

# The regional impact of the armed conflict and French intervention in Mali

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## ■ Executive summary

Despite the perceived threat to international peace and security presented by the crisis in Mali, the international community did not act to resolve it for nearly ten months, which allowed Islamists to militarily take control of the whole of northern Mali and impose *sharia* law. The French military intervention in Mali placed the country at the top of the international political agenda. But the conflict in Mali and the French intervention have wider implications not only for Mali and its neighbours, but also for Africa, the international community, and France's national security and strategic interests at home and abroad.

This report assesses the current crisis, the key actors and the nature of the complex conflict in Mali; the nature and scope of the military, political and diplomatic interventions in Mali by a range of actors; the regional implications of the conflict for the Sahel and West Africa; and the consequences of the French military intervention and its wider implications, including the debate about the risk of the "Afghanisation of Mali". It concludes with policy-relevant recommendations for external countries and intergovernmental actors interested in supporting Mali beyond the immediate military-security stabilisation to long-term peacebuilding, state reconstruction and development.

## Mali: a complex conflict

Different from the simplistic international media’s portrayal of the crisis, the conflict in Mali is a complex and multidimensional mixture of long-term fundamental grievances by diverse actors and groups. Three distinct but interrelated types of conflicts have coalesced to produce the current crisis in Mali. Firstly, it was caused by a secessionist rebellion by Tuareg ethnic groups in northern

Mali fighting for a separate independent state. Secondly, there is a political and constitutional crisis occasioned by the military overthrow of the democratically elected government by the army. Thirdly, the conflict is also an attempt by Islamist jihadists to militarily take over Mali and establish a terrorist state based on *sharia* law. Figure 1 presents the conflict types and key players in the Malian crisis.

**Figure 1: Malian crisis: types of conflict and key players**

Type of conflict	Political and constitutional crisis: military coup	Secessionist crisis: Tuareg rebellion in the north	Islamic jihadists and terrorist groups
Key players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Military coup organised by non-commissioned and mid-ranking officers of the Malian armed forces led by Captain Amadou Sanogo that led to the overthrow of the democratic government of President Amadou Toumani Touré and the suspension of constitutional rule</li> <li>Under international pressure, Sanogo, as military head of state, handed power over to the interim president, Dioncounda Traoré, a former Touré ally.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Movement for the Liberation on Azawad (MNLA), with Bila Ag Cherif as secretary-general of its political wing and Mohamed Ag Najim as head of its military wing: a secular Tuareg separatist movement fighting for an independent state of Azawad in northern Mali. Initially the ally of Ansar ed-Din and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), but now oppose Islamic jihadist groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ansar ed-Din (Movement of the Defenders of the Faith) led by former Tuareg rebel leader Iyad Ag Ghaly</li> <li>Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): North African and Sahel wing of al-Qaeda</li> <li>MUJAO: an AQIM splinter group committed to the spread of global jihad in West Africa, led by a Mauritanian, Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou</li> <li>Singed-in-Blood Battalion: an AQIM breakaway faction committed to global jihad, led by Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar, with strong ties to Ansar ed-Din and MUJAO</li> <li>Islamic Movement for Azawad (IMA): an Ansar ed-Din splinter group now claiming to oppose terrorism and extremism, led by Alghabass Ag Intalla, an influential figure in the strategic city of Kidal and former senior member of Ansar ed-Din</li> </ul>

The current political crisis was sparked off in March 2012 when Tuareg rebels attacked towns in northern Mali, signalling the start of a new armed rebellion. The government of President Touré and the armed forces of Mali demonstrated their lack of capacity and ability to deal with the new Tuareg rebellion. Malian soldiers felt humiliated and under-resourced to respond to the new Tuareg insurgency. As such, disgruntled soldiers turned a mutiny against President Touré for his ineffective response to the Tuareg rebellion into a military coup on March 22nd 2012 that deposed the president and suspended constitutional rule, ahead of planned democratic presidential elections in April 2012. Touré was accused of not doing enough to tackle Islamist extremists, drug trafficking and the needs of the armed forces. The military junta led by Captain

Amadou Sanogo promised to end the Tuareg rebellion in the north. As expected, the regional organisation the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the continental organisation the African Union (AU) mobilised the international community not to recognise the junta and expelled the military regime from their ranks.

The military coup provided a strategic opportunity for the Tuareg rebels, who had by then formed an unholy alliance with the Islamist jihadist group Ansar ed-Din to tighten their military control over large parts of northern Mali. In April 2012 Tuareg separatist rebels, now formally constituted as the MNLA and in alliance with Ansar ed-Din, seized control of the whole of northern Mali and declared an independent Tuareg state of Azawad.<sup>1</sup> This declaration

<sup>1</sup> In declaring the independence of Azawad, the MNLA spokesperson, Mossa Ag Attaher, speaking on France 24 (April 6th 2012), stated: “Mali is an anarchic state. Therefore, we have gathered a national liberation movement to put in an army capable of securing our land and an executive office capable of forming democratic institutions. We declare the independence of Azawad from this day on.”

only worsened the political crisis in Mali and showed the inability of the military junta to deal with and resolve the deepening conflict. Concerted international pressure forced the junta to hand over political power to a civilian interim government on April 12th 2012 led by President Dioncounda Traoré.

Between May and July 2012 the deepening political and military crisis led to continued violent clashes between soldiers supporting the military junta (the so-called “Green Berets”) and ousted president Touré’s “Red Beret” soldiers. Despite the installation of civilian political authority, the junta leaders were still the key players and effectively the de facto leaders of Mali. Pro-junta supporters, unhappy with Traoré’s handling of the crisis, stormed his office and beat him unconscious. In addition, the strategic military alliance between the Tuareg MNLA rebels and their Ansar ed-Din and al-Qaeda allies led to rapid military advances that saw the capture of the main northern cities of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. But Ansar ed-Din and its jihadist allies soon emerged as the main power in the alliance with the MNLA rebels and hijacked the Tuareg separatist rebellion to serve their jihadi and economic opportunism cause. The declaration of northern Mali as an independent Islamic state – the Islamic State of Azawad – was endorsed by AQIM and other jihadist groups in North Africa and the Sahel. Ansar ed-Din imposed *sharia* law in the world-renowned historic city of Timbuktu and other cities, which led to the amputation of hands for stealing and stoning for adultery, as well as the destruction of ancient Muslim shrines in Timbuktu that offended the jihadists’ puritanical Salafi Islamic views. A terrorist state under strict *sharia* law had emerged in the largely secular Muslim northern Mali similar to the al-Shabaab terrorist state in Somalia and the Taliban-al-Qaeda terrorist state in Afghanistan before the U.S.-led invasion in 2001.

The unstable political and military situation led to the formation of a transitional government of national unity headed by Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra in August 2012. This government included five close allies of the junta leader, Captain Sanogo. But this did not help the political and military situation on the ground and, if anything, only emboldened the MNLA rebels and their Islamist allies, who took advantage of the situation to further consolidate their military control over the whole of northern Mali. By September 2012 they had seized the strategically important town of Douentza and were poised to continue their advance on the government-controlled south-western part of the country and the seat of government in Bamako. This imminent advance on Bamako by the militarily strong and co-ordinated Islamist extremists and their MNLA allies forced the international community into action. In November 2012 ECOWAS, with the support of the AU and United Nations (UN), agreed on a co-ordinated military intervention force to recapture northern Mali,

which was only scheduled for deployment in September 2013. Opposition to the ECOWAS military intervention plan by the transitional government of Mali, with pressure from the military junta, led to the resignation of Prime Minister Diarra in November 2012 and the appointment of a new prime minister, Django Sissoko. This led to threats of the imposition of sanctions against the government of Mali by both the UN and U.S. As the political crisis unravelled, the Islamist jihadists and their allies attacked and captured the central city of Konna on January 10th 2013 and planned to advance on Bamako. This military attack on Konna changed the direction of the Malian crisis because events on the ground now dictated the nature and urgency of the response to it, shifting the focus from political dialogue to military action.<sup>2</sup>

The imminent attack on and possible capture of Bamako and the potential consequences for Mali, its neighbours and the volatile region, as well as for French national interests, led to the dramatic French military intervention in Mali on January 11th 2013. This intervention, supported by Malian troops, the ECOWAS-led African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) forces and other Western countries, in less than three weeks ended the Tuareg separatist rebellion, recaptured all the major cities in northern Mali, and dispersed the Islamist rebels, most of whom melted into the civilian population and tactically retreated into the mountains, caves and inhospitable desert terrain that they are familiar with.

