Conflict Drivers, International Responses, and the Outlook for Peace in Mali: A Literature Review

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About this report

This is a rapid review designed to provide a short synthesis of the available literature for policymakers. It was prepared for the European Commission by Shivit Bakrania (Honorary Research Associate, International Development Department, University of Birmingham).

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1. Introduction

This paper reviews the literature on: (1) the key conflict drivers (structural and proximate) in Mali, the principal actors and their positions, and the regional dynamics affecting the conflict; (2) international responses, including mediation efforts; (3) the outlook for peace (existing capacities for, and possible sources of, peace); and (4) recommendations for preventing further escalation and resolving the conflict.

There is a wealth of literature on Mali's experience with periodic Tuareg uprisings and the subsequent peace processes. There is also a more recent body of analysis on crime and terrorism in the Sahel region. This literature review attempts to reflect relevant empirical and policy analysis together with more up-to-date commentary on the situation in Mali.

The conflict in Mali is highly complex and fluid: the situation with regards to the various groups engaged in conflict is developing on a daily basis, as are the responses from local and international actors. This review reflects the state of knowledge at the time of writing (late January 2013).

2. Principal groups and actors

This section outlines the key actors in the current conflict, along with information on their positions and interests, and on relationships within and between competing rebel factions in the north.[1]

Mouvement national pour la liberation de l'Azawad (MNLA)

The MNLA was officially created in October 2011 as a coalition of Tuareg groups in northern Mali. It began with the intention of creating an independent secular political entity in northern Mali called *Azawad* (EIU, 2012). It launched its first attack on the 17th January 2012 on the Malian army in Ménaka, north-eastern Mali, after long consultations had taken place amongst Tuareg communities. Several further attacks followed, including one on the 30th March 2012 where they took control of Kidal, the location of the Malian army's counter-insurgency headquarters (ICG, 2012a).

The MNLA's military power and expertise comes mainly from Ag Mohamed Ag Najim and his fellow returnees from Libya; its political leadership is dominated by relatives of Ibrahim Bahanga, a key figure of the 2006 rebellion who died in 2011. Ag Mohamed Ag Najim was sidelined by the 2006 Algiers Accords, and Ibrahim Bahanga had rejected them. The MNLA lacks an organisational structure that provides clear demarcation between fighting units. This makes the risk of division and disintegration high – illustrated by the defection of MNLA fighters to Ansar Dine in the summer of 2012. Furthermore, the absence of a detailed political programme and a lack of resources explain the MNLA's inability to build on its

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[1] Appendix B includes an overview of Mali's ethnic groups, which may help in understanding the dynamics among competing groups in the north of Mali.

military victory and establish a new state. Having recently been ousted by other religiously conservative groups in many parts of northern Mali, it has moderated its initial position and will accept some form of federal arrangement (ICG, 2012a; EIU, 2012).

al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

AQIM grew out of Algeria's civil conflict in the 1990s. It was known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (*Groupe salafiste pour la predication et le combat, GSPC*) before it officially affiliated to al-Qaeda in 2007. The GSPC first established itself in Mali in 2003 after kidnapping 32 Western tourists in southern Algeria. Mali, through the mediation of Iyad Ag Ghali who now leads Ansar Dine, obtained their release. In return, the hostage takers obtained relative immunity on Malian territory. As such, AQIM has been present in Mali for ten years and has been able to flourish due to the 'construction of social arrangements at local, national and international levels' (ICG, 2012a, 5). AQIM mainly recruits from amongst the Tuaregs, Arabs, and Moors but also from sub-Saharan Africa. It is divided into several mobile sub-groups which are capable of moving from one country to the next to evade security services (Sidibé, 2012).

A relationship exists between AQIM and drug traffickers, who use the Sahel to transport drugs from South America to the West. AQIM escorts drug convoys and provides security, whilst the drug traffickers provide AQIM with funds to acquire vehicles and weapons (Sidibé, 2012). The kidnappings of western nationals in return for ransoms has also generated a prosperous industry, which has involved local and international, notably French, actors (ICG, 2012a).

Ansar Dine

Ansar Dine was set up by Iyad Ag Ghali, a key figure in Tuareg politics. Ag Ghali was involved in the 1990 (secular) Tuareg rebellion, but later played a lead role in negotiations to settle the 2006 rebellion. He subsequently converted to a more rigorous form of Islam. Ag Ghali was involved in initial Tuareg consultations before the current rebellion, but rejected the MNLA's separatist project unless it was to impose Sharia law throughout Mali. He was consequently sidelined by the MNLA and went on to form Ansar Dine (EIU, 2012; ICG, 2012a). Its stronghold is in the Tuareg-dominated Kidal region of far-northern Mali (ICGa, 2013).

