

Mali. Conflict Analysis

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Abstract. *The beginning of the 21st century brought about significant shifting trends in the predominant types of conflict that mankind was dealing with – as various conflict practitioners have often acknowledged. With a high degree of importance, magnitude, and prominence, the intrastate conflict is without a doubt a growing reality of our times, a reality impossible to ignore, as it affects human society at every level. Approached from a conflict practitioner perspective, in the present paper we strived to expose and analyze both context and elements of one of the most severe and highly publicized North African intrastate conflicts, which covered, for a year, one of the poorest countries from the African continent: The Republic of Mali. Far from claiming to be complete, the present paper performs its analysis through a bi-dimensional parallel approach, using the United States Institute of Peace and International Network for Education in Emergencies conflict analysis frameworks for gaining a plus of comprehensiveness and for offering valuable insights regarding the elements underlying the Mali conflict. The analysis focuses first on the geographical and socio-cultural context, and in the second part on the main actors in the Malian conflict. Once the elements mentioned above have been scanned, the reader has gained the basic knowledge for going deeper into the analysis, thus allowing him/her to observe the multiple causes and the dynamics of the Malian conflict. Finally, the analysis appeals to Michael Lund's Curve of Conflict in order to provide a visual timing framework upon the evolution of the conflict, as well as to serve as a basis for building other possible effective intervention strategies that could be implemented.*

Keywords: Mali, France, Senegal, Tuareg, Al-Qaeda, Ansar-Dine, AQIM.

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Conflict Studies Quarterly
Issue 3, April 2013, pp. 3-20

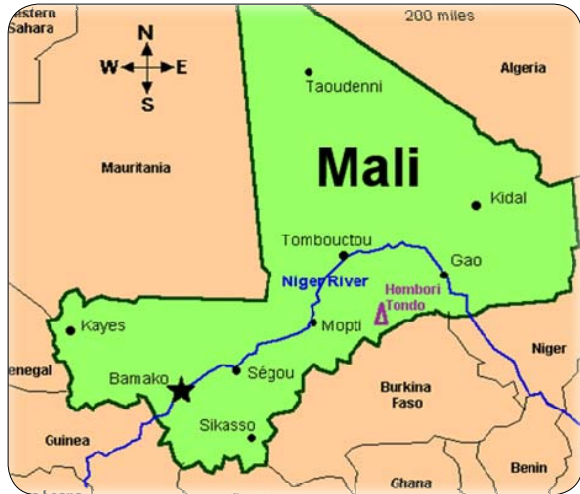
Mali Conflict – Another “Legalized” Afghanistan?

Mali – A Multi-Contextual Perspective

When trying to draw a comprehensive conflict portrait, it is necessary to first learn about its history. Although the Malian conflict was widely debated and presented across the globe by various media outlets, its history and culture still remained unknown for most of the people. Most outsiders

are presented only with the commercial part of the story, unable to understand all underlying factors behind a conflict. By descending into the Malian history, we will have the opportunity to gain knowledge about the disorganization, uncertainty, and violence that were long part of the poorest African state, embracing its latest facet within the 2012 spring uprising.

The Republic of Mali is the largest country in West Africa, sharing common borders with seven other African states: Algeria to the north-northeast; Niger to the east; Burkina Faso south-southeast; the Ivory Coast to the south; Senegal and Mauritania to the west. The country's **climate** spans across the transition zone between arid Sahelian savannah and the Sahara desert itself, exposing the country to substantial climatic variations as years of abundant



rainfall alternate with years of scarcity or actual drought (1977; 1982). Like in Egypt, the most important geographic feature of the country is undoubtedly the great river Niger, which crosses the Sahel and the southeastern section of the country, representing a critical source of sustenance and a major transportation artery. With a **population** of 14.5 million people, the Malian Republic can be considered a heterogeneous country, as more than 24 distinct ethnic groups live on the Malian territory: Mande 50% (Bambara, Malinke, Soninke), Peul 17%, Voltaic 12%, Songhai 6%, Tuareg and Moor 10%, other groups, 5%. In what concerns **religious** membership, 90% of the population is composed by Muslims, 9% have indigenous beliefs and 1% belong to the Christian religion. Although the official **language** is French, Mali's true lingua franca remains Bambara. **Administratively**, the Republic of Mali is divided into eight regions, namely Gao, Kayes, Kidal, Koulikoro, Mopti, Segou, Sikasso, Timbuktu, and the capital district-*Bamako*, each administered by a governor.

