



Transnational Arabs of the Sahel: Geographic Distribution and Involvement in Sudan's Wars of April 2023

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the geographic distribution of the transnational Sahelian Arabs and their involvement in Sudan's war of 15 April 2023, and discusses for why that involvement with emphasis on the Sahel's political instability, ethnic and tribal structures, and nomadism. The data were sourced from referred relevant academic publications, official Arabic websites of reputable newspapers and community platforms. The main results depicted a continuous geographic distribution and dispersion of these Arabs across the Sahel, and those long-standing ties with the Rapid Support Forces, in former fighting in Darfur, is the main driver, among others associated with the Sahel's general situations, for their involvement in Sudan's war. These are tribal and ethnic affiliations; military participation is expression of tribal and ethnic loyalty; competition over limited resources; rigid societal immobility with an inconsistent limiting pastoral livelihoods imposed by colonial and national authorities; local ethnic grievances deeply intertwined with tribal structures and political and security challenges; the breakdown of collective cohesion at the community and national levels; waning of traditional governance; absence of state presence in pastoral areas;; and feelings of exclusion and injustice. The research proposed an integrated approach, built on four pillars with their associated suggestions, with an ultimate objective to suppress the involvement of transnational Arab tribes in war, conflict, and disputes in order to sustain the Sahel's stability.

Keywords: Sudan's war, Sahelian Arabs, geographic closeness, conflict involvement, regional disputes

1. Introduction

Sudan has witnessed an outbreak of war, on 15 April 2023; between the Sudan's National Arm Forces and the Rapid Support Forces which has been remarkably supported by huge numbers of transnational Arabs from across the Sahel, who have ignited the war and elongated its continuity supported by some regional and world powers. This is a recurring phenomenon throughout the history of the Sahel, however, increased repeatedly in recent decades and therefore, requires a deep investigation. This article tries to contribute on that issue by reviewing the geographic distribution of the transnational Arabs of the Sahel and their involvement in Sudan's war of 15 April 2023, and discusses for why that involvement within the Sahel's tribal and ethnic structures, nomadism, and political instability, as based on referred relevant academic publications, and official Arabic websites of reputable newspapers and community platforms.

2. The Sahelian Transnational Arabs

The African Sahel (Figure 1) is distinguished by a mix of Arab and African tribes and a sparse, unevenly distributed population across its expansive territory, and genetically with pathogen-driven differentiation (Černý et al. 2018). The Sahel also exhibits significant religious and linguistic diversity (Political Encyclopedia.net), a characteristic shaped by the Sahara's historical role as a hub for human migration and transit (Open Edition Journals.net).

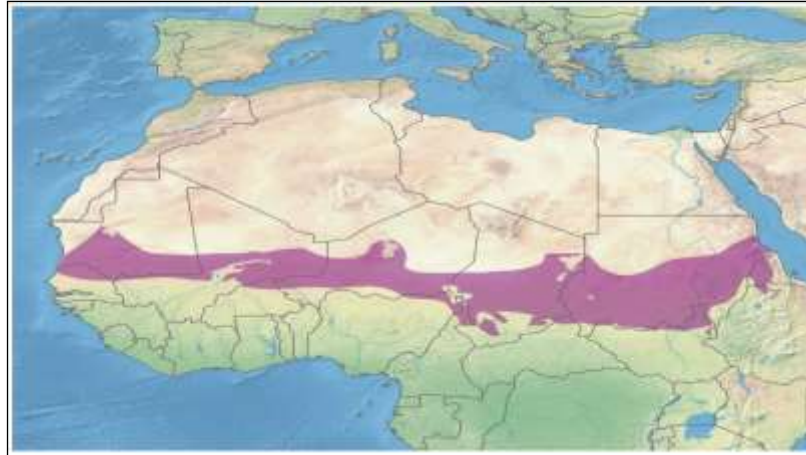


Figure 1: [The Sahel region of Africa](#)

Source: [origins.osu.edu](#)

Arabs have inhabited the Sahel since the 7th century CE, a period that aligns with the Islamic conquests in North Africa. Their presence increased during the Almoravid dynasty following the decline of the Ghana Kingdom in West Africa ([Independent Arabia.net](#)). The Sanhaja tribes played a pivotal role in spreading Islam to West Africa from the early 2nd century AH, with their influence extending from the northern Sahara to the vicinity of the "Sanhaja River" ([Al Jazeera.net](#)). A subsequent wave of Arab migration occurred in the early 9th century from Upper Egypt, significantly contributing to the emergence of Islamic kingdoms in the Sahel region ([Qiraat African.net](#)). This research will provide further details on the presence of Islam and Arabs in the Sahel within their geographic distribution by a country.

3. The geographic distribution of the Transnational Arabs by the Sahel's countries

The transnational Arabs distribute and disperse across the Sahel countries as detailed here.

3.1. The Niger

Islam was introduced early to Niger through Fezzan that lies close to its northeastern border with Libya, gradually spread by preachers, traders, and the Almoravid State, which conquered Ghana and transformed it to Islam ([islamweb.net](#)). Recently, Muslims constitutes approximately 97% of Niger's population ([islamweb.net](#)), while the Arabs constitutes 0.3% and form the seventh largest ethnic group in Niger ([origins.osu.edu](#)).