Ansar Dine initially fought alongside the MNLA and its contribution was decisive in several operations at the beginning of the conflict. As Ansar Dine forces moved south, they grew in strategic importance, numbers and equipment, with resources provided by AQIM. Furthermore, as Ansar Dine increased the frequency of its bold attacks, it gradually replaced the MNLA and even managed to recruit MNLA fighters on a paid basis. At the end of May 2012, the MNLA and Ansar Dine began consultations in an effort to reach reconciliation. This resulted in an announcement of a planned merger, with Ansar Dine recognising Azawad independence and the MNLA accepting the Islamic character of the new state. However by the 1st June 2012, expatriate MNLA leaders had rejected this agreement on ideological grounds. Divisions deepened after this failed attempt at reconciliation and by the 29th June

2012, clashes with MUJWA fighters aligned with Ansar Dine forced the MNLA to leave Gao and Timbuktu (ICG, 2012a).

Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA)[2]

MUJWA emerged in late 2011 as a splinter faction of AQIM (IGC, 2012a). Like AQIM, it has carried out kidnappings in the region and terrorist attacks in Algeria. MUJWA has taken advantage of anti-Tuareg sentiment in Gao to gain support from some Songhaï/Peul groups who are the majority there. This enabled it to attack MNLA positions in the town in June 2012, which led to the eviction of the MNLA from urban areas in northern Mali (Arieff, 2013a; ICG, 2012a).

The Islamic Movement for Azawad

On the 24th January 2013, Alghabass Ag Intalla announced that he would split from Ansar Dine and form his own splinter group. Ag Intalla was a key Ansar Dine member and the heir to the traditional ruler of Kidal. The group said it rejected terrorism, would be prepared to fight against Ansar Dine, and is willing to participate in inclusive political dialogue. MNLA members have reportedly joined his group (Beaumont, 2013).

Relationships between AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJWA

These groups have developed personal and business ties with communities in northern Mali on pragmatic, ideological, and ethnic grounds. The three groups also appear to coordinate their actions and share personnel (Arieff, 2013a).

The Government of Mali

In August 2012, interim President Dioncounda Traoré formed a national unity government that brought together both supporters and opponents of the March 2012 military coup (EIU, 2012). It has been weakened by internal divisions and military interference (Arieff, 2013a). President Traoré owes his tenuous position to ECOWAS and is deeply unpopular after months of inaction and shallow promises (ICG, 2012b).

Mali's armed forces

The Malian military is very small (totalling some 7,000 troops), is internally divided, lacks capacity, and has been implicated in human rights abuses. Personnel levels and equipment have been affected by defections of Tuareg troops to the MNLA in early 2012 and by desertions. Segments of the military have been accused of collusion with drug and hostage traffickers (ICG, 2012a). Furthermore, the military is reportedly providing support to allied and ethnically-based irregular militias such as the Ganda Koy and Ganda Izo (Arieff, 2013a).

Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, the coup leader, holds no formal position in the administration, but wields significant influence. For example, in December 2012, the interim Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra resigned after Sanogo ordered his arrest. Sanogo heads an official commission on security sector reform; his survival depends on his ability to keep the promises he made to soldiers, regarding bonuses and other advantages, while his

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[2] Also known by its French acronym MUJAO (Mouvement Unicité et Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest)

longer-term relevance in the transition depends on his ability to carve himself a role in restructuring and re-equipping the armed forces (ICG, 2012b; Arieff, 2013a).

Ganda Koy/Ganda Izo militias

The Ganda Koy, a Songhaï-based militia, was formed in 1994 to provide security for sedentary groups in the north. Its formation was also, in part, a reflection of general disapproval amongst non-Tuareg or Arab groups regarding provisions made in peace agreements. Its prominent leaders were a number of army officer deserters (Benjaminsen, 2008; Lecocq, 2010).

Ganda Izo (also referred to as Ganda Iso) is a Peul-based militia created in 2008 to provide self-protection to the Peul ethnic group, although there are now non-Peuls in its ranks (Al Jazeera, 2013). It has received training and some logistical support from the Malian army, but has not been armed or given a formal security role (HRW, 2012).

3. Structural reasons for conflict in Mali

Previous Tuareg rebellions in the post-colonial period took place in 1963, the 1990s and 2006-2008. The current conflict began with the Tuareg attack in January 2012, and although the situation has since evolved, (with a military coup in March 2012 and with the MNLA eventually having to give way to AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJWA), this renewed instability illustrates that structural problems in Mali have yet to be resolved. Therefore, whilst each new conflict has its own proximate drivers, they are related to unresolved issues spilling over from previous conflicts.

