

MALI: AVOIDING ESCALATION

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MALI: AVOIDING ESCALATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In a little more than two months, Mali's political regime has been demolished. An armed rebellion launched on 17 January 2012 expelled the army from the north while a coup deposed President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) on 22 March. These two episodes ushered Mali into an unprecedented crisis that also threatens regional political stability and security. An external armed intervention would nevertheless involve considerable risks. The international community must support dialogue between the armed and unarmed actors in the north and south that favours a political solution to the crisis. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) must readjust its mediation efforts to avoid aggravating the already deep fault lines in Malian society. Strengthening the credibility of transitional institutions to restore the state and its security forces is an absolute priority. Finally, coordinated regional security measures must be taken to prevent once foreign groups from turning northern Mali into a new front in the "war on terror".

In Bamako, the capital, the transitional framework agreed by ECOWAS and the junta, composed of junior officers led by Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, has failed to establish undisputed political arrangements. The junta has rallied grassroots support by capitalising on the anger of a significant minority of the population towards ATT's government, with which it associates the interim president, Dioncounda Traoré, former head of the National Assembly. Traoré was physically attacked, and could have been killed, by supporters of the coup leaders in the presidential palace on 21 May 2012. Flown to France for treatment, he had still not returned to Bamako in mid-July. The destruction of the military apparatus and the weakness of the transitional authorities, notably the government of Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra, soon to be reshuffled, impede the Malian forces' ability to restore territorial integrity in the short term and avoid serious collapse.

In the north, the Tuareg group that launched the rebellion, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad, MNLA) has been outflanked by an armed Islamist group, Ansar Dine (Ançar Eddine), led by Iyad Ag Ghali, a Tuareg chief initially sidelined during the discussions that led to the cre-

ation of the MNLA. By taking control of the north, Ansar Dine has established a *modus vivendi*, if not a pact, with a range of armed actors, including former regime-backed Arab and Tuareg militias and, in particular, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The latter is responsible for kidnappings and killings of many Westerners in Mali, Niger and Mauritania, attacks against the armies of the region and involved in criminal transborder trafficking. Northern Mali could easily become a safe haven for jihadi fighters from multiple backgrounds.

Considered for twenty years a model of democratic progress in sub-Saharan Africa, Mali is now on the brink of sheer dissolution. The prospects of a negotiated solution to the crisis are receding with the consolidation of hard-line Islamist power in the north and a continued political, institutional and security vacuum in Bamako. Although ECOWAS initially sent out positive signals, the credibility of its diplomatic action was seriously compromised by a lack of transparency in the attempts at mediation led by Burkina Faso, which was bitterly criticised in the Malian capital and beyond. Pressure is mounting in favour of an external armed intervention as specific security and political interests of foreign actors – neighbouring states and others – prevail over those of the Malian population in both the north and south.

It would be wise to ignore calls for war and instead to continue with existing initiatives to promote a political settlement of the conflict, while ensuring that security issues are not neglected. ECOWAS countries willing to send troops do not appear to fully grasp the complex social situation in northern Mali, and underestimate the high risk of intertribal settling of scores that would result from external military intervention. Such an intervention would turn Mali into a new front of the "war on terror", at the expense of longstanding political demands in the north, and rule out any chance of peaceful coexistence between the different communities. Finally, it would expose West Africa to reprisals in the form of terrorist activity to which it is not equipped to respond. AQIM's logistical links with southern Libya and northern Nigeria (through Niger) make it perfectly feasible for it to carry out terrorist operations far from its Malian bases.

This series of events in Mali is the result of a weak political system despite democratic practices, disillusionment in the lack of economic and social development in the north and south, government laxity in state management and the unprecedented external shock of the Libyan crisis. Under the ATT government, relations between the centre of power in Bamako and the periphery rested on a loose network of personal, clientelistic, even mafia-style alliances with regional elites with reversible loyalties rather than on robust democratic institutions. This low-cost system of governance was able to contain the actions of the opposition, including armed groups, given their limited military ambitions and capacities. It disintegrated when faced with a rebellion that was quickly transformed into a well-armed group by the effects of the Libyan crisis and the opportunism of Islamist groups that have in recent years accumulated an abundance of arms using profits from lucrative trans-Saharan trafficking of illicit goods and Western hostages.

The perpetuation of a power struggle in Bamako, during a transition period whose end is impossible to predict, and the confused overlapping of armed groups in the north mean the future is very uncertain. A solution to the crisis depends, first, on how to restore Mali's territorial integrity and, second, on whether the jihadi movements manage to consolidate their position of strength in the north. The decisions of Mali's neighbours (Algeria, Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso), regional organisations (ECOWAS, African Union) and Western and multilateral actors (France, U.S., UN, European Union) will also have some influence. It is urgent and necessary to restore the political, institutional and security foundations of the central state prior to working towards the north's reintegration into the republic. It is also essential to increase humanitarian aid to the civilian population in the Sahel-Sahara region, already facing a food crisis, and quickly resume foreign aid to prevent an economic collapse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure security and strengthen the legitimacy of transitional institutions and the state

To the Interim President and the Current Prime Minister:

1. Consolidate the legitimacy of the transitional authorities by urgently forming a genuine government of national unity after broad consultations with the main political parties and civil society organisations.
2. Ensure the effective establishment of the special unit composed of gendarmes and police officers dedicated to the protection of transitional institutions representatives and request, if necessary, the deployment of a small, external armed contingent to support the force.

3. Guarantee proceedings of the judicial investigation into the assault on 21 May 2012 against the interim president, and if progress stalls, request international assistance to help identify and punish those who were directly and indirectly responsible for the assault.

To the Malian Defence and Security Forces:

4. Guarantee the security and free exercise of their duties to the prime minister, members of the government and the National Assembly and other state officials.
5. Put an end to arbitrary arrests of civilian and military individuals and the settling of scores within the army.
6. Restructure and restore discipline in the armed forces, under the authority of the government and the official hierarchy of the different corps.

To Members of the Former Junta and to Leaders of Civil Society Organisations that support them:

7. Stop the manipulation of public opinion through divisive discourses that expose representatives of transitional institutions and politicians in general to violence.

To Mali's Bilateral and Multilateral Partners:

8. Contribute to the reorganisation of the Malian armed forces and provide necessary support to the effective establishment of a force to protect the transitional institutions.
9. Help stabilise the Malian economy through a rapid resumption of foreign aid as soon as a national unity government is formed; and answer the urgent humanitarian needs of the civilian populations severely affected by the crisis, whether internally displaced persons or Malian refugees in neighbouring countries.

To encourage a political settlement of the conflict in the North and neutralise the terrorist threat

To the Malian Government:

10. Refrain from launching a military offensive to regain control of the north prior to the creation of conditions for negotiation with non-terrorist armed actors and community representatives, including those forced out of the country by violence.
11. Seek the effective support of neighbouring countries, particularly Algeria, for a strategy to regain sovereignty over the north and neutralise the terrorist armed groups that threaten regional security.

To the Leaders of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad and Ansar Dine:

12. Formulate publicly clear agendas and commit to:
 - a) respecting human rights and the principles of democratic and plural governance, especially with regard to religion;
 - b) guaranteeing security and equal access of the population to basic public services and facilitating the access of humanitarian organisations to the population;
 - c) helping to establish the facts regarding the atrocities at Aguelhoc as well as all other atrocities perpetrated during the military conquest of the north;
 - d) combatting the criminal trafficking activities that thrive in the territory they control;
 - e) joining immediately the fight against AQIM and its armed offshoots; and
 - f) exploring with the Malian government how to reach a rapprochement to avoid a lasting partition of the country and an internecine war.

To the Governments of Algeria, Mali, Niger and Mauritania:

13. Revive regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism and transborder crime and open up participation to Nigeria and the Arab Maghreb Union, notably Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.

To the Algerian Government:

14. End the ambiguity about how serious a threat it believes armed groups in northern Mali are to regional security and show clear support for the restoration, even gradual, of Mali's sovereignty over its entire territory.

To the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union and the UN:

15. Continue to provide humanitarian support to the civilian populations who are the direct victims of the crisis in the three northern regions as well as to displaced people and refugees.
16. Adopt a joint strategy, together with the Malian authorities, that combines the establishment of a formal framework for negotiations with the armed groups in the north, restoration of the Malian armed forces and the mobilisation of as many resources as possible, including military, to neutralise AQIM and other criminal groups in northern Mali.

To the UN Security Council:

17. Support attempts to reach a comprehensive solution to the crisis within the framework of Resolution 2056 of 5 July 2012 by:
 - a) providing the Secretary-General's special representative in West Africa with the necessary means to use his good offices to support ECOWAS mediation;
 - b) adopting targeted sanctions against all those who are identified as hampering normal operation of the transitional institutions in Bamako and attempts at resolving the crisis in the north, and against all those responsible for serious human rights and international humanitarian law violations in the north and south;
 - c) establishing an independent group of experts to investigate the origin of the financial and material resources of the armed groups in northern Mali, as well as their arms supply lines, and collate information allowing the identification of Malian and foreign persons who should face targeted sanctions; and
 - d) requesting the creation of an independent UN commission of inquiry into the human rights and international humanitarian law violations committed throughout Malian territory since the beginning of the armed rebellion in January 2012, which should report to the Security Council as quickly as possible.

To Mali's Bilateral and Multilateral Partners, particularly the European Union, France and the U.S.:

18. Provide political and financial support to Malian political and social initiatives that seek to resolve the crisis by uniting all communities, in the north and the south, through promotion of respect for the republic's fundamental principles and society's traditional religious tolerance.
19. Support efforts to reconstitute the defence and security forces, with a view to strengthening their cohesion, discipline and effectiveness so they can ensure security in the south, constitute a credible threat of last resort to protect the populations trapped in the north and be capable of participating, if necessary, in regional actions against terrorist groups.
20. Provide intelligence support to the armed forces of Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Algeria, Libya and Nigeria to help them locate terrorist groups and their arms caches.

Dakar/Brussels, 18 July 2012

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I. INTRODUCTION

Well before the Libyan crisis, the most attentive observers were alerted to the danger of the country's political destabilisation by the presence of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali since 2003, the recurrence of localised armed actions by Tuareg and other groups in the politically and economically marginalised north of the country, and the increasingly dysfunctional nature of the Malian state.¹ However, neither the sequence of events nor the extent and the nature of the crisis that has affected the country since January 2012 were predicted accurately.

The expulsion of central government military forces from the north and the collapse of the government in the south following the coup led by Captain Sanogo took by surprise not only Malians and the international community but also the very instigators of the most spectacular episodes of this crisis: the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad, MNLA), which launched an offensive against Malian troops in January 2012 and the military junta that carried out the coup on 22 March 2012. In their respective spheres, these groups have since been overtaken by events caused by their actions.

The MNLA has had to give way to Islamic movements that have proved operationally stronger, while the junta's actions provoked a climate of insurrection in Bamako and

gave free rein to violent score-settling among politicians and within the army. The international community is not responding to this situation in a uniform manner and does not have local interlocutors who are acceptable and sufficiently legitimate to promote a political resolution of the crisis. This leaves the field open to vociferous war-mongering which is unable to offer a constructive long-term solution.

This report is published at a time of evident polarisation in the positions held by the multiple actors in this crisis and it is proving increasingly difficult for the most moderate to make their voices heard. It provides a detailed account of the causes of the decline and implosion of the Malian state, maps the strategies and methods of the actors concerned and assesses the influence of external forces on recent Malian political events. Without underestimating the extreme danger of some armed groups in the north² to the country and also to the region,³ it outlines how a solution might be sought to the Malian conflict that would avoid a military escalation of the crisis, prevent a long-term war and stop the conflict from spreading to the surrounding area.

¹ In March 2005, Crisis Group published a report on Islamism and the terrorist risk in the Sahel. Crisis Group decided to conduct this research in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks, when the U.S. launched a security cooperation program with the Sahel belt countries with the explicit objective of training the armies and security services of these countries for the war on terror. The U.S. feared that terrorist Islamist groups seeking territories not effectively under the administration of the states to which they formally belonged would set up permanent bases in the vast Sahara Desert and the surrounding area. The program was initially called the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) and included Chad, Mauritania, Niger and Mali. However, the Crisis Group report affirmed that "Mali, a star pupil of 1990s neo-liberal democratisation, runs the greatest risk of any West African country other than Nigeria of violent Islamist activity". See Crisis Group Africa Report N°92, *Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?*, 31 March 2005, p. i.

² In its 2005 report, Crisis Group established precisely the origin and nature of the jihadi terrorist threat in the region. Ibid.

³ See map of the region in Appendix B.

II. THE OBSCURE TWISTS AND TURNS OF ATT'S NORTHERN POLICY

Although the extent and progress of the military rebellion launched in northern Mali in January 2012 were to some extent a result of the collapse of the Qadhafi regime provoked by the rebellion and NATO strikes,⁴ the turn of events was mainly due to the Malian authorities' inability to govern the north in a way that responded to the security, economic and social expectations of its people. These unsatisfied aspirations are deeply anchored in the area's history and led to regular cycles of armed uprisings and repression throughout the 20th century. Well before the Libyan crisis, the government of Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) had aggravated discontent in the north and even further afield. The influx of Libyan weapons and the arrival of "returnees" – Tuaregs who formerly fought alongside Qadhafi and returned to their countries following his demise – precipitated a new rebellion that was fuelled by underlying resentment.

A. TUAREG REBELLIONS, THE NATIONAL PACT AND THE ALGIERS ACCORDS

Political integration of the northern and southern parts of Mali's vast territory is a long and turbulent story, going through several evolutions prior to the current climax. The most agitated periods of northern Mali's post-colonial history occurred in 1963, the 1990s and 2006-2008. The rebellions that took place in these years reflected the profound historical misunderstanding between the elites in the north and south at the time of independence in 1960,⁵ later entrenched by the south's marginalisation of the

north.⁶ Renewed instability indicates that no definitive settlement has been found for these structural problems. Each new episode had its own dynamics but was related to the previous one.

For example, the post-conflict period that followed the rebellions of the 1990s contained the seeds of the 2006 uprising just as the current rebellion is partly a result of the incomplete settlement of the 2006 crisis. With each conflict, memories of unpunished crimes that were not officially recognised in the past resurface. Stories of massacres, the poisoning of wells and forced exile from 1963, and the bloody settling of scores carried out by pro-government militias against Tuareg civilians in the 1990s are passed down to each new generation of fighters and shape the collective memory of a history marked by violence and suffering.⁷

At the beginning of the 1990s, a rebellion began in northern Mali by fighters from a wide range of Tuareg communities and, to a lesser extent, non-Tuareg communities in the region. These fighters were the heirs of two decades of activism among exile circles in Algeria and Libya, formed by those who had fled from government repression and drought in Mali. Some of them had temporarily enrolled

⁴ For an analysis of the conflict in Libya and NATO's military campaign, see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°107, *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (V): Making Sense of Libya*, 6 June 2011.

⁵ See B. Lecocq, "That Desert is Our Country", doctoral thesis, Amsterdam University, 2002. The author describes the political perceptions and calculations of the Tuareg elites in Adagh (Kidal region) at independence. They banked on the fulfilment of the French project to create a Saharan political entity, the Organisation of Saharan Regions (Organisation commune des régions sahariennes). The Tuareg perceived the abandonment of this project and the north's incorporation into the newly independent Mali, dominated by the Bambaras, as treason on the part of France. In addition to objective factors regarding the disconnection between north and south (geographical distance), the divide was exacerbated by the reciprocal negative racial stereotyping (Tuareg were "whites, slave owners, lazy" and Sub-Saharan were "black, unsophisticated and submissive") that infused political discourse and was recycled with each new episode of political tension.

⁶ See M. Humphreys, and H. Ag Mohamed, "Senegal and Mali", in P. Collier and N. Sambanis, *Understanding Civil War. Evidence and Analysis: Africa*, World Bank, Washington DC, 2005, pp. 247-302. The authors systematically explored the fault lines separating north from south and the profound and indisputable economic and social differences that manifest themselves in broad regional discrepancies in access to education and health. These inequalities were mainly inherited from the colonial era, when the colonial administration paid little attention to developing the northern economy, and from the transition towards independence, which entrusted the sedentary Bambara elites, indoctrinated in socialist ideology, with the task of administering the culturally and economically distant north, perceived as being feudal (see B. Lecocq, "That Desert is Our Country", op. cit.). At the political level, following the 1963 rebellion and until the 1990s, the south kept the north under military control. Repression, combined with droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, caused the collapse of the nomadic pastoral economy that was the heart of Tuareg social organisation and provoked an exodus of northern people into neighbouring countries. The north remained a disaster area during the first decades of independence. Subsequent development programs did not lessen this marginalisation. On the contrary, they were used as political levers by restricted groups of beneficiaries, causing jealousies and local conflicts (see A. Giuffrida, "Clerics, Rebels and Refugees: Mobility Strategies and Networks among the Kel Antessar", *The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3-4 (2005), pp. 529-543.

⁷ B. Lecocq ("That Desert is Our Country", op. cit.) describes the policy of terror conducted by the Malian authorities to defeat the 1963 rebellion: the systematic destruction of herds, summary executions, forced marriages and other humiliations inflicted on civilians as well as rebels.

in Colonel Qadhafi's Islamic Legion⁸ and served in Lebanon and Chad to promote the dictator's pan-African and pan-Arab ambitions. Their experience of exile and coping tactics shaped their *ishumar*⁹ political culture, which mixed socialism and nationalism.

The 1990 revolution's initial demands for independence were abandoned after pressure from Algeria, which mediated in the conflict,¹⁰ and because of the readiness of some influential Tuareg chiefs to negotiate. They were represented by Iyad Ag Ghali,¹¹ who single-handedly conducted a first round of negotiations leading to the Tamanrasset Accords of 1991.¹² These accords provided for a series of measures to make the north autonomous and to create a new administrative division out of the Kidal area, previously administered by Gao. Gao's Tuaregs became a minority among the sedentary populations of the Niger belt. These accords provoked a split between Ag Ghali's moderate bloc and radical supporters of independence. Tribal divisions accentuated ideological disagreements, leading to the creation

of many diverging Tuareg/northern movements. Although divided, the rebellion set up a "coordination", which negotiated with the Malian authorities a peace plan that was more formal than the Tamanrasset Accords. Known as the National Pact, it was the most ambitious of its kind to this day.

Its objective was "a fair and definitive peace in northern Mali and national reconciliation".¹³ It promised the gradual demilitarisation of the north and the complete integration of the rebels into special units of the national forces. It recognised the north's economic marginalisation and promised a ten-year economic recovery plan to overcome the development gap between north and south. The pact was accompanied by important constitutional changes that transferred a number of state powers to the region and opened up opportunities for decentralised international cooperation. However, it lacked financial resources and its implementation, especially the integration component, was continuously postponed.¹⁴ In addition, it gave rise to violent reaction from a sedentary militia that was dissatisfied with the arrangements made for "nomadic" Tuaregs. This militia, called Ganda Koy and composed of former Malian soldiers, helped to transform the conflict in the north into a violent intercommunal and racial conflict, resulting in the deaths of dozens of "light-skinned" Tuaregs and Arabs, especially in the Gao region, between 1994 and 1996.¹⁵

Non-implementation of the commitments made in the National Pact, new periods of drought, and discontent among Tuareg soldiers integrated into the Malian army caused a resurgence of rebellion in May 2006. Its leaders, Hassan Ag Fagaga and Ibrahim Bahanga, both young officers, expressed institutional frustrations and denounced discrimination within the army. Their movement, called the "23 May Alliance for Democracy and Change", was this time restricted to the Kidal region. Their men were mainly Ifoghas from the Popular Movement of Azawad (Mouvement populaire de l'Azawad, MPA), led by Iyad Ag Ghali in the 1990s. Ag Ghali became involved and added his signature to new accords, again sponsored by Algeria in

⁸ The Islamic Legion was a pan-African force created by Qadhafi at the beginning of the 1970s to combat Western imperialist initiatives. It was used in Uganda, Lebanon and especially Chad in the early 1980s.

⁹ After the French word "chômeur", meaning unemployed. See B. Lecocq, "Unemployed Intellectuals in the Sahara: The Teshumara Nationalist Movement and the Revolutions in Tuareg Society", *International Review of Social History*, vol. 49 (supplement, 2004), pp. 87-109; and E. Ag Ahar, "L'initiation d'un ashamar", *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, vol. 57, no.1 (1990), pp. 141-152.

¹⁰ Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, op. cit.

¹¹ Iyad Ag Ghali was then an *achamor* (singular of *ishumar*) from Kidal and a member of the Ifoghas clan (the noblest in the Tuareg hierarchy) and spoke French. After the Tamanrasset Accords, he led the Popular Movement of the Azawad (Mouvement populaire de l'Azawad, MPA), which later became a counter-insurgency force in the pocket of the Malian government after pro-independence radicals refused a ceasefire and the rebellion became an intercommunal struggle. The MPA opposed the Azawad Revolutionary Army (Armée révolutionnaire de l'Azawad, ARLA), led by Alaji Gamou, a member of the Imghad tribe, subordinate to the Ifoghas in the Tuareg political hierarchy. Ironically, Iyad Ag Ghali, now leader of Ansar Dine, and Alaji Gamou, who fought the MNLA and Ansar Dine as a colonel in the Malian army until March 2012, continue to face each other, both of them having switched sides.

¹² Another front signed the Tamanrasset Accords, the Azawad Armed Islamic Front (Front islamique armé de l'Azawad, FIAA) but some have questioned whether FIAA representatives were in fact present when the accords were signed (see B. Lecocq, "That Desert is Our Country", op. cit.). The FIAA was created on the initiative of members of the "Berabiche" Arab community from Timbuktu. In March 2012, a force that was heir to the FIAA temporarily claimed control of Timbuktu, before being replaced by Iyad Ag Ghali's Ansar Dine. It was therefore not by chance that Ag Ghali revived this alliance after the fall of Timbuktu in March 2012.

