

*As of 25/01/2022*

## **The Sahel – Mediterranean Compendium:**

### **Sharing Perspectives on the Current Security Situation and Future Obstacles in the Region**

8 February 2022  
09:00-12:15 EST / 15:00-18:15 CET  
Virtual Event

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Complex, impenetrable: this is how foreigners, and sometimes even locals, describe the Sahel. Bordered by Sahara's southern shore, the general public often struggles to understand that what occurs in such a remote area can affect its nearest neighbours, Europe, and the whole international community. Yet, since at least the beginning of the new century, several international actors have established their presence in the region, merging individual interests with regional needs for security and stability. For years now, international interventions and regional and transnational cooperation have made considerable efforts, both in terms of resources and human lives to meet these needs. However, the political, security and humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, and militants and jihadists continue their attacks on local governments, populations, as well as on international and French forces. While, locally, militancy and violent extremism are still successful in recruiting from rural populations, the apparent lack of concrete results negatively affects international and local public support. Some may argue that the Sahel is or is becoming another "Endless No-Win War" in a far-away place where despite tremendous human and financial resources, the outcomes are still dire. In that sense, international actors such as the French military are looking for ways to reconfigure their presence to try to escape the current stalemate, and others to fill the voids.

As an introduction of its 6<sup>th</sup> NESAI-IEMed workshop due to take place mid- 2022 and as part of its continuing series of Strategic Studies Network (SSN) sub-regional working groups, the Near East South Asia (NESAI) Center for Strategic Studies, with the collaboration of the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), and the US Africa Command, invites regional experts to discuss the current security situation and some of the phenomena affecting both the Sahel and the Mediterranean region. Moreover, the virtual event will also be an occasion to critically analyze the ongoing intervention and cooperation strategies, and how best to promote more constructive and creative future solutions for regional security.

- 13:00-14:30 CET      Login/Check Connection with NESAs Support Staff**
- 15:00-15:05 CET      Intro by Prof. Anne Moisan, Associate Professor, NESAs Center for Strategic Studies**
- 15:05-16:30 CET      Session 1 – Global Trends and Regional Dynamics Affecting the Sahel and North Africa**
- The echoes of Sahel’s instability resound in different parts of the world, like Western Africa, the Southern Mediterranean and North Africa. Internationally, the security theatre is liquid, with threats evolving to the reality on the ground faster than governments seem to be able to adjust. The first session will introduce the evolution of violent extremism in the region, as well as specific links between the Sahel phenomenon and the broader Middle East and Europe. It will also attempt to shed light on the interests and priorities that other international actors may share in the security context.
- Moderator:**            **Amb. Senen Florensa**, Executive President, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)
- Speakers:**            **Amb. J. Peter Pham**, Former US Special Envoy for the Sahel Region of Africa
- Emanuela Claudia Del Re**, EU Special Representative for the Sahel
- 16:30-16:45 CET      Break**
- 16:45-18:15 CET      Session 2 – Understanding the Link between Violent Extremism’ “Social” Strategy and the States in the Region**
- For decades, organized crime, militias and violent extremist groups have easily operated and established their presence in Sub-Saharan Africa. The region’s political instability, poor governance, growing social grievances and the geography of vast expanses have given non-state actors a free hand to firmly establish themselves, prosper, and strengthen their networks. Jihadist groups affiliated to Al-Qaida and Daesh have long understood the value and importance of support from local populations. Teaming with criminal elements, violent extremist groups have effectively filled the governance gaps left by the State and successfully slipped into the social fabric by making themselves indispensable, providing basic services while optimizing intercommunal differences.
- *What has the Jihadist strategy achieved on the ground? Which violent extremist group has been more successful in seizing social support?*
  - *Once susceptible communities are mapped, is it possible to decouple violent extremist activity from intercommunal violence and militancy?*

- *While jihadist activities were once localized in a few specific areas of the Sahel, how does this threat currently affect the broader Mediterranean region?*

**Moderator:** **Lurdes Vidal**, Director of the Arab and Islamic World Department, European Institute for the Mediterranean (IEMed)

**Speakers:** **Dr. Abdoulaye Sounaye**, Head of Research Unit “Contested Religion” Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO)

**Dr. Hussein Solomon**, Senior Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Free State

**18:15-18:20 CET**      **Closing Remarks**

**Prof. Anne Moisan**, Associate Professor, NESACenter for Strategic Studies

**Roger Albinyana**, Managing Director, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)