Malian History and the Path to Multi-Party Democracy

The history of modern Mali can be divided in **three periods: Pre-colonial Mali; Colonial Mali; and the Republic of Mali**. Throughout history, the Malian region was the seat of extensive empires and kingdoms. The first of these empires was *Ghana*, which controlled the trans-Saharan caravan routes from 4th to 11th century. It was a powerful empire, dominated by the Soninke or Saracolé people, and it was centered in the area along the Malian-Mauritanian frontier. Then Ghana fell under invasions by the Muslim

Almoravids only to be soon replaced by the *Mandinko Empire of Mali*. The medieval empire of Mali was a powerful state and one of the world's chief gold suppliers; it reached its peak in the early 14th century, under the emperor Mansa Musa. During that time, Muslim scholarship reached new heights in Mali, and such cities as Timbuktu and Djenné became important centers of trade, learning and culture. However, Mali's power did not last too long, as in the 15th century it fell into the hands of Songhai. *The Songhai Empire* expanded its power from its center in Gao during the period 1465-1530. At its peak under Askia Mohammad, it encompassed the Hausa states as far as Kano (present-day Nigeria) and much of the territory that had belonged to the Malian Empire in the west. It was destroyed by a Moroccan invasion in 1591. The Moroccans, however, could not effectively dominate this vast region, which broke up into smaller states. By the late 18th century, the area was in a semi anarchic condition and was subject to incursions by the Tuareg and Fulani. The end of the Songhai Empire also marked the ending of the importance of the region as a trading center, as the trans-Saharan trade routes quickly lost their vitality after the establishment of the sea routes by the Europeans.

French military penetration of Soudan (the French name for the area) began around 1880. By 1898, the French conquest was virtually complete. A French civilian governor of Soudan was appointed in 1893, but resistance to French control did not end until 1898, when the Malinké warrior Samory Touré was defeated after 7 years of war. The French attempted to rule indirectly, but in many areas they disregarded traditional authorities and governed through appointed chiefs. A nationalist movement, spearheaded by trade unions and student groups, blossomed during the period between the two world wars. The Sudanese Union, a militantly anticolonial party, became the leading political force. Its leader, Modibo Keita, was a descendant of the Mali emperors. As a colony of French Soudan, Mali was administered with other French colonial territories as the *Federation of French West Africa*. After the French Constitutional Referendum in 1958, the Republic of Sudan became a member of the French Community and enjoyed complete internal autonomy.

In 1959, the republic joined Senegal to form the Mali Federation which became fully independent within the French Community on June 20, 1960. The federation collapsed on August 20, 1960, when Senegal seceded. On September 22, Sudan proclaimed itself the Republic of Mali and withdrew from the French Community. In order to promote the African unity, the Republic of Mali joined a largely symbolic union with Ghana and Guinea, joining also in 1963 the newborn Organization of African Unity. From another perspective, the political stage was dominated by the Sudanese Union-African Democratic Rally, headed by the Malian president Modibo Keita, who quickly declared the newborn republic a single party state. Keita engaged in developing socialist policies based on extensive nationalization, but the continuously deteriorating economy led to a decision to rejoin the Franc Zone in 1967, a decision which allowed French administrators to assume a supervisory role in their economy.

After the rejoining of 1967, militant factions from the Sudanese Union started to oppose it vehemently and the Malian president formed a people's militia to destroy this opposition. After the militia arrested several dissenting army officers, in November 1968, a group of young officers staged a bloodless coup and set up a 14-member Military Committee for National Liberation (CMLN), with Lt. Moussa Traoré as Chairman. The military leaders attempted to pursue economic reforms, while internal political struggles and the disastrous Sahelian drought shattered the country's agriculture economy by killing thousands of livestock and hindering crop production. A new constitution was approved in 1974, which was designed to move the republic toward civilian rule, although the military leaders still remained in power.

The Democratic Union of The Malian People was established in September 1976 and was followed in June 1979 by single-party presidential and legislative elections, where the *General Moussa Traoré* was reelected president by over 90% of the voters. He managed to repress three coup attempts in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and was elected again in 1985. In the same year, a border dispute with Burkina Faso erupted into armed conflict. Although the neighboring nations sent troops to end the fighting, the relations between the two countries remained strained. The political situation was generally calm throughout the 1980s, as the government shifted its attention to Mali's economic difficulties. The new agreement signed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was regarded with growing dissatisfaction due to the austerity demands imposed by the IMF. In March 26, 1991, after 4 days of intense anti-government rioting, a group of 17 military officers arrested President Moussa Traoré and suspended the constitution. In the same year, a new constitution was approved, which provided a multiparty democracy and Alpha Oumar Konaré of the *Alliance for Democracy (ADEMA)* became Mali's first democratically elected president. In 1997, Konaré was reelected virtually unopposed and ADEMA won decisively in the legislative elections, which were boycotted by much of the opposition. General elections were organized in June and July 2002. President Konaré did not seek reelection since he was serving his second and last term, as required by the constitution. Retired General Amadou Toumani Touré, former head of state during Mali's transition (1991-1992), became the country's second democratically elected President as an independent candidate in 2002, and was reelected to a second 5-year term in 2007.

