

## **Sahel Sahara, Covid 19 and insecurity.**

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Will the Coronavirus pandemic have consequences on the security situation in the Sahel?

The risks of a positive response are great: foreign soldiers engaged in the fight against terrorism and evolving in this sub-region are mobile and come from several countries, some of which are hotbeds of transmission, such as China, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the USA. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) includes 57 nationalities, as y different pandemic situations. Though at various severity levels, the G 5 Sahel members states are now victims of the pandemic, Burkina Faso being the most affected.

The Secretary-General of the Malian Ministry of Health disclosed, early March the location of five suspected cases among MINUSMA soldiers returning by plane from their home countries to their posts. When tested, they were declared negative. He also added that Bamako-Sénou, Gao, Kayes and Mopti airports have been identified as "entry points at risk" of the disease, to be monitored closely. Human movements between the soldiers' homeland and their respective bases will be revised, perhaps downward, to reduce the risk of contagion and eliminate the requirement for quarantine. This limitation could affect the morale of the troops, deprived of brief family returns. The first consequence of this precaution is that any passenger on an airplane, regardless of their nationality and status, must submit to the Coronavirus test, and possibly accept its quarantine, for observation or for care.

More generally, for the Sahelian national armies, tests can be carried out in the barracks, where they exist, at the slightest outward signs of the disease: high temperature, cough. This precaution means that an entire detachment or battalion may be placed in quarantine, therefore with zero operational capability. A scenario which would require its immediate replacement by an identical battalion. The armed forces health services may be threatened with overwork, as are already their civilian colleagues in certain centers of contagion.

### **Costly response plans.**

The fear of the coronavirus, the obligation of social "distanciation" and the barrier gestures are such that contacts and exchanges between soldiers and Sahel civilians would be reduced, while these "civil-military activities" are strategic in building trust between the two entities.

On March 19, the communication service of the French Force Barkhane delivered the following message: "At the present time, no case of contaminated soldier has been proven, and Operation

Barkhane is taking place on a theater where there are few, if any, documented cases to date. Operations continue without being impacted by this pandemic, and the French armies are taking the necessary measures to ensure that this cannot be the case. "

As for the Sahel States, they have to redirect their spending. The "all safe" approach has already lived, under the blows of the various national plans established to fight the coronavirus. Burkina Faso has developed a response plan to COVID-19 of nearly 11 billion CFA francs. In Mali, after an extraordinary meeting of the National Defense Council, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita has decided to release an envelope of 6.3 billion FCFA to fight the pandemic.

The Sahel states also are destabilized by the humanitarian crisis caused by the influx of internally displaced persons and refugees. Humanitarian workers are threatened and may be weakened by the same virus. Since these resources will be unlocked at the expense of other sectors, all this means that States are a bit exposing a flank that terrorists could take advantage from.

### **Destabilized jihadists.**

What about the terrorists? They also are concerned by COVID-19.

The Islamic State (IS) has set out and broken down guidelines on the matter, which will apply to its supporters in Europe and Africa. First, for IS, the pandemic is "a punishment from God", a lightning that falls on the "infidels", at the mercy of the divine indexing. Then the jihadists are urged to stay in the countries affected by the disease, perhaps, to spread it. At the same time, those in good health should not enter the countries affected by the pandemic and those infected should not leave them. Then follows a list of barrier gestures and the distance to be observed, which are in compliance with what exists elsewhere. An attitude showing that the Islamists adhere, in part, to science.

In the Sahel, very clever is who will know whether the Islamic State in the Grand Sahara (EIGS) has an efficient technical platform and trained health personnel to care for its combatants suffering from COVID-19. By hypothesis, one can suppose that the terrorists would find it more difficult than the "infidels" to care for and manage their combatants affected by evil. The supply of various products, as well as their storage, would also be a notorious challenge.

Then, from a religious point of view, the jihadists must have been shaken or at least disturbed by the preventive measures taken by almost all the states facing the pandemic, including those recognized as "theocratic", such as Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Among others these measures include:

the prohibition of collective prayers, including the Great Friday Prayer; the closure of mosques; the suspension of the intermediate pilgrimage (Oumra) to Mecca.

These three measures, not disputed by religious leaders, are highly symbolic in scope: human life is above everything! For women and men in the "Holy War", there is reason to wonder about religion freedom, denied to the "infidels". But it turns out that the fight against COVID-19 is itself a war. Words of French President Emmanuel Macron, hammered five times, in a single speech: "we are at war".

**i. cinquante-sept (57) pays contributeurs de la Force militaire de la MINUSMA sont :** Allemagne, Arménie, Autriche, Bangladesh, Belgique, Benin, Bhoutan, Bosnie-Herzégovine, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodge, Cameroun, Canada, Chine, Cote D'ivoire, Danemark, Égypte, El Salvador, Espagne, Estonie, États-Unis d'Amérique, Éthiopie, Finlande, France, Gambie, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinée, Indonésie, Irlande, Italie, Jordanie, Kenya, Lettonie, Liberia, Lituanie, Mauritanie, Mexique, Népal, Niger, Nigeria, Norvège, Pakistan, Pays-Bas, Portugal, République Tchèque, Roumanie, Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord, Sénégal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Suède, Suisse, Tchad, Togo, Tunisie, Ukraine.

**ii ISIS issues tips on how jihadists can avoid getting coronavirus** by [Yaron Steinbuch](#)

<https://nypost.com/2020/03/13/isis-issues-tips-on-how-jihadists-can-avoid-getting-coronavirus/>

**Isis issues coronavirus travel advice: terrorists should avoid Europe** by Tom Harper

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/isis-issues-coronavirus-travel-advice-terrorists-should-avoid-europe-5m89dvjjw>