

NIANG, THIerno S.D. *Le Sahel, épicentre géopolitique. Des solutions endogènes face à l'enjeu sécuritaire*. L'Harmattan, 2023. ISBN 978-2-336-41161-3. Pp. 139.

Since 2012, several countries in the Sahel region of West Africa have experienced an increase in violent extremism, some of it inspired by Islamism, a political ideology committed to restructuring societies in order to make them conform to a radical interpretation of Islam. In this work, Thierno S.D. Niang, the Senegalese program coordinator of the think tank LEGS Africa, analyzes the threat that violent extremism poses to this region. Most importantly, he recommends several strategies to reduce violence, addressing both governments and citizens of these nations. Niang's work includes an overview of the genesis of extremism in the Sahel; he writes that many of the terrorist groups that have inflicted violence there formed during the Algerian Civil War (1992–2002). The poverty, geographic isolation, and weak governments of some countries in the Sahel, including those of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, make some individuals more susceptible to radicalization. While acknowledging the oppression that these countries experienced as a result of French colonialism, Niang attributes the responsibility for eradicating terrorism there to its countries' leaders. He rejects the use of "hard power," namely the militarization of splinter groups, as an



effective resolution to violent extremism, as this approach has backfired in Mali. Instead, Niang advocates for the use of a soft power that would make the wider culture condemn violent extremism at all costs, through education, art, and the promotion of *soufisme*, a branch of Islam that valorizes peaceful coexistence with others. He exhorts the peace-minded residents of the Sahel to openly and frankly spread a culture of peace, without fearing that a discussion of the connection between the political ideology of Islamism, and some incidents of violent extremism, could offend some. Niang expresses his vision for a peaceful Sahel, founded on collaboration between communities and the government: “Construire la paix ... est un double travail de la communauté et de l’État” (132). Overall, Niang’s work brings a historically rich context to a discussion of the causes of violent extremism in the Sahel, although its narration could be less repetitive. Niang’s idea that Sahel residents can best address violent extremism is admirable, but soft power’s effectiveness depends on various actors’ commitment to the goals in question. This work is useful for those interested in a sincere discussion of the sociopolitical issues facing West Africa. It is also particularly relevant to current events because France’s insistence on maintaining a military presence in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger angered many of their citizens, leading to the expulsion of French forces in 2023 by the countries’ military dictatorships. Clearly, French interventionism against violent extremism in the region is a sensitive issue, which arguably underscores Niang’s thesis that the region’s residents can best eradicate it themselves.