Malian Tuaregs – old grievances never fairly addressed

The book of Lieutenant Colonel Kalifa Keita, "Army of the Republic of Mali", gives insights on the previous conflicts that happened in Mali. Lieutenant Colonel Kalifa entered commissioned service in 1975, serving for most of his career in Armor leadership positions. The first tuareg rebellion took place in 1963 as the nomadic minority felt their traditions and way of life were threatened, and they were seeking to obtain their independence. The national government suppressed the nomadic rebellion with great

brutality and harsh coercive measures, which only increased rebel grievances and their hostility towards a government seen as an oppressor and an enemy. An economically and politically vulnerable Mali faced a second rebellion in 1990. As in the first uprising, the rebels were by no means united in one insurgent force, but were divided in four major movements and a number of minor ones. This time, however, they were much better organized and equipped, having learned from their previous experience. Outside forces also had an interest in backing them up. Libya for example, provided help with weapons in an effort to destabilize Mali. Indications of economic support from other countries can be seen in the equipment, as the rebel¹ combatants drove light vehicles and seemed to have an unlimited supply of modern Soviet small arms. They were also much more effective in destroying government facilities and eluding government pursuit, as well as finding apparent safe haven in neighboring countries. Even if their number wasn't that high, in the vast, sparsely populated regions of Mali, guerilla war is highly effective. For ending the conflict, both parties accepted a mediation (done by Algeria), and started working on means to alleviate the grievances of the rebels. The problem was that not all rebel leaders were able to be present at the negotiations, thus leaving some of them unsatisfied with the agreement. Some of the measures were to integrate former rebels in administrative roles, police, army, providing medicine and foodstuffs. Agreements were made for the government to concentrate also on directing funds for the development of the northern part of the country. In 2004, a locust invasion cut cereal harvest by up to 45%, which, coupled with severe draught, led to food shortage in the region. In May 2006, a third rebellion led by Ibrahim Ag Bahanga took place and lasted until 2009. Even if the government stated that the attacks were conducted mainly by army defectors, under the traditional Algerian mediation, a peace agreement was signed in July 2009, restating the demands made in the National Pact. However, due to the lack of trust manifested by all parties, it seemed to be a highly uneasy peace. Until 2011, multiple attacks were conducted against the governmental forces, followed by abductions and other terrorist operations. All these ended with multiple cease-fire agreements that weren't respected either by the rebels or by the Malian army. In 2009, Bahanga was exiled to Libya, where he remained until he returned on the Malian soil, in the summer of 2011. According to Lt. Colonel Rudolph Atallah's statement prepared for the United States Committee on Foreign Affairs, Bahanga's Libyan exile proved an important milestone on the way to the 2012 spring insurgency.

Emergent Issues in the Malian Context

From a *political perspective*, the Malian republic suffered violent regime changes which led to internal instability and failed attempts to implement effective reforms in key sectors: agriculture, health, and education. Major progress has been achieved in

1 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/people.cfm?authorID=485>

the area of democratization, as the Malian Presidency struggled to unite all of Mali's political forces. Just like other Sahelian countries, Mali is among the **poorest and least developed** in the world, rated 178th of 187 countries on the UNDP human development index of 2011. With an annual gross domestic product of \$300 per capita, about half of Malian population live below the international poverty line of \$1.25 day. Following colonial rule and with limited finances, the government converged on developing the more populated parts of the country and, by 1990, the largely ignored desert areas from the northern part of the country. After the second nomadic rebellion, the government signed an agreement to direct some of its finances for the infrastructure in that region; however, due to the economic situation, the areas which are sparsely populated have had a poor development. **Education** in Mali is in a **precarious state**, as primary schools suffer from shortage of teachers and buildings. The ill-equipped universities and the unimproved curricula left Malian human resources undeveloped. Many Malian children are abandoning the school after 3 or 4 years, ending up in the street, where they end up recruited by different terrorist groups, which use them as child-soldiers. Women are subjected to intense discrimination in acceding to professional or social employment. Confronted with these stringent issues, the government is unwilling to invest in ecological sustainability.

National and International Actors in Malian Conflict

The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) – In a statement for the US Committee on Foreign Affairs, Lt. Colonel Atallah explained the birth of this movement: in October 2011, in the oasis settlement of Zakak, Mali, near the border of Algeria, Tuareg youth, intellectuals, Malian Army defectors, and Libyan-trained Tuareg soldiers, merged two movements together, the Mouvement National de l'Azawad (MNA) and the Mouvement Touareg du Nord Mali (MTNM) to form The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), "Azawad" being the name of the Tuareg homeland. This move was one of the two largest fighting groups within the Malian territory, which strengthened its military strategy, enhanced tactical war-fighting capabilities, and generally augmented the nomads' political strength. The MNLA is the most recent manifestation of periodic rebellions by Mali's ethnic nomadic minority; **ideologically, it is a secular, pro-democracy secessionist movement**. A Stratfor report states that the MNLA Secretary General Bilal Ag Acherif leads the group's political wing, while the former Libyan army Col. Ag Mohamed Najem, who fought in the 2007-2009 Tuareg rebellion, leads the military wing. *Territorially*, the MNLA is based in northeastern Mali around the Adrar de Ifoghas Mountains because of group members' familiarity with bases there and the heavy Ansar Dine presence further west and south around Timbuktu. At international level, neither the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), nor any international body recognizes the group's claims of sovereignty over northern Mali. Bearing all these in mind, a pertinent question is how MNLA and Al-Qaeda in the

Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) ended up working together so efficiently, taking into account that these two organizations had been engaged in the past in numerous violent armed confrontations against each other. Opposed to the strict Sharia law followed by the Islamists, the MNLA were regarding these groups as outsiders able to corrupt their nomadic traditions and way of life. The only reason they ended up working together in the rebellion was because of Iyad Ag Ghaly, the current leader of Ansar Dine, of Tuareg origins. He is the founder of Ansar Dine and is known to have established connections with Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. The fact that he is a former Tuareg leader made the MNLA give credit to his words, persuading them to work with Ansar Dine, which had at its disposal a lot of resources and weaponry for the armed confrontations that were to come. If previously the communication between the rebel leaders had been effective and had succeeded in establishing a common goal for all the rebel groups-the independence of northern Mali, as the conflict evolved, the rebel leaders struggled to reshape their conflicting goals, but failed, resulting in an Islamic-nationalist conflict that included all the three main rebel groups. The Malian army has made life harder for many people of Tuareg lineage. Tuareg or the “people of the desert” as they are called, can be identified by their lighter skin color. Mali's president Dioncounda Traoré was recently berated by the French foreign minister, Laurent Fabius for the reports of military violence against light-skinned civilians. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has also accused them of racist attacks against the nomads, Arabs and Fulani. Even after all the recent events, among the nomad population, the dream of an independent state still lives.

Ansar Dine, or “defenders of the faith”, in a rough English translation, is a rebel group that appeared in Mali in March 2012 and is considered by far the most strongest militant force operating in Mali, having a great deal of resources provided by multiple sources. The Islamic group is led by Iyad Ag Ghaly, a former nomad leader who brokered negotiations for the releases of hostages held by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, AQIM. Ag Ghaly has also family members involved in groups tied to Al-Qaeda, his cousin being presently a commander for AQIM. It appears that Ag Ghaly created the Ansar Dine movement after failing to achieve his ultimate goal in becoming the leader of the MNLA. Ansar Dine is the strongest militant force in Mali and has a great deal of resources that must come from different sources. The Islamists also used propaganda to bolster their ranks by releasing videos and establishing a presence in jihadist chat rooms, recruiting young boys from the regions they occupied and indoctrinating them in training camps. During their occupation over the three major cities from the northern part of the country- Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao, numerous reports of human right abuses were received, particularly against women. During the hostilities, Ansar Dine's has been constantly changing alliances among the other players in northern Mali: the MNLA, AQIM and MUJAO. Ansar Dine's involvement in the Malian conflict, along with their close ties to Al-Qaeda has, made the United Nations and the United States of America add them to their list of terrorist organizations.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – is a group which evolved from the Algerian militant group, the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) and took their recent name after joining forces with Al-Qaeda, in January 2007. According to ADL (Anti-Defamation League) their ultimate goal is to overthrow the Algerian government, which it seeks to replace with Islamic rule based on a “pure” interpretation of the Quran”. Although Algerian nationals run AQIM, its fighting force is made up of Mauritanian, Moroccan, Libyan, Malian and Nigerian nationals. From 2003 until present, AQIM gradually took advantage of Mali’s weak security infrastructure to establish itself in the northern part of the country. Iyad Ag Ghaly, the leader of Ansar Dine has ties to them, which he forged during his time in Saudi Arabia. It is believed that he is the one who mediated the talks between the nomads, AQIM and other Islamic groups. AQIM is the main source of finance and strategic coordinators for other AQIM Islamic groups, including Ansar Dine and MOJWA, obtaining a large part of its finances by kidnapping foreigners for ransom. According to a declaration of a former US ambassador to Mali, published in a French newspaper, the French government paid in 2010 AQIM 17 million Euros in exchange of releasing some French prisoners, action denied by the French government, which stated that French did not make deals with any terrorists. Whether the French government paid them that ransom or it is just a rumor remains to be seen. Nevertheless, the international community criticized the presumably French action, which contributed further in supporting the terrorist activities, providing them the necessary means for engaging in the current Malian conflict. Recently, we have witnessed the fact that The Arab Spring has triggered a domino, with Al-Qaeda slowly starting to concentrate its efforts in Africa. Recent Al-Qaeda activity is moving to gain power in some of the more weak African states after the Arab Spring was disrupted, in an effort to reorient and reorganize their strategy. A French bombing raid in the Ifoghas mountain region managed to kill one of AQIM’s top leaders, Abdelhamid Abou Zeid, who commanded the Taregh Ibn Ziyad brigade, a unit which operates in Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and southern Algeria. Even if his death is good news, the French population back home has urged for a pause in the bombing to allow negotiations for the return of hostages.

Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA) – broke with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in 2011, in order to concentrate on spreading the Sharia law to the areas of West Africa that were not within the scope of AQIM. A front-page magazine article claims the reason MOJWA separated from AQIM was due to the marginalization of its black African members and the contempt in which AQIM’s Arabs hold blacks in general: supposedly no black African is known to hold a leadership position in the terrorist organization. Nevertheless, the group remains close to Al-Qaeda ideologically. The number of armed fighters of MUJAO remains uncertain but there are rumors that it encompasses thousands. OCHA observed a notable influx of foreign fighters joining MOJWA.