By all indications, France seems to have achieved the immediate and short-term objectives of the intervention, i.e. to prevent the takeover of Bamako by Islamist extremists and the emergence of a terrorist state; end the secessionist rebellion in northern Mali; and help the government of Mali to re-establish its control and sovereignty over its territories. This putative short-term success of the French intervention has led to calls by France for the deployment of a robust African troop presence and UN peacekeeping force to replace French forces in Mali. The improving security situation has led to the announcement by the government of Mali, under pressure from the international community, of a return to civilian democratic and constitutional rule by holding nation-wide presidential elections scheduled for July 7th 2013, the feasibility of which is still in question. The first batch of French troops (200 soldiers) withdrew from Mali on February 16th 2013 and a large-scale withdrawal is scheduled for March 31st.

The shifting political alliances among key actors further complicated the conflict situation in Mali. The MNLA, disappointed that the Islamists had hijacked its separatist rebellion, has since parted company with Ansar ed-Din and other Islamist allies, claiming that it does not support “extremism and terrorism”. It now “supports” the French military intervention, calling for a negotiated political

<sup>2</sup> The president of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, facilitated the ECOWAS-backed peace mediation between the government of Mali, the Tuareg separatists and Islamist rebels that led to the signing of the Ouagadougou Political Framework to resolve the conflict in Mali.

settlement to address the Tuaregs' legitimate demands. The new Tuareg rebellion has further heightened the tensions and violent relations between Tuareg rebels and Malian soldiers, on the one hand, and between Tuaregs and other ethnic groups in the south and east of the country, on the other, who "blame" the Tuaregs for the current crisis in the country.

## Causes of the conflict

The above narrative does not provide a reasoned explanation for the conflict in Mali. Fundamental grievances and deep-rooted divisions are at the heart of the current crisis, the most serious since independence from France in 1960. Mali is a landlocked state surrounded by seven neighbouring countries.<sup>3</sup> With a population of 15.8 million, it is one of the poorest countries in the world and has suffered decades of drought, persistent food shortages, locust infestations, civil wars and recurrent political instability, with 64% of the population living below the poverty line. The depressing socioeconomic and development indicators are compounded by the fact that the country is highly dependent on gold mining and agricultural exports for revenue. Mali is constantly threatened by spillovers of violent conflicts from neighbouring countries, and with long, porous borders, the country has been affected by cross-border banditry, kidnapping and terrorism.

The immediate post-colonial political history between 1960 and 1991 was blighted by one-party rule and military dictatorships. This unstable post-independence period led to the informalisation of state institutions by corrupt elites to serve their vested interests. The ensuing personalised rule and bad governance led not only to the politicisation of the army and security agencies, but also to the fragility of the state. By the time democratic politics was introduced in Mali in 1992 with the election of the first democratic president, Alpha Konaré, Mali had had no credible foundation for democratic politics and functioning democratic institutions and practices. Between 1992 and 2012 Mali was touted by the international community as a beacon of democratic example in a West African region torn by civil wars and authoritarian regimes. The reality was that Mali was nothing more than a superficial democracy and a fragile state that was unable to address its fundamental political, governance, security and sociodevelopment challenges.

For a start, the current Tuareg rebellion against the government of Mali has its roots in the decades of fundamental grievances felt by the Tuareg minority group. Historically, the Tuaregs are nomadic Berber people who

lived in the Sahel and Sahara regions of Mali, Niger, Algeria, Burkina Faso and Libya. They call the Tuareg homeland Azawad.<sup>4</sup> Their fundamental grievance is their claim of decades of discrimination and exclusion from the political and economic processes by successive Bamako-based governments. The Tuaregs therefore took up arms against the Malian government on several occasions, fighting for a separate state and the rights of the Tuareg minority. Between 1985 and 2009 the government signed several peace deals and ceasefire agreements after every violent Tuareg rebellion, without addressing on a long-term basis the fundamental problems of the marginalisation and exclusion of the Tuareg minority. The promises by successive governments of greater political autonomy and devolved rule for the Tuaregs in the north never materialised.

After the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in Libya in 2011 heavily armed Tuaregs and non-Tuaregs who had been part of Qaddafi's army returned to northern Mali with sophisticated weaponry.<sup>5</sup> Together with previous Tuareg rebel groups, they formed the MNLA in 2011 as the political-military platform to continue their fight for self-rule. It was these heavily armed and well-trained MNLA-led fighters that routed the government forces in March 2012 and declared northern Mali the independent state of Azawad.

The Tuareg rebellions in the north have always been complicated by the link with and involvement of Islamist jihadist groups and the threat they pose to Mali; its neighbours; and the wider regions of North Africa, the Sahel and West Africa. The security and terror threats that Mali faced led to it signing bilateral military and security agreements and forming a Joint Counter-Terrorism Command between 2009 and 2010 with Niger, Algeria and Mauritania to tackle Islamist extremism and terrorism in the region. As the crisis unfolded in Mali, Ansar ed-Din and MUJAO expanded the Islamist jihadist rebellion beyond the Tuaregs by incorporating other ethnic groups historically opposed to the Tuareg rebellion such as the Songhai and Bella groups. Northern Mali therefore saw the emergence of multiethnic militant and extremist forces motivated by Islamist jihadist fervour.

Even before the outbreak of the Malian crisis, northern Mali had become a breeding ground and safe haven for diverse groups of jihadists and militants led by AQIM. These groups not only exploited the fundamental grievances of the local population against the government of Mali and its repressive military and security forces, but also organised sophisticated criminal enterprises that involved drug and human trafficking, arms and cigarette smuggling, and the

<sup>3</sup> Niger, Algeria, Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso.

<sup>4</sup> In economic terms, with the introduction of camels as a means of transportation in the Sahara Desert 2,000 years ago, the Tuaregs controlled the trans-Saharan trade routes and commodities such as gold, salt and spices. But their economic decline started with the advent of the transatlantic slave trade and the switch in trade from the Sahara to the Atlantic Ocean. The Tuaregs make up the indigenous population of the central Sahara and Sahel, and number an estimated two to three million. There have been five Tuareg rebellions in Mali since independence, three in neighbouring Niger and sporadic Tuareg insurrections in Algeria.

<sup>5</sup> After the end of the civil war in Mali in the 1990s Malian Tuaregs joined Qaddafi's army in Libya, a move welcomed by the then-government of Mali. The MNLA comprised heavily armed Tuaregs who had returned from Libya, Tuareg rebels who had not laid down their arms after the failure of the 2007-09 insurrection, Tuaregs who had defected from the Malian army, battle-hardened Tuaregs from Niger, and rebels of the National Transitional Council of Libya. The estimated military strength of the MNLA is 3,000 soldiers. Roland Marchal (2012b) is critical of the international media portrayal of the MNLA as a secular and unified group.

kidnapping of Western nationals for ransom. These criminal enterprises became valuable sources of funding and were profitable for all stakeholders, including corrupt Malian government officials, state security agencies, local leaders, separatist rebels and Islamist extremists. These Sahelian criminal enterprises and their profitable economic and financial opportunities made jihadi insurgency a lucrative economic activity. As such, economic opportunism became a motivation for the growing number of jihadist groups in the region (see Marchal, 2012a).

In effect, poverty, bad governance, marginalisation, the exclusion of large sections of the Malian populace from the political and economic processes and the failure to address fundamental grievances by the ruling and governing class in Mali created the breeding ground for Islamist extremists to gain a foothold and organise profitable criminal enterprises that became mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. At the outbreak of the Malian crisis the country was already on the verge of implosion because of the collapsed nature of the state; the effect of decades of bad governance and the ineffective political and economic management of the state; and the role of the corrupt ruling and governing elites in subverting state institutions to serve their vested interests and regime survival, especially during the personalised rule of President Touré. Both the Tuaregs and the diverse Islamist groups were united in their fight against their common enemy, the government of Mali.