Humphreys and Ag Mohamed (2005) argue that cultural and historical particularities of Mali explain the origins of conflict. The motivations of rebel groups in northern Mali relate to the regional exceptionalism of the north and to grievances arising from entrenched economic and political marginalisation. Furthermore, a history of ineffective governance, weak state structures and corruption have all contributed to insecurity in northern Mali. In the view of Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, there is no evidence to suggest that greed-based explanations relating to the control of natural resources have ever been a contributing factor to the origin of conflicts in Mali.

Regional exceptionalism

The Tuareg perceive northern Mali to have a particular political, historical, ethnic and religious identity. Firstly, the north, which comprises mainly desert, is located a long distance from the political centre (Bamako), and is inaccessible due to a lack of infrastructure (Humphreys & Ag Mohamed, 2005).

Secondly, colonialists treated the north as exceptional. Due to the extent of armed resistance in the north, the region took more time to come under French control. Shortly before independence in 1960, the French even considered separating the north from the rest of Mali. Consequently, this history of resistance was used to motivate and legitimate new actions leading to a culture of militarisation (Humphreys & Ag Mohamed, 2005).

Thirdly, although Mali is ethnically heterogeneous, Tuareg and Arab communities are almost entirely based in the north, with the dominant Bambara active in the political centre. Whilst they do not constitute the majority in the north, Tuareg and Arab groups are considered to be racially different from other groups in the country: 'white' as opposed to 'black' (Humphreys & Ag Mohamed, 2005). Relations between the Tuareg, Arabs, Peuls and the Songhaïs have been characterised by conflict and rivalry. Before colonisation, inter-community violence in the north of Mali mainly came in the form of Tuareg raids against other communities; clashes between nomadic and farming populations were frequent (Sidibé, 2012).

Grievances

Grievances have stemmed from: economic marginalisation, which has been aggravated by access to land policies and environmental change; political marginalisation; and the use of violent repression. Furthermore, the failure of successive governments to implement provisions made in peace agreements has served to reignite periodic rebellions.

Economic marginalisation

Economic marginalisation dates back to the colonial period and the process of decolonisation. In particular, the drawing of national boundaries interrupted caravan routes and formally prevented access to traditional pasture grounds. Since independence in 1960, northerners have suffered proportionately more than the rest of Mali from economic neglect and marginalisation. During General Moussa Traoré's reign, for example, the military regime proved incompetent as economic managers and subsequent governments have increasingly failed to deliver public services (Poulton & Ag Youssouf, 1998; Melly, 2012). Economic marginalisation has continued into recent times, manifesting in a lack of investment in the north and a perception of unequal access to health and education provision. Socioeconomic data (measuring school attendance, malnutrition and vulnerability to food security) for the period 1995 – 1997 suggests that in the north these conditions were exceptionally poor compared to other regions of the country (Humphreys & Ag Mohamed, 2005, p. 46).

Access to land and environmental change

According to Abdalla (2009), the Tuareg rebellions have strong roots in access to land rights, which have been affected by environmental change, thereby threatening livelihoods and reinforcing the economic marginalisation of Tuaregs. Northern Mali is prone to environmental challenges, including drought, desertification, deforestation, soil erosion and an insufficient supply of potable water. During colonial times, the French pursued a policy of land registration and many Tuareg communities lost their right to the land they had previously inhabited. At independence in 1960, Tuareg access to land was further eroded due to President Modibo Keïta's policies of land nationalisation, agricultural modernisation and sedentarisation of nomadic groups. These anti-nomad policies, which were sustained by Moussa Traoré, further contributed to the marginalisation of Tuareg communities and precipitated the 1963 rebellion (Benjaminsen, 2008).

Natural disasters, such as the droughts in 1973-4 and 1984-5, seriously reduced livestock numbers and led to migrations of young men to urban centres in the Maghreb and West Africa. In the case of the 1984-5 drought, those who migrated to Algeria and Libya returned in 1990 to launch the armed revolt against Moussa Traoré's regime (Benjaminsen, 2008). In both drought periods, the Tuareg have felt that foreign aid and local assistance has not been distributed equitably: communities in northern Mali received proportionally far less in terms of development programmes and opportunities precisely when they needed these the most (Gutelius, 2007). Furthermore, international aid destined for drought-stricken areas has often been embezzled and redirected (Poulton & Ag Youssouf, 1998).

Political marginalisation

Tuareg rebels argue that they have suffered political marginalisation, which was exceptionally harsh in response to the Tuareg uprising of 1962 (Keita, 1998). For much of the period from the first uprising in 1963 to the overthrow of Moussa Traoré in 1991, the north was under military rule and the governors appointed, if from the region, were Songhaïs. Whilst Moussa Traoré's various governments included a 'token' Tuareg minister, northern Mali had little influence over politics during his reign (Benjaminsen, 2008). Consequently, there was a gross under-representation of Tuaregs and Arabs in post-independence cabinets, the army and in senior civil service positions until the democratic transition in 1991 (Humphreys & Ag Mohamed, 2005).