¹³ National Reconciliation Pact, p. 2.

¹⁴ Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, op. cit.; S. Straus, "Mali and its Sahelian Neighbors", "World Development Report 2011, Background Case Study", World Bank, Washington DC, 2011.

¹⁵ The Ganda Koy ("masters of the land") were mainly Songhai, and to a lesser extent, Peul. See B. Lecocq, "That Desert is Our Country", op. cit. and Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, op. cit. In 1996, the government officially demobilised the Ganda Koy militia and amnestied their members. However, they have reformed over the last five years and adopted the name of Ganda Izo ("sons of the land"), mainly to counter the emergence of armed Tuareg groups. See "New militia group allegedly behind murder of four Tuaregs south of Gao", cable from the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 9 September 2008, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/09/08BAMAKO778.html>.

July 2006.¹⁶ The Algiers Accords revived some provisions of the National Pact, notably the creation of a north-Malian security force – the Saharan Security Units. The Kidal region especially benefited from this agreement, and notably the Ifoghas, who were over-represented in the monitoring organs created to implement the accords.¹⁷

Once again, there was a delay in implementing the accords – notably regarding the creation of the Saharan Security Units – and consequently one of the movement’s instigators, Ibrahim Bahanga, resumed guerrilla warfare against Malian troops. He was followed by only a small number of supporters but he had the capacity to harm both the Malian army and other armed Saharan actors, such as traffickers.¹⁸ The Bahanga dissidence was temporarily interrupted in 2009. The rebel leader was pressured to make his way to Libya, where he was welcomed by Colonel Qadhafi. Meanwhile, ATT’s government created an Arab militia, led by Abderamane Ould Meydou, and a Tuareg militia, led by Alaji Gamou, to conduct counter-insurgency operations against Bahanga. The creation of these two militias followed the same reasoning: invert the local power hierarchy by recruiting forces loyal to the Malian state from the subordinate communities of the north who were open to cooperating with Bamako.

The Arabs of the Tilemsi Valley, in the region of Gao, Ould Meydou’s birthplace, and the Imghads, Gamou’s tribe, are respectively dependent on the Kounta and Ifogha com-

munities.¹⁹ The April 2009 local elections confirmed the growing influence of the Tilemsi Arabs and the Imghads in local politics.²⁰ Although these two groups benefited from the government’s formal support, other militias were created in the same period, the architecture of which was often the same as that of the fronts created in the 1990s: the Arab communities of Timbuktu regrouped around the former rebels of the Armed Islamic Front of Azawad (Front islamique armé de l’Azawad, FIAA) while the Peuls and the Songhaïs revived the Ganda Koy, which became the Ganda Izo.

The creation of Arab and Imghad militias and the arms race undertaken by other communities reflects ATT’s method for governing the north: producing irregular armed actors that temporarily neutralise each other, even if, in the words of an international official in Bamako, “a rebellion [is to break out] every five years”.²¹ The same reasoning was applied to the serious criminal, transborder trafficking that was undertaken within both the militia and military spheres.²² It appears that the release in January 2012 of Ould Awainat, one of the main defendants in a spectacu-

¹⁶ See F. Bouhlel-Hardy, C. Grémont and Y. Guichaoua, *Contestation armée et recompositions religieuses au Nord-Mali et au nord-Niger: perspectives locales*, French foreign ministry, research unit, 2009, unpublished. In this document, Charles Grémont explains that the non-involvement of other Tuareg communities on the side of the Alliance insurgency was largely due to their memories of the internecine struggles between the MPA and the ARLA in 1994 and to the latter’s distrust of Iyag Ag Ghali, who was co-opted by the Malian authorities during the rebellion and became a government agent.

¹⁷ The representatives of the other Kidal communities, notably the Idnan and the Taghat Mallet, struggled to reach an understanding on the steering committee established for the Algiers Accords and were gradually excluded. See “Prominent Tuareg’s view of Arab militias, rebellion, and AQIM”, cable from the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 18 March 2009, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/03/09BAMAKO163.html>.

¹⁸ For more on the career and the circumstances of the temporary fall of Bahanga, see “Mali using Tuareg militias to combat Tuareg rebels”, cable from the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 30 May 2008, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/05/08BAMAKO482.html#>; and “Is the rebellion over? Mali beats back Bahanga and prepares for peace in Kidal”, cable from the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 12 February 2009, revealed by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/02/09BAMAKO85.html>.

¹⁹ A useful panorama of the demographic, economic and political positions of Arab communities in northern Mali is provided by “Berabiche and AQIM in Northern Mali”, cable from the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 17 April 2008, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/04/08BAMAKO371.html#>.

²⁰ See “Electoral tensions in Tarkint: Where AQIM, Arab militias, and Tuareg meet”, cable from the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 8 May 2009, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/05/09BAMAKO280.html>.

²¹ Crisis Group telephone interview, 20 April 2012.

²² The cables sent by the U.S. embassy in Bamako revealed by WikiLeaks give a detailed description of the authorities’ arrangements with the armed groups and traffickers that had influence on the local political situation in the north. For example, see the clemency shown in 2009 towards Amadou Diallo, then leader of the Peul and Songhaï defence movement, the Ganda Izo, heir of the Ganda Koy. See “Mali releases some Tuareg prisoners and one murder suspect prior to local elections”, cable from the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 20 April 2009, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/04/09BAMAKO246.html>. Another example concerns an Arab commander of the Malian army and a former FIAA rebel, Ould Bou Lamana, after the interception of a convoy of cocaine in August 2007. See “Tuareg and Arabs clash over drugs and cash in northern Mali”, cable from the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 31 August 2007, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/08/07BAMAKO960.html#>. Ould Bou Lamana was later assassinated at his home in Timbuktu. U.S. administrators have many theories about the presumed killers as Lamana was at the centre of political, mafia and terrorist networks. “Armed assailants assassinate Col. Lamana Ould Bou in Timbuktu”, cable from the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 11 June 2009, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/06/09BAMAKO383.html#>.

lar drug affair (the Air Cocaine affair),²³ permitted Colonel Ould Meydou to recruit fighters in the Arab community.²⁴

B. LONG-TERM, DEEPLY-ROOTED ESTABLISHMENT OF AQIM IN NORTHERN MALI

The Malian authorities' reaction to AQIM's terrorist activities followed the same reasoning as their response to rebellions and crime in the north. They adopted a low-cost policy, in which the north was remotely governed from Bamako trying to spare as many state resources as possible. This could have been seen either as the only option, given the state's limited capacity to deal with militarily powerful terrorist groups,²⁵ or as an opportunity for profitable collusion between the interested parties. The first hypothesis is weak since Mali does not appear to have used the resources provided by France and the U.S. to fight terrorism in an optimum way.²⁶ Over the years, the

second hypothesis has seemed increasingly likely and has become the dominant doctrine in the foreign affairs departments of Western and neighbouring countries.²⁷

It is crucial to avoid seeing AQIM as a foreign and autarkic organisation that has benefited from the political and social vacuum falsely attributed to the Sahara region. It is objectively difficult to control the desert but in order to survive and flourish on a long-term basis, it is necessary to fit into its system of social, economic and political relations. AQIM's presence in Mali for around ten years is the result of the gradual construction of social arrangements at local, national and international levels.

AQIM is a political and social object, not a pathology. The organisation, which used to call itself the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat, GSPC) before it officially affiliated to al-Qaeda in 2007, is a product of the Algerian civil war. It is an armed fundamentalist group produced by a split among armed Algerian movements and based on a core of experienced fighters, some of whom have received military training in Afghanistan. The GSPC established itself in Mali in 2003 after kidnapping 32 Western tourists in southern Algeria. Mali took credit for their release, thanks mainly to the mediation of Iyad Ag Ghali. In exchange, the hostage takers obtained relative immunity on Malian territory (in the Timbuktu region and then, in 2007, the Timétrine mountains).²⁸

Over the years, AQIM has developed social, political and economic links²⁹ with the local political institutions and charged a toll on transborder traffic.³⁰ Its income was boosted in the period starting in 2008 by an increase in the number of Westerners kidnapped in this region which is important for the tourist industries of both Mali and Niger. AQIM's violent actions were initially concentrated outside Mali, in Mauritania and Niger, to the extent that neighbouring states and Western partners began to suspect the existence of a "non-aggression pact" between Malian

²³ In November 2009, the charred wreckage of a Boeing 727 emptied of its cargo was discovered in the desert near Tarkint, to the north east of Gao. The aircraft had flown from Latin America and, by all accounts, was transporting several dozen tonnes of cocaine, no trace of which was found. The aircraft was no doubt unable to take off again. As it was not possible to dismantle the network of traffickers, the investigation led to the arrest of individuals involved in the organisation of the convoy, including Ould Awainat, the Malian entrepreneur who was charged with building the landing runway for the aircraft and helping to unload it.

²⁴ See "Les brèves du Nord: Neuf colonels capturés par l'équipe d'Ould Meïdou", Maliweb.net, 23 January 2012, <http://www.maliweb.net/news/la-situation-politique-et-securitaire-au-nord/2012/01/23/article,43316.html>.

²⁵ It is a vision that the U.S. authorities espoused in March 2009. While emphasising the difficulties facing the Malian authorities in implementing the war against terror, it noted the lack of resources and concluded "that there is no collusion between the Malian government and AQMI" (See "Mali's reality: What motivates ATT?", cable of the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 19 March 2009, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/03/09BAMAKO167.html#>). It is likely that this view has been modified since then.

²⁶ Since 2002, the U.S. has been continuously involved in monitoring and managing the terrorist threat in the Sahel; first through the Pan-Sahel Initiative, which became the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative in 2005 and was eventually incorporated into the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2007. These diverse forms of military cooperation involved providing military supplies, anti-terrorism training and large-scale joint military exercises. The last of these exercises, which was due to take place in February 2012, had to be cancelled because of the outbreak of rebellion in the north. The rations supplied for the soldiers were eventually parachuted to the Malian soldiers besieged in Tessalit (Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Bamako, 19 March 2012). In recent months, U.S. military and intelligence activity has intensified in Africa and focused on the Sahel. See "U.S.

expands secret intelligence operations in Africa", *The Washington Post*, 14 June 2012.

²⁷ One indication of Western irritation towards the Malian authorities was the vehement speech given by the French ambassador in Bamako at the end of 2011. See "La colère en intégralité d'un ambassadeur atypique: Christian Roux", Maliweb.net, 13 December 2011.

²⁸ "Le sanctuaire quasi-imprenable d'Aqmi dans le Nord du Mali", *Jeune Afrique*, 21 September 2010; and Crisis Group interview, former rebel Tuareg leader, Niamey, 17 March 2012.

²⁹ Mokhtar Belmokhtar, one of AQIM's emirs, was married to an Arab woman from Timbuktu.

³⁰ The recent report of an information mission by the French National Assembly's foreign affairs committee provides detailed background on AQIM: "La situation sécuritaire dans les pays de la zone sahélienne", 6 March 2012.

forces and the terrorists.³¹ If such a pact existed, it was no longer in place in 2011, when many kidnappings took place on Malian territory.³²

The payment of large ransoms has generated a prosperous industry that rewards both the terrorist groups and the intermediaries responsible for negotiating the release of hostages. At the end of 2010, Algerian diplomats estimated that AQIM had received €50 million worth of ransoms since 2003.³³ Each Western hostage was “worth” around €2.5 million – to the countries which agreed to pay up.³⁴ This industry clearly took on mafia overtones. It involved local³⁵ and international actors, notably French.³⁶ While paying large sums to terrorists in exchange for the release of their hostages, Western foreign affairs departments demanded that ATT take a stronger line in the fight against AQIM. This has made way for repeated and insistent ne-

gotiations, but the Malian authorities have emphasised, not without reason, that the war is not exclusively theirs and insisted they have only very limited military resources.³⁷

However, Western belief in Bamako’s sincerity gradually declined in light of the weakness of the army’s anti-AQIM interventions. This mistrust reached its peak at the time of the Wagadou forest operation, near the Mauritanian border, in June 2011. Leaks from Bamako gave away the Mauritanian and Malian forces’ intention to attack the AQIM base located there and the Mauritanian troops, distrustful of their Malian counterparts, launched an independent offensive on 24 June. The Malian army only participated in subsequent operations.³⁸

C. THE FINAL FAILURE OF ATT’S SECURITY POLICY: THE SPECIAL PROGRAM FOR PEACE, SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN MALI

The final failure of the Malian president’s management of the “security and development” situation in the north was the Special Program for Peace, Security and Development in Northern Mali (Programme spécial pour la paix, la sécurité et le développement au Nord-Mali, PSPSDN). Officially launched in August 2011, it was allocated around €50 million and funded by many bilateral and multilateral partners, including France, Canada and the European Union (EU). Implementation was focused around new Secure Development and Governance Centres³⁹ at eleven strategic locations in northern Mali. Security forces were to be stationed at these centres while infrastructure projects were undertaken. The idea was to reaffirm the state’s presence in a region from which it had withdrawn. The PSPSDN encountered many problems before it was finally suspended with the outbreak of rebellion on 17 January 2012.

An expert on security questions in the north,⁴⁰ close to the case, identified three serious flaws in the project: the design did not anticipate the local population’s reaction to a

³¹ A U.S. cable of February 2010 outlined the Algerian ambassador’s extremely virulent opinion about the Malian authorities. According to this cable, he told his U.S. counterpart: “The Malian army had shown capability to take action against the Tuareg rebellion but refused to do anything about AQIM. Niger has fewer resources but does more in the fight, and the proof is that AQIM has been unable to establish a base in that country. It looks worse than weakness on the part of the Malians, it looks like wilful complicity”. See “New Algerian Ambassador to meet with Ambassador”, cable of the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 19 February 2010, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10BAMAKO99.html>.

³² Five citizens of Western countries were kidnapped in Hombori on 24 November and another was killed on 25 November 2011 in Timbuktu. See “Otages du Mali: les derniers touristes étrangers évacués de Tombouctou”, Agence France-Presse, 26 November 2011.

³³ “Terrorist hostage situations: Rescue or ransom?”, *Time*, 12 October 2010.

³⁴ Only the United Kingdom refuses to pay for the release of its citizens.

³⁵ The names that appear most often on the Malian side are those of the administrators and paymasters of the Arab militias close to the security services, such as Ould Bou Lamana, already mentioned above. See: “Of Tuareg and terrorists: A rebel’s view of unrest in the North and AQIM”, cable of the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 21 May 2008, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/05/08BAMAKO462.html#>.

³⁶ It was arranged that the French hostage and the two African employees working at the Arlit mining complex in Niger and kidnapped by AQIM on 15 September 2010 should be released without payment. The operation that begun in Niger was neutralised at the last moment by emissaries who hoped to take a share of any ransom paid. The release of the hostages only took place later and was organised in accordance with the wishes of the intermediaries responsible for the cancellation of Niger’s initiative. Crisis Group interviews, Tuareg leaders in Niger, Niamey, 13 and 16 March 2012. The reason for this sordid episode was probably competition between French emissaries. See “Otages français Niger: rivalités entre négociateurs”, *Paris Match*, 9 November 2011.

³⁷ Crisis Group telephone interview, French diplomat, 2 April 2012. WikiLeaks is also a valuable source for information about negotiations between Malian authorities and Western partners about the war on terror. See: “ATT: ‘We’re Acting On Aqim – Now We Need Your Help’”, cable of the U.S. embassy in Bamako, 19 June 2009, as released by WikiLeaks, <http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=09BAMAKO401>.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Bamako 24 March 2012; Crisis Group telephone interview, regional expert, 4 April 2012. Also see “Le Mali en simple spectateur”, *Jeune Afrique*, 6 July 2011.

³⁹ The following prospectus summarises the project’s main points: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mali/documents/projects/paix_et_securite_fr.pdf.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, 4 April 2012.

project establishing a mainly “southern” military presence in the north; the institutional arrangements made the project controlled completely by the president’s office and did not involve the ministries responsible for the security forces; and the excessively vertical management structure gave too much power to the program manager, Mohamed Ag Erlaf.⁴¹ As the project got under way, the EU deplored the lack of consultation with the local population, which had no practical input.

The fiercest criticism of the PSPSDN came in May 2011 from the Advocacy Network of Peace, Security and Development in Northern Mali (Réseau de plaidoyer en faveur de la paix, de la sécurité et du développement au Nord-Mali) in the form of a letter to the EU. Since 2009, this organisation, many members of which subsequently joined the MNLA, took on the role of a citizens’ lobbying group to alert the public to the many ills affecting northern Mali.⁴² It received funding from Switzerland and included recognised representatives of the region’s communities. It was led by Alghabass Ag Intalla, a deputy for Kidal and successor to the *amenokal* (traditional chief) of the Kel Adagh, the highest Tuareg traditional authority in the Kidal region.

The network’s indictment of the PSPSDN in May 2011 was damning. It deplored the lack of participation by the local population, the scheduling of implementation close to presidential elections, the disproportionate allocation of resources to security rather than to development and the corruption that the project had the potential to generate. Finally, it noted the population’s distrust of the military, which was seen as a potential nuisance rather than as an important contributor to the local economy. The organisation also expressed its surprise at the lack of effort to combat “serious crime”. Between October and December

2011, a series of armed attacks interrupted work⁴³ at the construction sites for the PSPSDN barracks.

A Bamako-based international official observed that the PSPSDN did not cause the rebellion in the north but that it undeniably contributed to its escalation.⁴⁴ The project again illustrated the gap between the intentions of donors and those of the Malian president. While the former saw the PSPSDN as a way of reviving the Algiers Accords and even the National Pact, as well as fighting terrorism and trafficking, ATT and his government seemed to have used it to discard previous accords and replace them with a sham attempt to address the new security threats.

D. FROM THE MNA TO THE MNLA: A REBELLION IN THE MAKING

ATT’s administration of the north was based on collusion with local rival and opportunist elites, questionable relations with AQIM terrorists and the non-transparent and imbalanced use of international aid (especially aid provided for counter-terrorism operations) to strengthen his control over the region. The juicy profits deriving from a criminal economy, sustained by transborder trafficking (especially of drugs) and ransoms from Western hostages, explain this “remote control” strategy. These benefits lined the pockets of northern and Bamako elites, including senior officials in the state administration.⁴⁵ They kept the regional economy in a precarious state of underdevelopment. As the regime declined, the international community gradually became alienated from the Malian state.

In the north, the National Movement of Azawad (Mouvement national de l’Azawad, MNA) denounced the situation before the Libyan crisis erupted in February 2011. This political organisation, created in November 2010 by Tuareg activists, advocated for self-determination. Its leaders, two young students from Timbuktu, Moussa ag Acharatoumane and Boubacar Ag Fadil, were arrested in November 2010 but released shortly after without charge. The MNA was the main source of the MNLA’s platform. In a detailed document distributed only to foreign affairs departments at the time, the MNA explained why it believed relations between Azawad and the centre of power in Bamako had reached breaking point. The document did not emphasise the differences between the northern and

⁴¹ Mohamed Ag Erlaf is a Tuareg from Kidal. He proudly proclaims his long experience serving the Malian administration, including a period as one of ATT’s ministers and as director of the National Investment Agency for Local Authorities (Agence nationale d’investissements pour les collectivités territoriales). His commitment to the Malian state made him a target for Azawad militants, to which he responded that he occupied his post on merit rather than the threat of violence. See “Mohamed ag Erlaf règle ses comptes: ‘Je ne suis pas un berger à qui on colle le grade de Colonel ...’”, Afribone.com, 19 December 2011, <http://www.afribone.com/spip.php?article38099>. However, he could be devious when carrying out his duties: an international official thought of him as a “mini-ATT”. Crisis Group telephone interview, 20 April 2012.

⁴² See “Manifeste pour la création d’un Réseau de plaidoyer en faveur de la paix, de la sécurité et du développement au Nord-Mali”, Kidal, 3 November 2009.

⁴³ According to the authorities, AQIM elements were responsible. However, Crisis Group interviewees say that, on the contrary, local people were responsible, Brussels, 1 March 2012.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group telephone interview, 20 April 2012.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Bamako, 22 March 2012. Commander Ould Bou Lamana was said to be under the direct protection of the director of state security, Mami Coulibaly. See “Of Tuareg and terrorists”, cable of the U.S. embassy in Bamako, op. cit.

southern ways of life and cultures; neither did it celebrate a glorious indigenous past in the classic manner of nationalist movements seeking to reinvent identities or “re-traditionalise” society.⁴⁶

On the contrary, the document focused on the origins of what it described as the gradual and irreversible erosion of trust between northern communities and the central government. It highlights several causes for this: economic marginalisation of the north, brutalisation of the population by the security forces, failure to comply with commitments made in the various peace agreements, the government’s lax approach to AQIM and drug traffickers, and corrupt use of international aid provided for the north. An account of these grievances was followed by an appeal to the international community to recognise Azawad as a legitimate entity. Although it is difficult to assess precisely the popularity of the MNA’s discourse among the northern population, it broadly reflects ideas put forward during formal civil society meetings in the region, such as those organised by the very extensive Advocacy Network for Peace, Security and Development in Northern Mali. At the end of 2010, there was fierce discontent among northern representatives towards the government. The Libyan crisis precipitated the network’s transformation into a rebellion.

III. NOW OR NEVER? THE RESURGENCE OF THE REBELLION

The resurgence of the rebellion in the north on 17 January 2012 and the coup of 21 March 2012 in Bamako could be seen as the latest elements in the wave of regional destabilisation that began with the conflict in Libya and international military intervention. A policy of regime change quickly replaced the notion of responsibility to protect, on which NATO’s action was theoretically based, without arrangements for ensuring the population’s security, much less for maintaining control over the circulation of arms.⁴⁷ Despite the embargo on flows in and out of Libya,⁴⁸ there was a massive transfer of Libyan arms across the Sahel belt.⁴⁹ A French diplomat confided that “those who took the decision to bombard did not have the least idea of the consequences it could have for the south”.⁵⁰ The uncontrolled sequence of events gives credence to this view.

