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Stabilisation Unit

**Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project:
Mali Case Study**

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**Stabilisation Unit
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Author details

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In addition to contemporary political and historical scholarship on Northern Mali, the authors draw on personal material accumulated in the last years in their work on the region. However, given the challenges in collecting reliable data in Mali, the report clearly distinguishes between confirmed information coming from reliable sources and more speculative yet plausible assertions.

Background to Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project

This case study is one of a series commissioned to support the Stabilisation Unit's (SU) development of an evidence base relating to elite bargains and political deals. The project explores how national and international interventions have and have not been effective in fostering and sustaining political deals and elite bargains; and whether or not these political deals and elite bargains have helped reduce violence, increased local, regional and national stability and contributed to the strengthening of the relevant political settlement. Drawing on the case studies, the SU has developed a series of summary papers that bring together the project's key findings and will underpin the revision of the existing 'UK Approach to Stabilisation' (2014) paper. The project also contributes to the SU's growing engagement and expertise in this area and provides a comprehensive analytical resource for those inside and outside government.



Executive Summary

This report discusses the failure of Mali's 2006 Algiers Accord. It places it within the broader context of Malian politics, which have been characterised by cycles of violent mobilisation driven by Tuareg aspirations for autonomy, followed by initiatives to promote peace. Recurring episodes of armed violence in Mali's Northern regions since independence have been driven by multiple causes, which a series of peace processes, including the one that led to the signing of the 2006 Accord, have failed to address. The culmination of these failures led to a major crisis in 2012 when Tuareg separatists occupied Mali's three Northern provinces, followed by a rise in jihadi movements operating in the country.

The cyclical nature of war and peace in Mali since independence is, itself, an indicator of the limited impact of peacebuilding attempts in the country. In fact, this paper argues that elite bargains aimed at ending conflict have instead planted the seeds of new rounds of conflict, as they have systematically failed to reconfigure the political settlement and address the core drivers of contestation.

The build up to an elite deal and its impact on the political settlement

Tensions in Northern Mali are rooted in postcolonial centre-periphery political inequalities. At the time of independence, certain sections of the Tuareg communities were reluctant to be considered part of the Malian polity and engaged in competitive violence against the state. State repression, economic hardship and political marginalisation exacerbated these polarising dynamics.

In the late 1980s, Tuareg activists returned from exile in Libya and triggered a rebellion. The insurgency soon fragmented along tribal lines, but yielded an ambitious peace agreement followed by effective local community-level agreements.

However, failure to implement provisions of the peace process, as well as exclusive appropriation by elites of the 'dividends of peace' through re-arranged, state-endorsed and short-term bargains, eventually led to renewed violence in 2006. Peace talks in the wake of the rebellion provided no more than a band aid, and failed to deter some Tuareg rebel leaders from continuing to conduct hit and run attacks against Malian government forces while at the same time carving out influence in the profitable cross-border smuggling business.

In response to persistent instability, the government armed ethnic militias recruited from Arab and Tuareg groups, who had remained loyal to the central authorities and, who were actively protecting their business interests. This took place alongside the rise of Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a jihadi group whose origins lay in the Algerian civil war. AQIM became part of a web of criminalised security actors countering Tuareg separatist aspirations alongside (but not politically aligned with) pro-government militias.

Therefore, the post-2006 era corresponded with a significant reconfiguration in the previous set of elite bargains and wider settlement. New Islamist actors infiltrated this process and carved out their own political influence and discreet bargains, notably through the kidnapping of Westerners.

The role of external actors

In the recent decades, political dynamics in the Sahara have been shaped by two major regional players, Libya and Algeria, whose intentions and influence have been complex and ambiguous.



Algeria has consistently been the promoter of peace processes in Mali yet has exported its jihadi militants there; while Qadhafi's Libya mediated conflicts yet also exacerbated Tuareg nationalism.

While Libya's influence significantly declined with Qadhafi's fall, Algeria remains central to contemporary political settlements in Mali. However, its involvement now takes place in parallel to initiatives from more distant foreign powers, including a UN mission, the US and, crucially, France, the ex-colonial power. These foreign powers have not been impartial and, as a result, have added a new layer of strategic confusion to an already complex Malian crisis.

The durability of the bargains

The ongoing peace process in Mali remains highly fragile and based on exclusive and unstable deals and bargains amongst the various elites. Genuine, sustainable peacebuilding has not occurred to date, despite ambitious peace agreements signed in 1992, 2006 and 2015. Instead, a form of governance is in place that relies on a fragile "managed" balance between different elite interests, each representing – albeit unequally – Mali's multiple Northern communities. Violence, and attempts to contain it, are integral to this short-term approach to maintaining order, as is the ongoing international support for the Malian government.

At the same time, broad-based coalitions have cyclically challenged the government of Mali's authority against a backdrop of social, economic and political tensions between the centre and the periphery. Yet the periphery is, itself, a highly contested political arena, leading to communal feuds that are easily exploited by the government as a counterinsurgency strategy and requiring tailored, micro-level peace-making efforts to complement national peace deals.



Introduction: Building long term peace or managing political violence?

This report focuses on events before and after the 2006 Algiers Accord (not to be confused with the 2015 Algiers Accord) that achieved little in addressing conflict drivers. Instead, it resulted in a reconfigured deal, which exacerbated existing grievances by empowering a new group of elites. It places this failed attempt at peace within a broader historical and political context. The analysis begins with events in the early 2000s, a decade after the end of rebellion that hit the country in the 1990s and resulted in an ambitious peace agreement, and ends in 2015, with another peace deal that aimed to end a large-scale rebellion that had been triggered in 2012. The events of 2006 remain pivotal, as they ushered in major changes in Northern Mali's political economy.

The multiple uprisings and peace deals that have occurred in Mali since independence in 1960 underscore failures in peacebuilding efforts in Northern Mali. In fact, this paper argues that elite bargains aimed at ending conflict actually planted the seeds of a new round of conflict. Episodes of conflict and corresponding agreements do not mark a neat separation between periods of war and peace. Instead, they are inscribed in a no war, no peace sequence, partly resulting from central authorities' specific ways of governing Mali's periphery. Both rebel forces and central authorities have constantly contested the fragile governance in the North, maintaining a prolonged state of low intensity violence.

Protagonists of recurring crises: key actors

This section presents an overview of politically active groups during the past and present crises. While the political protagonists have not varied significantly over the years, their relative influence has changed. Their changing positions in the (often armed) competitive political economy of Northern Mali are both the outcome and source of recurring processes of violent mobilisation. Arrangements among competitors in Northern Mali's political economy never last long. The following section presents some of the characteristics of the interactions between key political actors of Northern Mali.

Complex alliances in Northern Mali society are comprised of relatively small groups (tribes or families), who's internal organisations rely heavily on individual agency: youth and women, for instance, all have a say. It is common to find families whose members have different political preferences, and, in times of crisis, support different armed factions. Political alignment, therefore, has to be understood at a micro-level. Similarly, alliances between groups often derive from complex marital arrangements or personal friendships or enmities.

For the sake of simplicity, we can state that in Northern Mali, political alignments and violent mobilisation essentially follow parochial, tribal lines. On the military front, this may translate into small groups of fighters, sometimes comprised of just 200 men and a dozen pickup trucks, attached to a given territory (*terroir*).¹ These basic units of loyalty remain fairly stable and their cohesion is ensured by blood ties and patronage – which carries far greater weight than any acronym the group may choose for itself.

¹ While historically partly nomadic, Tuareg populations have a strong sense of where they belong.



In arid areas, tribal groupings are particularly strong. However, no tribe can live in isolation. Therefore, along with strong tribal bonds, each group is forced to develop connections beyond the clan as a condition of survival in the desert.² These connections are implemented through alliances that are firmly rooted in religious networks and enforced by *cadis* (Islamic judges) who play an essential role in adjudicating disputes.