Violent repression

Successive Malian regimes have dealt with Tuareg rebel movements through military repression. Between 1962 and 1964, Modibo Keïta dealt with the rebellion through military repression, as did the regime of Moussa Traoré in response to the rebellion in 1990 (Lecocq, 2010; Sidibé, 2012). As a result, 'a generation of Tuareg, born in the 1950s, grew up with forced sedentarisation and education, social economic destruction by drought and state agents, and social economic marginality in the nation states ruling their land. This led to strong resentment' (Lecocq, 2004, p. 89).

The failure of successive governments to implement the provisions of peace agreements

This issue has been of key importance in the reemergence of Tuareg rebellion throughout Mali's history. Mediation efforts after the 1990 rebellion led to the Algerian-sponsored *Tamanrasset Accords* of 1991, and later the more comprehensive *National Pact*. The latter promised the gradual demilitarisation of the north and the complete integration of the rebels into special units of the national forces. Furthermore, it recognised the north's economic marginalisation and promised a ten-year economic recovery plan. At the same time, constitutional changes were introduced that transferred a number of state powers to the region. However, the pact lacked financial resources and its implementation, particularly the integration component, was continuously postponed. This non-implementation, coupled with periods of drought and discontent among integrated Tuareg soliders, provoked the rebellion in 2006. New accords, again sponsored by Algeria in 2006, attempted to revive some of the National Pact provisions, particularly the creation of a northern security force, named the Saharan Security Units. However, once again, there were delays in implementing the accords, and consequently, a splinter Tuareg faction resumed guerrilla warfare (ICG, 2012a).

4. Proximate conflict drivers

Prior to the Libyan crisis in February 2011, the Mouvement national de l'Azawad (MNA), which preceded the MNLA, released a document denouncing the government's administration of the north, broadly reflecting civil society opinion in the region. It claimed that there had been a gradual erosion of trust between northern communities and the central government due to the structural reasons outlined above along with proximate drivers such as the government's ineffective approach to AQIM and drug traffickers. (ICG, 2012a). Within this context, the fallout from the Libyan crisis (explored further in the next section), which included a mass return of Tuareg fighters to northern Mali, served to lower the opportunity costs of engaging in violent conflict. Adding to this, discontent amongst sections of the armed forces with regard to military dysfunction triggered the March 2012 military coup.

Ineffective governance, weak state structures and state collusion with criminal networks

Ineffective governance and weak state structures have allowed the Sahel region to become a sanctuary for criminal networks and terrorist groups. Tensions related to drug trafficking and public discontent with the complicity of state institutions in organised crime have played an important role in the dynamics that led to the outbreak of conflict.

Arms trafficking networks encompass the Sahel region and the Mano River countries – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone – and a transnational network of drugs trafficking is well established in the north of Mali (Sidibé, 2012). Amadou Toumani Touré's regime allowed its local allies in the north to engage in criminal activity as a means of exploiting tensions between competing networks and retaining influence in the north. The regime eventually lost control of the conflicts this generated, while the legitimacy of state institutions was eroded through this complicity (Lacher, 2012). Some analysts argue that, during Amadou Toumani Touré's presidency, a tacit agreement existed between the Malian state and AQIM, 'under which the government did not vigorously pursue AQIM while, in return, AQIM did not directly threaten Bamako' (Arieff, 2013a, p. 8). There is evidence to suggest that the Malian leadership and local leaders in northern Mali benefitted from ransom payments taken by AQIM. Northern leaders, including those who later formed the MNLA, publicly denounced this collusion, which provided the context for the return of Tuareg fighters from Libya and the new rebellion (Lacher, 2012; ICG, 2012a).

The lack of an effective economic strategy, high youth unemployment amongst nomadic populations and the availability of arms fuelled previous rebellions and has further undermined state authority in the region (Sidibé, 2012). As such, the inability of the Malian authorities to govern the north in a manner that responded to people's security, economic and social expectations was responsible for the initial rebellion in January 2012 and its evolution into the current conflict (ICG, 2012a).

It appears that chronic insecurity, caused by the existence of criminal activity, terrorism and rebellions, is part of a vicious cycle that impacts the livelihoods of communities in northern Mali, including tourism, the local crafts industry and cattle rearing. Some populations have therefore engaged in trafficking due to the lack of alternatives, making it easier for terrorist and criminal groups to co-opt local communities. Young people are particularly at risk of being recruited as local fighters by groups such as AQIM (Sidibé, 2012).

Disarray within the armed forces

Mali's armed forces were short of weapons, equipment and even salaries (Melly, 2012). Soldiers blamed corruption and mismanagement in Amadou Toumani Touré's government for defeats at the hands of Tuareg rebels in early 2012 (Arieff, 2013a). Therefore, the March 2012 coup was more an expression of extreme discontent among a sector of the army about the deterioration of the security situation in the north than the result of a carefully planned initiative (ICG, 2012a).