A. THE LIBYAN FACTOR: QADHAFI AND NORTHERN MALI

Although Colonel Qadhafi was far from exercising regional hegemony – Algeria is another major regional power⁵¹ – he was able to influence irregular armed initiatives, particularly by Tuaregs in northern Mali and northern Niger. He facilitated rapprochements between these rebellions and the central governments of the countries concerned and controlled the calendar of political arrangements thanks to his financial resources. The other tool he used many times was the “integration” in the ranks of his army of Malian and Niger Tuareg elements that were most likely to cause turmoil in their country of origin.⁵² This approach, far from being philanthropic, served interests that were understood very well by the various parties involved. Qadhafi’s policy

⁴⁶ Such an anthropological and historical approach would be something of a challenge given that Azawad, as defined by the MNA, extends as far as north of Mopti and is demarcated by the Malian borders, despite the close links between the Malian Tuaregs and their otherwise culturally diverse counterparts in Niger, Algeria, Libya and Burkina Faso. In addition to the Tuareg populations, “Azawad” includes Arab, Peul and Songhai peoples. This diversity was recognised by the MNA (and later the MNLA). Its project was explicitly inclusive and reflected above all a desire to be rid of southern control. The political use of the term “Azawad” by Tuareg nationalists dates back to 1976. See B. Lecocq, “That Desert is Our Country”, op. cit.

⁴⁷ See Crisis Group Report, *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (V): Making Sense of Libya*, op. cit.

⁴⁸ See paragraph 5 of UN Security Council Resolution 2017 of 31 October 2011 on Libya.

⁴⁹ “Final Report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1973 (2011) concerning Libya”, UN Security Council, 2012.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Paris, 9 March 2012.

⁵¹ Another regional power is Morocco. Although surpassed in economic importance by Libya and Algeria, two major oil-producing countries, Morocco has a well-organised state administration and army that ensure political stability, despite the turmoil in North Africa. However, Morocco, which is farther from Mali, has historically had little influence over that country. Its relations with Libya and Algeria remain strained by the issue of Western Sahara.

⁵² See Crisis Group Report, *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (V): Making Sense of Libya*, op. cit., p. 23.

followed the same course in other countries south of the Sahara, for example, in Chad.⁵³

Qadhafi established lasting ties of allegiance in the Sahel while he enlisted fighters in his Islamic Legion and special units for his own military designs (for example, in Chad and Lebanon in the 1980s). The Tuareg combatants he recruited sought support for their own “revolution” in their country of origin; but this hope was never satisfied and the Niger and Mali rebellions in the 1990s were launched with equipment that had been patiently stockpiled rather than gratefully contributed by the Qadhafi regime.

Meanwhile, the states helped by Libya avoided having to make costly provisions for resolving armed conflicts in their outlying territories. Libyan patronage was not restricted to Saharan populations, far from it. Niger and Mali benefited massively from the generosity of Qadhafi, who, after the failure of his pan-Arab initiatives, refocused his economic cooperation and diplomatic efforts on sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. In addition to Libyan investments in Africa, flows of economic migrants in the opposite direction increased, resulting from drought and the collapse of the pastoral economy in the southern Sahara. The links that developed between Qadhafi’s Libya and the populations of northern Mali and northern Niger were therefore based on family and friendship ties as well as security considerations. It was in Libya (and Algeria) that the rich *ishumar* (unemployed exiles) protest culture was developed, which infused and unified⁵⁴ the rebel Tuareg projects in the 1990s.⁵⁵

Qaddafi’s overthrow not only deprived the region of one of its main political brokers and patrons, it also put on the market quantities of heavy arms that were redistributed in the region according to local demands and aspirations. It also compelled men who were no longer welcome to seek exile outside Libya, including those who supplied the MNLA with their military equipment and expertise, starting with Mohamed Ag Najim, its current military leader, a Malian Tuareg from Adagh whose father was killed in the 1963 repression. He belonged to Qadhafi’s Malian “fundamentalist” cohort, whose members were allowed to stay in Libya for a long period and were even granted Libyan nationality. These exiles lived in Libya from the end of the 1970s, were used by Qadhafi for his military adventures in Lebanon and Chad and participated in the Tuareg rebellions in Mali in the 1990s. Ag Najim later returned

to serve under Qadhafi as a senior officer of units stationed at Sebha, in the south, until the regime collapsed.⁵⁶

Qadhafi had positioned forces mainly of Malian Tuareg origin and, to a lesser extent, Nigerien, in the Fezzan, in Libya’s south west. They quickly realised it was best to leave the country as soon as NATO declared its support for the National Transitional Council (NTC), the Libyan rebels’ organ. Although these forces initially helped the Qadhafi war effort, they soon swelled the ranks of the “returnees” on the Malian side of the border. In addition to Malian and Niger fighters already based in Libya, a few hundred young Tuareg fighters came directly from northern Mali and northern Niger to join the loyalist forces on a paid basis.⁵⁷ Their experience as mercenaries did not last long and was often bitter.⁵⁸ Finally, Qadhafi’s fall released another important leader of northern Mali’s tumultuous political life, Ibrahim Bahanga, who, before his death in August 2011 (officially in a car accident), was the key agent in rebuilding a rebel Tuareg armed force, acting as an intermediary between the different groups and organising the supply of arms.⁵⁹

Intense arms circulation resulted from the movement of combatants in the Libyan, Nigerien and Malian deserts. Reports on the transfer of Libyan arms to Mali are inconsistent. During the summer of 2011, Western security experts voiced their concern about the possible circulation of “man-pads”, portable missile launchers able to strike against aircraft. To this day, the use of such weapons in the Sahara has not been detected but there are repeated rumours of their presence.⁶⁰ Moreover, several security sources signalled the presence of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, an AQIM emir, in southern Libya at the start of 2012, on a mission to establish alliances and/or to place orders for military equipment.⁶¹ The arms transported to Mali are reportedly mainly light arms and ammunition,⁶² but in June 2011, the

⁵³ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°180, *Africa without Qaddafi: The Case of Chad*, 21 October 2011.

⁵⁴ B. Lecocq, “Unemployed Intellectuals in the Sahara”, op. cit.

⁵⁵ For more on the “services” provided to Qadhafi by the Tuaregs, also see Frédéric Deycard and Yvan Guichaoua, “Whether you liked him or not, Gaddafi used to fix a lot of holes – Tuareg insurgencies in Mali and Niger and the war in Libya”, AfricanArguments.org, 8 September 2011.

⁵⁶ For a brief biography of Ag Najim, see “Rébellion du MNLA au Mali: Ag Najem, ou la soif de vengeance”, *Jeune Afrique*, 27 January 2012.

⁵⁷ See “Des centaines de Touareg maliens et nigériens recrutés par Kadhafi (élus)”, *Jeune Afrique*, 2 March 2011; and “Libyan oil buys allies for Qaddafi”, *The New York Times*, 15 March 2010.

⁵⁸ See “Libya: témoignages de ‘mercenaires’ touaregs de Kadhafi rentrés au Niger”, *Jeune Afrique*, 4 September 2011.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, regional expert, Brussels, 1 March 2012.

⁶⁰ However, there are technical difficulties associated with the use of this equipment and training is required. See “Libyan missiles on the loose”, *The Washington Post*, 9 May 2012.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Niamey, 13 March 2012; and “Mali: comment sauver le nord?”, *Jeune Afrique*, 9 May 2012.

⁶² An MNLA commander recalled 600 vehicles were involved in transporting these arms. They were mainly AK-47s and 12.7 mm machine-guns. See “Nous devons resserrer les rangs et éviter toute confrontation qui diviserait le mouvement”, *El Watan*, 9 April 2012.

Nigerien authorities intercepted a convoy transporting several hundred kilograms of explosives. Abta Hamidine, the trafficker arrested on that occasion, said that AQIM was due to take delivery of them in Mali.⁶³

The Libyan, Nigerien and Malian authorities seem only to have been able to curb this trafficking sporadically. In Mali, which does not have a border with Libya, the massive influx of arms from Libya raised suspicions about Niger, through which the arms are likely to have been transported.⁶⁴ Porous borders, Nigerien military weakness and practical difficulties in patrolling thousands of kilometres of desert have facilitated this circulation.⁶⁵ These constraints remain, even when the authorities receive information from satellite surveillance (notably from France).⁶⁶ In addition, it was not easy to disarm the “returnees” as they arrived in Mali, because they had first hidden their arms.⁶⁷ Only the Qadhafi dignitaries who arrived in Niger in September 2011 were officially disarmed. Finally, the heaviest arms currently deployed by the MNLA⁶⁸ were seized not in Libya but in Mali, notably at the battle for Tessalit, at the beginning of March 2012.

B. THE RISE OF THE MNLA

The MNLA launched its first attack on 17 January 2012, nearly six months after the arrival of the “returnees”, during which time many long consultations took place between the communities in northern Mali, especially in Zakak, near the Algerian border. These discussions mobilised the participants around the plan for an armed uprising. They did not however take place secretly. Many Malian government envoys, Tuareg dignitaries loyal to Bamako

and parliamentarians tried to open negotiations, but in vain. The refusal to enter into dialogue at this stage of the rebel project expressed both the mistrust of the future fighters towards the government⁶⁹ and the radical separatist ideas that had been consolidated by the Libyan windfall and that could be summarised in the slogan: “now or never”.⁷⁰

The theory that Malian forces stationed in the north were surprised by a sudden, heavily-armed revolt⁷¹ does not hold water. Since September 2011, and amid tensions provoked by the president’s “security and development” program, the Bamako press had been reporting on the resurgence of “security problems in the north” and the situation of the “returnees” from Libya. The MNLA was officially created in October 2011. A former leading rebel known as “Bamoussa” deserted from the Malian army in November⁷² and a Mauritanian website reported that Iyad Ag Ghali had returned to the bush in December.

The armed mobilisation that produced the MNLA was the product of circumstantial alliances between a range of actors who were ready to take up arms rather than the result of a process of recruitment of fighters by a vertically structured organisation.⁷³ This model involved the absence of clear and definitive demarcation lines between fighting units. Moreover, the military strategies adopted were the product of internal compromises and negotiations rather than direct orders from senior officers. The risk of division, if not disintegration, was high if those within the insurrection started to make calculations as to whether they had more to gain from leaving rather than staying. The division of the 1990s rebellion into many “fronts” (when some laid down their arms and were rewarded in return,

⁶³ United Nations Security Council, 2012, op. cit., p. 29; and “Reportage exclusif: Abta Hamidine s’apprêtait à livrer les quatre otages français au clan Khadafi”, *Air Info*, 29 June 2011.

⁶⁴ An anecdote conveys the reciprocal distrust between the leaders of the two countries. A senior Nigerien diplomat recounts how he was questioned by his Malian counterpart at an official meeting: “Why did you allow arms to be transported in that way?” To which the Nigerien diplomat replied, in an allusion to the Air Cocaine affair: “Why did you allow a cargo plane to land in your desert?” Crisis Group interview, Niamey, 20 March 2012.

⁶⁵ Illegal transborder traffic is the subject of informal arrangements between traffickers and state officials responsible for border surveillance. Crisis Group interviews, regional experts, Niamey, 16 March 2012, and Crisis Group telephone interviews, regional experts, 16 April 2012.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, French military specialist, 2 April 2012.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, former Tuareg rebel leader, Niamey, 17 March 2012.

⁶⁸ Armoured vehicles and anti-aircraft guns, which can be seen in this Al Jazeera report from Timbuktu: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5q7PW0B3L0&feature=youtu.be>.

⁶⁹ At the end of January, *Jeune Afrique* revealed the final Mali government proposals to the rebels, communicated by Mohamed Ag Erlaf, manager of the PSPSDN, at a meeting in Zakak on 7 January. They were based on the usual method of offering targeted favours, which was precisely one of the major root causes of the insurrection then underway. “Mali: ce que Bamako proposait au MNLA avant la rébellion”, *Jeune Afrique*, 31 January 2012.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Mossa Ag Attaher, MNLA communications officer, Paris, 28 January 2012.

⁷¹ Jean-Pierre Filiu, “Pourquoi personne n’a rien vu venir”, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 2475, 2012, pp. 66-67.

⁷² See “Après l’enlèvement et la mort de touristes occidentaux au Nord Mali...”, Maliweb.net, 30 November 2011, <http://www.maliweb.net/news/la-situation-politique-et-securitaire-au-nord/2011/11/30/article,36985.html>.

⁷³ This phenomenon is characteristic of the Sahel belt. Y. Guichaoua, “Circumstantial Alliances and Loose Loyalties in Rebellion Making: The Case of Tuareg Insurgency in Northern Niger (2007-2009)” in Guichaoua, Y. (eds.), *Understanding Collective Political Violence* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 246-266; M. Debos, “Fluid Loyalties in a Regional Crisis: Chadian combatants in the Central African Republic”, *African Affairs* (2008), vol. 107, no. 427, pp. 225-241.

while others carried on fighting with the aim of becoming essential interlocutors during negotiations) was a result of the rapid adjustments made in time of war. A variant of this scenario seems to be underway in the summer of 2012, with Ansar Dine attracting MNLA fighters over to its side.

The MNLA is a coalition of various groups. Its military power and expertise mainly come from Ag Najim and his fellow returnees from Libya,⁷⁴ while its political leadership is dominated by relatives of Ibrahim Bahanga. Before his death, the latter not only established contacts between Ag Najim and his followers, he also forged an alliance with young MNA militants who spent months secretly travelling around the countryside to promote their ideas. Deserters from the Libyan army then joined the MNLA, which benefited, if not from the official support, then at least from the good wishes of Alghabas Ag Intalla, president of the Advocacy Network mentioned above.⁷⁵

Finally, the MNLA has active political contacts and leaders outside Mali, in Mauritania, Burkina Faso and France. For example, the former student activist Mossa Ag Attaher, from Gao, and Hama Ag Sid' Ahmed, an elected representative in northern Mali and father-in-law of the late Bahanga and his spokesman during the different rebellions, have a high profile in Paris. Their activities are disseminated through the dynamic "toumastpress" website, which is censored in Mali (as is also the Kidal Info website). Algerian Kabyle nationalists who defend the common identity of the Berber peoples, which historically includes the Tuaregs, are among those who provide logistical support for pro-MNLA activism in Paris.⁷⁶ Moreover, the MNLA has been able to organise some communications operations in Europe with the support of regionalist movements, without, however, achieving the same level of success as the Nigerien Movement for Justice (Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice, MNJ) in 2008.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Unconfirmed reports mentioned 400 men, many of whom grew up in Libya and had only a vague knowledge of Mali. Crisis Group interview, former Tuareg rebel leader, Niamey, 17 March 2012.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, international official, Bamako, 20 March 2012.

⁷⁶ The most active Berber movement communications organ is the website www.tamazgha.fr. The Kabyle movement, whose propaganda normally aims at Algeria, allows Mossa Ag Attaher, one of the MNLA's Paris representatives, to produce a weekly video on the situation in northern Mali, which is posted on the website of the "press agency of the Tamasheq (Tuareg) people", toumastpress.com.

⁷⁷ The Tuareg rebels in the MNJ managed to mobilise a significant number of anti-globalisation organisations and parties: the Greens, Survie, the Danielle Mitterrand Foundation, the MRAP, the Anti-Nuclear Network (Réseau Sortir du nucléaire), etc., which had actively disseminated rebel propaganda (See Gui-

Bamako quickly perceived the MNLA's explicitly pro-Western stance as de facto collusion with the former colonial power. Supporters of the junta among others, buy into this theory. It was encouraged by the premature statements in favour of a political solution to the conflict made by the then French foreign minister, Alain Juppé.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, public opinion in Bamako was shocked by the successive military defeats in the north. The French authorities certainly saw the MNLA as a legitimate negotiating partner and even a potential ally in the "war on terror", given the passive attitude of the Malian security forces towards AQIM.⁷⁹ The option of using the Tuaregs, who know the terrain, against AQIM was in any case discussed in French circles even before the rebellion broke out in January 2012.⁸⁰

This benevolence in principle has not, however, translated into logistical support. Reluctance about promoting an explicitly separatist project, the absence of a clear MNLA program and leadership and the fluid nature of the loyalties of its organisers are all obstacles to a rapprochement with the French authorities.⁸¹ Mauritania, a major regional ally of France, welcomed the MNLA, and according to a country specialist, is favourable to the movement's plan to expel AQIM from northern Mali.⁸² It is impossible to say whether this rhetorical support has translated into effective logistical aid.

In the field, the MNLA's sociological profile is broad and plural. The movement is composed of representatives of most Tuareg communities in northern Mali, including from Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. However, its domination by recalcitrants from the Algiers Accords (close associates of Bahanga) and those who had been gradually sidelined by the agreement (members of the Idnans, Ag Najim's tribe) indicated a shift in the rebellion's centre of political gravity at the expense of the person who took the lead in settling the 2006 rebellion, Iyad Ag Ghali. The MNLA rejects the authority of both the central government and those in the north who have compromised with Bamako, such as Ag Ghali. However, in its opposition to Ag Ghali, who remains an important figure in the Tuareg community, the MNLA adopts a different, softer tone than that which it uses against the Malian state, which it sees as a coloniser.

chaoua, op. cit.). The MNLA has not benefited from any comparable wave of sympathy.

⁷⁸ "Au Mali, Alain Juppé appelle au dialogue avec les rebelles", Radio France Internationale (RFI), 27 February 2012.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interviews, senior French officials, Paris, 24 April 2012.

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Paris, October 2011.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interviews, senior French officials, Paris, 24 April 2012.

⁸² Crisis Group telephone interview, 4 April 2012.

C. IYAD AG GHALI'S THWARTED PERSONAL AMBITIONS AND THE ISLAMIST AGENDA

Iyad Ag Ghali attended the consultations organised before the rebellion was launched. He even asked to be appointed the movement's secretary general, which was refused.⁸³ He also indicated he was against an armed struggle unless it was to impose Sharia law throughout Mali and he explicitly rejected the MNLA's separatist project.⁸⁴ The central role he maintained in the Tuareg political order, especially in Kidal, nevertheless required him to take up a position vis-à-vis the emerging actors of the MNLA or to find a way of supplanting them.⁸⁵ Indisputably a key figure in Tuareg politics, he made a change in religious direction in the 1990s and his new beliefs have only grown stronger with time. He joined Jamaat ut-Tabligh, a missionary movement of Indian origin introduced to Mali in the mid-1990s. This movement preaches a rigorous Islamic faith of personal redemption, has no political vocation and even condemns jihad.⁸⁶

The attitudes of the various Tuareg tribes to Islam diverge and shape their identity. Although the *tabligh* is a current of Islam imported to northern Mali, the religious inclinations of the Ifoghas, Iyad Ag Ghali's tribe, are rooted in their local history. In addition, Ag Ghali's adherence to a more rigorous form of Islam is a choice many in Mali and

West Africa made, possibly in response to the extent of government corruption and the region's many economic and social problems. It would therefore be a mistake to deny any social legitimacy to the project to impose Sharia law embodied by Iyad Ag Ghali. Moreover, according to the academic Ferdaous Bouhlel, there is a wide variety of interpretations of Sharia in the north and it could therefore be the subject of negotiations.⁸⁷ Finally, it is dangerous to see the renewal of religious aspirations as a prelude to jihad, which involves violent methods of socialisation and distinct personal trajectories.

It nevertheless remains true that Iyad Ag Ghali's fundamentalist project – which echoes aspirations expressed in the south – is fiercely opposed by those Tuaregs who practise a tolerant Islam, respect the important role given to women in the social order⁸⁸ and celebrate the liberal ethos of the exiles (*ishumar*) and their artistic, especially musical, modes of expression.⁸⁹ The current divide between Ansar Dine ("the supporters of religion") and the MNLA manifests itself not only as rivalry in the struggle for power in the north but also in their different visions for society, which go beyond the strictly political framework.

The discrediting of Iyad Ag Ghali during the preparatory work for constructing the MNLA was indirectly aimed at the Algerian authorities, sponsors of the 2006 Accords produced with Ag Ghali. In an interview with Crisis Group in March 2012, Mossa Ag Attaher emphasised that the Algiers Accords focused almost solely on the Kidal region while the MNLA unites the three regions of northern Mali and has a clearly more ambitious project than the one finally validated by the Accords.⁹⁰ The resumption of the rebellion signalled the obsolescence of the political arrangement established six years previously under Algerian auspices and could be seen as a disavowal of its Algerian and Malian authors. When Algeria invited the rebels to Algiers, on 2-4 February, two weeks after the outbreak of hostilities, the only person to accept the invitation was Hamada Ag Bibi, a representative of the 23 May Alliance

⁸³ Iyad Ag Ghali was also hoping to be chosen as the successor to the traditional leader of the Ifoghas (*amenokal*), a role that was also refused him. Alghabass Ag Intallah, one of Intallah Ag Attaher's sons, was chosen instead and is the current *amenokal*. In the space of a few weeks, Iyad Ag Ghali therefore endured two humiliating defeats in northern Mali's Tuareg political life. Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 May 2012.

⁸⁴ See "Iyad Ag Ghali: 'Ansar dine ne connaît que le Mali et la charia'", *Jeune Afrique*, 8 April 2012. Iyad Ag Ghali seemed ready to abandon his anti-separatist position when Ansar Dine and MNLA discussed merging at the end of May. Following the failure of his plans, he has apparently returned to his initial point of view. "Interview-Mali Islamist leader rejects independence", Reuters, 16 June 2012.

⁸⁵ According to an MNLA representative, this strategic calculation is coupled with Iyad Ag Ghali's absolute detestation of anyone who challenges his power. Crisis Group interview, Paris, 29 June 2012.