The Boko Haram is an Islamic extremist group based in Nigeria, which started its affiliation with Al-Qaeda in 2012, when their attacks became more violent. Their presence increased in the current Mali conflict as hundreds of members were reported to have been sighted at training camps in Timbuktu, where they learned to fire Kalashnikovs and launch shoulder pad grenades. A witness that was hired to cook for the militants reported to the Daily Trust that new people were coming in every day. Recently, the group abducted a French family in Cameroon – one of the first instances when they crossed the border from Nigeria, abduction thought to be linked to the Malian conflict. Following the intervention of French troops, reports indicate that Boko Haram leaders are fleeing from Mali back to Nigeria.

Malian Governmental Forces – the Malian army numbers approximately 6,000-7,000 troops, consisting of land forces, air forces, a small navy, a paramilitary Gendarmerie, and a Republican Guard that is underpaid, poorly equipped and in need of rationalization. The Malian army suffered heavy losses at the beginning of the rebellion in 2012; the campaign in the north left them fragmented and demoralized. Malians were split into camps and a political disunity was installed at a national level after the coup organized by Captain Amadou Hya Sanogo, which hindered central control and prevented the formation of a cohesive military force. According to The Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), a large number of military tanks have been destroyed and the air force hasn't been effective in fighting rebels in the north. At the end of September, the Malian Prime Minister Diarra appealed UN General Assembly for aid in the crisis, followed later by President Toure, who also asked ECOWAS for military assistance.

Malian militias – following Islamic occupation several civilian forces have sprung up. Though their influence is limited, there are reports of increased activities and fighting against Islamic rebel groups by these militias. There are more than 15 known armed Malian militia groups but the most important are the Patriotic Resistance Front (PRF) and The Northern Mali Liberation Front (FLNM). With an estimating fighting capacity of hundreds or low thousands, PRF consists of six armed groups banded together, whose goal is to drive the Islamic occupants outside the country. The Northern Mali Liberation Front (FLNM) is made of three other important groups in the region: two Songhai militias, the Ganda Koy and the Ganda Izo, and fighters under the command of a Tuareg army colonel El Hadji Gamou. Created to oppose the nomadic rebels who seized control of north Mali in the March coup, FLNM embers supposedly received training from Malian soldiers, although their training level seemed limited. The fighters primarily relied on guerilla tactics, which proved successful during two attacks on the occupying Islamists. The strength of these groups grew gradually as new volunteers, tired of the Islamic occupation, joined their ranks, planning to remain active as long as the northern Malian territory remained occupied.

International Actors

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) describes itself as a regional group of fifteen countries, founded in 1975. Its primary mission is to promote economic integration in "*all fields of economic activity, particularly industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions, social and cultural matters*"². The countries constituting ECOWAS are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinee, Guinee Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togolese. ECOWAS agreed to send 8,000 troops to the northern region, to offer help to the Malian and French troops. The troops would come primarily from ECOWAS countries. CKN Nigeria news reported that Nigeria already deployed 1,200 troops to Mali for limited combat duties. The proximity of the Malian conflicting zone represented a major concern for the Nigerian government, who feared that the conflict could spill in their own back yard.

The European Union has acknowledged the present crisis in Africa and is keen on supporting the French and Malian troops by deploying 500 military trainers for a length of 15 months, with the sole purpose of training the Malian troops. Predicting that the first trained battalion will be operational by July 2013, the EU will provide also logistical and economic assistance, announcing that it will support ECOWAS initiative in the conflict with a 50 million euro donation. Combined with an estimated 583 million euros granted so far to the Malian government, the EU is without a doubt a key economical supporter in solving the Malian issue efficiently.

France – after initially stating that it would not engage militarily in the Malian conflict, France became a primary actor by authorizing the rapid deployment of French troops at the beginning of January 2013. After the Islamist forces captured the strategic town of Konna, France launched Operation Serval. Using Gazelle helicopters and four Mirage 2000-1 jets, the French managed to destroy more than half of the Islamist armed pick-up trucks and a rebel command center, forcing the rebels to withdraw from Konna and take positions to the north. The first day of battle claimed the lives of 46 Islamist's fighters, numerous Malian soldiers, and one French pilot, whose helicopter was gunned down by ground fire during the operation. Regaining the control of Gao and Kidal, the French used the same air combat strategy, but also deployed around 4,000 fighting ground troops and by January 27, the French began securing Timbuktu as none of the Islamist rebel groups had the strength to launch a solid offensive against their ground operations. By February 8, the French, backed by Chadian troops, regained the control of one of the last airports still not controlled by the governmental forces – Tessalit. As a last option resort, the Tuareg and Islamist forces retreated to the Adrar des Ifhogas, hoping to unleash

2 http://www.comm.ecowas.int/sec/index.php?id=about_a&lang=en

efficient guerrilla warfare against the governmental forces and on February 19, France launched the operation Panther, with the objective of dismantling the last rebel hiding place. Following the deployment of troops, France has become the main responsible player for driving the Islamic extremists to the Ifoghas Mountains. Their intervention prevented Al-Qaeda and their affiliates to take control of Mali. While French and Malian troops succeeded in re-establishing control over most of the country, recent fighting in Timbuktu has reminded the international community that the country is not yet fully secured. Currently there are 4,000 French troops, but in the coming weeks only 1,000 are expected to remain till the end of the year, and together with the African troops, to defend the country against any other threat from the Islamic groups.