5. Regional dynamics

The Sahel and Saharan countries share common and interlinked security, economic and social challenges, which all have an impact on insecurity in Mali. AQIM and criminal networks operate across the Sahel and Sahara region whilst Tuareg rebellions have also periodically occurred in Niger (Arieff, 2013a). There has been regional positioning in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, with each actor seeking to appear pivotal in the fight against AQIM. In presenting themselves as the true regional leader in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, each state tries to build close links with Western powers and support for their regime. Two countries in particular, Libya and Algeria, have historically had an important role in the current and previous conflicts in Mali. Sidibé (2012) argues that the Tuareg issue has been exploited by neighbouring countries such as Algeria and Qaddafi's Libya for their own, often competing, purposes.

The fallout from the Libyan crisis

The 'Libyan effect' is pertinent for the Tuareg in Mali as the fall of Qaddafi provided an opportunity for the MNLA to launch a rebellion. Qaddafi had presented himself as an advocate and defender of the Tuareg cause. He trained and used Tuareg fighters in Libya's 'Islamic Legion' offensives in Chad, Palestine, Lebanon and Nicaragua (Humphreys & Ag Mohamed, 2005). As a result of the recent turmoil in Libya, particularly the NATO strikes against the Libyan army, an estimated 2000 Tuareg combatants returned to northern Mali armed with weapons and ammunition (AU, 2012). There has also been an influx of non-Malians since the beginning of the Libyan crisis, many of whom have ethnic and cultural affinities to those living in northern Mali. They have been able to transfer state-of-the-art weapons, ammunition and equipment, including to groups such as the MNLA (IGC, 2012a). Sidibé (2012) argues that the availability of arms increased insecurity in northern Mali to the point where 'almost every inhabitant carries a small arm, because they are cheap in the region' (p. 27).

Algeria's regional role

Algeria's rivalry with Libya provides the context for their influential role in northern Mali. Algeria has been the interlocutor by default in the Tuareg issue: it sponsored the *Tamanrasset Accords* in 1991 and the *Algiers Accords* in 2006 (Sidibé, 2012). The international community recognises that Algeria has a key role to play given its involvement in response to previous Tuareg rebellions and the fact that AQIM originated from Algeria.

There have previously been close links between Tuareg leaders, some of whom have been known to work for the Algerian secret services, and the Algerian government. In the current context, there is a cold relationship between Algeria and the MNLA, due to the fact that MNLA leaders were sidelined or rejected by the Algiers Agreement. The MNLA has thus opposed Algerian mediation in the current conflict (ICG, 2012a).

There was also a rupture of the strategic alliance between Mali and Algeria during the presidency of Amadou Toumani Touré. Algeria did not intervene when the rebels took the strategic border town of Tessalit, and this is an important factor in explaining the ease with which Ansar Dine and AQIM took control of northern Mali (ICG, 2012b).

In mid-2009, Algeria, Libya, Niger, Mali, and Mauritania developed the *Tamanrasset Plan* for regional cooperation to counter terrorism and related crime. In 2010, the same countries established a combined military command centre, known as the Joint Operational Chiefs of Staff Committee (CEMOC). Algeria has provided training and equipment to its Sahel partners as part of this initiative. However, CEMOC does not appear to be very active, and the neighbouring countries' differing priorities appear to have limited their cooperation (Arieff, 2013a; 2013b).

Non-interference in other states' sovereignty is a key aspect of Algeria's foreign policy, and its politicians have fluctuated between opposing and tacitly accepting the concept of regional military action in Mali (Arieff, 2013a). However, Algeria is the country most able to apply pressure on armed groups based in northern Mali (ICG, 2012a).

6. International responses

This section summarises international responses to the current conflict in Mali. It includes an analysis of the efficacy of mediation efforts to date.

Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS)

ECOWAS played a lead role in mediation efforts after the military coup in Mali. Together with the African Union (AU), ECOWAS has been at the forefront of generating support for an African-led regional military deployment.

ECOWAS's diplomatic response following the coup has been strongly criticised, particularly the choice of Burkina Faso's President Compaoré as the lead mediator. The approach to mediation, which treated Sanogo as an almost exclusive interlocutor and provided Compaoré with a free hand, has been chaotic and unilateral in nature. Burkina Faso has subsequently wielded a disproportionate influence on Mali's transition. There was minimal consultation with Malian political circles over the choice of Modibo Diarra as acting prime minister or the formation of his government, which was criticised within Bamako over its illegitimacy and unrepresentative nature. Indeed, critics within Mali have presented arguments about national sovereignty, emphasising that leaders should not be imposed on Mali from the outside (Hagberg & Körling, 2012). Burkina Faso's controversial approach to mediation has led to a broadening of the response to include the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Security Council (ICG, 2012a).