⁸⁶ He converted to Jamaat ut-Tabligh and spent six months in a *tablighi* retreat in Pakistan. His position became more radical during an official stay in Saudi Arabia as a Malian diplomat after the Algiers Peace Accords in 2006. For more on the Tabligh in Mali, see Bouhlel-Hardy, Grémont, and Guichaoua, "Contestation armée et recompositions religieuses au Nord-Mali et au nord-Niger", op. cit.; Crisis Group Report, *Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel*, op. cit.; and cable from the U.S. embassy in Bamako on the Tabligh's relative success in northern Mali, as released by WikiLeaks, "Dawa meeting in Kidal not much to talk about", 21 December 2009, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/12/09BAMAKO822.html>.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group telephone interview, 22 May 2012.

⁸⁸ In February 2012, the independent journalist Andy Morgan collected testimony that showed the anger of Tuareg women following Ag Ghali's pro-Sharia speech at the discussions that took place prior to the rebellion. See "The causes of the uprising in northern Mali", Think Africa Press, 6 February 2012, <http://thinkafricapress.com/mali/causes-uprising-northern-mali-tuareg>.

⁸⁹ The "desert blues", played by groups that are having increasing international success (Tinariwen, Terakaft, Tamikrest, Am-anar to mention only Malian artists), is a powerful vector of *ishumar* counter-culture and a major cultural reference with values that are not compatible with Salafi Islamism.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Mossa Ag Attaher, Paris, 5 March 2012.

for Democracy and Change, previously discredited by the MNLA.⁹¹

The MNLA was opposed to Algerian mediation from the start.⁹² After the movement began its military offensive, Algeria refused, according to the rebels, to allow wounded fighters to seek refuge in its territory, thereby showing a cold relationship between the MNLA and Algeria. The episode provoked a virulent reaction on the propaganda website *toumastpress*.⁹³ The MNLA's opening of a political office in Nouakchott, Mauritania, a major regional ally of France, and the appearance of MNLA contacts at the side of Algerian Berber activists in Paris were two additional reasons for the increasingly tense relations between the Algerian authorities and the Tuareg movement. In more general terms, Algeria is worried about the deployment of an armed force that is not under its control very close to its southern border, all the more so as this force is suspected of benefiting from French good-will. The MNLA seems, however, to have softened its position towards Algeria in its most recent statements.⁹⁴

IV. THE FRAGMENTED AND VOLATILE DYNAMICS OF THE REBEL MOVEMENT

There is growing confusion about the armed actors that have been present in northern Mali since January 2012. As described above, this is the result of the constant establishment and breaking of alliances between experienced fighters in accordance with ever-changing circumstances. The war was conducted in equal measure by strategic military movements and diplomatic manoeuvres involving rapprochement, or the exact opposite, between the belligerent forces. These practices minimised, but did not eliminate, the frequency and intensity of violent clashes between rebel groups and Malian forces. Between 17 January and the end of March, discussions between the armed actors in the field preceded each territorial conquest.⁹⁵ The conventions of warfare seem to have been respected, with the notable exception of the grave events at Aguelhoc, which should be investigated.

A. THE LIGHTNING MILITARY CAMPAIGN CONDUCTED BY THE ARMED GROUPS IN THE NORTH

The rebel military campaign was very quick. The turning point was the battle of Amachach/Tessalit, in February and March 2012. Several hundred Malian soldiers were stationed at this base, which was essential to the government's security arrangements in the north and possessed an airport. The rebels surrounded and besieged the base and, despite using combat helicopters, the Malian army was unable to resupply it. On 10 March, the rebels took control of the base after negotiating the evacuation of its occupants to Gao. The towns of Menaka, Aguelhoc, Léré and Tinzaouatène had already been attacked and "conquered". After Tessalit and ATT's overthrow, the rebels took control of Kidal, Gao (where the army headquarters in charge of counter-insurgency operations was located) and Timbuktu. The rebel military advance ended with the MNLA's proclamation of the independence of Azawad on 5 April 2012.⁹⁶

The government forces on duty in the north were the Imghad and Arab "militias", commanded by Colonels Alaji Gamou and Abderamane Ould Meydou respectively. These militias formed part of the Malian army and recruited troops from within their own communities. They were

⁹¹ See "Rébellion touareg: retour à la case Alger", *El Watan*, 3 February 2012; and Crisis Group interviews, Bamako, 30 May 2012.

⁹² Crisis Group interviews, MNLA representatives, Paris, 23 January 2012.

⁹³ "L'Algérie partiale viole la Convention de Genève", *toumastpress*, 25 January 2012, <http://toumastpress.com/actualites/liberation-azawad/230-lalgerie-partiale-viole-la-convention-de-geneve.html>.

⁹⁴ Mélanie Matarese, "Mossa Ag Attaher: 'L'Algérie est incontournable dans la gestion de notre conflit', "Visa pour l'Algérie", blog published by *Le Figaro*, 14 April 2012, <http://blog.lefigaro.fr/algerie/2012/04/mossa-ag-attaher-lalgerie-est-incontournable-dans-la-gestion-de-notre-conflit.html>.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, former Tuareg rebel leader, Niamey, 17 March 2012.

⁹⁶ Some Malians interpreted the broadcast of this declaration by the French television channel on international affairs, France 24, as an indication of France's support for the MNLA project.

flanked by regular soldiers from the south. Expecting the militias to rally to its side, the MNLA carefully spared Gamou and its propaganda went so far as to praise the bravery of his fighters. On 31 March, defeated at Kidal, Gamou announced on RFI⁹⁷ that he would join the rebels, before reappearing a few days later in Niamey to say that it was nothing more than a manoeuvre designed to protect his retreat and especially that of the “southerners” among the ranks of his units. He and his men then stationed themselves in Niger.⁹⁸ Although the colonel initially indicated that they were again available to the Malian army,⁹⁹ he went on to open his own “front”, called the Republican Movement for the Restoration of Azawad (Mouvement républicain pour la restauration de l’Azawad, MRRA), undoubtedly in an attempt to increase his personal influence over the course of events.¹⁰⁰

Gamou’s Arab counterpart, Abderamane Ould Meydou, has apparently adopted similar tactics by creating a force in Mauritania.¹⁰¹ The number of men under his command is unknown. However, on the assumption that they receive external support and that Gamou manages to put together an operational military force in Niger, the military comeback of the two colonels presents the risk of further fragmentation of an already complex conflict into a series of micro-conflicts driven by private interests.

The rebels’ military modus operandi, characterised by harassment of the enemy followed by retreat to difficult terrain, is similar to that of previous rebellions. This time, it involved simultaneous deployments in several areas, the

expulsion of government forces from towns that the insurgents then declared under rebel “administration”. This strategy clearly showed a willingness to contest Malian sovereignty in the north. There are no precise figures available about the number of military victims so far; between several to a dozen people have died in “clashes” and sieges. The rebels have not sought to take many prisoners, despite detaining some.¹⁰² While taking care of prisoners can be costly, they have come to represent important bargaining chips in negotiations in the past years. Nevertheless, Ansar Dine unilaterally decided to release its prisoners in mid-April 2012.¹⁰³

B. THE EVENTS OF AGUELHOC AND OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE NORTH

Little is known about the most tragic episode in the war so far, the massacre of several dozen Malian soldiers at Aguelhoc between 18 and 24 January 2012. On 13 February, the French development and cooperation minister noted that “summary executions ... perhaps one hundred” had happened at Aguelhoc and indicated that the methods used were similar to those used by AQIM.¹⁰⁴ The soldiers had their throats cut after their hands had been tied behind their backs. Photos have been circulating on the internet, although it has not been possible to verify their authenticity. Between the date of the event and the minister’s statement, there was no official Malian communication about the episode. However, rumours were circulating and prompted soldiers’ wives to gather outside the presidential palace in Bamako on 2 February – a warning sign that a coup was in the offing. On 18 February, the MNLA denied French accusations on the toumastpress website and claimed the incident was a set-up by the Malian army designed to cover up a blunder by the pilots of its Ukrainian combat helicopters.¹⁰⁵

Western officials gave a version of the events that was close to that reported by toumastpress.¹⁰⁶ A Malian commission of inquiry, composed exclusively of members of the government’s security apparatus, delivered its conclusions on 22 February. It stated that it had “been able to gather evidence and witness statements from soldiers and civilians

⁹⁷ RFI later removed this announcement from its website.

⁹⁸ The VoxAfrica television channel broadcast a report on this subject on 19 April 2012: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHL3t1SeAYA&feature=player_embedded. Also see “Loyalist soldiers move into Mali’s rebel-held North”, Reuters, 21 April 2012.

⁹⁹ “Mali: comment Ag Gamou a échappé au MNLA et à Ansar Eddine”, *Jeune Afrique*, 11 April 2012.

¹⁰⁰ The movement’s declared goal was to drive out the Islamists from northern Mali and was composed of Imghad, Peul and Songhaï men, that is, the communities that would normally form part of the Ganda Izo movement and that had lost their leader, Amadou Diallo, and many fighters in a clash with MNLA forces on 25 March 2012. The Ganda Izo have since replaced Amadou Diallo with his brother, a soldier who immediately expressed his intention to serve the Malian army. There has been no official rapprochement so far between the Ganda Izo and the MRRA. Moreover, the latter has not claimed responsibility for any military action. At this stage, the declaration announcing the creation of the movement seems most likely to be a communications operation aiming to make Gamou and his men legitimate protagonists in possible future negotiations and indicate his availability to external sponsors who might be interested in using him to gain some political influence on Mali’s fate.

¹⁰¹ “Mauritanie-Niger: deux fronts en gestation pour libérer le Nord-Mali”, *Al Akhbar indépendante*, 4 June 2012.

¹⁰² Only *El Watan* reported on this subject. “Des prisonniers crient leur détresse”, *El Watan*, 8 April 2012.

¹⁰³ “Les islamistes d’Ansar Dine en position de force dans le nord du Mali”, *Le Point*, 16 April 2012.

¹⁰⁴ “Nord-Mali: Raincourt parle d’une ‘centaine’ d’exécutions sommaire à Aguelhoc”, *Jeune Afrique*, 13 February 2012.

¹⁰⁵ “Que s’est-il réellement passé à Aguelhoc?”, toumastpress, 18 February 2012, <http://toumastpress.com/autres/propagandemensongere-mali/273-que-s'est-il-reellement-passe-a-aguelhoc.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Brussels, 1 March 2012.

who escaped, substantiated by images showing unarmed Malian soldiers arrested and their hands tied behind their backs before being killed in cold blood". This evidence has not been made public.¹⁰⁷ In a video posted online on 15 March, Cheikh Aoussa, ex-*achamor* and poet,¹⁰⁸ and a longstanding lieutenant of Ag Ghali, claimed that Ansar Dine was present in Aguelhoc on the date of the massacre and indicated that there was fierce fighting but he did not mention any executions.

The only certainty is that many people were killed in Aguelhoc between 18 and 24 January and that civilians were evacuated while this was going on. These events should be rigorously investigated in any process that takes place at the end of the conflict. For the moment, there are some very useful reports available, for example, the report published on 11 July 2012 by the Malian Human Rights Association (AMDH) and the International Human Rights Federation (FIDH),¹⁰⁹ which confirms the execution of soldiers captured by MNL and Ansar Dine fighters. This would constitute war crimes. However, it would need at least an official international commission of inquiry to find out the truth and, if need be, see that justice is done following these tragic events.¹¹⁰

Atrocities against civilians were also committed in Timbuktu and Gao at the beginning of April 2012. Humanitarian workers in Timbuktu did not observe acts of cruelty against hospitalised people during this period.¹¹¹ However, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the FIDH, which gathered witness statements in Bamako and Niger, describe a high number of human rights violations and crimes: violence, kidnapping of young girls and rape, recruitment of minors by armed groups, systematic looting of government offices and banks, among others.¹¹² A number of non-governmental organisations had to hurriedly leave Timbuktu after Malian forces retreated. The civilian population in Timbuktu was exposed to criminal acts,

which were all the more numerous because the town's military base was looted, doubling the number of weapons in circulation.

Evidently, the rebel offensive and the simultaneous flight of government forces left the civilian populations in a security vacuum that facilitated criminal acts and the settling of scores, particularly in areas where inter-communal violence and/or crime are rife. Malian refugees in Mangaïze, Niger, deprived of almost all their belongings and completely dependent on humanitarian aid, told Crisis Group they had fled for fear of the resurgence of violent crime rather than fear of the warring parties.¹¹³ The recruitment of children by armed Islamist groups and the ill-treatment inflicted on them are a very worrying development.¹¹⁴

In the area lost to the Malian state, power was disputed between April and the end of June by many armed actors with different aims, including jihadi movements similar to AQIM. The security situation for civilians improved in April and May 2012 before deteriorating again. Ansar Dine sought public acceptance by taking on the task of maintaining public order and went so far as to provide civilians with the opportunity to use a "hotline" to contact its members in the event of an emergency.¹¹⁵ The Islamist movements have established Islamic courts to deal with disagreements and are taking charitable initiatives.¹¹⁶ Western NGOs, which are now less numerous and employ local Muslim staff, are again able to provide aid to civilians in Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao.¹¹⁷ However, residents are completely subject to the Islamist groups that have taken exclusive control of Gao and Timbuktu since the end of June and that are determined to impose their extremist version of Islamic practices. The destruction of the mausoleums of saints and other symbols of Timbuktu has shown the Islamists' disregard for the local people, who have been rendered powerless.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁷ In the absence of access to the original report, only journalists' accounts of the press conference called by the commission of inquiry are available: <http://www.essor.ml/actualite/article/executions-sommaires-de-aguel-hoc>.

¹⁰⁸ B. Lecocq, "That Desert is Our Country", op. cit.

¹⁰⁹ "Crimes de guerre au Nord-Mali", AMDH-FIDH, 11 July 2012, <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapmali592f.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Mali, which is a state party to the Rome Statute, announced that it had asked the International Criminal Court to investigate the crimes committed by armed groups in the north. See "Le Mali veut une enquête de la CPI sur les rebelles du Nord", Reuters, 12 July 2012.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, coordinator of humanitarian work, Paris, 27 February 2012.

¹¹² See "Mali: War Crimes by Northern Rebels", Human Rights Watch, 30 April 2012; "Mali: five months of crisis", Amnesty International, 16 May 2012; and "Crimes de guerre au Nord-Mali", op. cit.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interviews, five refugee families, Mangaïze camp, Niger, 14 March 2012.

¹¹⁴ According to UNICEF, armed groups have enlisted at least 175 boys (aged between twelve and eighteen) since the end of March. The agency also reports that eight girls were raped or sexually abused and two boys were killed and eighteen children wounded by exploding ammunition. See "Violence against children mounting in Mali", press release, UNICEF, Bamako/Geneva, 6 July 2012.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 May 2012.

¹¹⁶ See the report by the Nigerien journalist Moussa Kaka, RFI correspondent in Gao, 20 June 2012.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Paris, 23 May 2012, and Brussels, 20 June 2012.

¹¹⁸ "Les mausolées de Tombouctou victimes de la vindicte d'Ansar Dine", AFP, 1 July 2012.

C. THE GRADUAL EVICTION OF THE MNLA BY ANSAR DINE AND AQIM'S ARMED OFFSHOOTS

Soon after the MNLA launched its offensive, Iyad Ag Ghali's movement, Ansar Dine, fell in behind it and fought at its side without necessarily any coordination between the two groups. Although Ag Ghali seemed to be permanently weakened following his exclusion from preparations at Zakak, he reconstituted a military unit by recruiting about 40 men from an AQIM *katiba* led by an Ifogha relation named Abdelkrim El Targui.¹¹⁹ He then advanced in the wake of the MNLA, which did not look unkindly on these military reinforcements against a common enemy while insisting on the ideological differences between the two movements. Aguelhoc was the first battle where Ansar Dine's presence was observed. In mid-March, as mentioned above, Ansar Dine disseminated a video on the internet extolling its military victories and glorifying its struggle for Islam.¹²⁰

It seems that Ansar Dine's military contribution was decisive at Tessalit to the extent that some observers credit it with this victory.¹²¹ Its troops were then the first to enter Kidal, before spectacularly evicting the MNLA from the centre of Timbuktu, where it raised its flag and began to impose Sharia law.¹²² Timbuktu's fall was a turning point in the rebel conquest of northern Mali. Although only the MNLA and Ansar Dine had been active until then, other armed actors seemed to suddenly come to life, including local militias inherited from the ATT government, which had unclear links with AQIM. Iyad Ag Ghali managed to take advantage of this sudden confusion much more effectively than the MNLA.

In Timbuktu, Iyad Ag Ghali is reported to have begun talks with AQIM emirs, notably Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who is well established in the region.¹²³ There is suspicion about Ansar Dine's presence near the Algerian consulate in Gao, where, on 5 April, the Movement for Unicity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), a splinter of AQIM made up of Saharan rather than Algerian fighters, abducted seven Alge-

rian diplomats.¹²⁴ Militants of the Nigerian terrorist movement, Boko Haram, known to have links with AQIM,¹²⁵ have been observed in Gao.¹²⁶ The deployment of Iyad Ag Ghali's forces in the two towns abandoned by the Malian army therefore coincides with an increased presence of other more radical armed Islamist movements. The MNLA chose not to confront Ansar Dine and AQIM, and gave up control of the urban centres of "Azawad" to the Islamists. It withdrew and occupied positions in the urban periphery (Timbuktu's airport, for example), part of Gao and on the main roads.¹²⁷

The MUJWA has gradually consolidated its presence in Gao, on the invitation, according to an MNLA representative, of influential members of local Arab communities.¹²⁸ With MUJWA's efforts towards rapprochement with the

¹²⁴ The split between AQIM and the MUJWA was apparently due to quarrels about sharing out the ransoms paid for the release of Western hostages. The MUJWA's existence first came to public attention after the kidnapping of three European tourists at Tindouf in Algeria on 22 October 2011. However, according to an MNLA representative, it had already set up a separate base in northern Mali in 2008. Crisis Group interview, 29 June 2012, Paris. On 4 March 2012, MUJAO claimed responsibility for a suicide-bomb attack on the gendarmerie in Tamanrasset, although there were no casualties. The movement seemed to prioritise Algerian targets. Alain Antil, Sub-Saharan Africa Program officer for the French Institute for International Relations (Institut français des relations internationales) assembles the various hypotheses about the origin of the MUJWA in "Le Mujao, dernier venu des mouvements islamistes armés du nord Mali", *Ultima Ratio*, 2 May 2012, <http://ultimaratio-blog.org/fr/archives/4532>. The paradoxical role of negotiator that Mokhtar Belmokhtar shouldered to obtain the release of Algerian diplomats in Gao – that is, a situation where AQIM negotiated with AQIM – seems to confirm MUJAO's ties to the jihadi leader's *katiba*. "Pour libérer les otages algériens, des négociations avec Belmokhtar sont en cours", *El Watan*, 8 April 2012; and "Le groupe terroriste Ançar Eddine coupe tout contact", *El Watan*, 16 April 2012.

¹²⁵ At this stage, these links mainly involve sharing information and skills. A regional expert indicated that the bomb attacks carried out a short time ago by Boko Haram were without doubt the result of training provided by AQIM. Crisis Group telephone interview, 3 February 2012. However, these ties should not be perceived as representing a unified transnational terrorist threat. The respective paths/careers of AQIM and Boko Haram are above all the product of the Algerian and Malian political history in the case of the former and Nigeria's history in the case of the other.

¹²⁶ According to evidence presented by the journalist Moussa Kaka, the new chief of police in Gao, a jihadi member of MUJWA, claims to be a member of Ansar Dine, Boko Haram and al-Qaeda all at the same time. See Moussa Kaka's report on RFI, op. cit.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group telephone interview, Western diplomat, 10 May 2012.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interview, Paris, 29 June 2012.

¹¹⁹ This cell (or *katiba*) was responsible for kidnapping and killing the French citizen, Michel Germaneau, in 2010.

¹²⁰ "Video ansarEddine", video, YouTube, 11 March 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr6C49Zvhlc&feature=related>.

¹²¹ Crisis Group interview, former Tuareg rebel leader, Niamey, 17 March 2012.

¹²² An informative Al Jazeera report (carefully monitored no doubt) showed the new Timbuktu "mayor" at work: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79iwxApZzM>.

¹²³ "Tombouctou aux mains des Salafistes", *Africa Nova*, 3 April 2012, <http://afrique.blog.lemonde.fr/2012/04/03/tombouctou-aux-mains-des-salafistes>.

population, this led to a deadly attack against MNLA positions in the town at the end of June 2012, completing the eviction of the MNLA from urban centres¹²⁹ and forcing the latter to withdraw to peripheral desert areas.

There is still a lack of information about the sequence and degree of coordination between these different Islamist movements, but we can make some observations. First, as the rebel forces advanced towards the south, Ansar Dine grew in strategic importance and very probably in terms of numbers and equipment, thanks no doubt to resources provided by AQIM.¹³⁰ Second, a provisional *modus vivendi* seems to have been rapidly established between the different armed groups in Timbuktu and Gao, which seem to form the epicentre of the reconfiguration of power underway in northern Mali. The MNLA's acceptance of armed competitors on "its" territory stems from a strategic choice to avoid armed confrontation. Such a confrontation eventually took place in Gao but not on the MNLA's initiative. For the MNLA, alienating Ansar Dine would have meant losing support from one of Azawad's major communities and endangering its separatist project. Ag Najim, the MNLA's military chief, is a determined advocate of peace between all Tuareg factions.¹³¹

Relations between the two groups gradually became more one-sided. Ansar Dine increased the frequency of its bold strategic coups and gradually replaced the MNLA. The latter remained paralysed both by its cautious attitude and dread of a violent and internecine escalation of conflict and also by the balance of forces, which had become unfavourable as its resources diminished. It seems that Ansar Dine has managed to recruit some elements of the MNLA on a paid basis. In the words of a Western diplomat, the MNLA is "labour rich and cash poor while Ansar Dine is labour poor but cash rich".¹³² These respective situations clearly offer different prospects. This same observer believes that the absence of a detailed political program¹³³

and a lack of resources explain the MNLA's inability to build on its military victory and make a start on establishing a new state.

