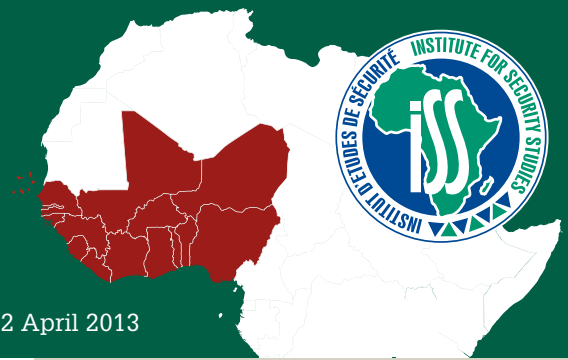


ECOWAS Peace and Security Report

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The political economy of conflicts in northern Mali

Introduction

Recent developments in Mali (the chaotic split of the north, the institutional crisis in the south), Libya (the fall of the Gaddafi regime and the proliferation of tribal-Jihadist militia) and Nigeria (the emergence of the Jihadist Salafism of Boko Haram) have introduced new risks that threaten the stability of the whole Sahel-Saharan region. While some of the actors have engaged in what is commonly described as terrorism (hostage taking, attacks, etc.), the situation in Mali, particularly in the north, makes it difficult to determine the status of the different organisations present (liberation movements, ethnic-tribal guerrillas, Mafia-type criminal organisations, etc.).¹

It is worthwhile recalling that historical sources show that caravans of traders carrying gold, slaves and other products crossed the Sahel-Sahara from the Sudan to the Arab cities and on their way back supplied the whole of West Africa with salt, cloth, manuscripts and weapons, among other goods. Depending on the context, the commercial transactions took various forms, but there was always some kind of institutionalised violence and the active trading often took place against a backdrop of armed conflict.

The present groups active in the north of Mali arose at least partly from the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). Emerging from the defunct Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA), this movement came to the Sahel-Saharan strip in 1994 looking for weapons. When it came into contact with the local population and authorities, it quickly realised that by settling in the area it could mitigate the effects of the reconciliation plan implemented by the Algerian government.² The 'penetration' strategy it adopted consisted of sending 16 people on a reconnaissance mission,³ infiltrating the social fabric and mobilising the youth around the ideals of the movement.

In 2003 the Saharan branch of the GSPC settled on northern Mali as the base for its activities. That choice seems to have been dictated by the proximity to Algeria, as well as the low level of Malian control over this part of the country and the opportunities this provided to engage in all kinds of trafficking (drugs, arms, migrants, etc.). Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was born out of the 'affiliation' of the GSPC with the elusive Jihadist movement al-Qaeda.

The purpose of this report is to provide a background to the emergence of the main armed groups present in northern Mali before the French intervention and to describe their modes of financing. The analysis is twofold, with the first part focusing on AQIM, describing the structure of the organisation and its mode of financing, how it overlaps with the local economy and its sources of income. The second part deals with the so-called 'local' movements, Ansar al-Dine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA).⁴

ECOWAS PEACE AND SECURITY REPORT SERIES

The *ECOWAS Peace and Security Report* series seeks to provide the decision makers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with analysis on critical and topical human security situations in West Africa. It results from a partnership between the ISS and the ECOWAS Commission (Regional Security Division). The objective is to produce independent, field-based policy research in a timely manner to inform ECOWAS decision-making process or alert its governing structures on emerging issues. The *ECOWAS Peace and Security Report* series includes analyses of country situations and other thematic issues with recommendations. It is circulated, free of charge, both electronically and in hard copy, to a diverse audience in West Africa and beyond. The *ECOWAS Peace and Security Report* is produced by the Conflict Prevention and Risk Analysis Division (CPRA) in ISS Dakar with the support of CPRA staff in ISS Addis Ababa, ISS Nairobi and ISS Pretoria.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Organisation and structure of AQIM

Al-Qaeda is not organised in hierarchical, operational or geographical segments. The image of al-Qaeda as a kind of 'holding organisation', acting vicariously through 'subsidiaries', conveyed mainly by the media, gives a false picture of its structure, which still remains unclear. While its general leadership is well known, there is little information on its operational levels and real organisational links with affiliated geographical groups. Most specialists describe it as being made up of highly partitioned and 'segmented' hierarchical structures that enable it to combine vertical rigidity in terms of ordinary planning with the capacity of segments to act independently in exceptional circumstances.

