

FRAGMENT POLICY RESEARCH MEETING – IAI, Rome, 9/12/2021

Hybrid event**“Governance, Fragility and Insurgency in the Sahel: A Hybrid Political Order in the Making”**

Once a region that rarely featured in debates about global security, the Sahel has become increasingly topical as it confronts the international community with intertwined challenges related to climate variability, poverty, food insecurity, population displacement, transnational crime, contested statehood and jihadist insurgencies. This policy-research meeting aims at combining different perspectives to explore the contours of political orders in the making. It focuses on the trajectory of regional security and multi-level governance over the past decade, addressing the challenges of state fragility and societal resilience in the context of increasing external intervention and growing international rivalry. Sahel experts, policy makers and scholars from the **Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)**, the **Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies (SSSA)**, and the **Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa (ARGA)** will discuss broader and deeper transformations of Sahelian political orders that can be neither ignored nor patched up through the reductionist narrative of the ‘war on terror’ projected onto ungoverned spaces. Building on the findings of the **research project FRAGMENT (Fragile states and violent entrepreneurs: conflict, climate, refugees)**, political economy and historical sociological lenses will be mobilised to shed light on how extra-legal governance plays a crucial role in the deformation, transformation and reformation of political orders in a contested region at Europe’s borders. Such findings have been published in 2020 in a [dedicated Special Issue of the International Spectator](#), journal of the **Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)** in Rome.

DRAFT MEETING PROGRAMME:14.00 **Introduction:**

[Morten Bøås](#) (NUPI Research Professor) and [Ettore Greco](#) (IAI Executive Vice-President)

14.10 **Keynote Address:** [Emanuela Del Re](#) (EU Special Representative for the Sahel)14.30 **Panel** chaired by [Daniela Huber](#) (IAI Head of the Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa Programme; The International Spectator co-editor)

- “Governance, Fragility and Insurgency in the Sahel: A Hybrid Political Order in the Making”: [Morten Bøås](#) (NUPI Research Professor) and [Francesco Strazzari](#) (SSSA Professor).
- “The Fragility Dilemma and Divergent Security Complexes in the Sahel”: [Kari Osland](#) (NUPI Senior Research Fellow)
- “Goldmining in the Sahel-Sahara: A Growing Security Governance Challenge”: [Luca Raineri](#) (SSSA Researcher)
- “Oscillations of Political Violence on the Lake Chad Basin”: [Alessio Iocchi](#) (NUPI Senior Research Fellow)

Online comments from:

[Nana Touré](#) (Independent Security Consultant) and [Abdoul Wahhab Cissé](#) (Senior Research Fellow, ARGA)

15.30 **Discussion**16.00 **Closure**

Contributions:

“Governance, Fragility and Insurgency in the Sahel: A Hybrid Political Order in the Making”

The presentation introduces the Special Issue of the IAI-based journal *International Spectator* dedicated to the changing dynamics of governance and political ordering in the Sahel, in a context characterized by the erosion of democracy – from Mali to Chad, from Guinea to Sudan –, the rise of competing spheres and networks of influence, and the calling into question of international hierarchies and norms.

“The Fragility Dilemma and Divergent Security Complexes in the Sahel”

Despite an exponential increase in international resources devoted to the Sahel, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. This is largely due to the so-called “fragility dilemma”, faced by fragile states that are in critical need of external assistance, but have limited absorption capacity and are governed by sitting regimes that dictate the terms and upon which external actors must rely. This dilemma has contributed to an increasing divergence between a state-centric regional and a people-centric transnational security complex. In particular, a heavy-handed approach to violent extremism and external policies aimed at curbing irregular migration have had a number of unintended consequences, disrupting livelihoods and further exacerbating instability in the Sahelian states.

“Goldmining in the Sahel-Sahara: A Growing Security Governance Challenge”

In the Sahara-Sahel, artisanal gold mining is booming. Fragile Sahelian states arguably provide a most likely case for the ‘resource conflict’ theory to hold, yet ‘resource capture’ can also underpin informal governance schemes through which the co-optation of non-state actors ushers in (hybrid) state-building. While the diversity of empirical cases lends credibility to both theories, the dialectic of proximity and distance – both social and spatial – helps make sense of the different modalities of artisanal gold mining governance in the region. In the Sahelian core of regional states, artisanal gold mining has supported regime empowerment; in the Sahara, it has helped assuage pre-existing tensions; in the Tibesti, it has led to militarisation and conflict.

“Oscillations of Political Violence on the Lake Chad Basin”

Widespread narratives of fragility and resilience in the Sahel paint a picture about the region’s inherent ungovernability that lead to consider an endless state- and peace-building process as the most feasible governance solution. Around the Lake Chad, while competition over territory and natural resources has intensified, community-based dispute-settlement practices have proven increasingly ineffective. Meanwhile, communities organised in self-defence militias are undergoing a process of progressive militarisation that tends to normalise violence and legitimise extra-judicial vigilante justice, further empowering arms suppliers gravitating in the jihadi galaxy, such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).