The United States of America – Mali has become a prime interest country for the United States after they became aware of the possibility it could become a base for international terrorist attacks. They are currently working with the French government to stabilize the country and contain the threat. For this purpose 100 personnel were sent to Niger in order to establish a drone base that will gather intelligence on the activity of the Islamic fighters. Their superior technology and resources make them an important factor in the conflict.

Algeria – even if not a member of ECOWAS, Algeria is a key player in the region due to its superior economic and military strength. Due to these qualities it is the natural leader in the regions security. Algeria has acknowledged the crisis but it has yet remained reluctant to provide military support in the international intervention. Algeria has its own nomadic population and there are worries that the present conflict might extend. There is also a worry for maintaining the inherited colonial borders. If the MNLA's demands for independence are met, it could be a catalyst for the nomadic tribes in Algeria to take this road as well. With the escalation of the Mali crisis, Algeria might be forced into a military intervention. Due to the fact that the Islamic fighters are fleeing to the Adrar des Ifoghas region, near the Algerian border, to regain their strength, the Algerian government has sent troops to the border.

In attempting to find a proper and efficient resolution to the Malian conflict, the parties mentioned above communicated through media or through a third party intervention. We have the President of Burkina Faso – Blaise Compaore, which acted as an ECOWAS mediator. Backed up also by the ECOWAS negotiators, Compaore succeeded in reaching an agreement with the military junta, which turned over the power to The National Assembly of Mali. On the other side, the rebels are delivering their releases through media channels (local radio stations and TV channels like Fance24, Al Jazzerah).

Even so, why did it happen? Apparently a simple question designed to reveal the de facto reasons lying behind a certain event or fact, when integrated in the subject analysis it simply becomes an open-ended question, with multiple facets and variables

to take into account. And for ensuring a chronological perspective, I proceeded with revealing to you first the **root causes** of the Malian conflict, causes that can be traced until 19th century, when a great resurgence of the Islam outspread along the region. In the empires of al-Hajj Umar (1794-1864) and that of Samori Toure (1870-1898) Muslims states strongly opposed to the French invasion of the region. Then the interwar period witnessed the emergence of various nationalist movements among the trade unions and the students groups. In the Tuareg' stated grievances, we can trace also **numerous structural and proximate causes**:

The Tuareg were utterly **hostile to the modernization** of their land and numerous times their political leaders stated that the nomadic Tuareg were marginalized and impoverished by the Malian government policies as the mining projects had damaged important pastoral areas. Also, they blamed the government for trying to force modernization onto the northern nomadic areas of the country, creating a feeling of lost identity. Al-Qaeda seems to be preying on those grievances and fueling them along with the promise of the coming day when they would have the possibility to fulfill their dreams of a state. The Tuareg are also called The Blue Men of the Desert; they are an Islamic nomadic people, who are divided by tribe and clan. Prior to the colonial era, the warlike nomads were able to exact "taxes" from the farmers who lived along the Niger River. French colonial authorities, in a desire to maintain peace with nomadic groups, did not dispute their claims to land ownership or the right to levy taxes in kind from the sedentary farming peoples, an issue that would ultimately poison relations between the nomadic population and their neighbors.

The region of Azawad became in time extremely important, as from early 1960 many among the nomad population dreamed of their own independent state that would encompass that particular region. It is this dream that was one of the bases for the creation of the MNLA. This state would be comprised of nomad-populated territory in northern Mali. The birth of this wish has its origins in the grievances of the nomad minority that started to feel like they don't have a place in the modern world.

Famine and Drought- The drought is an important issue, and an element that is tied to previous revolts in that area. The northern nomad tribes rely on their livestock for sustenance and with the drought there are fewer grazing pastures. The proud nomads are forced to sell their animals and go to shelters or look for work in towns, fueling their hatred upon the government who was viewed as the typical scape goat, being to blame for all their troubles. Of course the government isn't responsible for the drought because it can't be controlled, but they could have still offered some support for the nomads in those difficult times with foodstuffs.

The **precarious economic situation of Mali** – while the government subsequently announced a number of programs to improve local infrastructure and economic