The significant growth of Ansar Dine within two months poses a question. By advancing towards the south, notably towards Gao and Timbuktu, the rebellion entered sociological, political and religious terrain that was undoubtedly more favourable to projects combining the preservation of Malian territorial integrity with the promotion of a rigorous version of Islam rather than the secular separatism promoted by the MNLA. Timbuktu is the region where AQIM established itself in 2003 and where it has built a network of local alliances, including with Arab militias tolerated and even maintained by ATT. The leaders of these militias have alternately supplied AQIM, negotiated with it over the release of hostages or worked together in joint trafficking operations. It was therefore not surprising to see these actors defending their stakes in the local political economy as the rebels advanced and Malian troops, which did not threaten them, withdrew.

Iyad Ag Ghali undoubtedly has the political and symbolic "capital" that puts him in a better position than the MNLA to negotiate with existing militias in Timbuktu and Gao. The FIAA, military component of Timbuktu's Arab communities, was the only front to sign the Tamanrasset Accords with Iyad Ag Ghali's MPA in 1991. As a regular negotiator for the release of hostages, Ag Ghali is also close to the political-business complex that this industry has generated. The game of alliances already mentioned strengthened Ansar Dine as it approached the south of Azawad. It was perhaps also able to draw on the money from the drug trafficking controlled by Timbuktu's Arab militias or the ransoms collected over the years by AQIM.

This is the thesis vehemently and clearly held by Mohamed Mahmoud El Oumrany, a senior representative of northern Mali's Arab communities. He notes just how dangerous the relationship was between the former government and organised crime.¹³⁴ In brief, the new masters of Azawad seem to be the now autonomous former clients of the abolished Malian regime. A senior Western security source explicitly confirmed the thesis that AQIM has made its financial and military resources available to Ansar Dine.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ "Comment le MNLA a été chassé de Gao", *Jeune Afrique*, 4 July 2012.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, top-level Western security source, 10 May 2012.

¹³¹ On 16 April, Ag Najim told *El Watan*: "It is true that Ansar Dine is a group that wants to see sharia law, but it has participated in the liberation of Azawad under the MNLA's leadership. It represents a real tendency in our society. I do not see why people focus on our organisation, while the biggest operations were conducted by MNLA fighters. There are Islamist parties in all Muslim countries. Why do you not want see Ansar Dine in the same way, as one such party?" See "Nous ferons tout pour que les otages reviennent chez eux au plus tôt", *El Watan*, 16 April 2012.

¹³² Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 May 2012.

¹³³ In retrospect, while the vagueness of the MNLA's political program may have been fatal to its plans, it is also true that it ensured a broad alliance at the start of the rebellion. As one of

the movement's leaders told Crisis Group in January 2012, soon after the launch of the military offensive, "discussing the details now would be divisive". Crisis Group interview, Paris, 23 January 2012.

¹³⁴ "Mohamed Mahmoud El-Oumrany: 'les trafiquants de drogue sont dans une alliance avec al-Qaïda à Tombouctou, à Gao et à Kidal'", RFI, 5 April 2012.

¹³⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 May 2012.

V. THE COUP: COLLATERAL DAMAGE FROM THE NORTHERN REBELLION OR CONSEQUENCE OF THE LONG DECLINE OF THE STATE?

The situation remained confused for long hours in Bamako. By the morning of 22 March, a group of army officers made a televised statement from Mali Radio and Television Corporation (Office de radiodiffusion et télévision du Mali, ORTM), which it had stormed the previous evening, and announced the creation of a National Committee for the Reestablishment of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (Comité national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l'Etat, CNRDRE). This confirmed without doubt that the mutiny, which began the previous evening at the garrison town of Kati, about fifteen kilometres from Bamako, was a military coup against the government of President ATT.

The president escaped from the presidential palace as the mutineers attacked the building and was untraceable for several days, protected by the presidential guard. He only reappeared in Bamako to sign, under pressure, a letter of resignation on 8 April as a prelude to a formal return to constitutional order mediated by ECOWAS. This took place with the inauguration of the president of the National Assembly, Dioncounda Traoré, as interim president.

A. THE BRUTAL END OF A TWENTY-YEAR DEMOCRATIC CAREER

Chaired by Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, the junta is composed of junior officers rather than senior army commanders. It justified the president's overthrow, six weeks before the date set for the first round of the presidential elections (29 April) by "the government's failure to provide adequate equipment to the defence and security forces fulfilling their mission to defend the country's territorial integrity".¹³⁶ That ATT could not, and did not intend to, run did not matter to the junta. In all probability, the coup was not so much the result of a carefully planned initiative as it was an expression of extreme discontent among a sector of the army about the deterioration of the security situation in the north. Prior to the coup, the rebels had taken only two months to dislodge the Malian army from a number of positions: Ménaka, Aguelhoc and, in particular, Tessalit and Amachach. It was a tragic irony that, after the coup, in just a few days, the Malian army, now with a broken chain of command, abandoned the three regional capitals of Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao to the rebels.

¹³⁶ The junta's first declaration on 22 March 2012 at the ORTM, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wB8VHaQvQi0>.

1. A longstanding malaise within the armed forces

In the second half of 2011, Mali seemed to be the country most vulnerable to the immediate consequences of the Libyan conflict on the Sahel. Towards the end of ATT's presidency, government policy on the north was incoherent and there was increasingly direct and strong questioning of a military hierarchy accused of corruption, nepotism, irresponsibility and being too lax.¹³⁷ The malaise within the armed forces was one essential factor in triggering the coup in a country that had formed part of a group of young West African democracies. Mali seemed well equipped to institutionalise democratic progress through relatively credible elections and resolve internal social, community and political conflicts through dialogue. It was not the shock of the loss of human life and the military reverses suffered by government forces since the beginning of the rebellion in the north that was the source of acute discontent within the defence and security forces.

In 2009-2010, Bamako was already buzzing with accusations of dangerous liaisons between political and military elites and major drug and hostage traffickers and rumours of plots by junior officers angry about the way the president pampered senior officers.¹³⁸ Among the reasons for this frustration was the way that ATT promoted officers of his generation to the rank of general, too hastily and unjustifiably in the opinion of many,¹³⁹ and the perception, accurate or exaggerated, that close associates of the president were indulging in an unprecedented degree of corruption, wheeling and dealing. The increasing number of Western hostages captured in neighbouring countries and transferred to northern Mali, described as AQIM's sanctuary, only served to further undermine the credibility of the Malian state.¹⁴⁰ Despite the perception of unprecedented laxity in the state administration, it still seemed unlikely that a military coup could take place in a country praised for its democratic system in place for twenty years, espe-

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Malian officer and diplomats, Bamako, 4-5 December 2011.

¹³⁸ In 2010, a Malian security source confirmed the discovery of a plot by junior officers against President ATT. Crisis Group interview, Crisis Group researcher and independent consultant based in Bamako at that time, 2010.

¹³⁹ The number of generals doubled in two years in Mali. Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Bamako, 30 May 2012. 24 generals (23 brigadiers and one major general) were appointed on 1 October 2010. During his two terms, ATT appointed 37 general officers in the army and fifteen general police inspectors, making a total of 52 generals, compared to a total of eighteen by his predecessors, according to the count made by the Malian press. See "Armée malienne: Nommés par ATT: à quand leur mise à la retraite anticipée des Généraux ?", *Le Politicien africain*, 25 May 2012.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Malian officer and diplomats, Bamako, 4-5 December 2011.

cially just a few weeks before the departure of the president and new elections.

2. A political history typical of West Africa

Having achieved independence in 1960, like almost all the other French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, Mali also experienced the kind of political upset that characterised the first decades of most of these states under construction. The first president, Modibo Keita, a nationalist, pan-African and socialist, did not escape the epidemic of coups that hit West Africa in the 1960s. In 1968, he was overthrown by the military, led by Moussa Traoré, who installed a military regime, and, in 1976, a single-party authoritarian regime. Traoré remained in power for 23 years, until the coup of March 1991. Neither was Mali spared the violent pressure of social movements demanding the end of single parties and the return of political liberties and democracy. The population largely welcomed the coup that propelled Lieutenant-Colonel ATT onto the scene because it ended Traoré's increasingly violent regime.¹⁴¹ The army officers who took power seemed to support the political changes desired by the civilian elites.

A major debate between the elites about introducing new political, economic and social policies marked the one-year transition period. A national conference, organised from 29 July to 12 August 1991, led to a draft constitution, a charter for political parties, an electoral code and a full electoral timetable for the beginning of 1992.¹⁴² The elections were held amid hopes for a lasting resolution of the Tuareg conflict in the north, fulfilled with the signature of the National Pact. However, the elections, especially the actual number of voters in the north, highlighted the relatively weak position held by this part of the country in national politics.¹⁴³ President ATT became very popular in

his country and on the continent when he kept his promise to organise free elections at the end of the transitional period and went on to transfer power to Alpha Oumar Konaré, the civilian elected president in the second round of the presidential election on 26 April 1992.¹⁴⁴

While ATT focused on international diplomatic networks and became a high-profile mediator in African crises,¹⁴⁵ Konaré administered a rapidly changing country after years of economic stagnation.¹⁴⁶ He was re-elected in May 1997, although opposition parties denounced the election result. The democratic change in government in 2002, when Konaré left office, respecting the constitutional limitation of two terms, consolidated the young Malian democracy.¹⁴⁷ The former coup leader and transitional president, the retired General ATT, came to power again, still basking in the glow of his voluntary departure ten years previously. His campaign was based on his image as a man of consensus. He also benefited from rivalries within civilian political elites, associated with the Konaré government and accused by some sectors of Malian public opinion of becoming unduly wealthy. However, many people felt that Konaré had created the conditions for ATT's comeback, returning the favour of the person whose withdrawal had allowed him to become the first democratically elected president of the democratic era.¹⁴⁸ This democratic change of government had its dark side.

¹⁴¹ Unprecedented strikes and demonstrations led by students and teachers' movements in Bamako prompted the Traoré regime to lead a bloody repression. The killing of dozens of students by the security forces in January and March 1991 hastened Moussa Traoré's fall, which was finally orchestrated by officers close to him.

¹⁴² The constitutional referendum took place on 12 January, municipal elections on 19 January, legislative elections on 23 February and 9 March and a two-round presidential election on 12 and 26 April.

¹⁴³ The number of electors registered for the constitutional referendum held in January 1992 was 315,772 in the Timbuktu region, 221,574 in the Gao region and 11,653 in the Kidal region, compared to 681,152 in the Kayes region, 707,388 in the Koulikoro region, 768,131 in the Sikasso region, 756,959 in the Ségou region, 776,424 in the Mopti region, 366,403 in Bamako district and 628,056 outside the country. The three regions of the north therefore accounted for 10.5 per cent of the national electorate in 1992. See *Le processus démocratique malien de 1969 à nos jours*, op. cit.

¹⁴⁴ The history professor, Alpha Oumar Konaré, was one of the leaders of the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (Alliance pour la démocratie au Mali, ADEMA), one of the political and civic movements that organised the mobilisation that led to the fall of Moussa Traoré's single-party regime. ADEMA-PASJ later became the country's main political party.

¹⁴⁵ In 2001, the former President ATT was appointed as special representative of the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in the Central African Republic, after the failed coup against Ange-Félix Patassé.

¹⁴⁶ Major infrastructure projects were launched, especially in Bamako, and economic growth was on the agenda, stimulated by gold and cotton production and by the flow of development aid into the country. However, poverty rates were slow to fall and the Konaré governments faced corruption accusations. Nevertheless, this did not harm Mali's mainly positive image as a model democratic country in the process of consolidation.

¹⁴⁷ He was president of the African Union (AU) Commission from 2003 to 2008.

¹⁴⁸ The outgoing president, Alpha Oumar Konaré, did not clearly support Soumaïla Cissé, whom his party, ADEMA-PASJ, chose and who was beaten by ATT in the second round of the presidential election in May 2002. See Pierre Boilley, "Présidentielles maliennes: l'enracinement démocratique ?", *Politique africaine*, no. 86 (June 2002), pp. 171-182.

3. Weakness and corruption of the state at a time of globalisation

The coup in March 2012 revealed just how fragile Mali's political and security structure actually was. The consolidation of democracy, in the form of a stable multi-party system, observance of political liberties and regular elections that were generally perceived to be credible, did not lead to the consolidation of the state: political institutions, ministerial administrations, police, gendarmerie, army, intelligence services, public agencies and companies. The case of Mali shows that democracy, even when its leaders are really elected by the public and space exists for the expression of all types of political sensibilities, does not guarantee either an efficient and effective state or governance in the general interest. Moreover, compared to other young democracies in the region, the Malian public has never been over-enthusiastic about the ritual of elections. The turnout has generally been low, below 40 per cent of registered voters.¹⁴⁹

The last twenty years have also witnessed the rapid integration of West Africa into globalisation, thanks to new information and communications technologies, trade and foreign investment, but also as a result of transnational criminal networks, including the trafficking of people, drugs, cigarettes and other legal and illegal goods. Those who have access to transnational networks because of their job, especially in the state administration, have seen increasing opportunities to accumulate significant wealth. In a context in which northern Mali has become a crossroads for intensive trafficking involving a multitude and variety of actors, the lure of quick and easy money has led prominent individuals to abandon any vision of sustainable development for the country and to misappropriate much of the international aid flowing into the country.¹⁵⁰

The weariness of sectors of the Malian public, including the middle class and wealthy urban dwellers, towards the

end of the arduous presidency of ATT had become so acute that many people welcomed the coup, or more precisely, were not surprised by it. Moreover, it leaves open the question as to whether it would actually have been possible for ATT to organise presidential elections and a constitutional referendum on 29 April, as well as potentially a second round on the following 13 May. Was ATT really on the point of leaving power as he kept repeating? The insistence with which members of the government continued to talk about the organisation of the ballot, including in the north, even when the rebellion was making progress in mid-January, provoked the anger of Gao residents.¹⁵¹ After the coup, opinions differed about whether preparations had been made for the election, especially the electoral rolls, and about ATT's real intentions.

A debate had begun within political circles about whether to proceed with the elections despite the war. Some believed it was best to elect a president with a fresh mandate and therefore able to respond to the challenge posed by the armed groups in the north. However, others believed it was first necessary to defend Mali's territorial integrity. A third group pointed out the dangers of a constitutional vacuum and the need to quickly seek a political consensus. There was plenty of coverage in the Malian press for weeks but the government continued to affirm that the elections would take place as planned. Did ATT expect to "profit" from the security situation in the north to stay in power for another few months or even longer? It is difficult to believe that he did, given an appearance of fatigue and readiness to leave office.¹⁵² This thesis is the most credible. On the other hand, many feared he was preparing the ground for the former Prime Minister, Modibo Sidibé, in a race for succession that had in fact already begun.¹⁵³

The declared candidates in the presidential election with the most chance of victory seemed to be Soumaila Cissé, former minister and former president of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and candidate of the Union for the Republic and Democracy (Union pour la république et la démocratie, URD); former prime minister and former president of the National Assembly, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) of the Rally for Mali (Rassemblement pour le Mali, RPM); the president of the National Assembly, Dioncounda Traoré, candidate of the Alliance for Democracy in Mali – African Party for Solidarity and Justice (Alliance pour la démocratie au Mali-Parti africain pour la solidarité et la justice, ADEMA-PASJ), the dominant party since 1992; and former prime

¹⁴⁹ At the time of the presidential election in April 1992, the first of the new democratic era, turnout was only 23.59 per cent in the first round (See *Le processus démocratique malien*, op. cit.). Turnout was always below 40 per cent in the presidential elections of 1997, 2002 and 2007.

¹⁵⁰ For years, Mali's major donors had no longer believed the country was well governed despite its good image, but they always showed a lot of patience in their public statements. In private, they made repeated and detailed criticisms of corruption, including the dubious award of public works contracts to businessmen directly connected to political decision-makers; the mixing of private interests and good works in the activities of the Foundation for Children (Fondation pour l'enfance) run by President ATT's wife, Touré Lobbo Traoré; and the misappropriation of funds and materials in the education, health and other sectors. Crisis Group interview, researcher and independent consultant based in Bamako at that time, 2009 and 2010.

¹⁵¹ See "Marche des forces vives à Gao: pas d'élections sans paix", 22 septembre, 19 March 2012.

¹⁵² Crisis Group interviews, Malian politician and diplomats, Bamako, 30 and 31 May 2012.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

minister and loyal supporter of ATT, Modibo Sidibé, who was not the leader of a political party.

Created in July 2010 by a group of ministers and prominent figures close to President ATT and his wife, the Party for Economic and Social Development (Parti pour le développement économique et social, PDES) seemed to be the crucible from which would emerge the candidate favoured by the outgoing president, but the struggle for the leadership of the party¹⁵⁴ had immediately weakened it.¹⁵⁵

B. THE COUP'S AFTERMATH: CONFUSION AND CHAOS IN THE SOUTH

The leaders of the military coup began their period in power in a way that ruled them out as constructive interlocutors, if they were not already disqualified as such by the coup itself. They arrested prominent members of ATT's government, looted shops and restaurants in Bamako's city centre and stole private vehicles.¹⁵⁶ The tone and atmosphere of the first televised broadcast by Captain Sanogo and the junta's spokesman, Lieutenant Amadou Konaré, on the morning of 22 March 2012, was more reminiscent of post-football match celebrations than a solemn announcement of a politically motivated change of government. However, they announced the creation of the CNRDRE, which established its base in the garrison town of Kati, where the mutiny began and where the fam-

ilies of soldiers sent to the front had demonstrated their anger. African organisations and the international community immediately and unanimously condemned the coup.

1. Polarised political circles

The main political parties represented in the National Assembly, with the notable exception of the African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence (Solidarité africaine pour la démocratie et l'indépendance, SADI), also condemned the coup. The deputy and historic leader of SADI, Oumar Mariko,¹⁵⁷ and a few other lesser known politicians were among the founders of a movement that was favourable to a military overthrow of the ATT government, the Coordination of Patriotic Organisations of Mali (Coordination des organisations patriotiques du Mali, COPAM).¹⁵⁸ The member organisations of the coalition, such as the Popular Movement of 22 March 2012 (Mouvement populaire du 22 mars 2012, MP 22), were clearly created to oppose the dominant social and political forces.¹⁵⁹ COPAM believed that "it is absolutely necessary to restore democracy" to the country and that "it is the unquestionable right of every people to freely choose its own destiny". It denounced the "national chaos caused by the lax attitude and mismanagement of the former president, Amadou Toumani Touré, members of the former government and parliament".¹⁶⁰

The alliance between Sanogo and COPAM activists united youth with no jobs or education and vindictive military elements whose common enemy was the old Malian elites and foreign actors who did not understand the arguments in favour of a coup to "restore democracy". Their straightforward discourse, well articulated by eloquent and organised leaders, rallied some support in the streets of Bamako.

¹⁵⁴ Two of the party's organisers, Ahmed Diané Séméga, the equipment and transport minister under ATT, and Jeamille Bittar, a wealthy businessman and president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, intended to contest in the presidential election. However, neither of them received the support of President ATT who seemed to have instigated the founding of the PDES.

¹⁵⁵ Other parties and prominent individuals in the Malian political landscape included Tiébilé Dramé's Party for National Recovery (Parti pour la renaissance nationale, PARENA); Moutaga Tall's National Congress for Democratic Initiative (Congrès national d'initiative démocratique, CNID); Housseini Amion Guindo's Convergence for the Development of Mali (Convergence pour le développement du Mali, CODEM); Oumar Mariko's African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence (Solidarité africaine pour la démocratie et l'indépendance, SADI); future transitional Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra's Rally for the Development of Mali (Rassemblement pour le développement du Mali, RDM); Choguel Maïga's Patriotic Movement for Renewal (Mouvement patriotique pour le renouveau, MPR); and African Convergence for Renewal (Convergence africaine pour le renouveau, CARE), led by Cheick Boucadry Traoré, son of former president Moussa Traoré. In the Malian context, the names of these leaders counted for much more than those of their parties, which were almost exclusively created to serve the ambitions of their leaders.

¹⁵⁶ A Crisis Group researcher was in Bamako during the events and observed this behaviour during and following the coup.

¹⁵⁷ See "Oumar Mariko, un vilain petit canard dans le marigot politique malien", Slate Afrique, 23 May 2012.

¹⁵⁸ According to the statement made by COPAM, the coalition formed on 6 April 2012 included trade unions, civil society organisations and political parties, notably the Popular Rally for the Defence of the Homeland (Rassemblement populaire pour la défense de la patrie, RPD), the Patriotic Convergence for the Defence of Mali (Convergence patriotique pour la défense du Mali, COPADEM), the Alliance for Democracy and the Republic (Alliance pour la démocratie et la république, ADR) and the Popular Movement of 22 March 2012 (Mouvement populaire du 22 mars 2012, MP 22).

¹⁵⁹ COPAM's other leaders are the trade union leader, Hammadoun Amion Guindo of the Trade Union Coordination of Malian Workers (Coordination syndicale des travailleurs du Mali), Younouss Hamèye Dicko, Hamèye Founé Mahalmadane and Mohamed Tabouré.

¹⁶⁰ COPAM statement on the website of the SADI party, <http://www.partisadi.net/2012/04/declaration-de-la-coordination-des-organisations-patriotiques-du-mali-copam/#more-2579>, 9 April 2012.

Senior army officers, some of whom were arrested, remained silent after the coup, for fear of reprisals but perhaps also because they were not completely against the overthrow of the government and of some of their brothers-in-arms favoured by ATT in recent years.