The Arabs of Niger can be categorized into three main groups, including those who migrated from the ancient Berber kingdom of Mauritania in the late 7th century CE; the "Arabs of Diffa," who arrived from Libya in the early 20th century ([aljazeera.net](#)), and Algerian Arabs, who continue to migrate to Niger through intermarriage and tribal integration.

These Arabs communities are united under a single sultanate that encompasses various tribes of Darmashak, Badmak, Taghat, Afnishat, Kunta, Twej, Fulan, Dobouk, Al-Turshan, Awlad Suleiman, Barabish, Hasawna, and others ([facebook.com/permalink.php](#)). The Awlad Suleiman tribe has migrated earlier to Niger, intermixed with the nomadic Choa tribe, and now spans across Niger, Chad, and southern and central Libya (<https://www.independentarabia.com>). These Arabs are predominantly located in northern and northeastern Niger, Diffa (Figure 2), Tahoua, Zinder, and southern Agadez ([alarabblog.com](#)).



Figure 2: Camel resting in the Difa Region of Niger, 2006

Source: <https://origins.osu.edu>

3.2. Chad

The Yemeni Sayfiyyun Arab tribes reached Chad before the arrival of Islam and founded the Kanem Kingdom, which governed territories that now include Chad, large parts of Niger and Nigeria, the Fezzan region in Libya, and portions of Ethiopia. Over time, they lost some of their original cultural and linguistic characteristics, in contrast to the Arab tribes that migrated to Chad and settled there after the spread of Islam (chadhopeland.site123). Earlier waves of Arab migration to Chad began during the early Islamic centuries, originating from the Lake Chad Basin. A significant Arab migration occurred during the 8th century AH (14th century CE), involving the Rabia, Juhayna, and Quraysh tribes, who moved to Sudan and extended westward to the Niger River (facebook.com/froulinat/posts). Some tribes, such as the Hilaliyyun and Banu Sulaym, settled in Chad as early as the 13th century CE, while others, including Quraysh and Qays, arrived in Kanem during the early 14th century (marefa.org). Today, Arab tribes are predominantly concentrated in northern Chad (aljazeera.net/encyclopedia), and constitute approximately 45% of the country's population (facebook.com/froulinat/posts).

The term "Shuwa" is referred to Arabs by some Chadian tribes, while others call them "Baggara" (marefa.org), who can be divided into the hassaniyya group who are known as the Arabs of Bagirmi (aljazeera.net/encyclopedia), and Junaid group who are known as the Junaydis who arrived from Sudan during the 13th and 14th centuries CE (facebook.com/froulinat/posts). Another categorization of the Baggara Arabs of Chad includes three main tribal groups, which are Awlad Rashid tribe which extends from western Darfur to Borno in Nigeria and Niger, and al-Atawiya tribe which spreads from Bahr al-Arab to Lake Fitri in Chad and southward into countries of Central African Republic, Cameroon, and eastern Nigeria, and lastly, the Himayd tribe which inhabits areas around Abéché, extending westward and southward beyond Logone River into Nigerian territories near the Benue River. There are other Arab tribes including Salamat residing areas extend from Bahr al-Ghazal in Sudan to central Cameroon and Nigeria and from Umm Timan to southern Chad, and Banu Makhzum tribe which spreads from Darfur to Kano in Nigeria (ar.wikipedia.org/wiki).

3.3. The Sudan

There were around 300 Arab tribes migrated to Sudan Before the rise of Islam, and in 1317 CE, the Christian Kingdom of Alwa was overthrown by these Arab tribes, leading to its conversion into an Islamic state and consequently Arab tribes settled in central and southwestern Sudan, while some others have entered Sudan via "Darbal-Arba'in", through the Sahara (embassies.mofa.gov.sa).

The Arab tribes compose an approximately 40% of Darfur's population, and collectively known as the Baggara (alhurra.com/sudan), which descend to the Juhayna Arabs, a segment of the Himyarite tribe, who migrated to the Nile regions in the late 14th century. They were migration followed by the arrival of Banu Khuzam and Banu Halba, in the 15th and 18th centuries, respectively (embassies.mofa.gov.sa).

The Baggara tribes in Darfur claim descent from Junayd ibn Ahmad, whose lineage includes Rashid, Himayd, and Atiya. Over time, these lineages diversified into several clans such as Banu Sulaym, Jawama'a, Awlad Hamid, Habania, Salamat, Rashid, Hamar, and Hawazma. Further subdivisions include groups like Banu Halba, comprising Jabir and Jabara, and the Missiriya, divided into Humr and Zurug (embassies.mofa.gov.sa).

There are some of the Baggara tribes residing southern plains south of the 12th parallel, and mainly include Rizeigat, Habania, Bani Halba, Taaisha, Tarjam, Mahadi, Salamat, Missiriya, Ma'alia tribes (chadhopeland.site, gorof.alafdal.net). Another group of the Baggara tribes residing northern Darfur, are basically Arab nomadic, and mainly include Mahariya, Ariqat, Abu Jalul, Atifat, Ziyadiyah, Shattiyah, and Mahamid tribes (chadhopeland.site). The Ziyadiyah Arabs have mainly concentrated in al-Kuma, Mellit, Umm Hijleij, and Sariyah areas, while the Arab tribes of Tarjam and Mahadi, who are primarily sedentary population, dominate areas in West Darfur (gorof.alafdal.net).