Alliances are volatile and not always obviously 'rational'.³ They have roots in past interactions and cannot be undone instantly. Furthermore, honour and personal rivalries constrain the feasibility of these alliances. As a result, unity among rebels is the exception rather than the rule. Broad-based movements generally rely on minimal convergence of political agendas, and soon fragment along parochial lines when the terms of the broad deal with the government are irrevocably set and 'peace dividends' are in sight. As a result, peace-making requires efforts on multiple levels. Progress may be obtained by an overarching deal between the centre and the rebellious faction on the periphery, but it will need to be complemented by a series of local deals among subnational elites in order for peace to be preserved.

Armed rebellion is a common means of political dispute, although more peaceful ways of voicing dissent also exist. Carrying arms or being protected by armed men is another condition of survival in the Sahara. Saharan communities have a military culture and do not lack youth disposed to enforce it. Hit and run attacks on domestic military posts have historically been the main source of acquiring military supplies, with cross-border smuggling as a second source. In the case of the latter, the rapid transfer of arms from Libyan stockpiles in the summer of 2011 is the most emblematic case. Traditional leaders historically played a significant role in channelling people's discontent. However, their authority is dramatically declining as they have been replaced by armed leaders, even though they may, symbolically, seek approval from traditional leaders for their actions.

The following section outlines the six key tribal groupings present in Northern Mali: the Ifoghas, the non-Ifoghas Tuaregs, the Imghads, the Arabs, the sedentary communities, and the Fulani. They have varying relations with a seventh political actor, the Government of Mali, which is seen by international actors as the legitimate authority in Northern Mali – even if this is not always the case among domestic actors. Three external actors are then outlined: Algeria, Libya and France. A final actor, AQ in the Islamic Maghreb, is a hybrid movement that was originally composed of Algerians but increasingly drew on locals.

Domestic actors

The **Ifoghas** tribe and their immediate allies are concentrated geographically around Kidal, the country's most northern city. Their locality entertains more economic and social ties with Algeria than with the rest of Mali. The Ifoghas are nobles in the Tuareg hierarchy (which also comprises, historically, tributaries, blacksmiths and slaves) and they enjoy considerable religious credentials through their reputed scholars and history. The Ifoghas enjoyed relative privilege under French colonisation, at the expense of more southern Tuareg tribes, and resented the 'treason' of decolonisation. It left them officially attached to Mali, whose capital was thousands of kilometres away, and whose post-independence socialist agenda promised to combat such 'feudal' powers as represented by the Ifoghas. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Ifoghas have been extremely active in all the rounds of rebellion, and their military leader, Iyad Ag Ghaly, commanded the Tuareg rebellion in

² Judith Scheele (2012)

³ See, for instance, Christia (2012)



the 1990s. In the wake of this rebellion, Iyad Ag Ghaly re-established some ties between the Ifoghas and the Government of Mali but did not restore the Ifoghas' past political glory and became a contested political figure in Kidal. He gradually got closer to Islamist movements before fully endorsing jihad in late 2011, leaving his Ifoghas followers divided between nationalist and religious claims.

Non Ifoghas Tuaregs belong to a number of different tribes (including the Kel Ansar, Iwillimeden, Dawsahak, Chamanamass and Idnans), and are not as politically active or visible as the Ifoghas. All, with the exception of the Imghads (see below), have geographical strongholds, claim a *terroir* (territory), and occupy varying economic specialisations, including cattle breeding, trade and public office. These communities often play crucial roles in violent uprisings by holding territory and mobilising assets. For instance, the Dawsahak significantly contributed to arming the rebellion in 2012 by selling huge numbers of cattle. Politically, these tribes have the most volatile alignments. For instance, they might take up arms to defend an overarching Tuareg agenda against the central government and then defect if they do not feel represented enough in the rebellion or if the government offers them specific advantages. They might also individually contest existing political settlements and elite bargains by disrupting order in their respective territory.

The **Imghads** are not a tribe *per se*: the name designates a political identity operating much like a tribal identity, but does not correspond to a precise geographical territory. However, Imghads represent a significant proportion of Kidal's population. At independence, the "anti-feudalism" agenda of the socialist government made them natural allies of the central authorities against the Ifoghas, to whom they had traditionally paid tribute. Their leader, El Hadj Gamou, actually fought against Iyad Ag Ghaly in the 1990s despite having joined him earlier in the rebellion. The same cleavage between Ifoghas and Imghads deepened in 2009 and the following years after El Hadj Gamou received a mandate from the Government of Mali to restore order in the North. The Imghad/Ifoghas divide has been a defining fault-line among Northern actors for several decades now, with the Imghads now firmly siding with the Government of Mali.

Arabs in Mali are socially stratified in a way that is similar to Tuareg social stratification. Their tribes are multiple and their territorial presence well delineated, with separate groupings around Timbuktu, Kidal, Ber, Arawan and Gao. Some groups are traditionally subaltern, and consequently aspire to social promotion. Others belong to the political and religious nobility. Most Arab tribes have sided with the government but differ from Tuareg groups in two key areas. First, they have developed massive and profitable cross-border networks of trade, some of them forming internationally connected drug cartels. Second, they have acted as the primary vector for jihadi entrenchment in Northern Mali.

Sedentary groups are concentrated along the bend of the Niger river and mostly comprise Songhoys and Bellahs. They either farm or earn their livelihoods in urban areas, particularly around Gao. Songhoys consider themselves the legitimate autochthones ('sons of the soil') and have regularly mobilised self-defence groups under this banner, protecting themselves from proximate rebellions. As a result, they have tended to side with the state, which they see as the lesser of two evils, and which armed them in the 1990s and helped them form the Ganda Koy militia. The Bellahs are freed slaves previously owned by Tuaregs. While anti-slavery activism has occasionally brought them to the fore of the political scene, they tend to be systematically side-lined in peace negotiations.

Fulani groups are generally considered pastoralists, although large sections of Fulani society have become 'sedentarised'. Those who are politically mobilised, however, tend to belong to the



pastoralist segment, which competes for access to pastures with a number of Tuareg groups, notably the Dawsahak in the region close to the border with Niger. Violent clashes between Fulanis and Dawsahak over cattle theft or access to wells have been commonplace since the late 1970s. For the most part, they tend to side against the Tuaregs and align with the Government of Mali, although not always enthusiastically in a context in which post-independence state formation did not favour them. More recently, some of them have started joining jihadi groups, whose Fulani leaders have revived memories of the past splendour of the Islamic Macina empire of the early 19th century.

The Government of Mali's legitimacy in the North of the country is disputed by a number of actors, not least as a result of the government's heavy-handed repression against rebels following independence. Although a push towards conciliatory solutions was introduced in the wake of the 1990s rebellion, the process was piecemeal, non-inclusive and relied on limited financial resources. The decentralisation process, which was considered the main driver of peaceful change, generated more divisions and opportunities for corruption. In the mid-1990s, and later on in 2006 and the following years, a new strategy to govern the North was introduced, which consisted of using loyal, Northern proxies to counter separatist influences.

Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb and its affiliates was originally comprised exclusively of Algerian militants rejecting the amnesty package offered by the Algerian authorities to end Algeria's bloody war in the 1990s. The then-called *Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat* found relatively safe ground in Northern Mali, where they became increasingly entrenched through marital alliances and economic influence. The latter was largely as a result of a highly profitable hostage-taking business. Counter-terrorism efforts to dislodge them proved inefficient and their spread reached a climax in 2012, when they governed two thirds of Malian territory and sought to impose Sharia Law on populations under their control, in alliance with some Tuareg and Arab political leaders.

External actors

Algeria has had an opaque strategy toward Northern Mali that is hard to decipher by outsiders, and multiple conspiracy theories abound as a result. Algeria's official doctrine since independence has been one of non-interference in sovereign countries' political affairs. More pragmatically, however, Algeria pays close attention to what is happening on its doorstep for several reasons: first, Mali and Niger are allies of their former coloniser, France; second, while he was still in power, they recognised a need to counter Qadhafi's diplomatic efforts to woo Mali; third, they want to keep their own Islamists in exile at bay; and fourth, they want to contain eventual unrest in Southern Algeria, which has close economic, cultural and social ties with Northern Mali's communities. Algeria is regularly invited to mediate Malian crises and has initiated multiple rounds of negotiations. It was once considered close to Iyad Ag Ghaly, but this has not been consistently observed over the time. The question of which Malian player Algeria supports at any point feeds endless speculation that is rarely backed up by proof.