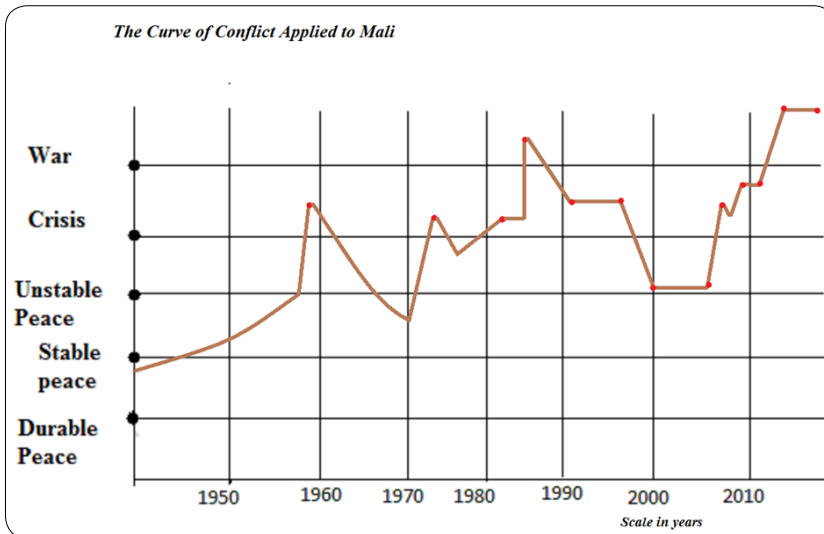
opportunity, it lacked the resources to follow through on most of them. As a result, the nomad population grievances remained largely unaddressed, and a seething resentment continued in many of their communities. BBC states that up until 2002 Mali owed debts amounting to 80 million Euros to France, debts that, according to an official French statement, would be cancelled in proportion of 40%. Going further, a country with an instable economy is a country with conflict brewing, as it is unable to meet the needs of all its citizens and protect itself from outside threats.

Al-Qaeda expansion in Africa – in early 2012 Al-Qaeda upped its recruiting in Iraq, numerous attacks conducted on Syrian soil being connected to Al-Qaeda operations. Analysis Intelligence theorizes that the central power of Al-Qaeda is shifting from its longtime strongholds in Afghanistan and Pakistan to unstable regions in Africa, a fact proven by the intense activity of the Islamic movements, in many other troubled African regions.

Triggering causes – Regarding their nature, the majority of the conflicts usually have a triggering cause and in Mali's case, it's no doubt that the fall of colonel Muammar Gaddafi combined with the military 2012 uprising represented the main key events that ultimately made the Malian conflict burst open. Why? Because many nomads in Mali joined Gaddafi's army and fought for him in his frequent wars on the African continent, including in Chad, Niger, Sudan, Mali, even Lebanon but finally, they fought for him in Libya. The nomad mercenaries were among those shooting down unarmed protesters in Benghazi in the first days of the February 17th uprising; they looted, raped, and murdered in Misratah and they were among his most loyal and steadfast fighters 'till his death. Dailykos article provides information on how the fall of Gaddafi led to the current conflict. Since the September fall of Gaddafi, thousands have been coming home from the fight in Libya, many of whom brought their heavy weapons with them too. Reports from northern Mali in late 2011 said two of the returning rebel contingents were seeking accommodation with the authorities and wanted integration into military and civilian structures, while a third wanted no part of this. With the high number of restless unemployed men having military experience, the government should have foreseen a crisis coming.

Finally as the military coup d'état took place in March 2012, it ended with the military junta seizing the power and suspending the Malian Constitution, creating thus the perfect context for an efficient rebel military action.

The Curve of Conflict Applied to Mali



An Efficient Resolution, or another “Postponed Old Struggle”?

Objectively speaking, there is no doubt that the two-month military intervention launched by Paris on January 11th was a success, since the last resistance rebel elements were neutralized in Adrar de Ifhogas region. After the military ground operations ended, the French President- Francois Hollande stated that it was a matter of days until the territory would return to Malian sovereignty. France’s leadership also stated that almost 2,000 French soldiers would remain deployed in the former French colony until the end of the year; half of these troops would be probably integrated in a UN peacekeeping operation force, that France was pushing for. At this point a crisis can occur at the political level, as the Malian interim government plans on organizing free elections in July 2013.

Now the main question is for how long this “military resolution” will be able to preserve the peace, as security alone will not definitively resolve the conflict. Shouldn’t Malian officials and the international community focus on economic development rather than on security? Nevertheless, in the last decade, the West and its allies were to find out how difficult it was to wage the famous “war on terror”. Irak and Afghanistan are two of the most eloquent and plausible cases that winning the battle does not mean that you won the war. Unresolved grievances and numerous abuses supported by the civilian population prolonged the war and brought huge casualties among the coalition soldiers fighting for the so called “freedom”.

“Innocent unwilling combatants” – the Malian conflict is not far away from the facts above as it affected mostly the civilians which were forced to seek shelter in the

neighboring countries. According to Amnesty International, the conflict created the worst human rights situation since 1960. Both Tuareg and Islamist groups conducted gang rapes, extrajudicial executions along with the use of child soldiers for their military operations. Additionally, the rebels have destroyed or damaged numerous historical sites in Timbuktu. Human Rights Observers reported numerous abuses committed by the Malian army in the central Malian town of Niono, although these were directed primarily against the rebels. It is estimated that almost one hundred civilians lost their lives since the beginning of the conflict, followed by a few hundred combatants, both rebels and governmental forces.