## Interventions

The crisis in Mali led to a range of external and regional military, political and diplomatic interventions to resolve the conflict by France and other key Western states, and by intergovernmental organisations, including ECOWAS, the AU, the European Union (EU) and the UN.

### France

The French military intervention has been the most significant in bringing about a rapid and decisive military end to the conflict in northern Mali. In justifying the intervention, President Hollande stated that France had no alternative but to intervene and prevent the emergence of a terrorist state that would have serious security repercussions for France and the West. The collapse of the Malian state and the inability of the armed forces to defend the country and stop the military advances of the separatist rebels and their Islamist allies, coupled with the failure of the deployment of troops from African countries, therefore forced France to act unilaterally, but with the approval of the international community, including Russia, China and African regional actors. The legality of the French military intervention was never in doubt, because France had a

historical obligation to respond to a request from the interim president of Mali for French support and intervention to end the crisis, even though the interim president had no democratic mandate. In addition, UN Security Council Resolution 2085, which was facilitated by France, had authorised the deployment of the ECOWAS-led AFISMA intervention force (UNSC, 2012b).

By all indications, the French intervention was a pre-emptive military strike against Islamist rebels in Mali. Worthy of note is that President Hollande had earlier refused to intervene in support of the beleaguered President Bozize of the Central Africa Republic (CAR) in December 2012.<sup>6</sup> The apparent U-turn on Mali was because of the threat posed by that country and how this resonates with the French domestic audience, i.e. the threat of the emergence of a terrorist state and its impact on France. In justifying the intervention, the French defence minister, Jean-Yves le Drian, stated: “The threat is that a terrorist state will be created near Europe and France ... we had to react before it was too late” (Daneshkhu, 2013).<sup>7</sup> France had maintained a consistent position on the crisis in Mali and used its political influence and leadership at the UN Security Council, the EU, the AU and ECOWAS to mobilise international support to resolve the conflict. Throughout the crisis France supported military intervention to prevent rebels and Islamists from taking over the whole of Mali, but preferred African forces to do the fighting. The failure to deploy African troops in the face of the imminent rebel and Islamist advance on Bamako forced France into action.

France deployed a powerful military force in Mali, including a well-equipped ground force of 4,000 soldiers and air power that easily pounded the separatist rebels and Islamist extremists into hasty retreat. France was supported by hastily trained and heavily armed Malian soldiers, as well as 6,000 ECOWAS-led AFISMA troops. In addition, other key Western nations – Britain, Belgium, Canada and the U.S. – provided military, intelligence and logistical support. France has indicated that it will reduce its troop levels by the end of March 2013 and, supported by the AU, ECOWAS and the Malian government, has called on the UN to deploy a peacekeeping force to replace French forces. By the end of January 2013 the military objectives of Operation Serval<sup>8</sup> had been achieved. Although the separatists had been defeated, the Islamists were on the run and their terrorist infrastructure in the north had been destroyed, the military and security threats posed by Islamist jihadists have not been eliminated.

On his visit to Mali three weeks after the start of the French military intervention, President Hollande was given a rapturous welcome and treated like a hero, in scenes

6 Hollande’s refusal to intervene in support of the CAR president was partly because of his commitment to depart from the post-colonial Franceafrique tradition of acting as the “policeman” of Africa. Intervention in the CAR was not perceived to be in the strategic national interest and any such intervention in the face of domestic economic recession and austerity would not have been popular in France.

7 According to the French ambassador to the UN, Gerard Araud, “Our assessment was that they [the rebels] were actually able to take Bamako. So we decided that what was at stake was the existence of the state of Mali and beyond Mali was the stability of all West Africa. We had no other choice but to launch this military intervention” (Hojje, 2013).

8 A serval is an agile desert wild cat that is nearly extinct.

reminiscent of President Sarkozy's visit to Benghazi in Libya after the fall of the Qaddafi regime in 2011. In reaffirming France's commitment, Hollande stated that the military intervention would last "as long as necessary". Critics are sceptical about this open-ended nature of the French commitment in Mali. As such, even when French soldiers and their allies were recapturing cities with impressive rapidity, Hollande was careful not to sound triumphalist. After the recapture of the historic city of Timbuktu he merely stated: "We are in the process of winning the battle. When I say we, I mean the Malian army and the African (troops) supporting the French." Hollande and the majority of French citizens see a link between the threat posed by Islamist militants in Mali and the threats from its own domestic Islamist extremism and terrorism. The logic of the French intervention is that failure to act in Mali will inevitably spiral out of control, with direct impact in France.

President Hollande's decision to decisively intervene in Mali has had a positive impact on his political fortunes and the image of France. For most of his first year in office Hollande has been criticised as being too soft, overly consensual and not capable of decisive actions. As one media analyst puts it, the president has suddenly "become a new kind of leader" (Schofield, 2013). Once again, foreign military intervention has helped to bolster the image of a president whose domestic political rating was in decline.<sup>9</sup> In addition, France's international image has been enhanced by its leadership in militarily taking on and "defeating" the separatist and Islamist rebels in Mali.

Mali is seen as a crucial test for the largely untested foreign policy approach of President Hollande, whose first year in office has been embroiled in domestic issues. The intervention in Mali shows that France is not about to end its long history of military interventions in Africa, often dictated by imperatives of national security and strategic vested interests, and largely framed by the opaque Franceafrique tradition. As a socialist president preoccupied with domestic economic issues, Hollande inevitably found his foreign policy placed under scrutiny by the Malian crisis. The intervention in Mali is seen as a departure from his election manifesto, in which he explicitly committed his government to ending the Franceafrique tradition and reducing France's military presence in Africa, boldly stating in his address to the Senegalese National Assembly in October 2012 that in the long term, "France will not need forces stationed in Africa". Mali has once again revived the foreign policy debate that sometimes casts France as pacifist, citing its refusal to send troops to Iraq in 2003 and its withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan. In addition, Hollande's initial comments about France's reluctance to continue to be the policeman of (Francophone) Africa only reinforce this view. But France has always shown a predisposition to undertake direct military intervention in pursuit

of its national security and strategic interests. If anything, it is one of the major powers with the capacity to do so. While refusing military intervention in the CAR, Hollande showed no hesitation in authorising military action in Mali deemed to be vital to French national security and strategic interests, which is consistent with the core principles and values of French foreign policy.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of February 2013 the war in Mali had cost France €100 million, according the French Defence Ministry. This no doubt will have serious domestic political repercussions if the war drags on, in particular for the recession-ridden and debt-laden government of France domestically implementing austerity measures and public sector job cuts.

The veracity of the claim that France has "no intention to stay" in Mali will to a very large extent be determined by the military and security situation on the ground, as this will potentially determine the scope, duration and extent of the French intervention. The signs are not promising, in that despite the rapid military victory against the separatist and Islamist rebels, the rebels have regrouped and reorganised themselves, launching attacks against French soldiers and their Malian and African allies. The killing of the fourth French soldier on March 6th 2013, against the background of increasing suicide bombing attacks, presents the picture of emerging protracted insurgency warfare that will keep France bogged down and engaged in Mali for a long time and without an exit strategy. The hostage crisis and the killing of foreign nationals at the In Amenas gas facility in south-eastern Algeria give an indication of the nature of potential reprisal attacks against French citizens and targets. Nearly three months after the invention, it will be premature to claim that France has no intention of staying long in Mali. Understandably, President Hollande's government has to allay domestic public concerns about a possible protracted and costly war in Africa for which there will be little domestic support. Increasing domestic public concerns about the withdrawal of French troops may have potentially negative political repercussions for Hollande. Capitalising on the potential difficulties of the French intervention in Mali, former president Sarkozy has been critical of the intervention, stating that "The rule is never to go into a country that has no government. What are we doing there if we're not just supporting putschists and trying to control a territory four times larger than France with 4,000 men?" (AllAfrica.com, 2013).