More recent mediation efforts by Compaoré have focused on negotiating an agreement between Ansar Dine, considered more moderate than either AQIM and MUJAO, and the MNLA. Ansar Dine announced a ceasefire in November 2012, but suspended it in January 2013, claiming that the Malian government was not showing a willingness to negotiate. Further talks between the MNLA and Ansar Dine scheduled for the 10th January 2013 were postponed after fighting between AQIM, Ansar Dine, MUJWA and the Malian army. Compaore's efforts have also met resistance from some political parties and civil society groups within Mali. They maintain that Mali should remain united and secular and have accused Compaoré of favouring rebels and terrorist groups (AFP, 2012; Palus, 2013; UN, 2013).

Carson (2012) suggests that the international community, while recognising ECOWAS' important coordination role, believes that Algeria and Mauritania also need to be involved in engagement with Mali. (Algeria and Mauritania border Mali but are not members of ECOWAS.)

The African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA)

The African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) is a joint ECOWAS/AU proposal that was approved by the UN Security Council on the 20th December 2012. It aims to assist in the training of Malian security forces and to support the recovery and stabilisation of northern Mali. The proposal initially envisioned a 3,300-person deployment in support of the Malian military, which was increased in January 2013 to 7,700 African

soldiers (Valdmanis & Le Guernigo, 2013). The regional deployment has been criticised due to the amount of time taken to prepare and deploy. Indeed, the AU itself accepts that its response to the conflict has been too slow (Al Jazeera, 2013). Furthermore, serious questions have been raised concerning regional troops' military capacity to engage in the desert terrain of northern Mali, their commitment, and their human rights records (Arieff, 2013a).

France

On the 11th January 2013, France launched military air and ground operations against insurgent targets in northern Mali after the sudden southward advance of AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJWA. The French operation marked a shift in international responses to the situation, which had previously been focused on the AFISMA proposal (Arieff, 2013a).

Prior to the coup, France provided support through the Delegation of Home Security Service (*Délégation du Service de la Sécurité Intérieure* – SSI), and the Mission for Military and Defence Cooperation (*Mission de Coopération Militaire et de Défense* – MCMD). The SSI provided training and logistical support to national security services (police, *gendarmerie*, civil security), and to Malian customs services. The MCMD operated at different levels including the provision of equipment to the National Guard, technical and logistical support, supply of land and air equipment, as well as organisational training (Sidibé, 2012).

The European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) is establishing a training mission to help restructure, reform, and build the capacity of the Malian security forces (Arieff, 2013a). The EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) has an initial mandate of 15 months and will specifically train and advise the Malian armed forces. The training will contribute to restoring military capacity and enabling the armed forces to engage in combat operations aiming at restoring the country's territorial integrity. The mission will not be involved in combat operations (EU, 2013a).

Prior to the current conflict, the EU was involved in the Sahel Security and Development Initiative, a comprehensive EU-Africa strategy adopted in 2007. In 2011, the EU adopted a Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, which aims to facilitate the implementation of a national policy against insecurity, adopted by Mali in 2010 (Sidibé, 2012). As part of this strategy, the EU also launched a civilian Common Security and Defence Policy mission called *EUCAP SAHEL* in July 2012 in order to contribute to the fight against crime and terrorism in Niger and the Sahel region (EU, 2013b).

The United States (US)

The US is currently supporting the French intervention through information sharing and the airlifting of French troops. Prior to the coup, the US was one of the largest bilateral donors to Mali, but has since been bounded by a guiding principle of non-cooperation with post-coup governments (ICG, 2012b). The US helped develop a regional plan called the *Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative* (TSCTI) in 2005. This plan aims to support Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and

Senegal in their fight against terrorism, under the direction of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) (Sidibé, 2012).

The United Nations (UN)

In October 2012, Romano Prodi of Italy was announced as the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Sahel. His role is to coordinate implement the UN Integrated Regional Strategy for the Sahel and to support national, regional and international mediation efforts in the sub-region, especially regarding cross-border and transnational issues, with an initial focus on Mali. As such, Prodi and the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) have been supporting ECOWAS led mediation efforts in Mali (UN, 2012; 2013b).

7. Existing capacities for peace and possible sources of peace

Opportunities for negotiation

Successive Malian administrations and rebel movements have negotiated peace settlements. Although rebellion has periodically reappeared following peace agreements, the fact that negotiations took place shows that the capacity and will to find a solution exists among different stakeholders within Mali.

Pezard & Shurkin (2013a) argue that many factions in northern Mali have an interest in cooperating to renegotiate the north's relationship with the south. Fighters have joined different rebel groups for political opportunism or economic benefit rather than ideological reasons. The fact that both AQIM and Ansar Dine have spawned their own splinter groups suggests that they may be struggling to retain organisational coherence. Consequently, it may not take much for large portions to change sides (Maplecroft, 2012).