The relationship between the mother organisation and its basic structures is similar to the franchise system practised by major corporations. The affiliated group is granted the right to use the logo, media and procedures of the brand provided it complies with a number of principles and pays certain fees. The hierarchical relationship is similar to a traditional allegiance. All organisations, irrespective of their size and mission, are led by an 'Emir' who has broad powers over the actions and members of the group.

AQIM inherited its main institutional structures from the GSPC, although it had to adapt them gradually to its 'globalisation' drive and the special conditions in its main geographical area of operations – the Sahara. The GSPC occupied nine regions, compared to the four occupied by AQIM. Each region is divided into *katibas*, which themselves are further divided into *sariyyas*.⁵ The number of troops in the *katibas* and *sariyyas* varies considerably.

The highest organ hierarchically is the *majlis al'a'yan* (the Council of Headmen), which brings together the Emirs and eminent persons co-opted from each region. It determines the main policies and appoints the Emir General. The next major structure is the *majlis ach-chura* (the Advisory Council) composed of the members of the supreme organ as well as the chairmen of the technical committees (communication, legislation, military, external relations, etc.) together with the representatives of the relevant regions, depending on the agenda. It provides an opinion on all issues submitted by the Emir General, the main executive authority.

The 'Centre' region covers zones 1, 2 and 3 of the GSPC (Algiers and its suburbs, Kabylie and the east coast of Algeria). It is the most active because it brings together the largest number of combatants (3 *katibas*, representing between 500 and 800 men), who are said to be established in the Aurès Mountains. The 'West' region, the least active, covers the GSPC's zones 4 and 8 (the western part of Algeria extending to Morocco, as well as the south-west of the country), depends on the 'South' region and is used as a conduit for weapons. The 'East' region covers

zones 5, 6 and 7 of the GSPC, is also highly dependent on the 'South' region and hosts about 100 combatants. The 'South' region (ninth region of the GSPC) is in charge of the Sahara and the Sahel.

The boundaries of the regions are not always clearly defined and the regions differ greatly from each other in terms of size and strategic interest. The 'East' and 'West' regions are secondary compared to the 'Centre' and 'South'. The 'Centre' region is at the heart of the traditional social vision and historical legitimacy of the movement, although the 'South' region is becoming increasingly prominent as the instrument of its internationalisation. The 'South' region is currently by far the most important structure of AQIM. Led from early October 2012 by the Algerian Yahya Jawadi abul-Humam (Jamal 'Ukacha, who replaces Moussa Abu Daud, who succeeded Yahya Jawadi in 2007), it is composed of two *katibas* and, exceptionally for AQIM, of two autonomous *sariyyas*.

The two *katibas* are *Katibat al-mulaththamin*, led by the Algerian Khaled abul Abbas (Mokhtar Belmokhtar, alias Bellawar),⁶ and *Katibat Tariq ibn Zayyad*, established by Abderrazzak El Para in 2003 and, since his arrest in March 2004, led by another Algerian, Abd al-Hamid Abu Zayd (Gadir Mohamed).⁷ They operate in two areas: *Katibat almulaththamin* in the 'West' region, which stretches from the south-west of Algeria to the north of Mali and Mauritania; and *Katibat Tariq ibn Zayyad* in the 'East' region, which extends from Timétrine to the border with Chad through the north of Niger.

The two autonomous *sariyyas* are *Sariyyat al-Furqan*, led until early October 2012 by the Algerian Yahya abul-Humam (Jamal 'Ukacha)⁸ and *Sariyyat al-Ansar*, led by the Tuareg Malik Abu Abdel-Karim (Ahmad ag Umama). Initially the latter was composed exclusively of Tuaregs.

The AQIM 'mode of production'

In the absence of reliable figures, any attempt to evaluate the financial status of AQIM is merely tentative.⁹

AQIM's activities in the region are more in the form of a public service than a business enterprise. The economy of this zone is part of what economists call 'a war economy', where the military effort structures and justifies everything else. As usual, the different parts of this effort (troops, weapons, positions, etc.) are 'defence secrets'.

Firstly, with regard to human resources, AQIM, though well established in northern Mali, has forged strong alliances, often strengthened through marriage bonds, with both the tribal headmen and the networks of traffickers who operate in a region that extends well beyond their safe havens.