President Hollande's claim that France has "no interest other than the goal of fighting against terrorism" is controversial because some analysts argue that the real motive for French intervention in Mali is to protect French economic interests in the country and especially in neigh-

<sup>9</sup> According to BVA polls published in *Le Parisien* in January 2013, 75% of French citizens supported President Hollande's decisive action for military intervention, with an 80-90% approval rating for the French army.

<sup>10</sup> As in Libya and Côte d'Ivoire, Sarkozy authorised military intervention in these countries deemed to be in pursuit of France's national and strategic interests (some would add the Franceafrique patronage network) and in fulfilment of its international obligations.

bouring Niger (Elischer, 2013). The spillover of the conflict into Niger and the potential implosion of that country would have a devastating impact on French economic interests there. The pre-emptive military intervention in Mali is in effect a strategy to protect French economic and financial interests in Niger, where France has significant economic and mining interests. Employees of the French nuclear company Areva operating in Niger and French engineers have been kidnapped and smuggled across the border to Mali for ransom. To put this in perspective, France depends on uranium imports from Niger for its energy security. Nuclear power is the primary source of electricity in France and the nuclear power industry is described as a “success story” for producing cheap and CO<sub>2</sub>-free energy. In 2004 alone France produced 425.8 TWh out of its total production of 540.6 TWh of electricity, i.e. 78.8%, from nuclear power, the highest proportion in the world (Spero News, n.d.). In economic and financial terms France is the largest exporter of electricity in the world, with an estimated €3 billion annually in sales. The two main electricity-generating companies, Areva and EDF (Electricité de France) operate the 59 nuclear plants in France. The French nuclear power industry depend heavily on the uranium from its two uranium mines in Niger. These mines are owned by a French-led consortium and operated by French interests. Therefore, the security and stability of Niger is a vital national security interest to France. It is reasonable to conjecture that the pre-emptive military intervention in Mali is in effect a foreign economic policy strategy to protect and secure the French nuclear industry and France’s energy security, especially against the backdrop of the current economic recession and austerity in France.

### **ECOWAS and the AU: the African-led International Support Mission to Mali**

Some claim that the French intervention in Mali once again exposes the limitations of African states and regional organisations when dealing with problems in the continent. The reality, however, is that both ECOWAS and the AU have been involved in the mediation and resolution of the Malian crisis from its inception. With the outbreak of the secessionist rebellion and military coup, both regional bodies imposed a range of political, diplomatic and economic sanctions on the illegal regime in Mali and mobilised international support not to recognise both the separatist Azawad state and the military junta in a bid to force the military regime to return the country to civilian democratic and constitutional rule (ECOWAS, 2012). The crisis in Mali was a serious violation of the Charters and Constitutive Acts of both ECOWAS and the AU relating to respect for the unity and territorial integrity of member states and the proscription of coup d’états. To this end, ECOWAS, supported by the AU, facilitated an attempt to achieve a political settlement of the crisis via a peace mediation process facilitated by the president of Burkina Faso, which called for a national

political dialogue of all stakeholders, democratic elections in April 2013 and a return to constitutional rule. The ECOWAS-led peace mediation was supported by non-ECOWAS countries that have vested national security interests in the Malian crisis, including Mauritania and Algeria.

The peace initiative notwithstanding, ECOWAS’s preferred option was a military solution to the crisis, but all the key political actors in Mali, including the deposed president, the military junta and the interim government, refused to accept the military option advocated by ECOWAS. How then could ECOWAS resolve the crisis in Mali when the political and military leadership in the country was firmly against ECOWAS military deployment? On the political and diplomatic front, the ECOWAS-AU-facilitated Peace Plan and Strategic Concept of Operation for Military Intervention formed the basis for the French-backed UN Security Council Resolution 2085 that authorised military intervention to end the Malian crisis (UNSC, 2012b). The ECOWAS-led AFISMA mission was authorised by a Chapter VII peace-keeping mandate and was to begin troop deployment in September 2013.<sup>11</sup> But the threatened rebel advance on Bamako and the subsequent French intervention not only changed the focus and scope of the UN-backed AFISMA intervention, but also hastened its deployment. On January 17th 2013 ECOWAS authorised the deployment of AFISMA with a Nigerian deployment of air and ground forces in Mali, followed by deployments from other AFISMA troop-contributing countries. AFISMA, headed by a Nigerian force commander, Major-General Shehu, has been fighting in Mali alongside French and Malian forces.

Far from the caricature presented by the international media of a continent not able to intervene and resolve its internal crisis, both ECOWAS and the AU have demonstrated political, diplomatic, military, and economic ability and leadership to intervene and end Africa’s own crises in partnership with key international actors. This leadership was shown in the development of the AFISMA Joint Conception of Operation Plan and the military deployment in Mali. The AFISMA plan is a product of the merging of ideas from the AU, ECOWAS and the EU, with a seven-point list of short- and medium-term objectives, including facilitating the inclusive democratic process in Mali; restoring the country’s unity and territorial integrity; reforming its defence and security sector; and addressing the structural challenges facing the wider Sahel region. The ECOWAS-AU plan went far further than the short-term-, quick-fix- and exit-strategy-oriented French intervention. It deals with the imperative to address Mali’s internal grievances, post-war peacebuilding and state reconstruction, as well as regional security challenges, as the key to resolving the crisis in Mali on a long-term basis. The UN secretary-general, in recognising the division of labour and sharing of responsibility, authorised the AU to provide

<sup>11</sup> AFISMA troop-contributing countries include Chad, 2,000 troops; Nigeria, 1,200; Togo, 733; Benin, 650; Burkina Faso, 500; Senegal, 500; Niger, 500; Guinea, 144; and Ghana, 120.

political and strategic leadership, while EOCWAS provided the military and police component of AFISMA through the ECOWAS Standby Force.

The initial ECOWAS and AU inaction in Mali in terms of immediate military intervention was constrained not only by the refusal of the Malian political and military leadership to accept ECOWAS military intervention, but also the fact that both ECOWAS and the AU had no standing military forces available for rapid deployment in conflict zones in Africa. The politics of financing and deploying ECOWAS and AU standby forces is a rather complicated and protracted business that does not lend itself to the immediate military intervention demands of conflicts in Africa. Nigeria, as the pivotal state in West Africa with the military, financial and political capability to intervene in conflict situations (as it has done under the auspices of ECOWAS/ECOMOG<sup>12</sup> in the 1990s in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire), is now restricted by the demands of the new democratic dispensation in Nigeria that limits the ability of civilian presidents to undertake military interventions in the region.

### The UN and EU

The UN and EU have been extensively involved in facilitating the mediation and resolution of the Malian crisis since its outbreak. Both not only supported the African-led peace mediation efforts, but also mobilised the international community to secure the much-needed diplomatic, financial and economic resources to support these efforts. The French-supported UN Resolution 2071, adopted on October 20th 2012, created the momentum to co-ordinate the various initiatives by international and African regional actors to agree on an operational plan for the deployment of a military stabilisation force in Mali. Specifically, the resolution requested the UN secretary-general to “immediately provide military and security planners” to assist ECOWAS and the AU, in consultation with the Malian authorities and core neighbouring countries (UNSC, 2012a). Resolution 2071 therefore established the basis for the creation of the ECOWAS-led AFISMA force that had been authorised by Resolution 2085. As a UN-authorized peace enforcement mission, AFISMA was budgeted to cost \$410 million annually. The UN also set up the international Trust Fund for Mali. In effect, the UN not only facilitated the creation of AFISMA, but also supported both the Malian government and AFISMA with planning and preparations for the military intervention. In fact, the UN played a co-ordinating role among the AU, ECOWAS, the EU and other key Western states in facilitating attempts to resolve the Malian crisis.

In addition to providing military trainers to rebuild the Malian army and train African forces for deployment in Mali, the EU's additional task was to mobilise international funding in support of the UN-backed AFISMA deployment.