The ethnic groups and their issues are extremely important within a country, both from geographical and a social perspective. If constantly ignored, they will eventually become grievances which will conduct to a conflict- like the Malian one (the worst case). As a middle solution and the best way, authorities can try to address some of their issues and to avoid the rising of tensions which can easily escalate, bringing the conflict into the sphere of reality. But I must emphasize that solving these grievances will bring other in contention. These scenarios are interdependent from the desire manifested by the actors to pursue a particular goal (their commitment to the cause), which can transform the parties from rational into irrational ones, making a resolution easy or impossible to find.

Annex

1. Other Options That Could Have Obtained a Positive Malian Conflict Resolution

Getting the Tuareg on the government's side against the Islamic fighters

Right from the start, the nomad rebels saw their alliance with the Islamic groups as temporary. There is a broad resentment within Tuareg society for the implementation of strict Sharia law. While of an Islamic faith themselves, the nomads don't like anyone to tell them how to practice their religion. Nevertheless, the grievances that comprise the latest backbone of Tuareg insurgency pushed some into Islamic factions, which share the same grievances and hatred for regional governments. If the government would come with a solution to these problems, the vast majority of them would opt for peace. Despite their contempt for strict Sharia law and a history of animosity towards radical Islam, Tuareg are opportunists and the prospect of money and having some of their grievances met are the links that bound them to AQIM.

Pro's

- A possibility for a long term solution to the conflict if coupled with mediation
- A less violent solution
- A quick solution to the conflict
- Stopping the expansion of Al-Qaeda in West Africa
- Saving human lives
- Uniting the ethnic minority with the government against a common enemy
- The Mali government gains military strength
- Tactic and strategic information gained as the nomad rebels were previous allies with the enemy

Con's

- Not all nomad rebels will be willing to do this
- Risk of spies and agitators
- Does not provide a long term solution to the conflict if not coupled with mediation
- Unwillingness of dialog on both sides

Mediations and negotiations

Previous conflicts in this area have been solved with mediations. The fact that Al-Qaeda and various Islamic factions have gotten involved will certainly complicate things, as these organizations are centered on Islamic radicalism. Traditional mediation methods involved getting them to take various positions in administrative fields, army or police, helping with food and medicine, protecting their culture and trying to integrate them.

Pro's

- Preventing loss of human life and loss of infrastructure
- Working towards a more stable peace
- Stopping the crisis from escalating even further
- Saving innocent lives and preventing anti humanitarian acts
- Will give a chance to NGO's and humanitarian foundations to give help to those in need
- Could lead to a win-win situation

Con's

- An unwillingness from both sides for discussion

2. Malian Conflict Timeline

August 2011: A high influx of armed Tuareg that fought for Gaddafi enter Mali'.

October 16, 2011: In the oasis settlement of Zakak, Mali, the Movement National de l'Azawad (MNA) and the Movement Tuareg du Nord Mali (MTNM) merge together to form The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). Its purpose is to create an independent state for the Tuareg minority in Mali.

December 20, 2011: Algerian troops cross the border into Mali to help the government fight combat groups affiliated to Al-Qaeda.

January 2012: MNLA launches attacks on Ménaka in far north. Fighting also reported in Ageul-hoc, Tessalit, Léré, Andéramboukane and Nianfunké.

February 2012: MNLA attacks Hombori. Protests start against the president's inability to deal with the violence in the North.

March 13, 2012: Iyad Ag Ghali claims that Ansar Dine is fighting for an imposition of Sharia law and not a separate Azawad.

March, 22 2012: The National Committee for the Establishment of Democracy seizes control of the government.

March, 31 2012: MNLA captures Gao.

April 2012: MNLA seizes control of northern Mali and declares independence. Following this president Toure resigns, and the new interim president Dioncounda Traore threatens to wage war on both Tuareg rebels and Islamic factions.

May 2012: Ansar Dine and the MNLA merge and start imposing strict Sharia Law in Timbuktu

June 7, 2012: Armed groups form in Timbuktu with the purpose of fighting against the Islamic factions.

June 8, 2012: Tension begins to appear between Ansar Dine and the MNLA.

June 27, 2012: Ansar Dine betrays the MNLA and joins forces with AQIM and MUJAO in seizing control of Gao. Following this they start a strict implementation of Sharia law.

July 1, 2012: Mali appeals to UN to take action.

November 11, 2012: ECOWAS agrees to deploy 3,300 troops.

December 20, 2012: UN approves sending an African led force to take back Mali. The Islamic extremists capture the town of Konna and are pushing further south to the capital. Mali asks France for support.

January 11-12, 2013: France deploys airstrikes and the city of Konna is recaptured.

January 14, 2013: French airstrikes continue to central Mali driving the Islamic extremists further back.

January 18, 2013: United States offer their support by sending 100 military trainers.

January 21-28, 2013: French and Mali troops manage to recapture Diabaly, Douentza, Gao and finally Timbuktu. The rebels flee into the Ifoghas mountains.

February 2013: The Al-Qaeda affiliated groups start a guerrilla war against Malian and French troops. The United States deploys drones for intelligence reconnaissance.

March 4 2013: An important AQIM leader Abdelhamid Abou Zeid confirmed dead.

March 23 2013: MUJAO tries to take Gao but are defeated by Malian and French troops.

April 2013: Preparations for the withdrawal of French troops.

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