3.4. Mali

The State of Mali contains over fifty Arab tribes who have familial and marital ties to tribes in Algeria, Mauritania, and Libya (independentarabia.com). Although of that, they form a minority within a population predominantly composed of African ethnic groups (alkhaleej.ae/2010-08). The prominent Arab tribes in Mali include Sharifs, Jaafrah, Awlad Aish, Awlad Muluk, Awlad Ghanam, and Nawaji (<https://www.independentarabia.com>), besides Barabi, Awlad Dawood, Lamhar, Kunta, Mishdhoof, Tijane, Takhat, and the Azawad Arabs (aljazeera.net/news), and simultaneously, Azawad region is a stronghold for Arabs and Tuareg tribes.

3.5. Mauritania

Mauritanians owns a mix of Arab, Berber, and African origins (alghad.tv), who spread across the interior and coastal regions (dSPACE.univadrar.edu.dz). The Berber tribes migrated from North Africa to Mauritania in the first millennium BCE, dominated over the black African population, and furthermore, supported by the more arrival of Sinhaja Berbers who settled in the area and became influential in controlling the trans-Saharan trade routes.

The Hassani Arabs of the Maqil tribe entered North Africa in the mid-5th century AH, reached the edges of the Sahara by the late 7th century AH, encountered Sanhaja, and dominated the Sahara by establishing emirates and through cultural assimilating with the indigenous populations of Moor, Soninke, Wolof, Tebu, and Fulani tribes (ejaba.com, culture.gov.mr).

The Banu Hassan is the largest Arab tribe in Mauritania which makes up about 30% of the population, followed by Banu Amer (20%), Sidian (15%), Oulad Eido (10%), Lamtine (5%), Teknine (5%), and Mouarib (5%) (ejaba.com), and at the meantime, Kunta Arab tribe is also significant in Mauritania (shamela.ws/book).

Arab tribes in Mauritania are dispersed across various regions. The Oulad Dleim tribe is found along the northern desert edges near the Sanhaja tribes. The Barabis reside between Souss and the Sahara, while Awdaya spreads between Wadan and Walata, and Rahamna tribe is distributed from southern Morocco to Tichit in central Mauritania. Oulad Ahmar (Amr) tribe is located in Tagant in central Mauritania, with some spreading eastward to Tagaouist and Aoudaghost. The Arab tribe of Smail Sharifs spreads across Morocco and Mauritania, particularly in areas of Adrar, Nouakchott, Medherdrah, Aleg, Sangrava, and Ayoun El Atrouss (megazine.ultrasawt.com; ecat.kfml.gov.sa).

3.6. Nigeria and Cameroon

In northern Nigeria, the Shuwa Arab tribe whose origins could be traced back to Gawalim, Thawabit, Hamidiya, and Shawafi tribes in the Maghreb (search.mandumah.com), has a significant presence, and are primarily concentrated in Maiduguri, one of Nigeria's major Islamic cities (ar.wikipedia.org).

Concerning the Cameroon, Islam has reached through northern trade caravans, with Muslim Fulani groups settling in the northern regions. These groups established Islamic communities that facilitated the spread of Islam to central Cameroon. By the first half of the 9th century CE, Islam had become prevalent in the Benue River basin and the central plateau.

The number of Muslims is estimated at about 24% of the population of Cameroon according to 2021 estimates (ar.wikipedia.org), constitutes the second religion after Christianity (google.com/search), where the key Muslim groups include the Shuwa Arabs, Fulani, Kirdi, Bamum, Tikar, and Mandara (ar.wikipedia.org/wiki), in areas of the Sanhaja River, the Adamawa Plateau, the Benue Basin, and Mandara Mountains, and also influences central Cameroon and southern cities, where tribes the Muslim tribes of Bamum, Diora, Laka, Koutin, Guidara, Fali, Mofu, and Matakarm are found.

4. The geographic extensions of the Shared Sahelian transnational Arabs

The transnational Arabs of the Sahel, mostly nomads (Figure 3), have a continuous geographic distribution in the region. Chad has many Arab tribes who extend into Sudan, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan (aljazeera.net/encyclopedia), and them is notably, the Kunta Arab tribe for its presence across the Sahara, spanning regions from Mauritania to Niger and southern Algeria (shamela.ws/book).

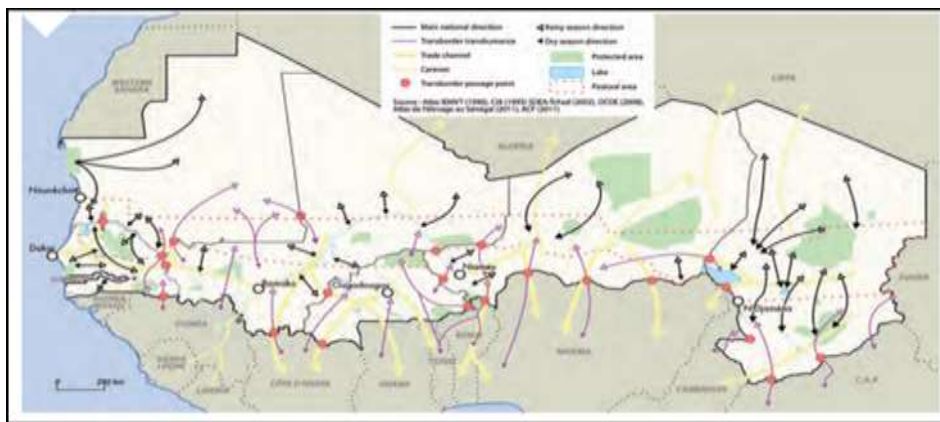


Figure 3: National and trans-border herd movements across the Sahel

Source: Atlas of trends in pastoral systems in the Sahel 1970-201 openknowledge.fao.org