To this end the EU organised an international donors' meeting in Brussels on February 5th 2013 to discuss how to fund, equip, train and deploy the AFISMA forces that will eventually take over from French troops. The EU-facilitated Brussels meeting focused on humanitarian aid support, post-war peacebuilding and state reconstruction involving the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and the resumption of humanitarian aid to Mali after its suspension due to the March 2012 military coup. The EU therefore supported the creation and deployment of AFISMA as a direct strategy to end the spread of Islamist extremism and terrorism that threatens Europe. EU defence strategists from France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain endorsed the UN-backed ECOWAS-AU AFISMA concept of operation and deployment. In the EU, there was broad consensus on the necessity and legitimacy of military intervention in Mali, but the EU's involvement was limited to providing training, financial, and logistical support for Malian and African forces, stressing the importance of African ownership of efforts to resolve the crisis.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to stress French leadership and influence both within the EU and the UN, in particular, the Security Council, to mobilise support and international consensus on the imperative to resolve the crisis in Mali and restore the unity and territorial integrity of the country. Unsurprisingly, both the UN and the EU, like ECOWAS and the AU, have been criticised for inaction in Mali. But the credible plan developed by the UN and ECOWAS was set aside by the French intervention. If anything, the UN has been criticised for its plan's failure to appreciate the extent of the fragility of the Malian state and the inability of the army to lead the military offensive against the combined forces of the separatists and Islamist rebels. The UN also did not fully grasp the threat posed by the crisis in Mali to international peace and security, and hence underestimated the military strength and capability of the well-trained, well-equipped, and determined Islamist insurgents and their familiarity with the desert terrain. Additionally, the UN had excessively focused on addressing the political and economic grievances of the Tuareg separatists as a strategy to prise them away from their Islamist allies and had believed that Ansar ed-Din would participate in political negotiations to resolve the crisis (Plett, 2013).

### Norway

Norway's involvement in Mali pre-dates the current crisis. Norway has had a long history of development co-operation with Mali dating back to the 1970s and this led to the presence of numerous Norwegian NGOs and research institutions in the country. But Norway had always linked its foreign and development co-operation policy in Mali with the wider Sahel region in terms of addressing persistent drought, famine and food security. In addition, the NGO Norwegian Church Aid was involved in facilitating the peace

<sup>12</sup> ECOWAS Monitoring Group.

<sup>13</sup> The EU's intervention in African conflict situations is not new. It has deployed military missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2003 and 2006, and in Chad and the CAR in 2008. EU military advisers also supported the AU missions in Darfur, Sudan and Somalia, while the EU deployed a naval force to deter piracy off the coast of Somalia.



process in northern Mali. This positive bilateral relationship with successive governments of Mali put the country at the centre of regional stability, prompted by the fear that failure to resolve the perennial crisis with the Tuaregs in the north would have serious repercussions for Mali, the region and Europe. Recent events in Mali seem to have justified the strategy of the Norwegian engagement in Mali.

With the outbreak of the current Malian crisis the Norwegian government joined the international community in condemning the military coup, suspended bilateral government development assistance, and encouraged national political dialogue and return to civilian democratic rule. But Norway was firmly against military intervention to end the crisis, with the minister of international development, Heikki Holmås, stating:

I do not believe that military force can resolve this crisis. There is a risk of foreign military intervention bringing the various militant groups closer together, and mobilising more militants in the region. There is also a risk of inflaming existing tensions between sedentary and pastoral communities. Rushing into military action could lead to a major bloodbath (Holmås, 2012).

But the hostage crisis in Algeria on February 26th 2013 involving the al-Qaeda-linked al-Mulathameen group, which claimed the lives of five Norwegian citizens, dramatically changed the Norwegian government's foreign policy approach. Justifying international military intervention in Mali and the threat posed by Islamist extremists and terrorism to Norway, the prime minister, Jens Stoltenberg, stated that "This time it was Algeria, next time it can be us" (View and News from Norway, 2013). With the decisive French military intervention and its success in driving out Islamist rebels from northern Mali, the Norwegian foreign minister, Espen Barth Eide, confirmed Norway's willingness to send troops (military advisers and trainers) to Mali, but only as part of the EU mission to Mali and in collaboration with other Nordic countries. To this end the Norwegian government has contributed NOK 30 million (\$5.2 million) to the UN Trust Fund for Mali in addition to the annual Norwegian contribution of NOK 80 million (\$13.9) in aid to Mali.

Norway's interest in Mali is also motivated by wider security concerns and the threats of terrorism to Norway in that some of the terrorists involved in the Algerian gas plant hostage crisis had been in Norway. The Norwegian Police Intelligence Unit claims that terrorist cells could exist in the country and that an al-Qaeda-linked group has been under police surveillance. Furthermore, economic and commercial motivations also underpin Norway's interest in Mali and the Sahel region in that the Algerian gas complex at the centre of the hostage crisis is jointly run by the Norwegian state-owned Statoil ASA, BP and the Algerian company Sonatrach.

## Regional implications of the conflict

The conflict in Mali has regional and international implications because the country has emerged as the new epicentre of regional instability, with devastating consequences for neighbouring states and the wider continent. Mali is now a threat to international peace and security, and is set to shape the patterns of new conflicts, wars and security threats emanating from the region in the coming decades. There are three distinct, but interrelated dimensions to the implications of the conflict, including the regional threats posed to West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea region, the North African and Sahel regions, and Mali's immediate neighbouring and proximate states. But why is Mali the new threat to international peace and security?

The main international security concerns have been about the potential of Mali imploding into a failed state controlled by Islamist extremists exporting terror in the region and globally. Events in Mali have shown that the north of the country had become the new haven for Islamist extremists. Northern Mali had become not only their new operational base, but also a magnet for foreign jihadist fighters. Mali, with its mountainous and desert terrain, is fast becoming the centre of gravity for jihadists and has led to a shift away from the traditional jihadist focus on South Asia to North Africa and the Sahel. The main security concern in Western capitals is that al-Qaeda should not be given the opportunity to establish itself in Mali. The U.S. defence secretary, Leon Panetta, on a visit to France in January 2013, was very clear about the threat posed by the crisis in Mali, stating:

We have a responsibility to make sure that Al Qaeda does not establish a base for operation in North Africa and Mali. While they might not have any immediate plans for attacks in the United States and Europe, ultimately that still remains their objective (Panetta, 2013).

It was this fear of the potential emergence of a terrorist state in Mali that galvanised France into military action: according to the French foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, in a statement made at the time, "We must stop the rebel offensive otherwise the whole of Mali will fall into their hands, creating a threat for Africa and even for Europe" (Newman, 2013).

Furthermore, Mali is situated in a volatile, unstable and conflict-prone region. Its neighbouring countries have had their own share of civil wars, violent extremism, and Islamist jihadist and terrorist activities. The last thing neighbouring states want is a failed state on their doorstep exporting violent extremism and terrorism that they are ill-prepared to deal with.<sup>14</sup> Mali's terrain, with its large swathes of ungovernable spaces, vast deserts, rugged mountain ranges and porous borders, makes the country ideal for the operations of militant extremists and criminal

<sup>14</sup> Algeria and Mauritania have had long-standing problems with Islamist insurgency and terrorism. There have also been recurrent Tuareg rebellions in Niger and post-election violence and civil war in Côte d'Ivoire.

enterprises. In addition, the decades of bad governance, extreme poverty, and the marginalisation of large sections of the populace from inclusive politics and development have not only converted Mali into a recruiting ground for extremists, but have also made it the new epicentre for lucrative criminal enterprises. According to a senior Algerian officer, Abdelmalek Guenaiz, quoted in a U.S. diplomatic cable from 2009, “the nexus of arms, drug and contraband smuggling in northern Mali created an enabling environment ... they use any means available to finance their activities, including corruption and hostage taking” (Lister, 2013).