2. ECOWAS actions and the junta's reactions

Despite taking power under the contemptuous eyes of observers, Sanogo initially listened to the injunctions that came from every side, especially from ECOWAS, which held an emergency meeting of heads of state and government in Abidjan on 27 March. Unsurprisingly, it demanded an immediate return to constitutional order, mandated the president of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, to lead mediation efforts and decided to send a delegation of six heads of state to Bamako¹⁶¹ to communicate the organisation's message to the new de facto authorities and discuss the practicalities of "constitutional normalisation". This delegation was unable to land in the Malian capital because a crowd of pro-junta demonstrators took over the airport runway, clearly under the supervision of the coup leaders themselves.

On their return to Abidjan, the heads of state decided to deploy a massive arsenal of political, diplomatic, economic and financial sanctions against Mali for as long as the junta remained in power. These drastic sanctions included the closure of Mali's borders with all ECOWAS member states – a crippling move for a landlocked country dependent on its neighbours' ports – and froze the country's accounts in the regional central bank. These decisions were similar to those taken during the post-electoral conflict in Côte d'Ivoire in 2011. A mini-summit on 29 March confirmed the decision "to put the ECOWAS Standby Force on high alert for all eventualities [sic]"¹⁶². The threat of regional military intervention was therefore quickly on the agenda but the statement was ambiguous, all the more so since two simultaneous crises were taking place: the junta's coup in Bamako and the MNLA's declaration of independence of the state of Azawad, representing an attack on the sovereignty of an ECOWAS member.

Burkina Faso's mediation efforts involved the almost continuous presence in Bamako of its foreign minister, Djibril Bassolé, accompanied by the Ivorian regional in-

tegration minister, Adama Bictogo.¹⁶³ The economic embargo had a major impact on the outcome of the first negotiations. On 6 April, Bassolé and Captain Sanogo signed a framework agreement on the return of constitutional order in exchange for an amnesty for those who had participated in the coup, legal provisions to strengthen the army and mention of a "role" and "place", to be defined later, for the CNRDRE in the transition.¹⁶⁴ This agreement did not therefore sideline the coup leaders. It provided for the president of the National Assembly to step in as ATT's formal replacement for a period of 40 days during which elections would be organised, as stipulated by the constitution. It also established "transitional organs" to govern the country for longer than this very short period. The CNRDRE was the only Malian signatory to what was a crucial political agreement about the country's future.

In the aftermath of the 6 April agreement, the deposed president, ATT, reappeared in Bamako to make his resignation official and open the way for Dioncounda Traoré to take office. He was sworn in on 12 April, in the presence of Captain Sanogo. The constitutional interim period ended on 22 May and uncertainty continued over whether to extend this period and over the roles of the interim president and the transitional prime minister. The latter was "head of the government" and "plenipotentiary", according to the framework agreement, and his mission was "to lead the transition, manage the crisis in the north of Mali and organise free, transparent and democratic elections"¹⁶⁵. However, the new president declared his willingness to play a concrete role. This did not please those, including civilians and army officers, who saw him as a symbol of the former government. Moreover, he had never been very popular on the political scene despite his position as president of the National Assembly and the fact that he had been the most important political party's candidate for the previously scheduled presidential elections.

According to a Malian politician, "Traoré was only in power for four days, from 12 to 16 April"¹⁶⁶ after he was sworn in. He began to lose power on the evening of 16 April when the military, in response to junta orders, carried out a new wave of summary arrests of politicians and army officers, including close associates of the interim president, although he had just accepted the appointment of Cheick Modibo Diarra as transitional prime minister. Traoré had no input into this choice, respecting the frame-

¹⁶¹ Presidents Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire), who then chaired ECOWAS, Blaise Compaoré (Burkina Faso), Boni Yayi (Benin), Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia), Goodluck Jonathan (Nigeria) and Mahamadou Issoufou (Niger).

¹⁶² Communiqué of the emergency mini-summit of ECOWAS heads of state and government on the situation in Mali, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 29 March 2012.

¹⁶³ He was forced to resign in Côte d'Ivoire after he was implicated in a case of corruption.

¹⁶⁴ Framework agreement to implement the solemn undertaking of 1 April, 6 April 2012, articles 7.a, d and e. See Appendix D.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, article 6.

¹⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Malian politician, Bamako, 30 May 2012.

work agreement that gave this prerogative to the co-signatories, the CNRDRE and the Burkina Faso mediator on behalf of ECOWAS. Interlocutors in Bamako confirm that the junta was mainly responsible for the choice of prime minister,¹⁶⁷ with the approval and perhaps the benevolence of the Burkinabè president.¹⁶⁸

Another extraordinary ECOWAS summit that took place on 26 April 2012 extended the transitional period by twelve months and “the mandate of the transitional organs, notably the Interim President, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet by the same twelve-month period”.¹⁶⁹ The summit also instructed the ECOWAS Commission “to commence, with immediate effect, the deployment of the ECOWAS Standby Force”.¹⁷⁰ These two decisions caused an outcry in Bamako among the junta and its civilian supporters. They wanted Traoré to step down on 22 May and his successor to be chosen by a “national convention”. It is difficult to say whether or not Sanogo was hoping to return to the spotlight as president of the transition, but he certainly intended to have a strong influence over whoever was appointed. Moreover, the junta believed that the Malian army needed logistical and material support from ECOWAS and other international partners, not regional troops. The announcement was a blessing for COPAM, which was able to mobilise on the issue of defending Mali against the “ECOWAS diktat” and violation of the framework agreement.¹⁷¹

The deadly clashes that suddenly broke out in Bamako on 30 April 2012 between the “red berets” of the 33rd Parachute commando regiment, based in the city centre, and the “green berets”, who supported the junta, revealed the fragmented nature of the military. This event finally con-

solidated Sanogo’s power, or more precisely, that of the junta, which amounted to more than him and whose men had come out on top. The attack was reportedly launched by a group of “red berets” close to ATT in response to reports that their leader was about to be arrested, but there were also rumours that the incident was an attempted “counter-coup” against the junta.¹⁷² In any case, this episode was the deadliest so far in the crisis. The number of victims is not known and neither is the fate of wounded soldiers who were taken to the military hospital in Kati. Following these internal clashes within the army, the government dissolved the red beret regiment, part of which was responsible for security of the presidency under ATT.

Interim President Traoré and Prime Minister Diarra attended a new extraordinary ECOWAS summit on 3 May 2012 in Dakar. In response to the junta’s negative reaction to its instructions regarding the Standby Force, the regional body decided that the deployment would only take place “as soon as the Malian authorities make the relevant request”.¹⁷³ Moreover, the arrests in April and May 2012 clearly aimed to show the interim president that power remained in Kati, where Captain Sanogo received a stream of visits from government officials, businessmen and civil society representatives. Sanogo had even had printed official portraits of himself as head of state and he had clearly quickly got a taste for power.¹⁷⁴

The pro-coup movement’s opposition to Traoré continued in Bamako with increasingly virulent verbal attacks on him, broadcast by several private radio stations, a rare phenomenon in the public debate in Mali. Efforts to weaken the president reached their height on 21 May 2012, when demonstrators Traoré had agreed to see in the presidential palace violently assaulted the 70-year-old president. There had been a lively debate from mid-April onwards about the interim president’s future after 22 May, between those who thought he should continue in post and those who wanted him out, including the junta and COPAM. The organisers of the demonstration and the security forces did nothing to stop the demonstrators and are therefore implicated. The matter has been referred to the Malian justice system as attempted murder and an investigation is underway. According to several sources, units of the police’s Mobile Security Group (Groupe mobile de sécurité, GMS), which is under the authority of the internal security minister, refused to rescue the president.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Malian politician and senior official, and diplomats, Bamako, 30 and 31 May 2012.

¹⁶⁸ Cheick Modibo Diarra, astrophysicist and former employee of the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), popular in Mali and considered to be a role model for youth, has had good relations with President Blaise Compaoré for some years. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the International Council for Solidarity with Burkina Faso (Conseil international de solidarité avec le Burkina Faso, CIS-AB), an organisation based in France that promotes Burkina Faso and its president, Blaise Compaoré, in Europe and the rest of the world. See the website: www.cisab.org. In 2011, Diarra formed a political party, the Rally for the Development of Mali (Rassemblement pour le développement du Mali, RDPM), in preparation for the presidential election scheduled for 2012 in which he planned to contest.

¹⁶⁹ Final communiqué of the Extraordinary Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, 26 April 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ “Déclaration de la COPAM suite au communiqué final du sommet extraordinaire de la Cedeao du 26 April 2012”, 28 April 2012, <http://www.partisadi.net/tag/copam>.

¹⁷² Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Bamako, 30 May 2012.

¹⁷³ Final communiqué of the Extraordinary Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, Dakar, Senegal, 3 May 2012.

¹⁷⁴ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Bamako, 30 May 2012.

¹⁷⁵ Members of a dissident police and gendarmerie trade union were implicated.

However, on 20 May 2012, the Burkinabè foreign minister, Bassolé, mediating on behalf of ECOWAS, announced he had reached a new agreement with Sanogo, by which the latter was granted the status of former head of state, enjoying all the benefits due to this rank, including an allowance, accommodation and bodyguards.¹⁷⁶ In exchange, he finally agreed to extend the mandate of the interim president to one year and promised that the junta would renounce any political role.¹⁷⁷ There is no indication that the junta played a direct role in the 21 May events. However, the soldiers who were present in the presidential palace clearly did nothing to prevent the excesses and the assault on the president. In a sign of their distrust, the military blocked Traoré's departure for Paris for two hours at the airport, despite the prime minister's presence. These unacceptable acts had the paradoxical effect of lowering tensions because they made the most hardline pro-junta elements act in a more restrained fashion, once they realised that they could be subject to legal proceedings.

3. Controversial ECOWAS efforts at mediation

ECOWAS monopolised the post-coup diplomatic response, through the mediation entrusted to Burkina Faso. The succession of summit meetings of heads of state indicated concern and a willingness to find a response to the dual challenge posed by the break with democracy and the Malian state's loss of sovereignty over more than two thirds of its territory. However, most actors, observers and diplomats consider that the intervention by ECOWAS, and particularly by Burkina Faso, has mainly had a negative impact. A Malian observer said: "I have never seen such chaotic and unilateral mediation".¹⁷⁸ He denounced the decision to make Sanogo an almost exclusive interlocutor and co-signatory of the 6 April framework agreement, effectively making the mediator a stakeholder in the establishment of the transitional organs, and the appointment of the prime minister and the government without any consultation with Mali's main political forces. This observer also criticised the generous decision to grant Sanogo the status of former president. ECOWAS later revoked this decision, initially on 6 June 2012 and then more clearly at the 28-29 June summit.¹⁷⁹

It is difficult to disagree with the strong criticism of ECOWAS's actions. As so often happens, the organisation was firm and clear about its principled refusal to countenance the breakdown of constitutional order and even took stringent measures, including a total embargo, which shocked some Malians but was coherent with its stated principles and aimed to put maximum pressure on the junta. However, from the moment ECOWAS designated a mediator, it seemed to give him a free hand to conduct negotiations. Although the organisation's chair, the Ivorian Ouattara, also sent his regional integration minister, Adama Bictogo, to support the Burkinabè minister, it was the latter who monopolised the negotiations in Bamako. According to several sources, heads of state at the 26 April summit expressed different opinions about the mediation and these opinions still hold.¹⁸⁰ They agreed that the Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, would work with Compaoré to mediate,¹⁸¹ which demonstrated a desire to increase supervision over Burkina Faso's efforts.

The announcement of the composition of the government on 25 April included the appointment of Sadio Lamine Sow to the strategic post of minister of state for foreign affairs.¹⁸² Sow had been a discreet special adviser to President Compaoré in Ouagadougou for three decades. This strengthened the feeling that the mediator was having a disproportionate influence on the Malian transition.¹⁸³ The general perception of the government varied depending on the interlocutor. Although it certainly did not represent a government of national unity even after wide consultations, some welcomed the political neutrality of most of its members.¹⁸⁴ Prime Minister Diarra, son-in-law of the former autocratic president, Moussa Traoré, had nevertheless

ECOWAS Commission, released after the meeting to discuss the situation in Mali. Also see Final Communiqué of the 41st Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Conference of Heads of State and Government, Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, 28-29 June 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Bamako, 29-31 May 2012.

¹⁸¹ Final communiqué of the Extraordinary Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 26 April 2012.

¹⁸² "Mali: Sadio Lamine Sow fait le grand écart", *Jeune Afrique*, 5 June 2012.

¹⁸³ Moreover, this minister is the only member of the government to have already had such a function. An interlocutor of Crisis Group questioned how such a close adviser to President Compaoré could establish good working relations with Mauritania, a full member that has difficult relations with Burkina Faso. Another influential and controversial special adviser to Compaoré, the Mauritanian Moustafa Ould Limam Chafi, is considered by Nouakchott to be an opponent and a warrant has been issued for his arrest. Crisis Group interview, Malian politician, Bamako, 30 May 2012.

¹⁸⁴ Crisis Group interviews, politicians, researcher, Bamako, 30-31 May 2012.

¹⁷⁶ ECOWAS heads of state later reversed this decision, a clear disavowal of Burkina Faso's mediation. See below.

¹⁷⁷ See "Crise au Mali: accord signé pour une période de transition de 12 mois", *Jeune Afrique*, 21 May 2012.

¹⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, Malian politician, Bamako, 30 May 2012.

¹⁷⁹ ECOWAS heads of state, meeting in Lomé, Togo, "reiterated ECOWAS's non-recognition of the CNRDRE as well as any status of Head of State or former Head of State bestowed on Captain Amadou Sanogo", point 10 of the Communiqué of the

called on one of the latter's former economy and finance ministers (Tiéna Coulibaly).¹⁸⁵ In September 2010, Diarra had himself created a political party, the Rally for the Development of Mali (Rassemblement pour le développement du Mali, RDM) with the objective of contesting in the 2012 presidential election.¹⁸⁶ Four ministers came from the diaspora and three officers occupied key ministries.¹⁸⁷

Modibo Diarra's government seriously suffered from the circumstances in which it was formed. As with the choice of prime minister, there was not much consultation among Malian political circles about the other members of the government. The desire to form a government composed of individuals that were not too close to the ATT clan was certainly understandable, as the former regime had been responsible for weakening the state over the previous ten years. But it was predictable that a team formed during obscure negotiations between the junta and ECOWAS mediators would not be perceived as legitimate. Not surprisingly, there was a lot of criticism in Bamako about the unrepresentative nature of the Diarra government and its inability to formulate a roadmap to fulfil the two main missions of the transition: resolving the crisis in the north and preparing free and transparent elections within one year.¹⁸⁸

Approval of the Diarra government came, a little paradoxically, from ECOWAS. A sub-group of heads of state that was acting as a Contact Group on Mali met on 7 July in Ouagadougou. An interesting feature of this meeting was the participation of Mali's major players, notably parliamentarians, the Higher Council of Local Authorities (Haut conseil des collectivités territoriales), political parties, whether they were represented in the National Assembly or not, trade unions, women and youth organisations, the Collective of Northern Citizens (Collectif des ressortissants du Nord, COREN) and a range of civil society associations.¹⁸⁹ However, pro-junta movements, notably the COPAM and the MP 22, boycotted the meeting, along with Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's party (IBK Mali 2012). The latter, a former prime minister, was a declared candidate in the aborted presidential election, who, like other Bamako politicians, wanted to have an influence over the

management of the transitional period.¹⁹⁰ These movements felt that the solution to Malian political problems should be sought in Mali and that it was not appropriate to go to Burkina Faso to form a new government in Mali.¹⁹¹

Neither interim President Traoré (whose attendance was announced), nor Prime Minister Diarra attended the meeting. The minister for Malians abroad and African integration, Rokia Traoré Guikiné, was the sole government representative. The ECOWAS Contact Group requested, or more exactly, demanded the formation of a national unity government representing at least a reshuffle of Diarra's cabinet, by 31 July 2012.¹⁹² The heads of state also demanded "that full light be shed on the physical attack against President Dioncounda Traoré and that charges be brought against the perpetrators of this attack". They clearly expressed a desire to confirm the position of the interim president, still in Paris, at the heart of political arrangements, by calling on "ECOWAS to support the Government of Mali with a view to arranging the return of the Interim President, His Excellency Mr Dioncounda Traoré, and guaranteeing his protection and physical integrity".¹⁹³

¹⁸⁵ "Les secrets du nouveau gouvernement malien", *Jeune Afrique*, 26 April 2012.

¹⁸⁶ However, Cheick Modibo Diarra was not among the favourites to win this presidential election, given that his party had only recently been formed and that he himself had not been on the political scene for long.

¹⁸⁷ Colonel-Major Yamoussa Camara (defence), General Tiéféng Konaté (internal security) and Colonel Mamadou Sinko Coulibaly, former director of Captain Sanogo's cabinet (territorial administration).

¹⁸⁸ Crisis Group interviews, politicians, senior official, diplomats, Bamako, 30-31 May 2012.

¹⁸⁹ Communiqué of the Second Meeting of the Contact Group on Mali, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 7 July 2012.

¹⁹⁰ See "Boycott de la 2^{ème} réunion du groupe de contact à Ouaga: la COPAM, le Premier ministre, IBK Mali 2012 et autres tombent dans l'excès", *L'indépendant*, 10 July 2012.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. Also see "Déclaration du BPN/RPM relative à la participation du RPM au mini-sommet de la Cedeao du 7 juillet 2012 à Ouagadougou", 6 July 2012, <http://www.ibk-2012.com/Pourquoi-le-RPM-ne-participe-pas.html>.

¹⁹² The final communiqué of the meeting stated: "In order to promote political stability and create favourable conditions for a peaceful way out of the crisis, the Member Heads of State of the Contact Group support the demand of the socio-political stakeholders of Mali, including political leaders and Civil Society, and call on them to hold consultations and make proposals to the Interim President regarding the formation, before 31 July 2012, of a Government of national unity which will be responsible for the implementation of the roadmap for ending the crisis". Communiqué of the 2nd Meeting of the Contact Group on Mali, op. cit.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

VI. WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR MALI?

The asymmetry of the military balance of forces between the north and south, coupled with the diplomatic and technical delays and obstacles to the eventual constitution of a military force able to reconquer the territory, makes it likely that the de facto partition of the country will continue in the coming months. Mali's immediate future is being played out in the north by armed groups that dispute its control and depends in the south on the ability of its leaders to overcome a major institutional crisis. It is still not known who really is in command in the south. The choices made by the international actors who have been involved in intense diplomatic activity since the coup, also largely condition the development of this double crisis.

A. POLITICAL ALLIANCES, SPLITS AND REORGANISATION IN NORTHERN MALI

The situation in northern Mali is changing rapidly and there is only fragmentary knowledge of what is really going on. One major question is whether the MNLA can survive. Is its plan for self-determination, backed by Tuareg nationalist tradition and devoid of a religious agenda, able to counter the already well-advanced Islamist attempts at subversion? The MNLA's capacity to impose its power and confront those who dispute its self-proclaimed monopoly of "legitimate violence" is declining.

At the time of writing, Iyad Ag Ghali, who has significant financial resources, has absorbed MNLA leaders and fighters into his movement. For example, Alghabass Ag Intallah, the future *amenokal* of the Ifoghas, previously believed to be a sympathiser of the MNLA, now speaks on behalf of Ansar Dine.¹⁹⁴ Many in the separatist movement's political bureau, who are not in the field, denounce what they consider an unacceptable compromise of their initial project. The line defended by MNLA leaders continues to be followed in the field, although undoubtedly with less vigour than in January 2012.

Many Malian Tuaregs remain loyal to Iyad Ag Ghali even if they disapprove of his religious views. A large proportion of his fighters are Tuareg from the Ifogha tribe and have relatives in the MNLA.¹⁹⁵ One of the recurring issues during preparations for rebellion in Zakak was the risk of a tribal division of the movement, similar to the one that

proved fatal to the insurgent Tuaregs in the 1990s. It is with reference to these concerns, as well as to the change in the balance of forces between the two groups since March 2012, that it is necessary to interpret the dynamic relationship between the MNLA and Ansar Dine. There have been attempts to iron out the tensions between the two groups, notably on 18 March,¹⁹⁶ after Ansar Dine disseminated their Aguelhoc video, but they failed to end the competition between the two organisations.

At the end of May 2012, the two movements began another round of consultations in Gao, with a view to reaching a lasting reconciliation. On 26 May, they signed a draft agreement that focused on two points: Ansar Dine recognised the Azawad independence proclaimed by the MNLA and the latter accepted the Islamic character of the new state and, consequently, the imposition of Sharia law.¹⁹⁷ MNLA leaders wanted Ansar Dine to commit to driving out AQIM as part of this agreement, but the movement only made vague promises.¹⁹⁸ Two days later, the MNLA's expatriate leaders denounced this agreement for fundamental ideological reasons, for fear of the West's reaction (where some of them were living) and, finally, because they questioned Ansar Dine's sincerity about wanting to fight AQIM.

The divisions between Ansar Dine and the MNLA deepened after this failed attempt at compromise. The two groups exchanged shots in Kidal and Timbuktu,¹⁹⁹ while female supporters of the MNLA demonstrated their rejection of a repressive religious order.²⁰⁰ Iyad Ag Ghali's failure to condemn MUJWA's attack on the MNLA in Gao at the end of June widened the gap separating the Tuareg leader from the MNLA. However, his Tuareg fighters do not necessarily share Ag Ghali's radical position, and they could align themselves with the MNLA in the event of inter-tribal confrontations such as those that took place in Gao.²⁰¹

During the military campaign, Ansar Dine acted as a buffer between the MNLA and AQIM. After the offensive began, the MNLA promised to combat terrorism provided that the international community supplied it with the necessary resources. It seemed to want to earn international legitimacy by becoming an auxiliary in a "war on terror" that

¹⁹⁴ According to Mossa Ag Acharatoumane, his role in Ansar Dine is to promote a rapprochement between his movement and the MNLA. Crisis Group interview, Paris, 29 June 2012.