The Baggara belt extends between latitudes 11° and 13° north, extending from Sudan's Kordofan region to the Diffa area (Figure 4) in southeastern Niger. Southward, it reaches the fertile savannas near the tropical zones, covering areas such as Bahr al-Arab, Abyei, and Bahr el-Ghazal in South Sudan. To the east, it stretches from the Ethiopian Plateau to the Sudanese plains, while westward; it reaches Lake Chad and Shari River in southwestern Chad, and then continues to Central African Republic's border (embassies.mofa.gov.sa).

The Mahamid Arabs are found in Libya, Sudan, Chad, and Niger, marking the westernmost expansion of Sudanese Arabic-speaking nomadic groups (marebpress.net). In Niger, Arab tribes inhabit northern regions near Algeria and Libya, as well as eastern and southern areas bordering Chad and Nigeria (ar.wikipedia.org). (x.com/Khalid), and their settlements include locations such as Diffa, Zinder, Agadez, and Tahoua, along with the southern banks of the Komadugu River (<https://x.com/Khalid>). Additionally, some Arab tribes maintain a presence between Mali's Azawad region and Mauritania (aa.com.tr/ar/archive), with approximately 62 tribes distributed across Azawad from west to east (alwahdawi.info).

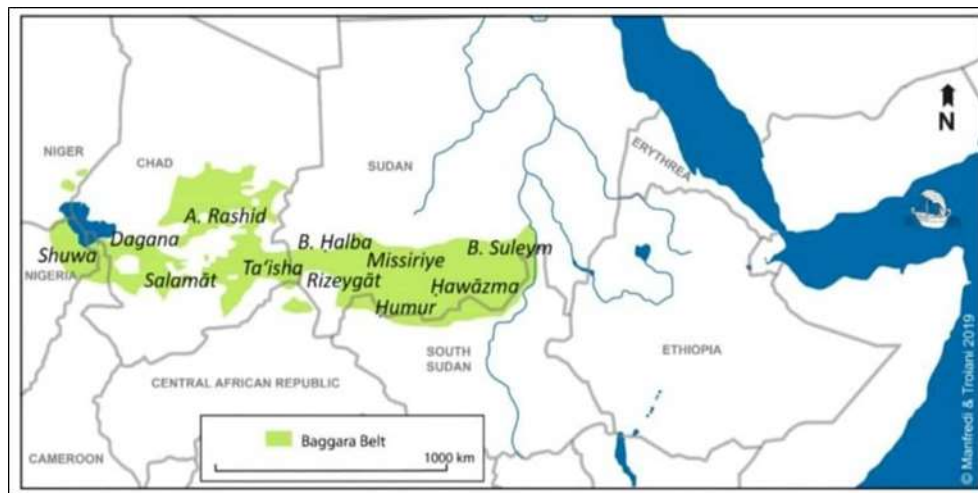


Figure 4: The Baggara belt and its main tribes

The Rashid tribe spans from western Darfur to Bornu in Nigeria and Niger, encompassing the Mahamid Arabs in Niger and Libya. The Mahamid forms a significant majority in Chad (aljazeera.net), where other notable tribes such as the Mahariya (chadhopeland.site). The tribe of Atawea extends from Bahr al-Arab in the east to Lake Fitri in the west, reaching the Central African Republic, Cameroon, and eastern Nigeria. The Hemaïd Arabs extends from Abéché to the southwestward and then cross Logone River to Benue River in Nigeria. Similarly, the Salamât tribe occupies the territory extends from Bahr el-Ghazal to Cameroon and Nigeria through southern Chad, while the Khozam tribe stretches from Darfur to Kano in Nigeria, occupying a geographic belt in the savanna bordering the desert (facebook.com/froulinat), and lastly, Awlad Malik tribe concentrate in Arada in eastern Chad, and in central areas of Batha and Abu Qudam sheikhdom (chadhopeland.site).

The tribe of Gouran or Tebu occupies the regions between Arab and African tribes and is viewed differently depending on the perspective that, the Africans often consider them Arabs, while Arabs regard them as Africans (aljazeera.net). Some of the Tebu have associations with the Tuareg who are a group of Berber nomads residing in the Sahara, and were divided into northern and southern groups. The northern Tuareg are primarily based in regions of Ahaggar Mountains in Algeria and Ghadames in Libya, while the southern Tuareg inhabit southwestern Niger near the Aïr Mountains and Taoua, Timbuktu in Mali, and parts of northern Burkina Faso (afak-revues.com). The Tebu are concentrated in Chad's Tibesti Mountains, southern Libya's oases, particularly in Fezzan and Kufra, and eastern Niger near the Tenere Desert (asbab.com). They also have geographic extensions into Sudan and Central Africa.