Perhaps more worrying is the fact that the crisis in Mali is seen as a struggle among rival Islamic sects for the “soul of Islam”. The majority of Malians belong to the Sufi tradition of Islam that accommodates secularism and venerates saints, in contrast to the puritanical Sunni tradition. Based on its puritanical interpretation of Islam, Ansar ed-Din imposed strict *sharia* law in northern Mali, which conflicts with the moderate Sufi version of Islam, thus setting the stage for the violent clash between two traditions of Islam, with potentially serious regional and global repercussions. Ansar ed-Din, AQIM and its affiliates simply wanted to replace the rich and diverse cultural and religious traditions of Mali. In effect, the crisis in Mali is a battle between a tolerant, secular Islamic tradition and an intolerant and violent Islamic tradition. Furthermore, the crisis in Mali has all the makings of a humanitarian catastrophe, with thousands of refugees fleeing into neighbouring countries with limited access to humanitarian assistance, as well as thousands of internally displaced persons being faced with malnutrition and disease.

It is important to stress that the problems in the Sahel region and North Africa pre-date the current crisis in Mali. Historically, the inhabitants of northern Mali and its neighbours have used their knowledge of the desert and the terrain for profitable criminal enterprises. If anything, the Sahel and Sahara regions have been host to a motley group of diverse armed groups, militant extremists and jihadists, motivated by different causes ranging from criminal enterprise to secession and global jihad linking al-Qaeda groups with other Islamist militants such as Nigeria’s Boko Haram and Somalia’s al-Shabaab. For a long time the al-Qaeda terrorist franchise has been firmly rooted in North Africa and the Sahel region with links to Islamist jihadists globally, and it now poses a transnational extremist Islamist threat to the Sahel, Sahara and Maghreb regions. Analysts argue that the Sahel has been the “forgotten frontier” in the fight against Islamist extremism and global jihad (Clarke, 2013). This international neglect created the opportunity for the emergence of multiple groups of militant extremists and jihadists in the Sahel, all motivated by the economic opportunism of their jihadi cause. It was the Malian crisis and the violent kidnapping of foreign hostages by Islamists in neighbouring Algeria that

refocused international attention on the threat posed by Islamist extremism in the region. To some extent the migration of international terrorism from its traditional zones of operation in South Asia, Yemen and Somalia into the Sahel region has been facilitated by the effects of the French-led NATO intervention in Libya that led to the fall of the Qaddafi regime in 2011. Mali and its neighbours in the Sahel have emerged as the “new zone of instability” (Haenlein, 2013; Pantucci, 2013).

### Neighbouring and other proximate states

The conflict in Mali has inevitably drawn neighbouring states and other proximate states into the emerging zone of instability through the regionalisation of the civil war and the activities of Islamist extremists in the region. The influx of refugees fleeing armed rebels and Islamist extremists into neighbouring states has threatened the national security and political stability of these countries. They have thus suffered and will continue to suffer from the fallout of the crisis. The fear is that chaos in Mali will seriously affect its neighbours.

#### Algeria

The Islamist groups operating in Mali pose a serious threat to Algeria’s security and stability because most of them indirectly evolved from the Algerian civil war in the 1990s. The Algerian government fought a long and violent war with Islamic extremists after it annulled the election victory of the Front Islamique du Salut in 1990. These violent groups included the Group Islamique Armée, which later transformed itself into Le Group Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat and in 2007 rebranded itself as AQIM. The AQIM commander is an Algerian, Abdelmalek Droukdel, who was a major influence on and provided support to Ansar ed-Din when it controlled Timbuktu. Islamist militants in Mali with roots in Algeria therefore pose a threat to Algerian security and stability.

What is more, Islamist jihadists have established training and logistical bases in the mountainous areas of Ageulhok and Tessalit near the Algerian border. It is therefore not surprising that with the outbreak of the Malian crisis the Algerian government opposed military intervention in Mali for fear of escalating its own internal terrorist insurgency and the possible destabilisation of its territory (see Dennison, 2013).<sup>15</sup> For the same reason, the Algerian government also opposed the French-led NATO intervention to topple Qaddafi. The fear that heavily armed rebels and Islamist militants would retreat to its side of the border has been a major national security concern for Algeria and, as such, it immediately closed its borders with Mali at the start of the crisis.

These security fears became manifest when heavily armed Islamist rebels fleeing from French air strikes in Timbuktu and Gao tactically withdrew to the mountain ranges around Kidal near the Algerian border. This fear became manifest with the Islamist extremists’ attack on the In Amenas gas

<sup>15</sup> See also J. Keenan’s (2009; 2013) controversial but important views on Algeria and the conflicts in the Sahel and Sahara.

plant that led to the kidnapping and killing of foreign hostages in retaliation for the French military intervention in Mali. The Algerian hostage crisis prompted a more visible and immediate involvement of key Western nations such as Britain and the U.S. in the fight against terrorism and Islamist extremism. During his visit to Algeria immediately after the hostage crisis the British prime minister, David Cameron, stated that the international community should use every means at its disposal to fight terrorism and that the hostage crisis in Algeria was a reminder that what happens in other countries affects Britain.<sup>16</sup>

### *Niger*

Niger is in the firing line of the crisis in Mali and has similarly seen the influx of armed Tuareg and Islamist rebels. Niger's involvement in the ECOWAS-led AFISMA intervention in Mali is to help stabilise and contain the crisis in Mali before it spills over its borders, with violent repercussions. The main security concern is that the influx of separatist rebels will not only aggravate the already tense situation with its own Tuareg community, but that the Islamist insurgents will regroup in Niger, using its territory as a base to launch guerrilla attacks against French and African forces in Mali. In fact, there is every indication that the crisis in Mali will eventually migrate to Niger, because the country has a similar volatile domestic situation that remains largely unresolved. But it is doubtful whether France will allow Niger to disintegrate into chaos, because of its strategic importance to French energy security (see above). Furthermore, U.S. troops in Niger are to set up a drone base for the surveillance of and military attacks against Islamists in Mali. The expansion of U.S. drone warfare in the Sahel will potentially have serious repercussions in terms of civilian casualties and the erosion of the sovereignty of Mali and its neighbours, and may lead to a new escalation of tensions and political fallout between France and its West African allies. Marchal (2012a) claims that the crisis in Mali will not repeat itself in Niger because some of the Tuareg grievances have been addressed by the government and Tuaregs are better incorporated into the political and economic governance processes of the country than in Mali. In addition, President Issoufo took pre-emptive action in disarming armed groups after the fall of Qaddafi, which the ousted president of Mali failed to do.

### *Libya*

Although Libya does not share a border with Mali, the country was the trigger for the outbreak of the current Malian crisis. Some analysts claim that this crisis is partly a spillover of the conflict in Libya, and in particular blow-back from the French-led NATO intervention to oust Qaddafi (Fessy, 2013; see also Marchal, 2012b). The claim is that hundreds of heavily armed and well-trained Tuareg and non-Tuareg fighters who had been part of Qaddafi's

army and defended his regime before his fall returned to northern Mali, formed the MNLA and started the separatist rebellion that was later hijacked by Islamist jihadists. Western powers had not planned for the security vacuum created by Qaddafi's fall and, if anything, had underestimated the impact of the security threats, risks and vulnerabilities on the Sahel after Qaddafi's fall, just as happened in Iraq in 2003. Tuareg rebels and Islamist jihadists simply helped themselves to the heavy weaponry and arsenal left over from the Libyan war. It seems that France is now paying a heavy price for its intervention in Libya and has had to fight rebels it helped to arm in its war against Qaddafi. Mali is therefore a casualty of the Libyan conflict. However, not all agree with this conclusion and according to Adam Thiam, a Malian newspaper columnist,

The Libyan crisis did not cause this coup but certainly revealed the malaise felt within the army ... President [Touré] hasn't been active in tackling drug trafficking and Al Qaeda fighters, and the emergence of new rebel movements only added to the soldiers' frustrations (Fessy, 2013).

Although the conflict in Libya may have provided the trigger for the Malian crisis, the fundamental problems that caused the crisis are largely domestic.