Libya is no longer the power broker it aspired to be a decade ago, after then-President Qadhafi travelled to Timbuktu with the intention of opening a Libyan consulate in Kidal. However, the Libyan territory continues to play a crucial role in Northern Mali's security. Rebellions in 1990 and in 2012 were made possible as a result of substantial support coming from Libya, and the 2009 rebellion was arguably stopped after Libya offered residence to its leader, Ibrahim Ag Bahanga. In the wake of the French intervention in 2013, Libya's territory served as an escape route for Northern Mali's senior jihadis.



France has had a complex relationship with Malian authorities as well as Tuareg militants. The myths of the noble Tuareg warrior and the Meharist colonial officer⁴ have consistently attracted sympathy among the French military and French public opinion. This, combined with geopolitical interest (including French uranium exploitation in Niger and the preservation of a sphere of political influence against Algeria), translated into support for rebels in the 1990s, while the exact nature of French involvement in the 2012 crisis remains unclear. The return of Malian fighters from the Qadhafi Islamic Legion, which led to the rebellion, was de facto undermining resistance to French bombings in Libya in 2011. Later, when the French intervened to drive out the jihadis, it used the Tuareg rebels as auxiliaries and eventually secured their return to their Kidal stronghold.

The pre-2006 era: Anti-state mobilisation, fragmentation and external involvement in Mali's periphery

Exploring the origins of the 2006 rebellion is vital to understanding outbreaks of violence that followed. Recurring episodes of armed violence in the Republic of Mali's Northern regions since independence have been driven by multiple causes, which various peace processes have failed to address. The culmination of these failures led to a major crisis in 2012, when conflict reached an unprecedented peak with the occupation by Tuareg separatist forces of Kidal, Gao and Tombouctou, the three main cities of the North. The Tuareg separatists were temporarily allied with Salafi-jihadi groups (Ansar Eddine, MUJAO and AQIM), but were eventually driven out by these same groups.

The intensity of violence in Mali has remained relatively moderate compared to other civil wars in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since 2012, for instance, less than a thousand people per year have been killed by violence. However, violence is a daily occurrence, consisting mainly of hit and run attacks, suicide bombings (a phenomenon unknown in Mali until 2013), and violence associated with vendettas between communities, which take advantage of general unrest to settle scores. Protracted violence also disrupts economic life. At its height in 2012, the latest crisis displaced approximately 400,000 people, either internally or in neighbouring Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and, to a lesser extent, Algeria. In March 2017, there were still more than 140,000 refugees in neighbouring countries, itself a testimony of the low levels of trust placed in the ongoing peace process by civilian populations.

Crucially, however, past violence has never been dealt with as part of any official or public transitional justice process. The horrific killings that took place during the 1963 repression of the first Tuareg rebellion by Malian authorities are still alive in many people's memories and family histories;⁵ and lists of dead from the 1990s still circulate among activists without being officially acknowledged. The major killings of the latest crisis (notably the Aguelhoc massacre in which dozens of Malian soldiers died in February 2012) have never been properly investigated.

⁴ A French military officer commanding dozens of indigenous combatants.

⁵ Colonel Mohamed Ag Najim, military chief of the 2012 rebellion, and Iyad Ag Ghali, Ansar Eddine leader, have lost their fathers during the 1963 rebellion repression.



Early Tuareg nationalism

The story of Tuareg rebellions can be seen primarily as centre-periphery struggles. Indeed, the decision made by the first Malian President Modibo Keita and his successors to build a centralised state, was inherently hostile to separatist aspirations expressed by minority groups.

Since colonial times, Tuareg nationalism has led to a series of rebellions, with successive demands for further integration, autonomy or, more recently, independence. Just prior to independence in 1960, Tuaregs, prominently from the Ifoghas tribe and other northern populations, afraid of being ruled by Bamako-based Southerners, increasingly made demands for the creation of a Saharan State. Their hopes were fed by the willingness of France to keep a hand over the Sahara. In December 1956, the French National Assembly voted through a bill that created the *Organisation commune des régions sahariennes* (OCRS). Its implicit goal was to maintain France's control over recently discovered oil resources in the Sahara, and over its military installations in case of independence. At its creation, the organisation covered a significant territory including the two Saharan regions of Algeria and the northern regions of Mali, Niger and Chad.

The OCRS slowly faded from view, as Algeria became independent. However, between 1957 and 1960, northern community leaders launched two petitions asking the French authorities to separate their territories from Sudan (which would eventually become Mali). The first one was signed by 300 Tuareg, Arab, and Songhoy leaders from Tombouctou, Gao and Goundam, and the second was initiated in Agadez by Tuaregs from the Air and signed by all Tuareg leaders from the region. Both petitions⁶ were sent to Charles de Gaulle, then President of the French Republic. While some academics assert that French soldiers were behind these initiatives, these petitions were later used as evidence by Tuareg rebels to demonstrate the legitimacy of their claims for independence throughout their cycles of uprising.

In 1962, two years after its independence, the young Malian state faced its first Tuareg rebellion in Kidal. Its leaders were from the Ifoghas tribe, which had politically benefitted from the French presence at the expense of other Tuareg tribes, and did not look favourably upon the transfer of power to Bamako. Terrible repression ensued, creating narratives of violence and injustice that persist to this day.

Nationalist revival and the first conflict resolution mechanisms

In June 1990, the *Mouvement populaire de libération de l'Azawad* (MPLA hereafter),⁷ led by Iyad Ag Ghali (now famously leading Al Qaeda's branch in Mali), attacked a Malian gendarmerie post in Menaka and started a new rebellion, ending with the Tamanrasset Accords signed on 6 January 1991. The Tamanrasset Accords were signed by the Chief of Staff of the Malian Armed Forces, Colonel Ousmane Coulibaly, and Iyad Ag Ghali representing the *Mouvement populaire de l'Azawad* (MPA), successor of MPLA, and the *Front Islamique Arabe* (FIA), an Arab militia. Under Algerian mediation, a cease-fire was agreed by the parties that signed, and all prisoners were to be freed.

⁶ None of the petitions is accessible in the French or Malian State archives.

⁷ Created in 1988, the *Mouvement populaire de libération de l'Azawad* (MPLA) was renamed *Mouvement populaire de l'Azawad* (MPA) before the signing of the Tamanrasset Accords in January 1991.



The two-page Accord stated that the Malian Armed Forces had to “proceed to a progressive reduction of their presence in the 6th and the 7th regions”,⁸ to “disengage from the running of the civil administration”, and to “proceed to the suppression of certain military posts”.⁹ As a consequence, they were “confined to their role of defence of the integrity of the territory at the frontiers”. In exchange, MPA and FIA rebels had to be “stabilized within the zones corresponding to their current places of cantonment”, to “put an end [...] to infiltration of armed elements coming from outside” and finally to “integrate the Malian Armed Forces”.¹⁰ A “Commission of Ceasing of Hostilities”, presided over by Algeria, was also created. It was the first time the government agreed to end a rebellion through political agreement, thereby seemingly empowering the insurgents. However, this was to make violent, identity-based mobilisation a way to access privilege.

The signing of what was, essentially, an elite bargain led to the disintegration of the MPA¹¹ into multiple tribe-based splinter groups. Six months later, rebellion resumed following a disagreement between groups on the implementation of the Accord. Some, like Iyad Ag Ghali’s MPA, were partisans of a “diplomatic” resolution whereas others were more radical. Although it was a signatory, the MPA became involved in the upsurge of violence under the new umbrella group *Mouvements et Fronts unifiés de l’Azawad* (MFUA)¹² comprised of other groups.¹³

On April 1992, the *Pacte National* was signed in Bamako between the MFUA and the interim Malian government under the mediation of the Algerian government. Besides a “definitive ceasefire” and the creation of a “Cease-Fire Commission”, this new political deal affirmed the “particular status” of the North, announced a decentralisation process with the creation of a new administrative system in the North, and agreed to the “total integration” of MFUA combatants inside the Malian Armed Forces (and the creation of “special units [...] composed mostly of integrated MFUA combatants”). As with the previous agreement, the Malian Armed Forces had to gradually reduce their presence in the North and to redeploy their military installations and outposts outside of urban centres and grazing areas.