5. The involvement of the Transnational Arabs in Sudan's wars of April 2023

Arab tribes have significantly involved in Sudanese war of April 2023 as part of the Rapid Support Forces (google.com/search) since they have long-standing ties to militias like the Janjaweed, and have been deeply involved in the fighting, particularly in targeting non-Arab ethnic groups.

These transnational tribes were brought from Mali, Chad, and Niger to the Sudan (origins.osu.edu), since the core of the Rapid Support Forces are nomadic Arabs from Sudan's west tribes, with Chadian Arab and non-Arab auxiliaries recruited from elsewhere in the Sahel and the Sahara, and from among Khartoum's urban poor, and fighters of a group formerly based in Libya (sudanwarmonitor.com), where their recruitment by the Rapid Security Forces has been on basis of ethnic affiliation, or driven by economic motivations and influenced by historical migrations (origins.osu.edu), besides many fighters are motivated by an Arabist racial ideology and local ethnic grievances (sudanwarmonitor.com), which is understated by the Rapid Support Forces which lack a clear unifying political program (sudanwarmonitor.com), and where the legacy of [pan-Arabism and Arab-supremacy ideology](#) plays a part (theconversation.com).

The Rapid Support Forces has capitalized on tribal networks to recruit fighters and secure territorial control, while mercenaries and fighters from diverse tribal backgrounds have deepened the conflict. These dynamics illustrate how ethnicity, resources, and power struggles shape both the war and its broader implications across Sudan and the Sahel (Arab News, November 5, 2023, Eurasia Review, CMI, 2023), and underscores how tribal affiliations, historical grievances, and resource competition fuel ethnic and political divisions, and where the geography of Sudan's and tribal structures are deeply intertwined with its political and security challenges. Here, the western regions of Sudan, particularly Darfur, have long been sites of complex tribal rivalries and violence, particularly some groups like the Rizeigat, including their northern factions, who have been central to the mobilization of militias such as the Janjaweed and the Rapid Support Forces (origins.osu.edu). Here, the alliances and rivalries often reflect disputes over natural resources.

The involvement of the Baggara tribes in Sudan's war of April 2023 reflects their historical alignment with armed groups and militias. During earlier conflicts, the Sudanese government armed the Baggara to serve as proxy militias in counterinsurgency campaigns in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains. These campaigns integrated them into paramilitary groups such as the Janjaweed, which later evolved into the Rapid Support Forces. In 2023, the Rapid Support Forces continued to recruit fighters and derive influence from the Baggara tribes, leveraging shared history and mutual interests in autonomy and territorial control, particularly in Darfur tribes.

Sudan's western regions of Kordofan and Darfur have deep historical connections to West Africa, the Maghreb and to the Libyan provinces of Cyrenaica and Fezzan. The Mahadism movement owes much to earlier west African millenarian revolutions., and it was Abdullah Torsheeh al-Taishi, with west African origin, was the first who recognized Mohamed Ahmed al Mahdi as the awaited one (sciencespo.fr).

The Rapid Support Forces has also benefited from external support, including arms trafficking networks spanning Libya, Chad, and the UAE. Mercenaries recruited from Chad, Niger, Mali, and the Central African Republic has further shaped the war's dynamics.

6. Discussion

The involvement of the transnational Arabs of the Sahel in Sudan's war of April 2023 could be discussed within the Sahel's political instability, ethnic and tribal structures, and nomadism.

The issue of political instability could be justified as an integral element into Sudan's war of April 2023. The Sahel, generally, is driven by a combination of rebellions, coups, protests, and illicit trafficking activities (Walthe, 2017), particularly, the political disputes in the Sahel, since the late 1950s, have centered on conflicting territorial visions, with disagreements over sovereignty which highlight the influence of emerging ideas of state sovereignty and political legitimacy on competing territorial claims (Campos-Serrano et al, 2016), with a hybrid process in its revolutions involving revolutionary civilian mobilization and a military coup (Fain et al., 2024). This growing disillusionment among many Sahelian states led them to seek more dependable allies (Lubotzky), since liberal democracy has failed to create resilient institutions capable of preventing state collapse (Ibrahim, 2013), a failure stemmed from disconnect between the imported liberal democratic frameworks of the Western tradition and the informal institutions rooted in local culture, values, norms, and traditions of Sahelian societies (Ibrahim, 2013).

The Sahelian countries of Niger and Mali and Mauritania and Chad, have faced violent conflicts between central governments and security challengers in peripheral areas, since gaining independence from France in 1960. These violent conflicts included the Tuareg uprisings in Niger and Mali, multiple interconnected natures of regional conflicts rebel insurgencies in Chad, and racial tensions between black Africans and Arabs in Mauritania. Here, the national armed forces remained the dominant political actors in these contexts (Elischer, 2019), and the inability of a State authorities to manage armed violence often leads to the formation of ethnic-based self-defense groups, exacerbating ethnic polarization in conflict dynamics (google.com/search).

