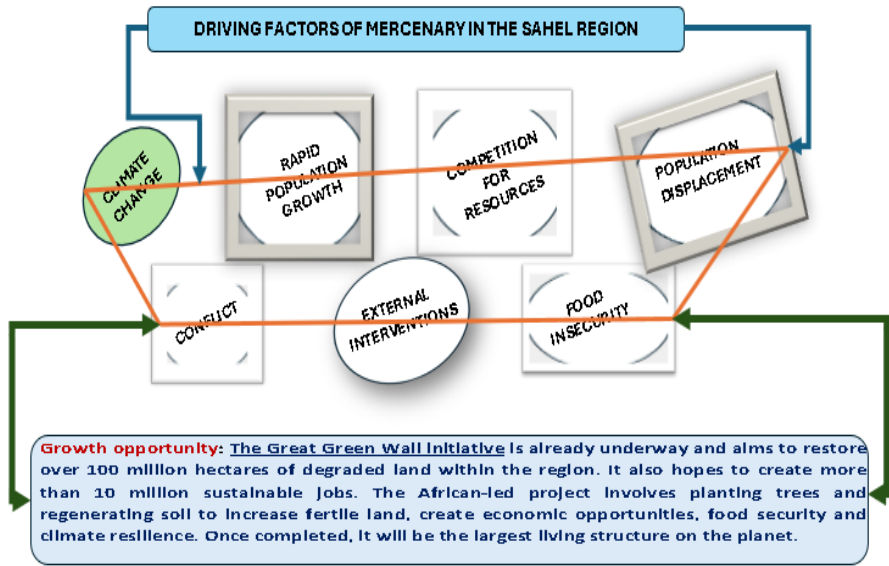


Figure 3: Driving factors of mercenary and mercenarism and the Great Green Wall Initiative in the Sahel

The “Great Green Wall initiative” aims to restore over 100 million hectares of degraded land within the region and sequester 250 million tons of carbon and create 10 million green jobs by 2030, involves planting trees and regenerating soil to increase fertile land, create economic opportunities, food security and climate resilience. This will help communities living along the Wall to grow one of humanity's most precious natural assets; fertile land; economic opportunities for the world's youngest population; food security for the millions; climate resilience; and a new world wonder spanning 8000 km (<https://www.unccd.int/our-work/ggwi>).

Conclusions

The present research, in short, contributes to the understanding over the extent of mercenary and mercenarism that were not isolated within a State's borders, but transferred sub-regionally in the Sahel, and providing insights into the complex interplay between internal threats linked to internal instability which has cross border implications of neighboring conflicts, and to external threats linked to growing global interference. Mercenarism is likely to rise in the Sahel, unless effective measures were taken internally and internationally.

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