The *Pacte National* addressed the North-South cleavage but not the intra-North political rivalries. As stated above, the North is not politically homogenous, and political competition for resource and power is fierce. Therefore, national elite bargains that include some and exclude others are not sufficient to generate sustainable peace. Instead, communal feuds immediately followed the signing of the peace deal, involving those who had not previously taken up arms (including sedentary communities) or those who had been poorly represented in the peace deal.

⁸ Tamanrasset Accord, Agreement on ceasing of hostilities, January 1991.

⁹ Accords de Tamanrasset (1991).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Considered as Ifoghas centric, the Tuareg tribes of Chamanamas and Imghad created splinter groups, respectively the *Front populaire de libération de l’Azawad* (FPLA) and the *Armée révolutionnaire de libération de l’Azawad* (ARLA).

¹² Created under the name *Front Unifié pour la Défense de l’Azawad* (FUDA) in December 1991 in Algeria, it was renamed a first time as *Mouvements et Fronts unifiés de l’Azawad* (MFUA) and a second time in 1992 as *Front pour la libération de l’Azawad* (FLA).

¹³ These included the Imghad-centric *Armée révolutionnaire de libération de l’Azawad* (ARLA), the Chamanamas-centric *Front populaire de libération de l’Azawad* (FPLA), and the Arab *Front islamique arabe de l’Azawad* (FIAA). Two smaller clan-based groups named the *Front unifié de libération de l’Azawad* (FULA) and *Front national de libération de l’Azawad* (FNLA) broke away from the FPLA in 1993 after signing the *Pacte National*.



It then took multiple mini-deals to put an end to intra-North violence, via so-called *rencontres communautaires* (community meetings), the most famous being the ‘pact of Bourem’ named after a locality situated north of Gao. Crucially, these ‘mini’ elite bargains were initiated by local, unarmed power brokers, using their own diplomatic resources. This primarily bottom-up feature of peace-making is arguably what made them successful, a fact that did not escape the attention of donors who, during later episodes of violence, tried to encourage similar formats. However, by effectively monetising the process, they eventually de-legitimised it, and donor-sponsored initiatives such as the Anefis Accords in 2015 eventually failed to generate peace.

On 27 March 1996, the “Peace Flames” Ceremony took place in Tombouctou, in which more than 3,000 weapons were burnt, illustrating the dismantling of the MPA and MFUA. This symbolic event put a temporary end to a conflict that had been going on between Tuareg rebels and the Malian army since 1990 (and a conflict between Songhai militias and the Malian army since 1994). More than 3,000 rebels and militiamen were cantoned in military camps before their integration inside Malian forces, and socio-economic projects funded by the international community were also offered. A meeting in Tombouctou on July 1995 with representatives of Tuareg groups and government officials was organised to assess the needs of Northern Mali’s economy.

After the Tamanrasset Accord in 1991, armed groups fragmented, following a pattern that has since been repeated: once an overarching objective has been achieved, or cannot be pushed further, other local demands that have been overlooked eventually lead to further violence. This, in turn, led to increasing fragmentation as, typically, the North/South cleavage transformed into cleavages within the North. In Mali, there is a strong divide between groups based in Kidal and those based in Menaka or Gao, whose respective economic, sociological and political environments differ sharply. Fragmentation coincides with the creation of new acronyms that often obscure the essentially parochial nature of political re-alignments.¹⁴

Between the surrender of armed groups in 1996 until the 2006 rebellion, there were no major incidents of armed violence. However, 14 years after it had been signed, there had been little implementation of the *Pacte National*’s provisions. As a result, a number of Tuareg leaders including Iyad Ag Ghali, Hassan Ag Fagaga,¹⁵ Ibrahim Ag Bahanga and Ahmada Ag Bibi decided to found a new group called the *Alliance démocratique du 23 mai pour le changement (ADC)* and raided Ménaka and Kidal the same day.¹⁶ The renewed violence against Malian Armed Forces outposts in Kidal and the mutiny in Menaka instigated by the ADC, was a local, low-intensity and short-lived rebellion.

¹⁴ Post-Tamanrasset splinter groups included the *Mouvement populaire de l’Azawad (MPA)*, led by Iyad Ag Ghali. Based on tribal affiliation, the community of Chamanamas were then represented by *Front populaire de libération de l’Azawad (FPLA)* and the Imghad by *Armée révolutionnaire de libération de l’Azawad (ARLA)*. Intense inter-community clashes in the North took place between 1993 and 1994 between former allies, namely the Iyad Ag Ghali Ifoghas-centric MPA and the Ag Gamou Imghad-centric ARLA.

¹⁵ Ex-veteran from MPA, he joined the Malian army after the *Pacte National*. He commanded the ADC’s raid on Kidal.

¹⁶ The group was the result of a merger of a number of tiny groups with small military capacities but strong links between its founders. Ag Fagaga, Ag Bahanga and Ag Bibi were all combatants of Ag Ghali’s MPA. Ag Bahanga, Ag Fagaga’s cousin, who had also integrated into the army in 1996, was dismissed after he kidnapped ten military soldiers in 2001. In 2006, Ag Fagaga left the army with no more than 30 soldiers and joined forces with his cousin. According to Baz Lecocq, the 2006 rebellion resulted from ARLA’s leader Ag Gamou’s promotion and appointment as commander of the Gao garrison over Colonel Ag Fagaga. After the first attacks, ADC combatants immediately withdrew to their camps in Tigharghar Adrar.



Their main demand was to obtain new status for the Kidal region. They did not demand independence but wanted further autonomy for their province, disregarding possible similar grievances among Tuaregs outside Kidal. A few days later, Hassan Fagaga explained in an interview to *Jeune Afrique* that the “Tuaregs cannot accept indefinitely to live as second-class citizens in their own country”. That is why, he explained, they asked for “an autonomy that allows us to handle our own affairs within Malian entity”.¹⁷ He also described discrimination against integrated combatants and the marginalisation of the North through a lack of development as core causes of this new rebellion.

The Malian president, Amadou Toumani Touré had been involved in the development of the *Pacte National*. When the 2006 rebellion broke out, he knew the actors and the dynamics of Northern Mali, and had been in contact with Hassan Ag Fagaga in November 2005, seven months before the start of the rebellion.

The rebel leaders refused the mediation proposed by Northern tribal leaders and Libya, but accepted the intervention of Algiers, as with every peace process since 1990. The Algerian government asked the rebels to abandon their autonomy demand, and to stay in the Adrar of Teghaghgar with a ban on contacting other Tuareg organisations in neighbouring countries. In exchange, it asked the Malian government to open official talks. The pressure from the rest of the international community was minimal, and comprised mainly of promises of financial support to development projects in the Kidal region.

Within three months, a peace agreement was reached through Algerian mediation and the Algiers Accords were signed on 4 July 2006, in which the rebels had to relinquish their demands for autonomy under pressure from the Algerian government.

For the most part, the Algiers Accords reaffirmed the principles and provisions of the *Pacte National* but once again failed to create opportunity for the combatants, most of whom were young people who had mustered behind Ag Bahanga, to re-negotiate the balance of power between Northern elites. Instead, the elites – most notably Iyad Ag Ghaly – maintained the upper hand throughout the negotiations, leaving many excluded. As a result, Ag Bahanga and his men continued to fight in the area through a new movement called *Alliance Touareg Niger-Mali* (ATNM), and developed close cooperation with the Nigerien Tuareg insurgency active at the time (between 2007 and 2009), the *Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice* (MNJ).

Regional powers played a key role in influencing the shifting allegiances within Mali during the period. Having been involved in the peace processes in the 1990s, Algeria appeared to be an obvious candidate to lead mediation as the 2006 rebellion unfolded. Considered the most charismatic Tuareg leader in Northern Mali, Iyad Ag Ghali kept strong ties with Algerian officials who had supported him since the MPA rebellion, although Algeria was careful to avoid openly supporting Tuareg rebels.

