

(R)evolution of threats:

Examination of Adrar des Ifoghas in the context of the Global Black Spot theory

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The proposed presentation is the result of a study devoted to examination of Adrar des Ifoghas in the context of the Global Black Spots (GBS) theory. Adrar des Ifoghas is a mountainous massif situated in northern Mali and southern Algeria. The author employs the aforementioned theoretical approach in order to explain the role of this cross-border territory as a main criminal, rebel, and terrorist safe haven in the western part of Sahel-Saharan Africa; and as well to diagnose the threat posed by illicit actors operating there (Islamists terrorists, organized non-state armed and criminal groups, etc.).

Territories that are: (1) outside of effective governmental control; (2) dominated by alternative, mostly illicit, authority structures (criminals, warlords, terrorist organizations); and (3) are capable of breeding and exporting insecurity (e.g. illicit drugs, conventional weapons, weapons of mass destruction, terrorist operatives, illicit financial flows, strategic/sensitive know how) to faraway locations are called Global Black Spots.

Since the independence of Mali in 1960, the area of Adrar des Ifoghas has repeatedly been a conflict hot spot and has been serving a safe haven for rebels, smugglers, and most recently: terrorists; also all the Tuareg-led rebellions of the north against the central government started there, and so was the last one of 2012. It is therefore crucially important to consider the role this territory plays in ensuring security to northern Mali and the broader Sahel-Saharan region. The GBS approach serves as tool to do so. In the proposed presentation, after discussing the theory of the GBS itself, and investigating the phenomenon of transnational organized crime and terrorism in the Sahel-Saharan region, the author focuses on the case study of the discussed area, bringing closer not only the illicit activities that were undertaken there, but also exploring the geographical, historical and social characteristics of the region with special attention given to the Tuareg people of Kel Adagh.

Adrar des Ifoghas is situated in remote cross-border and non-accessible location, it lies on a trafficking route, it has served a safe haven for rebels during Tuareg uprising, it was the starting point of these revolts, used to be a sanctuary for GSPC/AQIM and other terrorists, and finally hosted their stronghold with huge caches of arms and other facilities. It all suggests that the aforementioned mountain range is not a typical location as many in the region, on the contrary: its

features allow us to consider it as a black spot, and even, due to its impact on the security of other countries and regions, a global black spot.

Yet to be a black spots, a territory should have four already discussed features. Firstly, to be outside of effective governmental control. The core part of Adrar des Ifoghas lies within the Malian northern province of Kidal, and the other within remote Algerian wilayas of Adrar and Tamanrasset. Here, only the Malian part is considered due to illicit activities that are predominantly undertaken on this side of the frontier, though terrorist and traffickers do not recognize the borders, therefore most probably the black spot lies on the territory of both states. The region of Kidal is economically and socially deeply neglected, and the central government power is either not seen or widely contested by the local militant groups such as mainly MNLA or CMA that control some major towns in the region.

Secondly, the area must be dominated by alternative, mostly illicit, authority structures (criminals, warlords, terrorist organizations, etc.). The settlements are under control of ethnic militias (mostly Tuareg but also Arab, Songhai and Fulani), and sometimes under the rule of nexus of politicians and traffickers; for several months (June 2013 – January/February 2014) the territory was under direct control of Islamist terrorists of Al-Qaeda affiliated groups (AQIM, Ansar Dine, MUJAO, Al-Murabitoun, etc.). The mountainous area are basically not controlled, what is exploited by traffickers. Bamako has no authority over that land, and those who have, could perhaps be defined as criminal, and most certainly non-state armed groups.

Thirdly, the region is capable of breeding and exporting insecurity (illicit drugs, weapons, terrorist operatives, etc.) to faraway locations. Not to mention the Tuareg rebellions, it is enough to recall the Islamist *reign of terror* that recently spread all over the northern Mali and threatened the south. The mountains have served as well as a hiding place for the kidnapped Western tourists; and as trafficking route for arms and drugs, sometimes even on industrial scale. The facilities discovered in the mountains indicate that it was a centre for producing improvised explosives; finally it was the stronghold for all illicit actors in the area where they could undergo training and plan attacks on Western targets.

Yet fourthly, a black spot ought not to be a zone that exhibits independence tendencies or are field of an armed conflict. The point is to not to confuse “freedom fighters” with warlords interested in power or economic gain. In this case it seems that Adrar des Ifoghas, and broadly Azawad – as the Tuaregs call the area of northern Mali, should not be considered a black spot since it exhibits separatist tendencies and, quite regularly, is a field of revolt. Nonetheless, I would

dismiss this condition as a superficial argument in this case. Adrar des Ifoghas was a black spot despite armed struggle, and even in the time of peace. It not only served the noble independence purpose of self-determining the Tuareg fate, but also it served the traffickers and terrorists who have nothing to do with the Tuareg irredentism. Furthermore, possibly this territory, due to its unique characteristic, could constitute a black spot even after potential independence of Azawad. The various activities, that are undertaken in the area, and their intensity indicate that this black spot is characterized by a pulse character and produces panoramic variety of threats.

In consequence, considering all above discussed specifics of the region of Adrar des Ifoghas, and mentioning the European concern over developments in Mali, and the French intervention over there what constitutes the proof that the insecurity flow out of northern Mali had or could have global reach and impact; it is legitimately to term Adrar des Ifoghas a global black spot, and the Amettetaï valley its “heart of darkness”.

In conclusions the author provides a tentative model of a Sahel-Saharan global black spot, reveals some basic hints allowing detection of other GBS, indicates necessity of further research, and suggests some policy recommendation that are aimed at restoring security and long-term stability to the region. The study is a result of Ph.D. research and fieldwork conducted in the region.