### *Nigeria*

Although not having a border with Mali, Nigeria is one of the proximate neighbours that are seriously affected by the crisis in Mali, and its government sees the crisis as a national security threat. Nigeria is currently fighting a protracted and violent war with Islamist extremist groups, in particular Boko Haram. Intelligence reports claim that AQIM has provided terrorist and jihadist training to Boko Haram in northern Mali. Another terrorist affiliate of AQIM, al-Shabaab, has provided insurgency training to Boko Haram in Somalia. Nigeria's leadership of ECOWAS to deploy AFISMA forces in Mali is therefore a pre-emptive intervention to crush Islamist extremists in Mali, and to deny them access to and prevent them from providing support to Boko Haram in Nigeria. The government of Nigeria, like the majority of Western states and Mali's neighbours, dreads the collapse of Mali and its emergence as a terrorist state and safe haven from which to attack Nigeria and threaten the disintegration of that fractious country. This fear became manifest when a Nigerian-based terrorist group, Ansaru, kidnapped a French family in northern Cameroon, on the border with Nigeria, and on March 10th 2013 announced the killing of seven foreign hostages it had seized in the northern Nigerian state of Bauchi.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Cameron's was the first ever visit to Algeria by a British prime minister since independence. Both Britain and Algeria have suffered from terrorism and therefore had the imperative to co-operate to combat terrorism. The prime minister signed a security partnership with the Algerian government and the delegation interestingly included the British trade minister, Lord Risby, while the Algerian energy minister was present at meetings. This indicates that trade (particularly in oil and gas) and economic investment issues were part of the security partnership.

<sup>17</sup> Ansaru (Jamaatu Ansarul Mushimina Fi Biladdis Sudan/Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa) is an offshoot of Boko Haram and linked with AQIM. It has a regional jihadist ambition and claims it is fighting to establish an Islamic state.

## Consequences of the French intervention

The consequences of the French intervention are many and include those discussed below.

### Reprisal attacks against French citizens and targets

Despite domestic support for the French military intervention, there have been fears of possible security risks and terrorist reprisals against French nationals, cities, and forces in Mali, as well as targeted kidnappings of French citizens. Since the intervention attacks against French citizens have increased, with 15 hostages being taken by Islamist extremists in the region, who described the hostage-taking as retaliatory attacks prompted by the intervention. Between 2010 and 2012, even before the outbreak of the Malian crisis, there had been increasing targeted kidnappings of French citizens by Islamist extremists in the region for ransom. The French intervention has therefore heightened the security threats against the 30,000 French citizens in West Africa.

The kidnapping of French tourists in Cameroon by the Ansaru Islamist group has further raised fears about the targeted kidnapping of French citizens in West Africa. Ansaru paraded the hostages on the Internet, threatening to cut their throats if the French and Nigerian governments did not release imprisoned Islamist jihadists. By all indications there has been an increase in the spate of attacks against French citizens since the start of the French intervention.

### Increase domestic terrorist and Islamist extremist attacks

Since the start of the French intervention there is increasing concern that some militant extremists among France's five million Muslim population, the majority of whom are from North and West Africa, may be motivated by the intervention to seek "revenge" on French soil. These fears are based on France's long battle in the 1990s with Islamist extremists in France. The recent terrorist attacks in the country only reinforced these concerns. These attacks include the killing of three off-duty French soldiers and three Jewish children and a rabbi in Toulouse by Mohamed Merah, a French citizen and terrorist trained in Pakistan with links to AQIM; the firebombing of the Paris offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a newspaper that published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad; and a grenade attack in September 2012 on a Jewish supermarket in a Paris suburb. In addition, four men were arrested for suspected links with Islamist extremists in West Africa and detained for possible "association with a terrorist enterprise". Furthermore, a French national was arrested in Niger while trying to join Islamist rebel groups in Mali. The police also uncovered bomb-making materials in a Paris suburb and alleged that the Islamist terror cell involved was planning the biggest bomb attack on French soil since the mid-1990s. The French government therefore warned of possible terrorist attacks in France due to its military intervention in Mali. The French interior minister, Manuel Valls, stated, "We

have to continue dismantling these networks that want to either commit attacks on our soil or take individuals overseas to carry out jihad" (BBC News, 2013). Some of these attacks and arrests, although not directly linked to Mali and the French intervention, have only further heightened fears about domestic retaliation. The intervention in Mali has led to a rise in the domestic terror threat level, with President Hollande promising to increase protection on public buildings and transport networks.

### Mission creep and domestic political reaction

The French intervention faces the risk of mission creep and the possibility of France being drawn into a violent and protracted insurgency war with terrorists and Islamist jihadists. The killing of French soldiers and French casualties – or the "body-bag syndrome" – will almost inevitably provoke negative domestic political reaction that will force the withdrawal of French forces before they have completed the objective of defeating terrorists and Islamist jihadists in the region. The concern is that the French intervention may potentially embroil France in the wider volatile conflict and security threats in the Sahel and Sahara, making it difficult for France to achieve a quick exit.

### French intervention: a magnet for global jihadists

The crisis in Mali has attracted foreign fighters and Islamist extremists committed to the spread of global jihad in the Sahel region and West Africa. The crisis has seen the emergence of diverse Islamist extremist groups in Mali linked to AQIM and other terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in Somalia. The French intervention has added a new dynamic to the crisis in Mali and now serves as a magnet to recruit terrorists and Islamist jihadists to fight against the "infidels". Foreign Islamist militants, including Europeans, fighting in Syria with rebels against the Assad regime are reported to have gone to Mali to fight against the French "crusaders". In March 2013 French forces captured a French national fighting with Islamist militants. In an effort to destroy all the terrorist bases in Mali, the French dismantled a major al-Qaeda base at a site called Ametetai in the Ifoghas mountains. Describing the base, the French defence minister, Jean-Yves le Drian, stated that

There had been established a kind of place, a terrorist war network, that could receive youngsters seeking a radical future, as some may have done in Afghanistan or Syria. We knew this part of Mali was potentially the sanctuary of AQIM and we have been able to inflict heavy damage on them. We are dealing with resolute and heavily armed terrorists (Le Drian, 2013).

### Neighbouring states drawn into the conflict

The Algerian gas complex hostage crisis and the kidnapping of a French family in Cameroon have inevitably drawn neighbouring countries into the conflict because of the French intervention in Mali, thus directly embroiling neighbouring states in the Malian crisis. The attempt by the Algerian government to militarily free the hostages and the

ensuing bloodbath illustrate the complexity of the security threat to neighbouring states, which may negatively affect France. The spillover of the conflict in Mali and the French intervention have thus led to the regionalisation of the crisis in Mali. Neighbouring countries are being reluctantly drawn into the conflict in Mali in an attempt to prevent the spread of terrorism and global jihad in the region.

### Expansion of U.S. drone warfare

The French military intervention has paved the way for the expansion of U.S. drone warfare in the Sahel region. Beyond the crisis in Mali, U.S. drones will be used in Central and East Africa in the fight against the Lord's Resistance Army. The emergence of a protracted shadow war could lead to French mission creep and to France fighting an insurgency that requires different skills, equipment and tactics, for which the French forces are not prepared in Mali. Possible counterinsurgency warfare will include the increasing use of U.S. drones against terrorist and militants, like the U.S. use of drone warfare in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.

### The "Afghanistanisation" of Mali?

The French intervention has raised the spectre that Mali will become France's Afghanistan. In the face of superior French military firepower, the Islamist rebels simply melted into the civilian population or tactically withdrew into the mountains and vast, inaccessible desert areas, where they have regrouped and from where they have launched renewed attacks against French forces and their African allies. The Islamist rebels have started a new insurgency war, launching suicide attacks in the city of Gao, carrying out a car bombing of a French base in Kidal and firing rockets at French troops, in scenes reminiscent of al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgency attacks against U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan. Mali is already a dysfunctional state mired in bad governance, with an ill-equipped and ineffective army incapable of providing security for the populace. This presents the new danger of Mali becoming another Afghanistan in the Sahel and Sahara regions, with potentially devastating consequences for French and Western nationals and strategic interests there. The spokesman for Ansar ed-Din, Sanda Ould Boumama, boldly stated that "The war has only started. We expect more casualties", while MUJAO claimed that it had "created a new combat zone" from Gao to Kidal in Mali (CNN, 2013). After fighting by French troops and their allies against Islamist rebels for control of Gao, a 30-year-old local resident, Maouloud Dicko, stated that "I am really afraid. You hear of these kinds of things in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Gao is becoming like Pakistan" (France 24, 2013).