Algeria’s role was further complicated by its ambiguous role in the formation of jihadi cells in Mali, as it appeared to allow its Islamists militants flee to the desert. This would eventually contribute to the formation of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, as the migration of Algerian radicals deeply impacted the geopolitical situation in the Sahara-Sahel region.

¹⁷ *Jeune Afrique* (2006).



On the Libyan side, as early as 1980, Qadhafi declared Libya the natural homeland of all Tuaregs, offering them Libyan residence permits or nationality.¹⁸ The droughts of 1974 and 1984 increased the number of young men who emigrated, and many went to Libya where they were recruited into Qadhafi's Islamic Legion where they eventually served Qadhafi's military ventures in Chad, Lebanon or Afghanistan. Multiple Malian rebels, including Iyad Ag Ghali and Ibrahim Ag Bahangawere enrolled in this corps. Qadhafi's policy towards Tuaregs explains, in part, the militarisation of political claims in Northern Mali.

But, while Qadhafi's influence was accepted by some Tuaregs, he never succeeded in being seen by Malian authorities as a potential official mediator in peace processes. In April 2006, Qadhafi was in Tombouctou to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. In front of thousands he invited all inhabitants of the Sahara to form a unique entity, from the Senegal river to the Euphrates, to defend their territory. During his stay, he also announced the opening of a Libyan consulate in Kidal, although no Libyans were living in the city. This visit to Mali is generally considered a forerunner to the coming rebellion.

Algerian and Libyan rivalries played a key role in the fragmentation of rebel groups that led to the 2006 uprising. Soon after the Algiers Accords were signed in 2006, the ADC combatants were divided into two main factions. The first, led by Iyad Ag Ghali, recognised the peace agreement; while the second, led by Ag Bahanga, was hostile to its implementation. Algeria and Libya both backed the Malian government's designated mediator, Iyad Ag Ghali, in its attempt to bring Ag Bahanga's ADC faction to negotiate with Malian authorities. During the following months, both Algeria and Libya played a prominent role in the release of hostages held by rebel forces.

The Algiers Accords: an elite bargain with dramatic consequences

The speed of the peace process under Algerian mediation that successfully reached a peace agreement only two months after the attacks is striking. As noted, the Algiers Accords mostly reaffirmed the *Pacte National's* provisions, but with a focus on Kidal region. The agreement did not change the essence of the elite deal, but simply underlined the urgent need to implement what had been agreed upon in 1992. However, once more the incapacity of the State to bring about proper reforms sowed the seeds of the 2012 rebellion.

A hasty, unambitious agreement doomed to non-implementation

The full title of the Algiers Accords is indicative of its narrow scope: namely, the "Algiers Accords of 2006: Restoration of peace, security, and development in the region of Kidal". The agreement had a unique focus on the Kidal region, created by the 1992 *Pacte National*, but did not seek to address the challenges that arose from the non-implementation of the *Pacte National* in the two other northern regions.

The main provisions of the Algiers Accords included the creation of a regional assembly with the power of consultation on legislation affecting the Kidal region; the organisation of a forum in Kidal with international donors; the building of new infrastructure (an airport in Kidal, the extension of electricity and phone networks, and roads from Kidal to Gao, Ménaka, and Algeria); the renewal of

¹⁸ Poulton, R.-E. and Ibrahim Ag Youssouf (1998).



the (not previously implemented) ten-year preferential tax regime meant to stimulate economic development; and the reintegration of deserters into the Malian army.

Soon after the Accords were signed, they faced the same political opposition that earlier deals had. Nearly 90 percent of the Malian population live in southern regions and dominate the government, the administration and the armed forces. Southern elites and their constituencies have resisted the greater representation of Tuaregs and other northern communities in national institutions. Southern criticism of the Accords was underpinned by an historic animosity towards Arabs and Tuaregs who raided sub-Saharan populations for decades and forced them into slavery. They accused northern populations of using arms against the Malian state to obtain exclusive advantages.

Misunderstood by politicians and the wider population in the south, the Algiers Accords were perceived as the surrender of the Malian state. Despite a communications campaign that sought to explain the terms of the Accords, national elections a few months after the signing of the Accords silenced all remaining supportive voices. As a consequence, the government showed little willingness to implement the Accords.

Nonetheless, the leader of the ADC, Amada Ag Bibi and General Kafougouna Koné, met in Algiers and signed a memorandum on February 2007 detailing the schedule of the Accords' implementation. They planned to hold a Forum with international donors for Kidal's development. But this also ran into opposition from southern Malians who decried their own poverty and poor access to public services.

The Aftermath of the 2006 Algiers Accords

Over the longer term, the Accords also ushered in new forms of behaviour that would eventually precipitate the outbreak of a further crisis in 2012, as well as a new era of Tuareg activism, sowing the seeds for a growing jihadi presence in the region. In many respects, the 2006 Algiers Accords underpinned the rise of new political and social dynamics. New forms of militancy emerged as a consequence, and dissent that had been formerly expressed through nationalist idioms was replaced with a jihadist agenda.¹⁹ At the same time, booming cross-border drug trafficking and a nascent hostage-taking business brought to the fore of the Northern political economy new commercial elites, who later played a key political and economic role in Mali. Key protagonists among Northern Mali's elite developed strong international connections, which had an impact on their ability to influence and leverage other political players. A re-positioning of the government's relationship with Northern actors occurred, and previous political settlements were seriously disrupted. With regard to the Tuaregs, three key dynamics occurred, which signalled the dysfunctional nature of the deal and paved the way for future mobilisation.

First, the 'dividends' of the peace deal were appropriated by a small clique – or at least not shared widely enough to satisfy various communities' demands. Iyad Ag Ghaly (who was offered a diplomatic job in Saudi Arabia) and other Tuareg leaders in charge of 'projects' to promote economic and social development soon started to be seen as "Bamako's Tuaregs", enjoying personal comfort and not contributing to the collective well-being. Grudges against leaders took a parochial turn: non Ifoghas, Kidal-based Tuareg leaders blamed the Ifoghas for using the dividends of peace exclusively (possibly to divert attention from their own misuse of public money) and sporadically threatened the

¹⁹ However, the jihad has a long history in the area. Anti-colonial uprisings led by Tuareg commanders Fihrun and Kaocen were explicitly framed in terms of jihad.



fragile political order. In short, power devolved to Northern elites who consolidated their patronage networks and own power, as had been the case in the 1990s.²⁰

Second, and partly as a result of a political system dominated by elders, a generational change occurred among Tuareg activists. As indicated above, while the main mobilisation processes tend to occur along parochial lines, youth activists began to have an important voice within their communities. The *Mouvement national de l'Azawad* (MNA), which directly stemmed from campus activism and was led by Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, himself a young man, explicitly advocated for separatism, leading to Moussa Ag Acharatoumane spending a few weeks in prison. This episode immediately made him the flag bearer of the new protests against established elites, both among Tuareg circles and beyond. The MNA later became the intellectual focal point for the *Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad* (which Moussa Ag Acharatoumane eventually left in 2016 to form his own faction, somewhat ironically in defence of his Dawsahak community).

Third, while some of the youth opted for campus activism, others opted for a more “adventurous” lifestyle embodied by Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, and later his older cousin Ag Fagaga. They included criminalised youth who were involved in cross-border smuggling and anti-state activism, some of whom joined Islamic movements such as the quietist Tablighi Jamaat.²¹ The old way of governing Northern Mali through intermediaries mandated by successive governments was proving increasingly unsustainable. Recourse to influential Tuareg leaders as intermediaries had traditionally allowed the central authorities to postpone institutional reforms and avoid a move towards federalism.

Instead, the government opted for an indirect approach, seeking to control the North through the use of proxy militias, recruited among Northerners who opposed greater independence for the Tuaregs.

The Tuareg leader, Bahanga, whose group had not signed up to the Algiers Accords was involved in the hijacking of traffickers linked to Arab traders, based in Gao or Timbuktu. The state had no capacity to deploy its troops in the North and such a move would anyway have triggered fierce resistance.²² This triggered concern among Arab businessmen, who reactivated a dedicated militia to protect their activities. An Arab officer, Colonel Ould Meydou, was appointed commander of the force, with the agreement of the government. The body formed was not a militia *per se* since its personnel enjoyed official enlistment in army ranks, but in practice Col. Ould Meydou was free to pick his recruits on an ethnic basis and lead the counterinsurgency.