¹⁹⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, regional expert, 3 April 2012.

¹⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Tuareg political leader, Niamey, 17 March 2012.

¹⁹⁷ "Nord du Mali: les rebelles touareg et les islamistes d'Ansar Dine fusionnent", *Jeune Afrique*, 27 May 2012.

¹⁹⁸ Crisis Group telephone interview, 2 June 2012.

¹⁹⁹ "Nouvel accrochage entre Touareg et islamistes dans le nord du Mali", *Bamako.com*, 13 June 2012, <http://news.abamako.com/h/2170.html>.

²⁰⁰ "Nouvelle manifestation contre les islamistes à Kidal", *Le Temps d'Algérie*, 6 June 2012.

²⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, MNLA leader, Paris, 29 June 2012.

was not its own.²⁰² Even if the MNLA receives the desired military assistance and even if it really wants to use it against AQIM, it is uncertain what the results of such a move would be. AQIM has a lot of firepower and is an elusive, yet deeply-rooted organisation in northern Mali.

Finally, although the MNLA evacuated Western residents from Gao and Timbuktu in April, it was Ansar Dine that helped to arrange the release of two hostages. The MNLA therefore seems to be less effective than its Salafi rival, precisely in the field in which its leaders claim to excel. Its unconvincing positioning is tactical but is also a result of the exhaustion of its resources: eventually, the movement has to look outside Mali to the West for the resources that would allow it to avoid suffocation. It is possible that the Libyan equipment source, so plentiful between April and August 2011, has not completely dried up.²⁰³ However, the political reorganisation underway in southern Libya is not favourable to the Tuaregs. Several experts have expressed their scepticism about the idea that the MNLA can rely on permanent support from within Libya, even though the movement's chief, Ag Najim, remained loyal to Qadhafi after his return to Mali and seems to have helped the overthrown regime's secret service's number two, Abdallah Senoussi, to escape.²⁰⁴

Within Mali, the MNLA has been unable to resist the Islamist groups, or, at the very least, it has adopted a wait-and-see policy. However, it has benefited from the support of an immensely respected figure in the north, the traditional chief (*amenokal*) of the Kel Adagh, Intallah Ag Attaher, who, in a letter made public, disavowed Iyad Ag Ghali, a member of his own group, to the advantage of a movement dominated by the Idnan. A senior traditional authority of the Kounta, the most prestigious Arab group in northern Mali, has made a similar pronouncement. These declarations of support emphasise just how divisive the fundamentalist position taken by Iyad Ag Ghali is within the Tuareg community. Attempts to mobilise the public in favour of Azawad, especially in Gao, are another facet of

the MNLA's search for legitimacy.²⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Ansar Dine is repressing the practices that it judges incompatible with its interpretation of Islam but could also become more popular if it manages to maintain order and eliminate the petty crime that promotes perceptions of insecurity among the public.

Attentive observers in the region do not believe it is in Iyad Ag Ghali's interest "to cross the red line" by becoming too close to jihadis. He is more likely to focus on making sure he is at the centre of decision-making and maintains the brokering capacity that has brought past political successes: between the rebels and Bamako, between Bamako and Algiers and between Bamako and AQIM. This certainly seems to have been the driving force behind the release of an Italian hostage detained by AQIM since February 2011 and the Swiss hostage kidnapped in Timbuktu shortly after its fall.²⁰⁶ While operationally associating himself with AQIM, Iyad has taken care not to endanger his chances of political survival by showing his ability to act on the hostages issue. This undoubtedly makes him useful to AQIM's leaders, who are unable to place themselves as actors in political negotiations.

Ansar Dine de facto provides another service to AQIM by intervening between jihadis and the MNLA. There is no evidence that the MNLA would have challenged AQIM militarily in the absence of Ansar Dine but the question would be higher up the agenda without Ansar Dine. The MUJWA and Ansar Dine are mainly composed of local people. They form a kind of vernacular AQIM, which was itself founded outside Mali. This process seems to be in accordance with the aim of Abdelmalek Droukdal, AQIM's highest authority, to "gradually" impose his political project on northern Mali by leaving the management of the local situation to Ansar Dine while AQIM concentrates on its jihadi activities.²⁰⁷

However, coercion is now being used to impose Sharia law in the north (strict clothing code, a ban on consuming alcohol and smoking, corporal punishments for offenders),²⁰⁸ to the extent of provoking sometimes violent reac-

²⁰² The MNLA seems forced to play the "extraversion" card to consolidate its viability as a legitimate political actor. A hypothetical future Azawad must also lie on links with the international system. In the opinion of a Paris representative of the MNLA, the future development of Azawad depends on its capacity to attract international development cooperation aid currently controlled by Bamako. This reasoning reveals the extent to which external intervention is as much part of the Malian problem as its solution, as shown by the case of the PSPSDN, described above. That AQIM kidnaps Western hostages to extract substantial ransoms also obeys the logic of "extraversion".
²⁰³ Crisis Group interview, former Tuareg rebel leader, Niamey, 14 March 2012.

²⁰⁴ "Libye: le récit exclusif de la cavale d'Abdallah Senoussi", *Jeune Afrique*, 2 April 2012.

²⁰⁵ The MNLA rationalises this as "a war to raise awareness rather than a fratricidal confrontation". See "Le sombre Iyad Ag Ghaly acculé de toute part dans l'Azawad", *toumastpress*, 24 April 2012, <http://toumastpress.com/actualites/actualite/684-iyad-ag-ghaly-accule-toute-part-azawad.html>.

²⁰⁶ "Mali: les dessous de la libération de l'otage Béatrice Stocklyet", RFI, 25 April 2012; and "Mali: le récit de la libération de l'otage italienne Maria Sandra Mariani", RFI, 18 April 2012.

²⁰⁷ See "AQIM leader gives advice to fighters in Azawad", SITE Monitoring Service, 23 May 2012; and "Qaeda leader tells fighters to support Mali rebels", Reuters, 24 May 2012.

²⁰⁸ See "Timbuktu couple get 100 lashes for child out of wedlock", AFP, 20 June 2012.

tions, as in Gao in mid-May.²⁰⁹ The approach thus seems less and less incremental. How far will these movements go in imposing Sharia? Does AQIM intend to use Ansar Dine as a security cordon for its jihadi activities or does it intend to extend a political model combining Sharia and jihadism to neighbouring areas? Finally, is it possible to impose on northern Mali a religious project that the MNLA's political leaders perceive as being the replacement of southern "colonisation" by Arab Islamist "colonisation?"²¹⁰

B. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AT SIXES AND SEVENS

African regional organisations began to mobilise after the MNLA attacked Malian army positions in the north in early 2012 and government forces and President ATT showed they were clearly unable to deal with the situation. Meanwhile, the UN had for several months become increasingly concerned about the general security situation in the Sahel, in the context of the conflict in Libya and the considerable transfers of arms and fighters from that country. The UN Secretary-General and the AU Commission had sent a joint multidisciplinary mission to the Sahel, between 7 and 23 December 2011, to assess the impact of the Libyan crisis on neighbouring countries.²¹¹ The AU Commission then organised a ministerial level consultation between the region's governments and other stakeholders in Addis Ababa, on 29 January 2012, to examine the mission's report and recommendations. However, events moved very quickly in Mali and several participants at a ministerial meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council (PCS) held in Bamako on 20 March were still there when the coup occurred on 22 March.

The desire for coordinated international action was expressed in the PCS's call for the establishment "under the aegis of the AU and United Nations of a support and follow-up group comprising all the neighbouring countries, the relevant Regional Economic Communities (ECOWAS and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, CEN-SAD), as well as the international partners concerned".²¹² This group only met for the first time on 7 June 2012 in Abid-

jan.²¹³ Behind the façade of unity that characterised the international community's response, which condemned both the rebellion in the north and the coup in Bamako, there was a wide range of views about what should be done to contain the crisis.

ECOWAS was initially recognised as best placed to start negotiations. However, the controversial approach of its Burkina Faso mediator (see Section V.B) led to the broadening of the diplomatic framework for resolving the crisis, to include the AU and then the UN Security Council. This shift in the level of diplomatic intervention coincided with the promotion of an increasingly belligerent agenda by some parties, a position championed by Niger and which led to the promise of mobilising 3,300 troops from Niger, Senegal, Nigeria and perhaps Côte d'Ivoire.²¹⁴ Senegal later backtracked and, at the beginning of July, its newly-elected president, Macky Sall, declared that his country's soldiers were already involved in many external operations.²¹⁵ Meanwhile, the Burkina Faso government continued to negotiate with actors in northern Mali.²¹⁶

Burkina Faso and Niger, which hold the most extreme positions within ECOWAS, respectively in favour of a political settlement and a military solution, were both defending their own particular interests. Blaise Compaoré is trying to preserve his status as undisputed mediator of regional conflicts from which he draws the international support necessary for his political survival within his own country.

Niger's position is complex. President Issoufou has a Marxist, secular and anti-ethnic ideological education. This country is also at the crossroads of the transnational terrorist threats (Libyan and Nigerian connections). Finally, his government is getting a lot of international attention after the successful democratic transition that brought him to power in April 2011. His "security and development" program receives major international funding.²¹⁷ France also has a strategic interest in Niger because of its urani-

²⁰⁹ "Mali: plusieurs blessés à Gao après des manifestations contre les groupes armés", *Jeune Afrique*, 14 May 2012.

²¹⁰ Mossa Ag Attaher, "Pourquoi je rejette l'accord avec Ansar Dine", *toumastpress*, 31 May 2012. <http://toumastpress.com/autres/lettre-ouverte/722-moussa-ag-attaher-pourquoi-je-rejette-accord-ansar-dine.html>.

²¹¹ "Declaration on the situation in the Sahel region", African Union Peace and Security Council, 314th ministerial meeting, Bamako, Mali, 20 March 2012.

²¹² Communiqué of the African Union Peace and Security Council, 314th ministerial meeting, Bamako, Mali, 20 March 2012.

²¹³ Chaired by the president of the AU Commission, Jean Ping, the meeting brought together ECOWAS members, non-members (Mauritania and Algeria), the AU chair (Benin), permanent members of the UN Security Council and AU states currently sitting on the Security Council. See "Inaugural meeting of the support and follow-up group on the situation in Mali", Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 7 June 2012.

²¹⁴ "Mali : l'Afrique de l'Ouest envisage d'envoyer une force de 3.300 éléments", *Jeune Afrique*, 16 June 2012.

²¹⁵ "Mali : le Sénégal ne prévoit pas d'envoyer des troupes", *Afriscoop*, 10 July 2012.

²¹⁶ "Nord du Mali : Ansar Dine accepte de négocier", *Le Monde*, 18 June 2012.

²¹⁷ EU funding of Niger is much higher than funds promised to Mali. See "A Coherent Strategy for the Sahel", European Parliament, Brussels, 2012.

um mines, exploited by the French nuclear energy company, Areva. Issoufou resolutely supports a firm approach to security issues. He seeks to enhance his credibility as a reliable regional partner in the “war on terror” and receiving any other dividends that may come his way in the process. Nigeria, as it fights Boko Haram, also supports this position. Côte d’Ivoire, another regional power, seems anxious to assert itself vis-à-vis Blaise Compaoré who has been too involved in recent Ivorian history.²¹⁸

Algeria is a blind spot in diplomatic activity on the Sahel question. Its position is the subject of much speculation, which is more or less plausible but rarely supported by hard evidence.²¹⁹ AQIM is an originally Algerian organisation, which should logically give Algeria a preponderant role in the “war on terror”. However, in practice, its involvement is not proportional to the considerable military resources at its disposal. Many analysts think the country is playing a “double game” that seeks, first, to perpetuate a domestic terrorist threat that could be used to demonise a possible “Algerian Spring” should one endanger the regime’s survival, and second, to ensure external military funding.²²⁰

The Malian authorities and regional and international actors that have responded to the crisis therefore need to involve Algiers in the search for solutions to the crisis in northern Mali. Prime Minister Modibo Diarra visited Algiers on 12 June 2012.²²¹ On 15 July, it was the turn of the French foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, to visit Algiers. One of his immediate priorities is Mali.²²² While he declared on 12 July in Paris that the use of force in northern Mali was probable “at some stage or other”,²²³ the Algerian authorities always clearly insist on their preference for a “political solution”.²²⁴

At the end of a meeting of heads of diplomacy of the countries of the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) on 10 July, the

Algerian foreign minister, Mourad Medelci, said the Maghreb countries were “convinced” of the need for a political solution and that “a dialogue between the Malian government and parties is necessary”.²²⁵ The Algerian minister of Maghreb and African affairs, Abdelkader Messahel, went further and stated in an interview that it was possible to negotiate with the MNLA and Ansar Dine and that the latter’s leader, Iyad Ag Ghali, was “an interlocutor like any other”.²²⁶

It is important to ensure that external strategic agendas do not hinder diplomatic efforts to help Mali. The UN Security Council correctly perceived the ambiguities in the situation when rejecting, on several occasions, AU and ECOWAS requests for a mandate for military intervention.²²⁷ France, which is the permanent council member most actively engaged in the Malian crisis, pressed for the adoption of Resolution 2056 of 5 July 2012, under Chapter 7 of the Charter. The resolution does not provide for the immediate use of force to restore Mali’s territorial integrity, but instead reaffirms the need for a civilian government in Bamako and provides for targeted sanctions against individuals and groups associated with AQIM.²²⁸

C. HALT THE DECLINE OF THE MALIAN STATE AND PREVENT REGIONAL DESTABILISATION

The Malian crisis is of unusual complexity as deep fault lines run through Mali on so many levels. The macro division between north and south adds to micro divisions in each camp while the international actors (neighbouring countries, ECOWAS, AU, UN) are finding it difficult to agree on a joint response. Moreover, although a military option exists, the countries in the region that could potentially contribute military personnel are exposed to the risk of discontent in their own armed forces, which are not aligned with the wishes of their political elites.²²⁹

In the field, the situation is all the more confused because the actors have only a limited appreciation of the implications of their own decisions. In a tragic irony, three months after the MNLA launched its offensive, it finds itself overwhelmed by an Islamist force that it initially disregarded but is now unable to contain. In March 2012, the coup leaders in Bamako, led by Captain Sanogo, announced their goal of recovering control over Mali’s territory but

²¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Ivorian political analyst, Abidjan, 31 May 2012.

²¹⁹ See, for example, “La mystérieuse politique de l’Algérie au Mali”, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 12 July 2012.

²²⁰ L. Aïda Ammour, “Regional Security Cooperation in the Maghreb and Sahel: Algeria’s Pivotal Ambivalence”, *Africa Security Brief*, no. 18 (2012). Also see “A Coherent Strategy for the Sahel”, op. cit.

²²¹ “Mali-Algérie : Cheick Modibo Diarra demande l’aide du président Bouteflika”, *Jeune Afrique*, 14 June 2012.

²²² “Visite de Laurent Fabius à Alger: Divergences sur le Mali et accord sur la relance de la relation bilatérale”, *Tout Sur l’Algérie* (TSA), http://www.tsa-algerie.com/diplomatie/divergences-sur-le-mali-et-accord-sur-la-relance-de-la-relation-bilaterale_21461.html

²²³ “Nord-Mali : utilisation probable de la force ‘à un moment ou à un autre’ (Fabius)”, AFP, 12 July 2012.

²²⁴ “Mali : ‘fortes chances’ de trouver une solution politique à la crise (Algérie)”, AFP, 10 July 2012.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ “Abdelkader Messahel : ‘L’Algérie n’a pas les moyens de régler les problèmes du Mali’”, *Jeune Afrique*, 13 July 2012.

²²⁷ Security Council press statement on Mali, SC/10676, 18 June 2012.

²²⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2056, 5 July 2012.

²²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Abidjan, 5 June 2012.

only strengthened the position of the armed separatist groups that, one week after the coup, took control of the north's three provincial capitals, bringing about the de facto partition of the country.

1. Get the Malian state back on its feet

What options are available that could de-escalate the Malian conflict? The surest way of failing would be to ignore the local causes of the conflict and operate instead on the basis of an external frame of reference. Some observers who refer to the "Somalisation" or "Afghanisation" of Mali, and the leaders of neighbouring countries who say that the country is currently suffering from "external aggression", reinforce this dangerous tendency.²³⁰ While the former display intellectual laziness, there are suspicions that the latter want to use the "war on terror" for their own purposes. They must not prevent or interfere with Malian ownership of state rebuilding.

Depoliticise the security forces

However desirable a thorough review of the way power is exercised in Mali would be, this will only be possible if the non-partisan nature of the security forces is re-established, thereby guaranteeing democracy and respect for transitional institutions. The reconstruction of a coherent chain of command is a priority, not only to promote political stabilisation in the south but also to settle the crisis in the north. There is a need to dilute the political divisions that run through the security forces and this could be done with support from regional and international actors. In order to preserve the operational capacity of the civilian authorities in the short term, provision should be made to strengthen the security of the president,²³¹ the prime minister and members of the government by establishing a clear chain of command for this task. External support in this regard is undoubtedly necessary. ECOWAS should negotiate with the Malian authorities about how this can take place while avoiding the replacement of the entire Malian gendarmerie and police force by regional troops.

Create an executive power that represents a broad consensus

If the republican reorganisation of the security forces is to be carried out in a credible way, the civilian actors in the transition will need to show they can fulfil their responsibilities. This means breaking with past corrupt practices

that, from the point of view of part of the general public, legitimised the coup led by Captain Sanogo. The views of all sectors of society should be taken into account because it is crucial that the state regain its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. After ECOWAS was initially involved in the hasty formation of the Diarra government and after Burkina Faso's mediation allowed itself to be too influenced by the junta and Captain Sanogo, a government reshuffle is necessary and ECOWAS should call for a government of national unity. Precious time has been lost, but it is not too late to provide the country with a government that has a broader political base and that is capable of proposing a roadmap for the transition.

Begin a dialogue with the political forces of the north

The disconnection between the north and south is repairable. In the south, there are initiatives to promote dialogue with representatives of the north and they should be supported. One of the most credible of these initiatives is the Coalition for Mali created on 26 May 2012. It unites political parties, intellectuals, independent prominent individuals of all origins, in addition to the Collective of the Elected Representatives of the North (Collectif des élus du Nord), the Collective of Northern Citizens (Collectif des ressortissants du Nord, COREN), organisations of nationals of the seven circles of the Western Sahel and the Coordination of Arab Communities of Mali (Coordination des communautés arabes du Mali).²³² The leaders of this coalition distance themselves from the emotional and vengeful discourse on the problems of the north promoted by others and treat the situation as a genuine national question that requires the greatest possible consensus in the south about what is negotiable and what is not negotiable with the north. The establishment and domination of Islamist and terrorist groups does not mean that questions over the reintegration of different northern Malian communities into the nation should be ignored.

²³⁰ For example, the president of Niger, Mamadou Issoufou, told France 24: "The president of Niger is ready to intervene militarily in Mali 'in the last resort'", France 24, 7 June 2012.

²³¹ At the time of writing, President Traoré was still in Paris, officially to receive medical treatment following the assault on 21 May 2012.

²³² The coalition's board has 47 members and is chaired by Gabouné Keïta, a member of civil society. Tiébilé Dramé, president of the Party for National Renaissance (Parti pour la renaissance nationale, PARENA) is its first vice president and Mohamed Mohamoud El Oumrani, representative of the Arab communities, is the second vice president. Several former prime ministers of Mali are also members. A college of religious dignitaries (Imam Mahmoud Dicko, Monseigneur Jean Zerbo, Chérif El Madani Haïdara, El Hadj Sidi Konaké) has also been created. See Aguibou Sogodogo and Boukary Daou, "Naissance de la Coalition pour le Mali", *Le Républicain*, 28 May 2012.

2. In the north: promoting a political approach while pursuing the restoration of military capacity

The hawkish solution to the crisis in the north, which involves hastily seeking to restore a military force able to conquer the lost territory, should be immediately discarded. An external armed intervention is likely to result in more civilian victims and aggravate the dangerously fragile situation of the entire country, even though most of the population is in the south. It would also carry a high risk of contagion and radicalisation. Former Nigerien Tuareg fighters, who have been waiting since 2009 for their government to “integrate” them,²³³ could be tempted to resume the armed struggle. In addition, although ECOWAS has so far shown a façade of unity, it is not certain that there is consensus about an armed option either among member states or between the civilian governments and the armed forces within member states.

The reconstitution in Nigerien territory of a counter-insurgency force led by Alaji Gamou coupled with the Manichaean analysis presented by President Issoufou²³⁴ seems to indicate that Niamey is promoting a hawkish option. Meanwhile, Burkina Faso is continuing its efforts to promote dialogue between representatives of the armed groups in the north and political actors in Bamako. In the absence of a regional consensus, the possibility of a low intensity “proxy war” exists, which would turn Mali into a theatre of more or less latent confrontations between armed groups with each of them benefiting from international ramifications. Such a scenario would be devastating for Mali and its people. It would be especially disastrous if the government was to rearm the Imghad or Ganda Izo militias that have already caused so much violence and thereby end the possibility of dialogue in northern Mali for a long time to come.

At the political level, attempts by the two main armed groups (MNLA and Ansar Dine) to iron out their differences, as in Gao in mid-May 2012, were, in theory, welcomed. The move indicated that a political process was underway, which Malian and external actors could try to

influence by presenting their hopes regarding the outcome. The door quickly closed as Ansar Dine gained the upper hand over the MNLA and opted for an increasingly hardline anti-Western position.²³⁵ It is important to clarify whether Iyad Ag Ghali’s positions displayed in the media are accurate. It should also be taken into account that he deliberately adopts ambiguous views to reduce his adversaries’ chances of weakening him. To engage him in a transparent discussion would pressure him to begin to clarify his objectives, which he has purposely kept vague for political gain.