There are possibilities for advancing negotiations with the MNLA, Ansar Dine and the Islamic Movement for Azawad. Having been ousted by Ansar Dine, AQIM and MUJWA, the MNLA has offered to join the government in fighting against these groups and has moderated its own demands – from full independence to a measure of autonomy for the north. Ansar Dine has also indicated a readiness to negotiate. Indeed its leader, Ag Ghali, who has been a key Tuareg political figure and was involved in negotiating previous peace settlements, could be attracted by a deal on extensive regional autonomy (EIU, 2012).

Civil society and customary approaches to conflict resolution

In Mali, problem solving has traditionally involved local leaders (particularly elders and religious leaders) who have responsibility for resolving community differences. Communities in northern Mali use traditional methods of conflict resolution based on Islam and Sharia law, as well as amicable agreements. Furthermore, customary chiefs and religious leaders play a central role within their respective tribes, as they contribute to maintaining security and social cohesion (Sidibé, 2012).

Storholt (2001) states that the process of conflict management in response to the 1990 Tuareg rebellion, which included the signing of the National Pact in 1992 and concluded in 1997, prevented a full-scale civil war. The effectiveness of this peace process was partly due to the significant participation by civil society and customary leaders. In the case of the 1990 rebellion, there were attempts to convince leaders to enter into dialogue from the time of the first strike. Individuals and organisations from civil society prepared these leaders and contributed to reconciliation between different rebel movements and between these movements and the government. The **Bourem Accords** of January 1995 are an example of customary chiefs having taken the initiative to contribute to peace by organising the first inter-community meetings between different Tuareg factions.

Peace and advocacy networks

Sidibé (2012) mentions the **Northern Mali Network for Peace and Security**, which has received support from the EU. This network brought together locally-elected representatives, chiefs, community leaders, dignitaries and senior executives. Its objective was to foster social cohesion, promote non-violent approaches to resolving disputes, and prevent conflict.

ICG (2012a) mentions an **Advocacy Network of Peace, Security and Development in Northern Mali (*Réseau de plaidoyer en faveur de la paix, de la sécurité et du développement au Nord- Mali*)**, which received funding from Switzerland and included representatives of the region's communities. According to ICG (2012a), many members of the group later joined the MNLA. It was led by Alghabass Ag Intalla, who formed the Islamic Movement for Azawad, a splinter faction from Ansar Dine, and has stated his desire to seek political dialogue.

ICG (2012a) also mentions a **Coalition for Mali**, which was created on 26th May 2012 and unites political parties, intellectuals, and prominent individuals. The leaders of this coalition distance themselves from the emotional and vengeful discourse on the problems of the north. They perceive the situation as a national issue that requires the greatest possible national consensus.

The current status of these networks is not clear from the literature.

8. Recommendations for preventing further escalation and resolving the conflict

This section summarises practical recommendations in the literature. Special attention has been paid to 'do no harm' principles.

Support efforts to reestablish Malian defence and security forces by strengthening their unity, discipline and efficiency: This involves depoliticising the security forces to guarantee democracy and a respect for transnational institutions. Furthermore, the reconstruction of a coherent chain of command is a priority, both to promote political stabilisation in the south and help resolve the crisis in the north (ICG, 2012a).

Ensure that executive power represents a broad consensus: According to Pezard and Shurkin (2013a; 2013b), only a functioning state can address the long-term grievances that have prompted the northern rebellion. Consequently, Mali needs to make progress towards effective leadership and transition back to constitutional order. Elections, which are due to be held on the 31st July 2013, form an important part of this process (Harding, 2013).

Continue dialogue with political forces in the north, including with tribal and religious leaders: Political and advocacy networks have been instrumental to negotiating peace settlements in Mali. Similarly, local communities should be encouraged to work with state actors by employing traditional and customary conflict-resolution mechanisms (Sidibé, 2012).

Promote efforts towards dialogue that ensure Malian ownership of the process: ICG (2012a) argues that it is preferable to facilitate dialogue between Malians in Mali rather than entrust mediation efforts to regional powers, such as that led by ECOWAS, who could be biased in their approach. A sustainable basis for constructive dialogue is required, rather than the external sponsoring of accords such as has happened previously. The UN, which might be considered more neutral, could facilitate this process through the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Sahel. Depriving Malians of control over their own future could risk creating political space for populist forces that oppose a peaceful settlement. As part of these efforts, international actors should harmonise their approaches so as to avoid doing more harm than good.