From January 2012 until the latest events in Azawad, AQIM units travelled across the Sahara, easily crossing the borders of Mauritania, Algeria, Mali and Niger. Satellites cannot differentiate a group of warriors from any other group of Bedouins. They travel quickly over huge territories where it is possible to cover hundreds of kilometres without seeing a single soul.

Experts agree on the relatively low number of AQIM fighters, estimated at between 500 and 1 000. These fighters are mainly Algerians, but the organisation also welcomes Mauritians, Moroccans, Libyans, Malians and Nigerians. Out of a total of about 100 men, one-third of the Bellawar *katiba*¹⁰ apparently consists of Mauritians. However, in estimating AQIM's numbers one should distinguish between the *moujahidines*, who structurally belong to the organisation, and the 'auxiliaries', who provide it with various services without being members.

Talking to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Malian National Assembly meeting of 11 May 2011, Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, then the Malian Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated that AQIM in Mali 'numbers about 250 to 300 men', but that 'the real number of combatants is about 100, to which one should add those who earn a living from the activities of the organisation'. AQIM easily recruits youths because of their marginalisation and the endemic unemployment.

Most of the AQIM combatants in northern Mali are foreigners who depend on the nomadic population's knowledge of the terrain. They also depend on the local population for logistical support, particularly water supplies, food and fuel.

In 2011, the Algerian security services drew up a black list of members of terrorist groups active in the Sahel-Saharan region, together with their photos. There are 108 suspects on the list, including 21 Algerians. Most of the names are Mauritanian, numbering 34. There are also five Moroccans, three Tunisians, six Libyans, 14 Nigerians, seven Chadians and 21 Malians. The list was prepared by the security forces of the Sahel countries in charge of fighting terrorism. It seems that more than half of the new recruits of the al-Qaeda branch in the Sahara are from Mauritania and Mali. However, the leadership of the movement is still in the hands of Algerians.

Secondly, regarding its contribution to the local economy, AQIM used a 'seduction' strategy aimed at stimulating the hitherto non-existent local economy, thus providing many services to the population and thereby ensuring its deep penetration of the zone. This integrated strategy is based on employment- and income-generating activities, including the recruitment of combatants and auxiliaries (guides, drivers, informers, paramedical staff); the supply of foodstuffs (cereals, sugar, tea, etc.), fuel, tyres, spare parts and weapons; and subcontracting hostage taking and hostage keeping.

AQIM took advantage of the lack of public structures to occupy the space vacated by failed states. Today, whole families derive their livelihoods from activities generated by AQIM. The Arab-Berber traditional chiefs have lost their authority and can do nothing about AQIM's increasing popularity. Moreover, the organisation has forged blood relations by marriage between its men and young local girls.

AQIM's main financial resources are derived, directly or indirectly, from traditional banditry (smuggling, racketeering, extortion of public funds, levies on the trafficking of drugs, cigarettes or

human beings, etc.). The use of these resources has been much debated by the *fuqalia* (Muslim legal advisers) and Jihadist organisations. The first fatwa authorising the financing of the jihad by such activities goes back to the 1990s, and a 2001 *fatwa* by the Syrian Salafist *faqih* Abu Bassir al-Tartusi legitimised the use of illicit sources to finance the jihad. The extortion of public funds is justified by the claim that such funds are illegally held by regimes considered to be apostate, and that combatants have a rightful share in all public goods.

The increasing levies on all forms of trafficking (cigarettes, drugs and fuel) have recently become AQIM's most lucrative activity. The levy takes the form of a right-of-way fee paid by smugglers passing through territory under the control of AQIM, with the old salt caravan routes used today by trucks carrying smuggled cigarettes, weapons, illegal immigrants, hashish or cocaine.

However, there is still disagreement about how deeply the Jihadists are involved in this trafficking. Most observers believe that the combatants do not take part in but only facilitate the transit of smuggled goods, unless the latter are meant for the 'infidels'. At least for now, the interests of the drug traffickers and Jihadists seem to converge. AQIM is believed to provide security for the cocaine convoys illegally crossing the Sahara. There are still questions about the circumstances surrounding the incident in which a plane chartered by a South American cartel burned out in November 2012 along with its cargo after crash-landing near Gao in the Jihadist-controlled zone.