A parallel counterinsurgent force, called Delta, was formed at the same time, led by El Hadj Ag Gamou, the Imghad commander, who, like Ould Meydou, recruited his own combatants. While both Ould Meydou and Gamou denied that their troops formed militias, at the very least this is how they were perceived by leaders from other groups. These forces eventually drove out Bahanga, but then became *de facto* instruments of pro-government armed politics in the North at a time when the Ifoghas and other tribes were using civil society channels (such as a Switzerland-funded ‘Network for Peace’) to voice their discontent about the criminalised forms of governance and electoral politics that were developing under the patronage of Gamou and Ould Meydou.

²⁰ International Crisis Group 2012; Ag Youssouf & al. 2012.

²¹ Bouhlef-Hardy & al. 2009.

²² Ag Youssouf & al., 2012.



The business elites behind the militias outlined above gained increasing influence around the mid-2000s, and transformed Northern Mali (and notably places like Ber, Gao or Tabankort) into a highly profitable drug-trafficking business²³ involving cannabis from Morocco, and cocaine from Latin America. In the mid-2000s, cocaine traffickers from Colombia and Venezuela had re-routed their business via West Africa as the direct route to Europe became too tightly controlled. Although Malian operators in this global trade remain minor players, and Mali remained a transit zone, the proceeds accumulated in Mali made those players extremely wealthy in Mali. It allowed them to expand their economic influence through investment in the licit economy (including public transport, public works and well drilling), making them inescapable business partners for the state, NGOs and others.

The emergence of these new Arab elites dramatically transformed the intragroup power balance, particularly as the tribes leading these businesses were traditionally low status. Business disputes also resulted in violence, barely concealed behind the political façade of existing armed groups. For instance, in 2009 a Boeing 767 aircraft landed on a hidden runway near Bourem, North of Gao, the hotbed of an Arab tribe, whose members were known for actively participating in drug trafficking. When it landed it was full of cocaine, but only the skeleton of the burnt plane was found by the authorities and the cargo had vanished. Arab leaders started accusing each other of stealing the drugs, and a number of them ended up in prison only to be released later at Col. Ould Meydou's request. This episode not only shows the close entanglement of militia politics with trafficking, but also demonstrates the extent to which these new economic rivalries were undermining earlier elite bargains and the wider settlement

Another crucial element that empowered criminal elites were the jihadi militants who enjoyed relative safety in Northern Mali in the mid-2000s, and developed a lucrative hostage business. By 2012, it is thought that payment of ransoms by Western countries to release hostages amounted to EUR 150 million.²⁴ A number of Arab elites had effectively carved out a safe haven for jihadis (see below) and had become natural brokers in the negotiations for the release of hostages, taking their cut in the ransom payments.

In the late 1990s, a small group of jihadis arrived in Northern Mali from Algeria. This was the beginning of a significant change in Northern Mali's political landscape, culminating in the occupation of the North by jihadi forces in 2012. The point of this section is not to narrate in detail the rise of jihadism in Mali, but to sketch the changes it introduced in a context of existing and fragile political settlements.

Politically, the presence of new armed players challenged existing forces. However, it was not the state that was worst affected by this shift, but the separatists whose nationalist political agenda was diametrically opposed to the jihadis desire to enforce Sharia law. Antagonism to the state proved more lenient: as explained above, those appointed to govern the North on behalf of the state identified with the jihadis as their anti-separatist agendas converged. Interestingly, the opportunity to ally with a new militant group became a vehicle for revenge among those who felt side-lined by others militants. The trajectory of Iyad Ag Ghaly exemplifies this logic: disappointed by the fate of separatist militancy and partly rejected by the younger generation of activists, he recycled his warrior capital under the jihadi banner in order to settle scores with his former companions.

²³ Lacher, 2012.

²⁴ Callimachi, 2014.



Economically, proceeds from hostage-taking ransoms not only helped jihadis acquire arms, but also, crucially, helped them to integrate into local economies and start winning hearts and minds. Jihadis became generous neighbours of Timbuktu's communities, then moved further East in Gao after a partial split, and in the Adrar mountains, further North (under the protection of Iyad Ag Ghaly). They paid for their upkeep handsomely and recruited many locals as a result. Their low-profile attitude and gradual approach towards populations was deliberate and in line with Al Qaeda's doctrine.

Despite some successes in counter-terrorism operations, the penetration of jihadi militants into Northern Mali society did not stop and even accelerated over the years. In the second half of the 2000s, the growing number of marriages between local women and foreign jihadists, mostly Algerians, is case in point. According to AQIM reports discovered in Northern Mali's main cities following French operation Serval, the relationships that jihadists had with local tribes were considered of strategic importance to the AQIM leadership.

Counter-terrorism: The growing presence of actors from outside the region

Following a French, US and UK decision to coordinate their respective military cooperation programmes with African partners, in 1998 France decided to create a new programme called RECAMP – *Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix* – dedicated to strengthening the African peacekeeping capabilities through tactical training, formation, technical assistance and projection support in case of a crisis situation.

Cooperation in counter-terror efforts between Sahelian countries and Non-African partners then developed from 2002 following growing jihadi threats across the Sahara Desert. Indeed, US involvement in Sahara region began in the early 2000s soon after the 9/11 attacks. President Bush and Algerian President Bouteflika met in Washington in November 2001 to discuss cooperation in the war against terrorism. Two factors accelerated US focus on the Sahara region. First, Algerian salafi-jihadi insurgent groups were expanding southward; and second, the US administration was eager to reduce its dependence on Middle East oil, and saw access to Africa's oil supplies as being of strategic national interest. Within a few years, the US was Algeria's largest foreign investor in hydrocarbons, amounting to \$22 billion in trade in 2008.

In 2002, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) was placed on the US list of terrorist organisations, which led to an increased focus by the US administration on the borderlands between Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Libya. Former US Ambassador to Mali, Vicki Huddleston, warned as early as 2004 that Algerian extremists shared a "bond" with the Tuareg and Arabs tribes of Northern Mali. In the mid-2000s, GSPC tried to extract revenues from informal licit and illicit trade of goods across Sahara Desert. For instance, the prominent jihadi leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar allegedly gained fame as a cigarette smuggler, which owed him the nickname "Mr. Marlboro".

In November 2002, focused on GSPC activities, the US launched the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) in four Sahelian countries: Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad. US Special Operations Forces (SOF) were deployed in these countries to provide training and equipment in order to improve border security and avoid the growth of jihadi havens. The creation of rapid-reaction forces to pursue terrorists was part of the US initiative, but appears to have been a total failure in Mali despite the fact that more than half of the PSI budget was focused on Northern Mali. Nonetheless, the capture of GSPC cell leader "El Para" by Chadian armed forces in 2004, after a two-month pursuit involving troops from Mali and Niger and support from Algerian and US forces (air and logistic support, intelligence sharing), was considered by the US to be the first result of the PSI. El Para was a major target.



Formerly a lieutenant of GSPC leader, Hassan Hattab, he became a jihadi kingpin by kidnapping 32 European tourists in 2003 and killing 43 Algerian soldiers a few months later.

This event led to the expansion of the scope and budget of the PSI, which was renamed Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP)²⁵ in 2004. Up from \$7.75 million in 2003, the US Congress approved a \$100 million annual budget for TSCTP, fearing the spread of Al Qaida training camps across the Sahara. A new focus was developed on illicit trafficking in arms, drugs and labour migrants.

Under the Obama administration, TSCTP has been progressively absorbed by US Africa Command (AFRICOM), responsible for all military affairs in Africa since 2007.²⁶ To deflect the AQIM threat in Mali, in 2009 President Obama endorsed a \$5 million military assistance package to Malian armed forces through the Counter Terrorism Train and Equip (CTTE) programme.