Contribute to Mali's economic resilience, which is mired in a serious crisis, by resuming foreign aid and supporting development and livelihoods: Economic marginalisation has only deepened with the onset of the current crisis. Communities in northern Mali would welcome the prospect of stable administration, regular salaries and development projects. The existence of viable economic alternatives could ultimately dissuade local communities from engaging with criminal and terrorist groups (Melly, 2012). Meanwhile policies to support access to land and natural resources for Tuareg communities should be encouraged, which could improve the opportunities available to achieve sustainable livelihoods (Abdalla, 2009).

Weaken criminal networks *incrementally*: Related to the previous point, until there are viable economic alternatives, clamping down on smuggling could further alienate local communities in northern Mali. External actors could help to weaken the networks in Mali's north incrementally by developing a coherent international approach to limiting ransom payments, one of AQIM's main sources of funding, and to supporting regional cooperation. A zero-tolerance policy towards criminal networks and trafficking should be avoided. Rather, more attention could be paid to state-criminal network complicity and the development of viable economic alternatives (Lacher, 2012).

Prevent further deterioration of the human rights situation in Mali: Security forces have been implicated in numerous abuses including torture, enforced disappearances and arbitrary executions of Tuareg and Arab men. If not addressed, these abuses could interfere with the organising of national elections and therefore damage the chances of a durable solution (HRW, 2012). A UN independent commission of inquiry into human rights should be established to look into violations committed since the beginning of the rebellion (ICG, 2012a). International partners could also help local authorities carry out credible, impartial, and independent investigations and prosecutions (HRW, 2012).

Address rising ethnic tensions: The resurgence of armed conflict has been accompanied by an increase in ethnic tensions. Pro-government militias and ethnically allied youth groups, such as the Ganda Koy and Ganda Izo, have prepared lists of people in northern Mali to be targeted for reprisal once government forces retake control. Furthermore, ethnic tensions are being fuelled by the political manipulation of ethnicity by some political and military leaders. If these tensions remain unaddressed, they could further provoke collective punishment and ethnic violence. Future negotiations need to ensure that the opinions and grievances of all northern communities, not just those who have taken up arms, are heard. Particular focus should be given to to monitoring and reporting on incitement to ethnic violence (HRW, 2012).

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Appendix A: Further information

Chronology of key political events

For a chronology of key political events in Mali between September 1960 and June 2012, see pp. 40-41 in:
ICG (2012a). *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*. Africa Report No.189, 18th July 2012. Brussels: International Crisis Group. http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/west-africa/mali/189-mali-avoiding-escalation-english.pdf

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Mali (case study) in *Topic Guide: SSR in West Africa,*
Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform (GFN-SSR)
http://www.ssrnetwork.net/topic_guides/mali.php

Appendix B: Background information on Mali and its peoples

Mali shares a 5,000 km long mountainous and porous border with Algeria, Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso, which is difficult to access and control. Mali also forms part of the Sahel, along with Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, and northern Mali extends into the Sahara. Northern Mali represents 74.32 per cent of the total land area of Mali and comprises of three regions: Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. It is home to ten per cent of the country's population, including: *Tuaregs* (1.7 per cent of the national population); Arabs, including Moors and *Kuntas* (1.2 per cent of the national population); *Peuls*, nomadic pastoralists (data not available); and the *Songhaï*, a community living in fixed settlements (7.2 per cent) (Sidibé, 2012).

Tuareg

The Tuareg are a people of Berber descent who speak the Tamacheq language and practise a liberal form of Islam. They have traditionally lived a desert nomadic life, but almost everyone in the North is now an agropastoralist (Poulton & ag Youssouf, 1998). They are not a homogenous group and are divided into a number of sub-groups who live in different territorial entities, including: the Kel Haggar, the Kel Ajjer, the Kel Aïr, the Kel Adrar or Ifora, the Lullemeden, and the Tenguérédiff. As such, Tuareg opinion over issues of political Islam and ethnic separatism remains divided, which presents challenges to finding durable solutions to Mali's problems (Lecocq, 2010; ICGa, 2013).

Arabs

Malian Arabs are made up of the *Kunta*, the *Barabich*, the *Gouanin*, the *Shamba* and the *Rguiba* (moors). Life is principally dominated by Islam (Sidibé, 2012).

Peuls

The *Peuls* are nomadic pastoralists with a complex and hierarchical social organisation (Sidibé, 2012). They are concentrated around the interior delta of the Niger and near the conflict-prone border with Mauritania (Poulton & ag Youssouf, 1998).

Songhaïs

The *Songhaïs* are the dominant community in north, residing in fixed settlements in Timbuktu and Gao. They engage in agriculture and cattle rearing (Sidibé, 2012).

Mandé-speaking communities

In the Republic as a whole, the majority of the population (50 per cent) are Mandé-speaking peoples (Bambara, Malinké, Soninké), who inhabit the southern and western half of the country (Poulton & ag Youssouf, 1998).