The right-of-way fees levied are large and collected relatively regularly. Some estimate them to amount to €100 million a year. Bellawar's involvement in this type of trade is well known, which is why he is called 'Mr Marlboro'. His main rival in the Saharan zone, Abou Zeid, denounced this trafficking and, in 2008, called a meeting of the Council of Headmen, which decided in his favour and called for more 'respectable' financing: hostage taking and revolutionary taxation.

Thereafter, AQIM tried to legitimise hostage taking by considering hostages to be prisoners of war. Islamic law allows those holding hostages to use them as ransom or as a means of exchange to obtain the release of other prisoners.

Negotiations are always conducted in the same manner: claims (proof of detention) followed by a ransom, often partly open (release of hostages) and partly secret (money). Every time hostages are released, whether publicly or not, there is always a financial deal in the background. This activity is said to yield more than €50 million some years.

- The first foreign hostages taken were 32 Europeans in Tassili in February 2003. Thirty-one of them were released for a ransom of €5 million.
- On 22 February 2008, two Austrian tourists were kidnapped in Tunisia before being transferred to northern Mali. AQIM claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and released the hostages in October. The organisation was reported to have received at least €2 million.

- On 14 December 2008, a Canadian, Robert Fowler, the special envoy of the UN Secretary General to Niger, was kidnapped in that country along with his assistant and driver. AQIM claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and they were released in Mali on 21 April 2009.
- On 22 January 2009, four European tourists (two Swiss, one German and one British citizen) were kidnapped on the border between Mali and Niger. On 3 June, AQIM announced that it had killed the British citizen, Edwin Dyer. The three others were released in April and July. AQIM reportedly executed Dyer because the UK refused to meet its demands.
- On 26 November 2009, a Frenchman, Pierre Camatte, was kidnapped in Ménaka in Mali. He was released on 23 February 2010. Camatte's release followed intense negotiations by Paris, Bamako and Algiers, and the open part of the deal resulted in the release of four Salafists (two Algerians, one Mauritanian and one Burkinabe) jailed in Bamako.
- On 29 November 2009, three Spanish relief workers (Alicia Gamez, Roque Pascual and Albert Vilalta), members of the NGO Barcelona Acciosolidaria, were kidnapped on the Nouakchott-Nouadhibou road. Gamez was released on 1 March 2010. On 23 August 2010, the release of the two other Spanish relief workers was officially announced. In exchange, AQIM reportedly obtained the release of Omar the Sahrawi and was paid €7–8 million.
- On 18 December 2009, two Italians (Sergio Cicala and his wife Philomène Kaboré) were kidnapped in Mauritania and transferred to the AQIM-controlled zone in northern Mali. They were released on 16 April 2010.

The series of kidnappings is the clearest indicator that the Saharan branch of AQIM was stepping up its activities. Thanks to these resources, the organisation is reported to earn about €130 million annually. In September 2012, during a UN debate on a global anti-terrorist strategy, an adviser to Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika stated that Western countries had so far paid €150 million to AQIM in exchange for the release of hostages. It now costs €2,5 million to obtain the release of one hostage. This is enough to provide the organisation with weapons, for it to win the war for the hearts of people abandoned by the state, and to attract Sahel-Saharan youths who grow up in an environment that worships arms, revolt and illegal trading.

Hence AQIM's decision to significantly redirect its activities toward this niche. However, this resource comes with some risks. Beyond the fierce response of the international community, the amounts involved have caused leadership conflicts, the most significant of which has for a number of years divided the leaders of the two *katibas* of the Sahara, apparently resulting in the dismissal of Bellawar. The exacerbation of this conflict may also be due to dwindling resources, since Western countries now refuse to pay any ransoms.

On 19 April 2010, Michel Germaneau, a 78-year-old French national, and his Algerian driver were kidnapped in the north of Niger. On 22 July, the Mauritanian army conducted an operation

against an Al-Qaeda base in the desert. Paris confirmed that it took part in the operation with the objective of finding Germaneau. On 25 April, the AQIM leader Abou Moussab Abdel Wadoud announced in a recorded message that the hostage had been executed. On 26 April, French President Nicolas Sarkozy confirmed Germaneau's death.