If the Islamist insurgents are not totally defeated and all their bases and terrorist infrastructure destroyed, they will use the cover of the civilian population to regroup and mount new insurgency attacks in Mali, just as the Taliban did against the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan. Most of the foreign Islamist fighters in Mali are battle-hardened

jihadists who have received their training and fought in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Syria and Somalia. They are now bringing their experience and expertise to Mali, with potentially deadly repercussions for French forces and their African allies, as well as the local population. The Islamists, who are used to this type of guerrilla warfare and are familiar with Mali's desert and mountainous terrain, see the crisis in Mali as a new jihadist adventure to harass, humiliate, kill and bog down the French "infidels" in an unwinnable war. Mali's terrain, like that of Afghanistan, is perfect for guerrilla warfare, with remote mountains and caves and vast deserts. After the initial French air strikes, most militants tactically withdrew to the Ifoghas mountain range east of Kidal. In recognition of the potential for Mali to become a safe haven for terrorists and Islamist extremists, the British prime minister, David Cameron, during his visit to Algeria, stressed that Mali will not become "another Afghanistan or even another Libya ... just as we had to deal with that in Pakistan and in Afghanistan. So the world needs to come together to deal with the threat in North Africa" (10, 2013). But if the French use similar tactics and methods in Mali and the region to those applied in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, this could possibly engender resentment and the further radicalisation of young Muslims against France.

What is more, Mali's domestic political, governance and security problems are far from over with the intervention of French forces. The secessionist rebellion is only contained, but not resolved, and the political and military situation is chaotic, with the army exerting a powerful, but destructive influence on the governance of this failing state. This prevailing domestic situation, in the face of extreme poverty, marginalisation and the absence of essential social services, creates a breeding ground for recruitment to extremist ideas and an environment conducive to the continuation of insurgency warfare against French and allied forces. Islamist extremists in Mali and the region feed on local grievances and take advantage of state weakness and lack of control over large swathes of ungovernable territory in northern Mali. In addition, the corrupt ruling and governing elites in the region exploited the al-Qaeda terrorist brand of criminal enterprises and did not do enough to end the kidnapping of foreign nationals for profit. This complex domestic situation and conflict environment will inevitably draw France, the former colonial master, into a "war of occupation" that will in turn become an effective propaganda tool for recruitment to the jihadist cause in Mali.

But not all agree with the claim the Mali will become the "new Afghanistan", with Seay (2013) stating that

The idea that Mali is or could be the next Afghanistan is flat-out wrong, as is the notion that France's role in West Africa is likely to be akin to the US presence in Afghanistan. While there are comparisons to be made (e.g. both countries are struggling to combat the presence of Islamist extremists), the two situations are

so different that defining them as mere equivalents only seems to muddle clear thinking about Mali's current and future prospects.

More to the point, the circumstances of the French intervention in Mali are different from the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan and the global war on terror in that the French intervention was at the request of the Malian government and the actual intervention was based on specific objectives that will/should lead to the withdrawal of French troops.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the above analysis, the conflict in Mali and the French intervention have short- and long-term implications for the maintenance of international peace and security in the years to come. Military action alone will not end the crisis in Mali and the associated terrorist and Islamist extremist problems in the Sahel region and West Africa, nor will it immediately lead to post-war peacebuilding and state reconstruction, especially when the French have indicated that the intervention is not about post-war nation-building.

The **generic recommendations** pertinent to the conflict in Mali and the French intervention include the following:

- The solution to the crisis in Mali should be seen as a regional problem that requires a regional approach to dealing with Islamist extremists, as well as addressing the depressing regional socioeconomic and development issues of poverty, injustice, drought and famine.
- There should be recognition that the French military intervention and the planned July elections are short-term-, quick-fix- and exit-strategy-oriented interventions that do not guarantee long-term peace and stability.
- There should be a commitment to long-term post-war peacebuilding, state reconstruction and development by the key actors of the international community led by France and ECOWAS, similar to the British-led international community's support to post-war peacebuilding and state reconstruction in the West African state of Sierra Leone that has seen the country organise three peaceful democratic elections and transfers of civilian political authority between 2002 and 2012.
- French and AFISMA troops should not withdraw until the government of Mali and the Malian army are able to establish authority and control over the whole country.

Neighbouring states should strengthen the security and policing of their porous borders with Mali.

Specifically, there are short- and long-term non-military intervention strategies that Mali, France, Norway, ECOWAS, the AU and the international community could undertake to consolidate durable post-war peacebuilding, state reconstruction and development.

The **government of Mali** should:

- use the opportunity provided by the crisis and war to develop a new strategic vision and roadmap for the future direction of post-war Mali based on inclusive democratic politics and political accountability;
- organise a national political dialogue that will lead to a final political settlement of the Tuareg separatist grievances through an inclusive, negotiated political framework of devolved regional government for the Tuaregs within a new federal political framework;
- reform the country's military and security agencies and national governance institutions for efficient political and economic management of the state;
- undertake, with the support of the international community, a verifiable programme for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of all combatants;
- remove the powerful junta leader, Captain Sanogo, from the political scene in Mali by providing incentives to him for further studies and professional career advancement through a fully funded scholarship programme in a Western country;
- encourage the winner of the scheduled July 2013 presidential elections to form a broad-based national unity government in the spirit of national reconciliation and the inclusive representation of the country's diverse and fractious political class; and
- immediately approve the deployment of a UN peace-keeping force in Mali.

The **government of France** should:

- learn the lesson that military intervention in a foreign country should immediately be followed by non-military political, diplomatic and socioeconomic development programmes specifically aimed at nation-building;
- support and encourage the winner of the July 2013 presidential elections to form a broadbased national unity government as a strategy to consolidate post-war peace and national reconciliation;
- provide financial and technical support for the reform of the security sector and the carrying out of DDR in post-war Mali;
- encourage the Sahelian states through diplomatic initiatives and pressure to develop a regional approach to fighting terrorism and the spread of Islamist extremism;
- provide a five-year graduate study or professional career development scholarship programme for Captain Sanogo and his key military allies for studies in France as a diplomatic strategy to remove the powerful coupist from the Malian political scene; and
- facilitate the formation of an International Contact Group on Mali (Friends of Mali) to mobilise international resources for long-term post-war peacebuilding, state reconstruction and development.

The **government of Norway** should:

- renew its development assistance to Mali based on conditions of verifiable benchmarks for political and governance reform, and in particular gender equality, and

support increased women's participation at all levels of democratic representation in Mali;

- play a leadership role in facilitating, in collaboration with the Norwegian Church Aid mediation group, a national political dialogue on devolved government for Tuaregs in northern Mali as a long-term solution to the fundamental grievances of the marginalised Tuareg community; and
- support and fund, in partnership with the international community, the security sector and governance reform programmes of the government of Mali.

#### **ECOWAS and the AU** should:

- facilitate a regional approach to the resolution of the crisis in Mali beyond the military intervention phase;
- in collaboration with the UN and EU, support the security sector and governance reforms of the government of Mali;
- support the training, professionalisation and democratic accountability of the Malian army;
- facilitate the transformation of AFISMA into a UN peacekeeping and peace support operation to replace French troops in Mali; and
- lead a new ECOWAS-AU initiative, with the support of the international community, to prevent terrorism and the spread of Islamist extremism in the Sahel and Sahara regions.

#### The **UN and EU** should:

- approve the deployment of a new UN peacekeeping and peace support mission in Mali with a Charter VII peace enforcement mandate to replace the French- and African-led forces in Mali;
- open a peacebuilding support office in Mali to support, fund and facilitate the government's post-war security sector and governance reform programmes; and
- through diplomatic and political pressure and economic and development incentives encourage the winner of the July 2013 presidential elections to form a broad-based government of national unity as a strategy to consolidate post-war peacebuilding and national reconciliation.

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