In recent decades, armed rebellious activity in the Sahel surged In 2010s, with the number of attacks are increasing sevenfold in 2015 compared to 2010 (Issaev, 2021), and in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger occurred 1,463 armed conflicts caused by 195 violent armed groups across 1,263 locations between 2012 and 2019, and in Chad, the Boko Haram and ISIS sought to demonstrate their combat capabilities (Issaev, 2021), which made violence to reach unprecedented levels in 2019 suggesting with emergence of new conflict zones (Raleigh et al., 2021), and generally, such rarely arise from isolated grievances or straightforward causes; rather, they reflect a complex interplay of interrelated factors (Helland et al., 2014), where there were fragile alliances among insurgent groups with durability depended on brokerage, competition, and shifting alliances mechanisms (Bencherif et al., 2018).

At a State's level of the Sahel there are many rebellions such as those between Mali and its Tuareg nomadic population following their rebellions in 1962–64 and 1990–94 (Keita, 1998). The Second Tuareg Rebellion in the early 1990s was coincided with broader political turbulence in Malian society (Keita, 1998), while in 2012 the Tuareg were organized under the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad which sought for an autonomous state by the [capture](#) the regional capitals of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu; and to declare the [independent state of Azawad](#) in northern Mali ([cfr.org](#)), and succeeded in the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Azawad's (Skretting, 2021).

Colonial powers in Libya disregarded North African tribes and their traditional territories, and this has disconnected between identity and geography, which has fueled irredentism and national security, as well as Libya's inability to secure its borders (Ben Khayal, 2023), in addition to that, Al-Qaeda-affiliated networks have collaborated across ethnic and social divisions despite the challenges posed by local political complexities (Burchall Henningsen, 2021). The collapse of the Libyan state in 2011 led to [proliferation of weapons and armed fighters](#) (Figure 5) in the Sahel ([cfr.org](#)), and highlighted the significance of tribal politics as a central factor and explanatory element in the Libyan war (Lacher, 2013).

Algeria has interests in the Sahel, particularly after the collapse of the Malian state in 2012 and the subsequent French military intervention in 2013, emphasized political and diplomatic solutions over military strategies and balancing securitization with humanization in its approach (Sour, L., 2022). Power struggles at the highest levels of government have affected Algeria's ability to address the regional crisis effectively, diminishing its influence as a regional leader (Ammour, 2013). In Chad, an escalation is attributed to Boko Haram and ISIS which sought to demonstrate their combat capabilities, exacerbating the government's inability to maintain security (Issaev, 2021), and in Mauritania, the military continued to dominate politically, while segments of the armed forces in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger resist civilian authority (Elischer, S., 2019), although in the past three decades, the Sahel has seen a gradual shift toward civilian oversight in governance (Elischer, S., 2019).

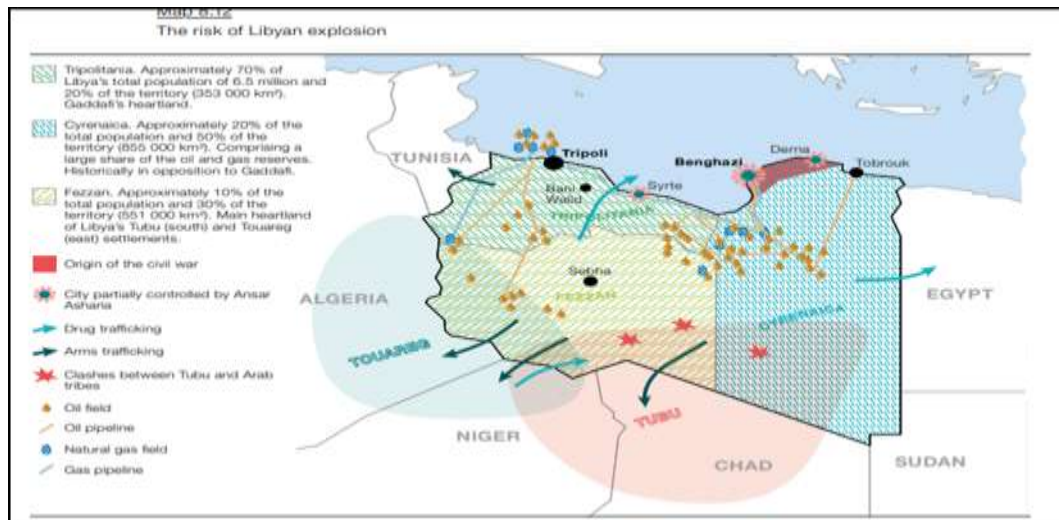


Figure 5: The risk of Libya explosion

Source: OECD/SWAC (2014), An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography,

Economics and Security, West African Studies, OECD Publishing

The foreign support, funding, and fighters have increased the conflict's complexity in the Sahel. There have been numerous reports that Chad and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have provided funding and weapons to the Rapid Support Forces in its war in Sudan since April 2023 (lordslibrary.parliament.uk), and the French forces, the U.S. military, and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, have been heavily involved in conflicts (Dieng, 2021), besides that, the Western governments have often underestimated or overlooked the destabilizing influence of organized crime in these areas (Lacher, 2012), have long influenced Sahelian economic systems and geopolitical arrangements by operating beyond state frameworks (Niang, 2015), increased militarization in origin and transit countries (Davitti et al. 2018), driven by bureaucratic considerations where their presence is viewed as a sovereignty issue that limits domestic political discourse and leaving Sahelian authorities in a precarious position (Guichaoua, 2020).