On 16 September 2010, five French nationals, one Togolese and one Madagascan, mainly employees of the French groups Areva and Satom, were kidnapped at night in the mining region of Arlit in the north of Niger. They are still being held by their kidnapers.

'Local' movements

The Salafist or Jihadist ideology is not well rooted among the local population, who are deeply attached to their traditional forms of worshipping. The elite of these communities generally do not welcome the practices promoted by the Salafist or Jihadist movements as they fear such practices may usurp their authority. That is why the Malian and Algerian authorities are sometimes tempted to mobilise these populations against AQIM. In 2001, for example, the Algerian security services reportedly supplied the Tuaregs with weapons and incited them to fight against AQIM. A few clashes occurred. More recently, Tuaregs returning from Libya said they wanted to clean up the region by driving out the AQIM *katibas* and the traffickers. These statements, which pleased Western countries, were not followed by any action. Relations between the Tuaregs and AQIM seem to have more or less stabilised. For the former, deprived as they are of the late Muammar Gaddafi's support and engaged in a new rebellion in Mali, it does not seem advisable to fight AQIM. The Tuaregs reportedly also took part in various AQIM operations, including the kidnapping of foreigners in Arlit, Niger. A young Tuareg staying in the same hotel was apparently responsible for the kidnapping of two French nationals in Hombori, Mali in November 2011. He is believed to have sold them to AQIM for €30 000.

There is no doubt that AQIM, which is not a big organisation, needs logistical support and intermediaries to conduct its activities. The impoverished local communities are often tempted by this lucrative criminality. Collaborating with the *katibas* can provide a livelihood to many families. The locals therefore find it increasingly difficult to resist the financial proposals of these organisations. For example, in 2011 delivering a Frenchman could fetch €86 000. The large amounts at stake destroyed the protection systems that the Europeans who went into these areas thought they enjoyed.

The fall of Gaddafi and the deterioration of the political situation in Mali led to the emergence of new 'local' movements, most of which were spawned by AQIM. This fragmentation may mainly be due to the complex tribal-ethnic disputes in northern Mali, but it may also indicate an attempt to decentralise and localise the movement before the impending war.

The youth of these organisations and the complex conditions surrounding their emergence make it somewhat tricky to



Members of Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) Picture: © Brahim Ouedraogo/IRIN

evaluate their human and material resources. It does seem clear, however, that the two largest of these organisations, Ansar al-Dine and MUJWA, have benefitted from the resources related to trafficking and hostage taking, the hasty departure of the Malian armed forces and the administration and support provided by AQIM.

Ansar al-Dine

This group, founded in 2011 by the Malian Tuareg Iyad Ag Ghali, claims to be an independent Islamist Salafist movement. Established within the Ifoghas Tuaregs, it presently controls the region of Kidal and has announced that is determined to create an Islamic state in Mali.

Ansar al-Dine was apparently born out of the Ifoghas Tuaregs' desire for independence and the hegemony of their territory, as well as the political ambitions of Iyad Ag Ghali, the leader of all the Tuareg movements in Mali since 1991. In 2010, apparently because of his links with the Islamists,¹¹ Iyad Ag Ghali was compelled to leave a diplomatic post in Saudi Arabia to which he had been appointed following the Algiers Agreement in 2006. After playing a probably well-paid role in the release of Camatte and the three Arlit hostages, Iyad Ag Ghali quickly anticipated the risks and gains of the post-Gaddafi era. After his execrable relationship with Mohamed Ag Najim, the military leader of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), hurt his bid for the post of MNLA secretary-general, he sought to succeed old Intalla Ag Attaher, the customary chief of the Kidal region. The Tribal Assembly finally endorsed the selection of Intalla's second son, al-Abbass.

In 2012 he succeeded in recruiting several of his tribesmen from the AQIM unit led by Abdel Karim al-Targui. This group took part in the MNLA attacks against Aguelhoc on 18 and 24 January 2012 and participated in the MNLA attack on the Amashash garrison on 10 March 2012. In a video posted on YouTube the next day

the group officially adopted the name Ansar al-Dine. Iyad Ag Ghali was able to claim that he was the main architect of the defeat of the Malian armed forces in the north and of the conquest in three days of the regional capitals of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. Parading with an impressive convoy of new 4x4 vehicles, he negotiated the division of the region: Gao was given to MUJWA, Kidal to Ansar al-Dine and Timbuktu to AQIM under the auspices of Ansar al-Dine.

Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA)

Founded in 2011 within the Lamhar Arab population of Azawad, MUJWA made a name for itself by kidnapping three Westerners in the Sahrawi camps of Rabbouni in October 2011 and seven diplomats from the Algerian Consulate in Gao. Until the military intervention in January 2013, the movement helped control Gao together with al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Dine.

Not much is known about the leadership of the movement. Initially there were claims that its leader was Sultan Ould Badi (formerly of AQIM, often mentioned as a member of the networks that managed the drug trafficking logistics). Presently, the movement is believed to be led by a triumvirate composed of Ahmed Ould Ansar, the Emir of the movement, an Arab from Telemsi; Hamada Ould Mohamed Khayri, a Mauritanian and head of the Committee for the Application of Sharia Law, a former rising star in AQIM whose dispute with the latter's management was apparently caused by their refusal to allow him to create a *katiba* or *sariyya* unit for the 'local' Arabs; and Adnan Abou Walid, the movement's spokesperson and a native of Western Sahara.

MUJWA's Saharan connections are evidenced by its first major action: kidnapping three Europeans in the Sahrawi refugee camps managed by the Polisario. The movement's fighters are made up of Malians belonging to the tribes of the region to the north of Gao, commonly called the Tilemsi Arabs. The core of this

community, the Lambar tribe, is generally closely associated with managing the logistics of drug trafficking in Mali. With a clearly Salafist ideology, MUJWA seems to be open to different types of combatants from sub-Saharan Africa. The prominence of the Tilemsi Arabs is the reason why, when the division of the north was negotiated by Iyad Ag Ghali following the withdrawal of the Malian armed forces, Gao was allocated to MUJWA. With its large income from trafficking and especially the €15 million it reportedly received as ransom for the three European hostages captured in Tindouf, MUJWA currently appears to be the wealthiest movement. The superiority of the MUJWA forces was clearly demonstrated when it drove the MNLA out of Gao on 27 June 2012.

Conclusion

When the French Operation Serval was launched, followed by the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), AQIM was perceived with growing hostility by the host communities as a 'foreign' body (in terms of both religion and nationality). The open conflict between the two Emirs, Bellawar and Abou Zeid, did not help the situation. Moreover, the group seemed gradually to be overrun by Ansar al-Dine and MUJWA. However, the latest developments related to the stepping up of the military action may indicate a controlled 'local disbandment' strategy by AQIM. Faced with the military intervention, AQIM may have created groups that can claim local legitimacy in order to melt into the local population with a view to engaging in guerrilla warfare and participating in peace negotiations when the time comes.

Iyad Ag Ghali's inability to gain a dominant position among the Ifoghas and the costly efforts to offset this weakness in other regions may have scattered the forces of Ansar al-Dine, causing the movement to run out of cash and recruits. Faced with the imminent occupation of Kidal, the traditional Ifoghas aristocracy seems to have decided to cut all ties with Ansar al-Dine. Indeed, on 24 January 2013, it announced the creation of a new group, the Islamic Movement of Azawad. This movement has since indicated that it is willing to sever its links with AQIM and negotiate with Bamako. MUJWA, the wealthiest of the three Islamist groups, also seems equally limited by the quasi-mono-ethnicity of its leadership and its close links to drug trafficking. It also faces increasing hostility from other ethnic groups in the Gao region, particularly the Songhaï and Peuls.

The growth of these movements has negatively impacted the economic development of the area. It encouraged criminality to grow and helped terrorist violence find room for expansion, particularly in Nigeria with Boko Haram. Their attacks, and hostage taking, as well as the inability of governments to stop them, have caused the deterioration of security in the zone, keeping away increasing numbers of investors. However, the on-going military operations in northern Mali have also disrupted the various illegal activities that had flourished in the region.

The illicit activities of the local criminal networks that cohabited with these movements strongly dominate the local economy, particularly in the cigarette, drugs and fuel sectors. The resources mobilised by these organisations and their activities have a negative impact on the area for several reasons. In terms of governance, they considerably derail the peoples' will. By allowing votes to be bought during elections, they pervert democracy and alienate all of those who do not benefit from the crooked politics. In this way they significantly erode societal values. Productive work is abandoned in favour of trafficking, which is much more profitable and takes very little effort.