France launched Operation Sabre in the Sahara-Sahel region in 2009. Sabre's main goal was to assess jihadi threats in the region and eventually take on the terrorists. Only a few French Special Forces were thought to have been based in Atar (Mauritania) initially, before other teams were sent to Mopti (Mali) and Niger after the kidnapping of French uranium company AREVA workers. However, the 2012 rebellion and spreading of Salafi-Jihadi threats across the Sahel painfully underlined the inefficiency of these successive programmes. Until then, the French and US military presence in Mali had been limited, focussed on discrete Special Forces operations and training missions for the Malian army. The occupation of northern Mali by jihadis dramatically changed this state of affairs, and provoked a tactical rapprochement between the French and the Tuareg separatists. Reactivating memories of collaboration between French colonial troops and Tuaregs, France decided to rely on MNLA fighters to counter Jihadi groups, using them as guides in order to access Adrar des Ifoghas, located East of Kidal, where many Jihadists found refuge.

The cooperation between French troops and Tuareg rebels, accompanied by an abandonment of claims for independence and high military involvement of the international community in the North, undermined the separatist movement's credibility. Despite losses following French intervention, Iyad Ag Ghali's Ansar Eddine and AQIM's affiliates succeeded in convincing a number of Northern youth and ex-rebels that they would be the only group to make no concessions to the Malian and International authorities.

2012-15: Renewed violence

Large-scale rebellion as a consequence of failures in the 2006 deal

Direct threat to Malian territorial integrity

As noted, the 2006 Algiers Accords, and the elite bargain it enshrined led to a series of shifts in the political settlement, and an unprecedented crisis, probably the most severe the Malian state had to deal with since its independence. Malian armed forces were expelled from across the North by rebels demanding independence for Azawad, territory corresponding to the three Northern regions (Gao, Tombouctou and Kidal). Salafi-jihadi groups like MUJAO, AQIM and its affiliates overwhelmed

²⁵ From 2004 to 2005, the programme was called Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI).

²⁶ Created by President Bush in 2007, US military operations were previously divided among three regional commands including CENTCOM, EUCOM and PACCOM.



rebel groups and took control of Gao, Tombouctou and Kidal, where they applied Sharia law. A number of prominent Tuareg leaders, including Iyad Ag Ghali, shifted from rebellion to jihad. The Malian Armed Forces deserted all of its northern outposts, threatening the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state. These events provoked a military coup in Bamako, deepening the crisis even further.

Consequences of the 2006 political settlements

The poor implementation of the 2006 Algiers Accords' provisions was undoubtedly at the core of the return to violence in 2012. While the Accords in theory granted northern Mali further political autonomy and more development funds, Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré only launched the main development programme in 2011, more than four years after the deal was signed. Known as the Special Programme for Peace, Security, and Development in Northern Mali (*Programme spécial pour la paix, la sécurité et le développement du Nord Mali*, or PSPSDN), the programme was much criticised for being poorly funded, and its managers were accused of corruption.

The programme's murky management as well as its intention to redeploy the army in the North (and make the military outposts sources of local development) are seen as reasons behind the MNLA formation in the same year. Indeed, the MNA, predecessor of MNLA, had opposed the programme in September 2011. Besides non-implementation, the relapse into violence was accelerated by a harsh geopolitical environment (including the war in Libya and the entrenchment of jihadi groups) and by a growing generational divide between Tuareg youth and senior leaders involved in former peace processes. For years, Touré had tried to implement political deals agreed after the 2006 Rebellion, mostly by appointing rebel leaders into the Malian administration and integrating rebel fighters into the armed forces. But these national-level elite bargains with rebel leaders appeared to be a total failure: Ag Fagaga left the army again in 2007, and Iyad Ag Ghali was expelled from his diplomatic post in Saudi Arabia because of his growing connections with Islamic extremists. The launch of the PSPDN development programme, decentralisation reform and the creation of new regions came far too late, and new grievances were already growing in the North.

The 2015 Algiers Accord: repeating past mistakes

The Peace and Reconciliation Accord of 2015 (confusingly and commonly also called the Algiers Accord) was signed in Bamako on 15 May 2015 by the Malian government, loyalist armed groups and international community representatives (including Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritanie, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, AU, UN, ECOWAS, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, EU and France). Initially, no rebel groups signed due to ongoing battles against loyalist groups around Ménaka city. Finally, under international pressure, a broad -based rebel coalition of separatist rebels, the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), signed the peace agreement on 20 June 2015.

The Algiers Accord was once again crafted in line with the *Pacte National* provisions in its attempt to address core structural issues through institutional reform and further decentralisation – while denying further autonomy to Northern regions or any form of federalism. Thus, it reaffirmed “respect for national unity, territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the state of Mali, as well as its republican and secular character.” It called for “balanced development” and a “fight against corruption and impunity.” Regarding Tuareg insurgents' demands, the peace agreement included the creation of locally elected “Regional Assemblies” to be granted large autonomy and resources (30% of national revenue); the establishment of a Senate to increase representation of northern minorities in national institutions; the setting up of “Development Zones of the Northern Regions,” to receive priority public investment and development projects so as to “lift the northern regions to



the same level as the rest of the country in terms of development indicators,”; and, finally, for funds from donors.

However, this attempt to resurrect the 1992 *Pacte National* ultimately failed: it disregarded the jihadi presence in Northern Mali who had, by this time, taken root in Northern Mali and, as a result, modified local elite bargains and reshaped the political settlement by taking over rebel groups and by governing main cities and implementing Sharia Law.

The French intervention was explicitly aimed at defeating the jihadi groups. Meanwhile, the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), was established in 2013 to provide technical and financial support in order to try and avoid past failures to implement peace agreements. It is clear that without French and UN intervention, the political settlements in Mali would have been fundamentally different to that seen today.

France’s Operation *Serval* shaped local bargaining processes in a way which eventually recalls post-2006 arrangements. The Malian government succeeded in integrating pro-Mali militias – whose structure was close to those set up to drive away Bahanga after 2006 – as a way of counterbalancing the weight of separatists. Just as happened two decades earlier, a North/South cleavage would then transform into cleavages between different groups in the North, still as yet unresolved. Meanwhile, a number of Ifoghas who followed Iyad Ag Ghaly into his jihadi group, Ansar Eddine, created a splinter group called *Mouvement Islamique de l’Azawad (MIA)* before merging with a political entity, the *Haut Conseil de l’Azawad (HCA)*, which was eventually renamed *Haut Conseil pour l’Unité de l’Azawad (HCUA)*. This was a way to ensure that Ifoghas ruling family would not be excluded from future local bargains and political deal making. Of course, following the French intervention, those excluded from the various local bargains and peace agreements at the insistence of the West would become the fiercest spoilers under AQIM patronage. Most Northern communities are now torn apart between those who adhered to the peace process and those who joined jihadi militancy. A new cleavage has been added to an already complex series of nested cleavages. But this new cleavage has a specific feature: being framed in the ‘war on terror’ narrative, it is exclusively treated through military means.

Conclusion

Making sense of Mali’s multiple episodes of crises is a considerable challenge, given the endlessly fluid and shifting allegiances among the key players. The official and unofficial interference of foreign actors has further complicated the situation, as has the rise of the various jihadi actors.

While the coexistence of macro- and micro-level cleavages is commonplace in civil wars, it is a particularly defining feature of Malian politics. Broad-based coalitions cyclically challenge the Government of Mali’s authority against a backdrop of social, economic and political tensions between the centre and the periphery. Yet the periphery is, itself, a highly contested political arena, leading to communal feuds that are easily exploited by the government as a counterinsurgency strategy and requiring tailored, micro-level peace-making efforts to complement national peace deals.