The ethnic and tribal structures are central to understanding political and security dynamics in the Sahel (Warsza, 2018), since the emerging States in the Sahel remain divided along lines of religion, pastoralism, farming, and ethnicity (Saka, 2024). The Sahelian nations exhibit "family resemblances" that distinguish them from the coastal and tropical regions of West Africa (OHAS, 2021), and features resilient populations adapting to harsh climates (Černý et al. 2018), who diversify their livelihoods through agriculture, livestock rearing, and labor migration (Ruthven et al. 1994, Turner, 2019), that persist regionally (Černý et al. 2018), with diverse social systems and cultures which shape how these communities engage with and exploit their natural environment along with the economic, social, and technological changes in the Sahel (Raynaut, 2001), that could be due to interactions of various influential participants affected rural populations (Saqalli, 2008), associated with Arabization policies coincided with the rise of an ideology promoting Arab cultural and racial supremacy (Sharkey, 2007), where the physical and political mobility have historically been integral to expressions of loyalty and critique, shaping political authority in the Sahara (Drury, 2020).

The traditional life of communities in the Sahel underwent rapid changes during colonization and post-decolonization that has brought limited benefits to the majority of the population, excluding the social elite (Rubio, 2024). This could be viewed as an erosion of traditional systems for managing people, labor, and resources and consequently led to present social upheaval in the Sahel, accompanied with new dynamics of expanding markets and shifts in rural social hierarchies such as the challenged the old regulatory frameworks governing resource use (Raynaut, 1996), in addition to deeper integration into the global economy that have reshaped the Sahel, and drastically changing production systems, requiring states and civil society to adapt rapidly and effectively (Cour, 2001) where for example, the family inheritance systems have transitioned from a "customary" single-heir model to a "local Muslim" framework with the rise of individualistic family structures and greater resilience among village populations (Saqalli et al., 2010), where in this context, ethnicity and social status play crucial roles in mobilization efforts associated with Islam (Jourde, 2017).

Tribalism is deeply inherited in the Sahel communities and plays a significant role in various crises where many Arab tribes, yet their tribal coalition is fractious, have a long history of fighting each other (sudanwarmonitor.com), in situations where each tribe's influence depends on its strength and level of loyalty or proximity to the ruling regime (Ben LaMMA, 2017). Tribalism served as a key factor contributing to the Libyan crisis and the ongoing armed fragmentation (Carles, 2023). This is because the Libyan society is primarily organized along tribal lines that refer to social organization based on lineage and shared ancestry, and evolved and shaped by successive waves of Arabs migrations, and over time served as systems of social and cognitive reference that enabling various networks to organize, function to gaining privileges and ensure protection against violence (Ben Lamma, 2017).

The Sahara and Sahel remains a contested regions characterized by numerous ideological and personal divisions (Graham, 2011), where for example the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the fall of Qaddafi's regime disrupted the delicate ethnic and political balance in the Sahel (Raleigh et al., 2021), and migration has brought about socioeconomic changes and facilitated the rise of trans-border criminal networks in the Sahel (Muhammed, 2023).

The issue of nomadism in the involvement of transnational Arabs in Sudan war of April 2023 could be viewed by that, the populations of the Sahel have maintained close political, economic, and social ties facilitated by the mobility inherent in a nomadic lifestyle, consistently shaped by conflict and cooperation, forming alliances that shifted rapidly over time (Cordell, 1985), and by that, the survival of pastoral communities in the Sahel depend on complex resource access, managing inter-ethnic conflicts and cooperation (Thébaud et al., 2001), and that the pastoral societies, before colonialism, were dynamic as evidenced by Saharan accounts that drew upon Islamic models (Cleaveland, 1998).

During the early 20th century, French and British colonial scholars constructed rigid, descent-based models of African pastoral societies that emphasized societal immobility and early prioritizing static descriptions (Cleaveland, 1998), with an inconsistent involvement of post colonial States in supporting or limiting pastoral livelihoods with negative stereotypes about pastoralism in certain policy and governmental discussions (Thébaud et al., 2001). This consequent, as historically confirmed that, marginalized groups are more likely to develop grievances (Piombo et al., 2024), which was practically confirmed by the marginalized Bedouin groups of Tuareg, Arabs, Flan, Tubu, Kanuri, and others who posed a profound problem that questions their relations with states and with other ethnic groups that make up those national entities ([studies.aljazeera.net](https://www.aljazeera.net)). In the States of Niger and Mali, the Tuareg nomads and semi nomads have exhibited complex engagement with their States, ranging from legal statelessness to multiple citizenship (Perrin, 2024) resulted in a State's belonging and territorial and community bonds (Perrin, 2024), where the Sahel borders have allowed nomadic Arab tribes from Chad and Niger, to participate as both fighters and refugees which is highlighting the (De Waal, A. 2023, Flint, J. 2010, Smith, J. 2022, Niang, 2015).