Fighting against these organisations necessarily involves depriving them of their funding sources and financing networks. Within the organisations and activities analysed, large amounts are mobilised, mostly in cash. All of this trafficking generally involves informal financing channels. This is not to say that all the funds circulating in similar manner in the region come from illicit sources, but there is no doubt that these networks enable the couriering and laundering of most of the funds going to or coming from illegal activities.

It should be noted that the informal financial system that has developed independently of the conventional system is best adapted to operations where anonymity, liquidity and speed are essential. It is generally agreed that the amounts involved are huge and over and above the amounts circulating in the entire official financial sector.

Most of the rules of this system are derived from traditional trade financing (agreements are often verbal and guarantees are based on trust and the capacity to retaliate in case of non-compliance). Networks are based on relationships: kinship, friendship and other kinds of community relationships (religious, tribal, etc.). The development of telecommunications, especially fax and mobile phones, has considerably facilitated informal financial transactions. Operations range from simple fund transfers to complex credit and investment transactions. The porosity of the so-called formal systems makes it quite easy to launder the proceeds of illicit trading since the final destinations are rarely local. The formalisation and control of the informal financial system are the most effective weapons against these networks.

Since the Libyan crisis and the fall of the Gaddafi regime, the risk of seeing an axis of terrorism in Africa extend from Mauritania to Nigeria, and thereafter Somalia, remains a worrying prospect for all those concerned about the future of the continent. While the launching of Operation Serval and the deployment of AFISMA to support the Malian troops raised hopes, the fact remains that military action will only have a limited impact on these practices. Fighting these organisations necessarily involves depriving them of their sources of funding and their financing networks. No state in the region can do this alone – it will require close collaboration among states and the support of the international community.

Recommendations

1. Step up the fight against illegal trafficking, especially drug trafficking. In view of the weakness of the Establishment and the fact that it is deeply infiltrated by powerful transnational criminal organisations, only a concerted effort under the supervision and with the support of the international community, with coordination at the sub-regional, continental and international levels, will make it possible to conduct such a mission successfully.
2. Take measures to prohibit illicit activities by calling upon the traditional codes of ethics of the different components of this criminal economy. Such measures involve, among others, mobilising religious authorities (imams, ulemas, etc.) to disseminate a *fiqhi* message (based on Muslim jurisprudence that governs worship, the status of individuals, and social intercourse) that is clear and precise and prohibits all association with such activities. The Mauritanian authorities, for example, in 2010 initiated negotiations between the ulemas and Salafists that led to the release and social rehabilitation of more than 40 of the 70 Salafists detained.
3. Help the populations involved in this economy to find more sustainable alternative income-generating activities. The participation of the states concerned, ECOWAS and development partners will be essential to ensure that people currently benefitting from these activities have access to genuine alternatives. Understandably the income thus generated will be much lower than their current earnings. However, the security, social status and religious salvation they hope to gain will make up for the gap.
4. Formalise and control the financial systems – the most effective weapons against these networks. The average banking rate of states in the region is about 5 per cent. Measures should be put in place to improve this rate. Further, there is a need to devise appropriate standards for overseeing financial institutions and adopt effective tools for monitoring money laundering, including by limiting and regulating cash transactions. The Intergovernmental Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) could play a major role in this.