The 2006 elite bargain was limited in scope and ambition, reflecting the limited scope and ambition of the uprising itself. However, the management of this peace process exemplifies the failings of peacebuilding in Mali, in which, typically, bargains have been exclusive, short-sighted and



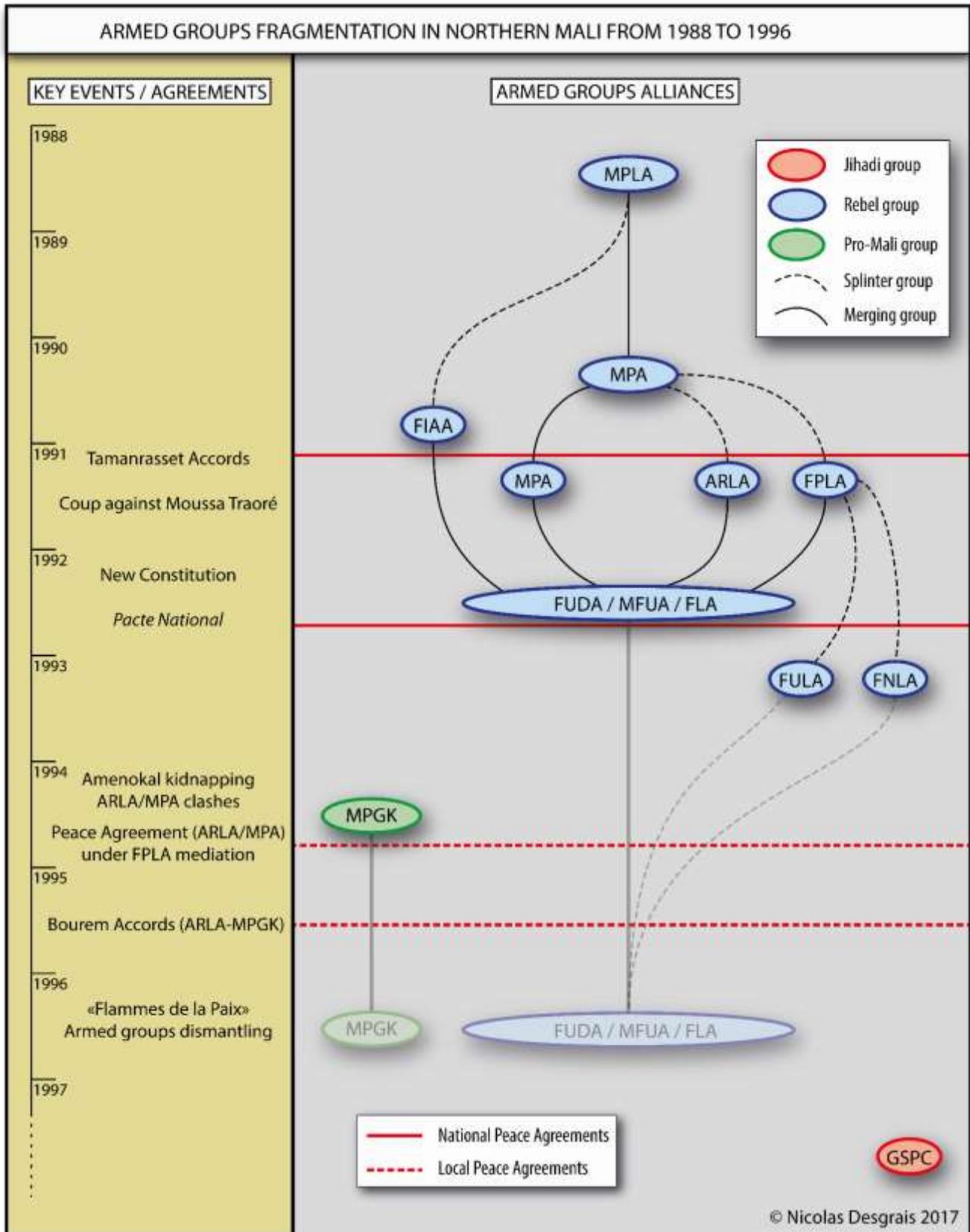
undermined by unofficial strategies. It was these failures that planted the seeds of the 2012 rebellion.

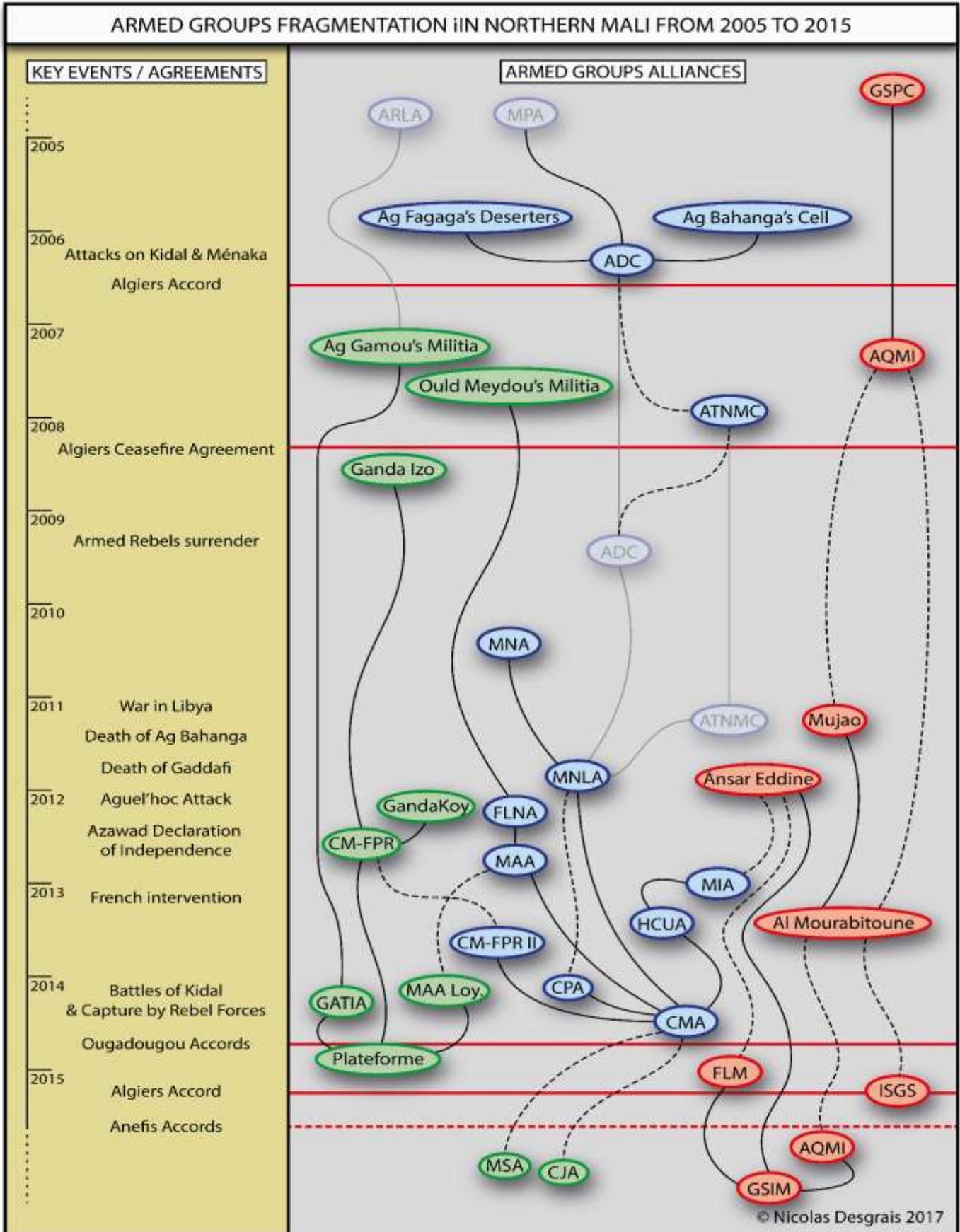
The 2015 peace agreement that followed the 2012 round of violence repeats many of mistakes of earlier iterations. As a result, the government continues to govern the North through armed proxies whose political and business interests coincide; and foreign involvement is ambiguous and lacks partiality.

The French intervention and the wider international presence in Mali could perhaps have done more to secure the 2015 agreement by monitoring the implementation of its provisions. However, this *de facto* neo-trusteeship became entangled in many of the complexities of Malian politics. Worryingly, two recent trends have emerged. First, Islamist militants have strengthened their influence by gathering support from those disappointed by the repeated failures to bring peace and the inequalities of the existing political settlement. Second, the micro-level diplomatic resources capable of stopping local vendettas seem to have been exhausted, as armed actors have repeatedly incapacitated legitimate, unarmed, public figures.



Timeline of group formation, fragmentation and peace processes





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