7- A proposed integrated approach for the suppression of Sahelian transnational Arabs' involvement in war, conflict, and disputes

The proposed integrated approach was built on four pillars (Figure 6), each one contains some associated suggestions, detailed later, with an ultimate objective to suppress the involvement of transnational Arab tribes in war, conflict, and disputes in order to sustain the Sahel's stability.

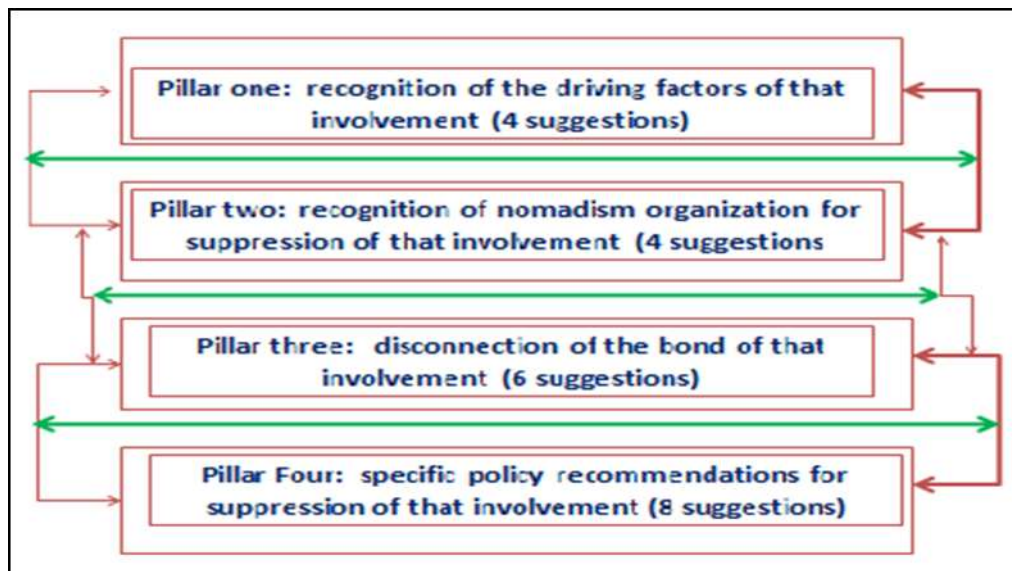


Figure 6: The proposed integrated approach for the suppression of the involvement of transnational Arabs of the Sahel into war, conflict, and disputes

Pillar one: the recognition of the driving factors of that involvement, which could include:-

- 1- Challenges of economic dynamics, resource access dynamics, and social and political dynamics.
- 2- Feelings of exclusion and injustice, utter neglect, and the breakdown of collective cohesion at the community and the national levels.
- 3- Waning of traditional structures of governance, and absence of the State presence in pastoral areas.
- 4- Competition over possession of limited resources that are not fairly distributed and ethnic divisions which undermine development.

Pillar two: the recognition of nomadism organization to suppress that involvement, through:-

- 1- The recognition of nomadism as a production system, with patterns of mobility, has involvement into crop farming and livestock production as an economic and social cultural activity which binds these groups together.
- 2- Recognition of nomads' mobility as essential to benefit from the random spatially distributed rainfall.
- 3- The avoidance of the nomads' centralization of cultural and social life.

- 4- Recognition of the strong hierarchical structure of nomadism marked by very specific cultural identities and reluctance to deal with the overwhelming powers of the State's authority.

Pillar three: disconnection of the bond of that involvement, through:-

- 1- Inclusion of pastoralists in decision making at the local and national level such as pastoral associations in Niger, Senegal, and Mauritania, and pastoral codes to support the rights of the pastoralists.
- 2- Integrated schemes or programs for pastoralists that focus on youth and women.
- 3- Increasing political awareness of the plight of pastoralists on the contribution of pastoral livestock to the security and development to recognize pastoralists' critical role in maintaining stability,
- 4- Preserved key area for livestock breeding and incorporated into a broader livestock production strategy that includes the higher ecological zones further south of the Sahel region.
- 5- Promotion of pilot development areas
- 6- Avoidance of negative perceptions of local populations and work for an effective coordination between participating organizations.
- 7- Addressing the challenges of the Sahel security by focusing on tribal dynamics and power structures.

Pillar Four: specific policy recommendations for suppression of that involvement, including:-

- 1- Provision of a "level playing field" by designing development interventions according to the needs of nomads, rather than to the needs of governments.
- 2- Elimination of arbitrary taxation of transhumance routes and livestock trade.
- 3- Clarification of the roles and mandates of traditional and formal governance to ensure unbiased conflict resolution.
- 4- Reducing limitations on mobility and improving secured access to water sources during dry seasons and mitigating land grabbing.
- 5- Stopping competition from imported animal products which stalls investments in local breeding activities.
- 6- Strengthen of regional integration, encouragement of local responsibility and ownership by populations.

The suggestions embedded in this integrated approach could be included in the Sahelian States' policies of development that should, specifically, target the desert parts of these countries. They have to guarantee the inclusion of views and participation of transnational Arabs' communities in these development policies.

Conclusion

This research reviewed the geographic distribution of the transnational Sahelian Arabs of the Sahel, and their involvement in Sudan's war of April 2023. The main conclusion is that, inappropriate policies towards the Sahel's nomads have determined political and social stability, and shaped both the nature of war and peace in this region.

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