Important dates

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|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| February–
March 2003 | Kidnapping in Illizi, Algeria, of 32 Europeans, 31 of whom were released for a ransom of \$5 million. | 18 December 2009 | Kidnapping of two Italians in Mauritania. They were transferred to the AQIM-controlled zone in northern Mali before being released on 16 April 2012. |
| 22 February 2008 | Kidnapping of two Austrian tourists in Tunisia by AQIM. They were transferred to northern Mali and released in October for a ransom of €2 million. | 19 April 2010 | Kidnapping of a Frenchman and his Algerian driver in the north of Niger. His execution was announced on 25 July by the leader of AQIM, Abou Moussab Abdel Wadoud. It was confirmed on 26 July by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. |
| 14 December 2008 | Kidnapping of a Canadian, Robert Fowler, special envoy of the UN Secretary General to Niger, together with his assistant and driver by AQIM. They were released on 21 April 2009. | 5 April 2012 | Kidnapping of 7 diplomats of the Consulate of Algeria in Gao, Mali by MUJWA. Three of the hostages were released in July. One of the diplomats was reportedly executed on 2 September and three are said to be still held by the kidnappers. |
| 22 January 2009 | Kidnapping of four European tourists (two Swiss, one German and one Brit) on the border between Mali and Niger by AQIM. The British national was executed on 3 June and the others released in April and July. | 16 September 2012 | Kidnapping of five French nationals, one Togolese and one Madagascan in the mining region of Arlit. They are still being held by their kidnappers. |
| 26 November 2009 | Kidnapping of Frenchman Pierre Camatte in Ménaka, Mali. He was released on 23 February 2012 in exchange for four Salafists jailed in Bamako. | 16 January 2013 | Kidnapping in the gas fields of In-Amenas in Algeria by the new katiba of Belmokhtar called 'the blood signatories'. The provisional toll of the attack by the special Algerian forces and kidnappings is 67 dead and five foreigners missing. |
| 29 November 2009 | Kidnapping of three Spanish relief workers on the Nouakchott-Nouadhibou road. One was released on 10 March 2012 and the other two on 23 August in exchange for the release of Omar the Sahrawi and a ransom of between €7–8 million. | | |

Notes

- 1 This paper was presented at a workshop organised by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in Dakar on 8 November 2012, on the theme: 'Mali: making peace while preparing for war'. Some changes have been made to take into account the rapid development of the situation since the French intervention on 11 January 2013.
- 2 By Order no. 06-01 of 27 February 2006 on the implementation of the National Peace and Reconciliation Charter, Algeria granted a broad amnesty to all terrorists who gave themselves up within six months. There were said to be between 6 000 and 9 000 who gave themselves up, including Hassan Hattab, the leader of the GSPC.
- 3 Of these 16 people selected within the 'Saharan Vanguard' movement, only Mokhtar Belmokhtar, alias Bellawar, survives today.
- 4 Although the activities of Boko Haram in Mali receive a lot of coverage, this movement focuses mainly on Nigeria (similarly to the GIA and GSPC in their early days in Algeria) and owes its yet-to-be-confirmed internationalisation, logical in view of its evolution, to the international recognition of the al-Qaeda label.
- 5 Drawing from Islamic military tradition, the organisation into *katibas*, *sariyyas*, *fassilas* and *jama'as* was copied by most of the Muslim armies, often corresponding to the type of organisation inherited from Western armies: *katiba* for battalion (about 300 men); *sariyya* for squadron (fewer than 100 men); *fassila* for platoon and *jama'a* for group. The GSPC, and later AQIM, copied the structure of the National Liberation Army (ALN), which adapted this organisation to guerrilla conditions and the practice of the Prophet: lighter units, organised according to the type of mission.
- 6 According to a recent press report this *katiba* has broken away from AQIM and is now a separate organisation. It is reported to have established *Katibat al-muwaqqi 'inbid-dima* (*katiba* of blood signatories), who are said to have participated in the In-Amenas hostage taking in Algeria. This information was confirmed by Bellawar himself in a video that was broadly disseminated after the In-Amenas operation. Chad has announced that it had killed Bellawar. Several sources close to the Jihadist movements have denied this claim. Algeria has not confirmed it.
- 7 Chad, followed by France, announced that Abu Zayd had been killed. To date, Algeria has not confirmed this death. Certain sources close to AQIM have denied this information.
- 8 Led since December 2012 by the Mauritanian Abdallah al-chinguity.
- 9 We rely mainly on information published in the media and gathered from interviews with actors in an attempt to provide an estimate of this economy.
- 10 See note 5 above.
- 11 While it seems that Iyad Ag Ghali did indeed have relations with the fundamentalist movement *ad-da 'uwattabligh* (he is said to have performed the initiatory journey to Pakistan, where the headquarters of the movement is located), there is still no evidence that he has ever worked with el-Qaeda.

Contributors

Dr Mohamed Fall Ould Bah
Saharan Research Center (RESA)
Nouakchott, Mauritania

Contact

Conflict Prevention
and Risk Analysis Division
ISS Dakar
Ouakam road, Atryum Building
(Accross Mermoz Lycée)
4th floor, B.P. 24378
Dakar, Senegal

Tel: +221 33 8603304/42
Fax: +221 33 860 3343
Email: dakar@issafrica.org
Website: www.issafrica.org

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