Preliminary contacts between Burkinabè envoys and MNLA representatives at the beginning of April 2012 suggested that the separatist movement will only negotiate with Bamako if the latter recognises its independence. Such an outcome would be inconceivable for the international community.²³⁶ This position was reiterated at meetings in Nouakchott between MNLA representatives and Mauritanian²³⁷ and Malian representatives.²³⁸ Since then, the movement has lost the upper hand, politically and militarily. The commitment to respect Mali’s territorial integrity initially made by Iyad Ag Ghali means that his project is at first glance more acceptable than the MNLA’s separatist intransigence. However, this project’s hardline Islamist agenda and proximity with AQIM are unacceptable.

Are these choices irreversible? A permanent aspect of the Sahel armed groups’ social profile is their extreme fluidity: alliances are made and broken extremely quickly and loyalties are bought and sold on the basis of ideological, tribal and economic ties. An exclusively military approach is not adequate for a situation of such social and political complexity and would only add one more armed actor to an already confused situation. The pattern of volatile and uncertain alliances at least has the advantage of providing constant opportunities for dialogue. Discussions between Bamako and non-terrorist armed groups in the north must precede any attempt at armed conquest of the territory.

Although Mali’s sovereignty is certainly at stake, its borders are not disputed: there is at least a baseline agreement

²³³ During the summer of 2009, Colonel Qadhafi ended the rebellion of the Nigerien Movement for Justice (Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice) by distributing assets to their chiefs and fighters in exchange for their disarmament. Measures to stabilise the region on a lasting basis should have followed but there was no written agreement and the promises were not kept because of the overthrow of Qadhafi. International donors, notably the EU, and the Nigerien government are currently (June 2012) releasing funds to pay for an ambitious “security and development” program that is supposed to respond to the country’s needs.

²³⁴ “Le président du Niger prêt à intervenir militairement au Mali ‘en dernier recours’”, *op. cit.*

²³⁵ According to a witness close to the negotiations in Gao, Iyad Ag Ghali dismissed the risk of a Western-backed military intervention, saying he would be able to obtain support from Arab countries to counter this prospect. Crisis Group telephone interview, 2 June 2012.

²³⁶ Crisis Group interview, London, 5 April 2012.

²³⁷ “MNLA à Nouakchott: seules les modalités d’organisation de l’autodétermination sont à discuter”, *toumastpress*, 16 April 2012, <http://toumastpress.com/actualites/dossier/azawad/364-mnla-nouakchott-organisation-autodetermination-a-discuter.html>.

²³⁸ “Négociations avec le MNLA: Tiébilé Dramé ouvre le bal”, *Maliweb.net*, 16 April 2012, <http://www.maliweb.net/news/armee/2012/04/16/article,60533.html>.

about the territory that the protagonists are contesting. It would be best to facilitate dialogue between Malians in Mali rather than entrust the coordination of this dialogue to biased regional powers. External actors, for example, the UN, that are neutral and legitimate in the eyes of parties concerned, could facilitate this process. What is required is not the kind of “sponsoring” of accords that has been done so many times before, but rather the establishment of a sustainable basis for a constructive dialogue, the terms and objectives of which should be prepared by the protagonists themselves. It is likely that Mali will not be able to resolve this crisis without having a fundamental rethink about the basis of the national social contract between the north and south. That assumes putting an end to remote-control governance through dubious criminal and mafia intermediaries in the north.

The surest way for Ansar Dine and the MNLA to show they really intended to combat terrorism would be to take the initiative and drive out AQIM from northern Mali. However, there are not many reasons to believe this is going to happen. The MNLA’s preferred diplomatic lever is that of the anti-terrorist struggle, as proposed to the international community (more precisely to the Western powers) but the movement has been seriously weakened in the field. Ansar Dine is closely allied to AQIM and it is unlikely that this alliance can be broken in the short term. But Ansar Dine has twice taken the initiative regarding the release of Western hostages, although, this confirms both how close it is to AQIM and its median position between the jihadis and the West. This arrangement was, however, perhaps nothing more than an opportunistic chance to raise funds. That is why it is necessary to ask the Ansar Dine leaders to specify their political intentions. Do they have anything else to offer other than an adjustment of the religious status quo in the north, coupled with impunity for traffickers and terrorists? There are few signs of a positive development in this respect.

3. Harmonise international action and avoid doing more harm than good

International actors must not deprive Malians of control over their own future. Such a development would risk creating political space for internal populist forces that are hostile to a peaceful settlement of the conflict, even with armed Malian groups. In this context, it is a priority to alter the framework for international mediation, currently led by ECOWAS, in order to promote dialogue between Malians. The “core countries” (Mauritania, Algeria, Niger) that influence the Malian political situation should be asked to harmonise their positions and avoid “free-rider” strategies (ie, content that turmoil is occurring in one’s neighbours’ territory instead of one’s own). This reasoning must be complemented by resolute and targeted cooperation on the anti-terrorist struggle, based on sharing information

and facilitating rapid action to control and eliminate trans-border trafficking and gradually asphyxiate criminal and terrorist organisations, while preserving economic opportunities for the local population.

AQIM has created a significant place for itself in the local political economy, but it would not be a good idea to punish the local population economically at the same time that action is taken to eliminate the group. The construction of a response to the terrorist threat should not yield to external pressure (U.S., French, European), which would unduly benefit some actors. Algeria should put its massive (compared to its neighbours) military and technological resources to work as part of a collective and sincere initiative in the anti-terrorist struggle. The Joint Operational Committee of Chiefs of Staff (Comité d’état-major opérationnel conjoint, CEMOC) formed in Tamanrasset to coordinate the anti-terrorist struggle between Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger is underused and should be made operational. The army commanders in these four countries met in Nouakchott, Mauritania, on 11 July 2012 to “examine how to help the Republic of Mali recover sovereignty over all of its national territory” but no specific measures were announced.²³⁹

CEMOC’s field of surveillance could be extended to areas located on the edge of the Sahel such as northern Nigeria, in cooperation with the Nigerian authorities, where the terrorist group Boko Haram is active. Morocco, Tunisia and Libya, all members of the UMA along with Mauritania and Algeria, should join the anti-terrorist mobilisation. However, Algeria is the regional power that has most easily to hand the resources required to weaken the terrorist groups that operate on its southern border. In current circumstances, the political and military authorities in Algiers should end the ambiguity regarding their perception of the seriousness of the threat posed by AQIM and send a clear signal of support to the reestablishment, even gradual, of Malian sovereignty over its northern territory.

Following the PSPSDN’s failure, one of the EU’s medium-term objectives is to review the methods for designing and implementing “security and development” programs as part of its strategy for the Sahel, along with other donors. Another medium-term objective is to change the policy of paying ransoms in exchange for the release of hostages. These ransoms have clearly strengthened the military position of the terrorists and attached the Malian state to political and mafia networks that have an interest in the perpetuation of this system.

²³⁹ “Nord du Mali : les chefs des armées de 4 pays du Sahel réunis à Nouakchott”, AFP, 11 July 2012.

However, in the immediate future, international actors should provide political, financial and logistical support for reconstructing the legitimacy of the state in southern Mali, including the defence and security forces. They should also facilitate dialogue between those actors in the north and south who reject a violent escalation of the conflict – which would only benefit extreme political forces – and strive to define a political solution to the crisis. ECOWAS and the AU have officially referred the matter to the UN Security Council and asked it to “authorise the deployment of an ECOWAS stabilisation force”.²⁴⁰ But the council should first use all available instruments to promote an inter-Malian political process based on the principles set out by the Support and Follow-up Group at its meeting in Abidjan: respect for the unity and territorial integrity of Mali, rejection of recourse to armed rebellion and the fight against terrorist and criminal networks “which must be neutralised by all possible legitimate means”.²⁴¹

The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2056 on 5 July was good news in the sense that it created a framework for resolving the crisis, focused on rebuilding political legitimacy in Bamako and did not provide hasty backing for the option of military intervention proposed by ECOWAS. The international community should now deploy the threat of individual sanctions against both terrorist actors in the north and opponents of political normalisation in the south, request the establishment of an international commission of inquiry into human rights violations in both the north and south, declare clear and strong support for the Malian civilian government by resuming external aid, protect the transitional institutions and take immediate steps to promote the restructuring and training of the Malian army. Even if it is not called on to reconquer the north by arms, in current circumstances Mali will need reorganised, re-equipped defence and security forces subject to civilian political power in order to completely resolve this unprecedented crisis.

VII. CONCLUSION

Mali has descended into a serious and difficult political situation, caused by overlapping and interlocking factors that have local, national and international dimensions. Understanding this complexity is a prerequisite for reasoned action by political actors both within and outside Mali to resolve the crisis. Nothing would be worse for the country and the entire sub-region than to replace efforts to make an informed analysis with a uniform approach of anti-terrorist repression that ignores the nuances and the often legitimate political demands of Malian political actors in the north and south. Attempts to solve the crisis face the dual challenge of raising the profile and strengthening the forces that want to see a negotiated settlement of the conflicts that permeate Malian society while neutralising internal and external supporters of radicalisation.

Dakar/Brussels, 18 July 2012

²⁴⁰ Security Council press statement on Mali, *op. cit.*

²⁴¹ Conclusions of the inaugural meeting of the Support and Follow-up Group on the Situation in Mali, *op. cit.*

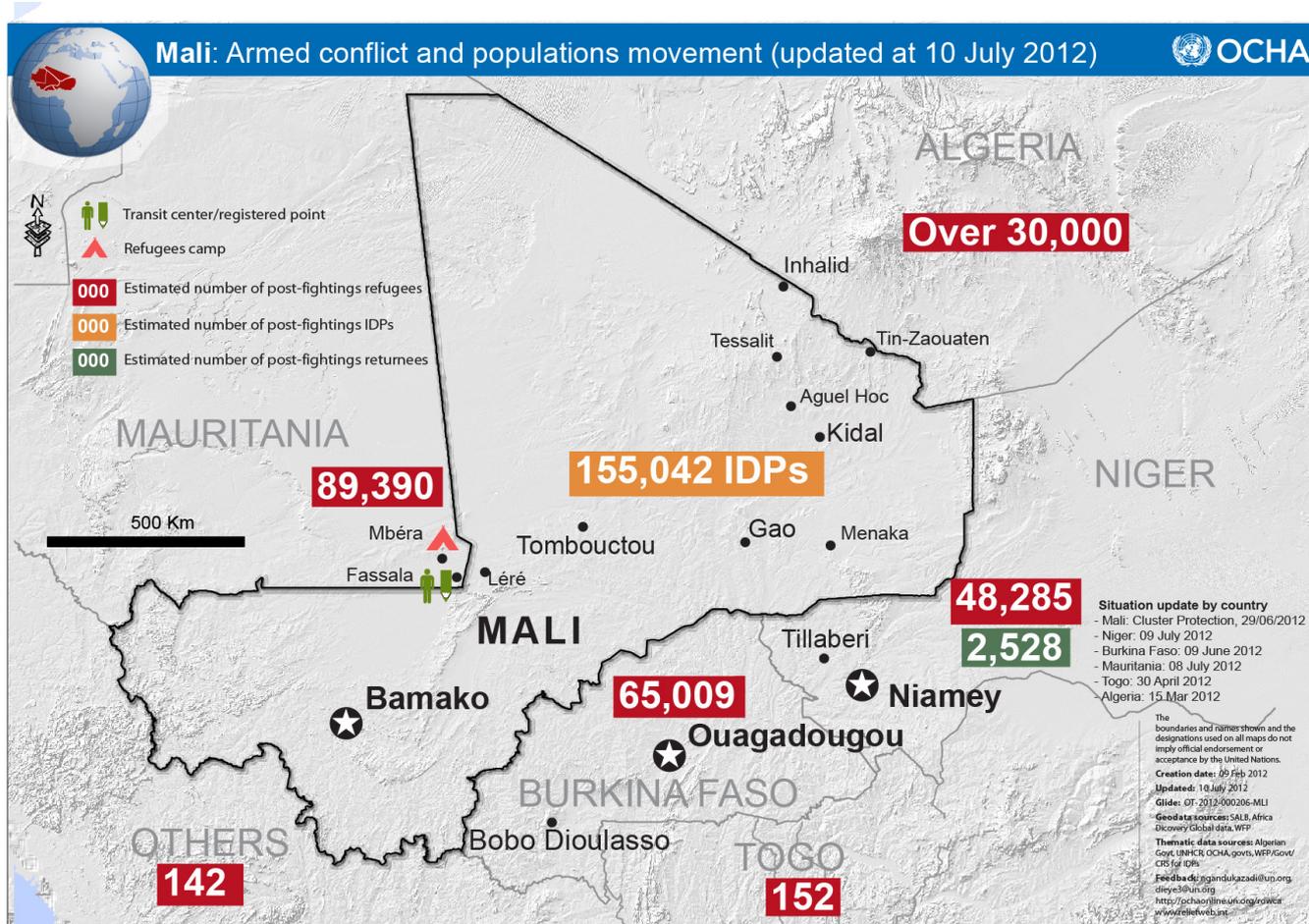
APPENDIX A

MAP OF MALI



APPENDIX B

MAP OF MALI AND THE REGION: ARMED CONFLICT AND POPULATION MOVEMENTS



Source:

APPENDIX C

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADEMA	Alliance pour la démocratie au Mali/Alliance for Democracy in Mali
ADEMA-PASJ	Alliance pour la démocratie au Mali-Parti africain pour la solidarité et la justice/ Alliance for Democracy in Mali – African Party for Solidarity and Justice
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
ARLA	Armée révolutionnaire de l’Azawad/Azawad Revolutionary Army
ATT	Amadou Toumani Touré
AU	African Union
CARE	Convergence africaine pour le renouveau/African Convergence for Renewal
CEMOC	Comité d’état-major opérationnel conjoint/Joint Operational Committee of Chiefs of Staff
CNID	Congrès national d’initiative démocratique/National Congress of Democratic Initiative
CNRDRE	Comité national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l’Etat/ National Committee for the Reestablishment of Democracy and the Restoration of the State
CNT	Conseil national de transition/National Transitional Council
CODEM	Convergence pour le développement du Mali/Convergence for the Development of Mali
COPAM	Coordination des organisations patriotiques du Mali/Coordination of Patriotic Organisations of Mali
COREN	Collectif des Ressortissants du Nord/Collective of Northern Citizens
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FIAA	Front islamique armé de l’Azawad/Azawad Armed Islamic Front
GMS	Groupe mobile de sécurité/Mobile Security Group
GSPC	Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat/Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
IBK	Ibrahim Boubacar Keita
MNA	Mouvement national de l’Azawad/National Movement of Azawad
MNLA	Mouvement national de libération de l’Azawad/National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
MPA	Mouvement populaire de l’Azawad/Popular Movement of Azawad
MP 22	Mouvement populaire du 22 mars/Popular Movement of 22 March
MPR	Mouvement patriotique pour le renouveau/Patriotic Movement for Renewal
MRRA	Mouvement républicain pour la restauration de l’Azawad/Republican Movement for the Restoration of Azawad
MUJAW	Movement for Unicity and Jihad in West Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
ORTM	Office de radiodiffusion et télévision du Mali/Mali Radio and Television Corporation
PARENA	Parti pour la renaissance nationale/Party for National Recovery
PDES	Parti pour le développement économique et social/Party for Economic and Social Development
PSI	Pan Sahel Initiative
PSPSDN	Programme spécial pour la paix, la sécurité et le développement au Nord-Mali/ Special Programme for Peace, Security and Development in Northern Mali
RDM	Rassemblement pour le développement du Mali/Rally for the Development of Mali
SADI	Solidarité africaine pour la démocratie et l’indépendance/African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence
UEMOA	Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa
URD	Union pour la République et la démocratie/Union for the Republic and Democracy

APPENDIX D

FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOLEMN COMMITMENT OF 1 APRIL 2012

BETWEEN

The ECOWAS Mediator on the one hand,

And

The *Comité National de Redressement de la Démocratie et de la Restauration de l'Etat* on the other hand,

Considering that return to constitutional order shall be achieved through the respect for the provisions of the Constitution of 25 February 1992, where Article 36 establishes who shall act as President of the Republic in the event of a power vacuum or incapacity.

Recalling that Article 36 states that “When the President of the Republic is temporarily prevented from carrying out his duties, his powers shall provisionally be exercised by the Prime Minister.

In the event that the position of President of the Republic becomes vacant for any reason whatsoever or in the event of complete and final incapacity determined by the Constitutional Court which has been approved by the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister, the duties of the President of the Republic shall be performed by the Speaker of the National Assembly.

A new President shall be elected for a new tenure of five years.

The election of the new President shall take place within twenty-one (21) days at least and forty days at most after the official notification of the vacancy of the definitive incapacity.

No matter the incapacity or vacancy, Articles 38, 41, 42 and 50 of this Constitution shall not apply.”

The ECOWAS Mediator and the *Comité National de Redressement de la Démocratie et de la Restauration de l'Etat* (CNRDRE) agreed to adopt this Framework Agreement for the Implementation of the Solemn Commitment of 1 April 2012 as follows:

Chapter 1: Application of the provisions of Article 36 of the Constitution

Article 1

The President of the Republic shall officially resign.

Article 2

The President of the CNRDRE in accordance with his solemn declaration of 1 April 2012 shall initiate the process for the application of Article 36 of the Constitution of 25 February 1992;

Article 3

In keeping with the provisions of paragraph 2 of Article 36 of the Constitution, the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister shall inform the Constitutional Court of the resignation of the President to establish the power vacuum.

The Constitutional Court, referring to provisions of paragraph 2 of Article 36 of the Constitution, shall establish the vacancy.

Article 4

The Speaker of the National Assembly shall be sworn in by the Constitutional Court as acting President of the Republic, and shall be made responsible for the organisation of Presidential elections within the constitutional period of 40 days.

Chapter II: Establishment of Organs for the Transition

Article 5

In light of the unusual circumstances in which the country finds itself, given the institutional crisis and the armed rebellion in the North that has seriously affected the regular functioning of the institutions of the Republic and as elections cannot be organised within the forty days stipulated by the Constitution, a political transition must be organised which shall lead to free, democratic and transparent elections across the national territory.

Article 6

Subject to the conditions of Article 5 above, the signatories to this Agreement hereby decide to create the following organs for the transition. These organs shall lead the transition until the organisation of the Presidential Elections with a duly reviewed voters' register that is accepted by all.

- a) A Prime Minister for the Transition, Head of the Government and plenipotentiary shall be appointed. The Prime Minister shall lead the transition, manage the crisis in the North of Mali and organise free, transparent and democratic elections, in keeping with a road map.
- b) A Government of National Unity for the Transition, of consensus personalities, responsible for the implementation of the road map to end the crisis;
- c) The Government of National Unity shall support the provision of humanitarian assistance;
- d) The signatories, in consultation with all stakeholders shall agree on a road map for the transition which shall include the:
 - duration and calendar of the transition;
 - operational duties of the various organs so as to ensure a peaceful transition;
 - modalities for the elections for a return to normalcy;
 - review of the voters' register;
- e) The role and position of the members of the CNRDRE during the transition period should be defined.

Chapter III: Adoption of Support Legislative Measures

Article 7

In a country experiencing war, where elections need to be organised smoothly across the national territory and consolidate social cohesion and national unity, a certain number of legislative texts to support the transition process shall be passed by the National Assembly:

- a) A legislation for general amnesty applicable to the members of the CNRDRE and their associates;
- b) A legislation providing for the compensation of victims of the war and the uprising of 22 March 2012;
- c) A legislation extending the tenure of the parliamentarians to the end of the transition;
- d) A legislation on military orientation and programming for the organisation and equipment of the Army;
- e) A legislation establishing a military committee to monitor the reform of the defence and security forces.

Chapter IV: Commitments of Signatories

Article 8

The *Comité National de Redressement de la Démocratie et de la Restauration de l'Etat* (CNRDRE) shall implement this agreement under the auspices of the ECOWAS Mediator and with the support of the international community.

Article 9

Once this agreement is signed, the current Chairman of ECOWAS shall take the necessary steps to lift the sanctions imposed on Mali during the Summit of 29 March 2012.

Article 10

Given the severe humanitarian crisis, the current Chairman of ECOWAS shall provide Mali with funds for humanitarian assistance and shall seek to obtain appropriate humanitarian support from technical and financial partners of Mali and the international Community.

Done at Bamako this 6th Day of April 2012

.....
Yipène Djibrill Bassole
For ECOWAS Mediator and by delegation
Minister of Foreign Affairs and
Regional Cooperation of
Burkina Faso

.....
Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo
For the *Comité National de
Redressement de la
Démocratie et de la
Restauration de l'Etat*
(CNRDRE)

.....
In the presence of
Adama Bictogo
Minister of African Integration

Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

.....
In the presence of
Dr Mohammed Nurudeen
Minister of State in the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs
Federal Republic of Nigeria

APPENDIX E

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY POLITICAL EVENTS

September 1960

The former Sudanese Republic becomes the Republic of Mali and proclaims independence. Modibo Keita is appointed president of the Republic and the constitution is adopted.

1962-64

In the north, the first Tuareg rebellion, the Fellagha rebellion in the regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu is violently repressed. Government troops make no distinction between Tuareg fighters and civilians. The conflict provokes a massive exodus of Tuaregs towards neighbouring countries, particularly Algeria.

19 November 1968

A military coup overthrows Modibo Keita. Lieutenant Moussa Traoré becomes president and installs a military regime.

1976

Moussa Traoré creates a political party, the Union démocratique du peuple malien (UDPM). Mali adopts a single-party system.

June 1985

Moussa Traoré is re-elected without opposition and with 89 per cent of votes. A new Tuareg rebellion breaks out in Mali and Niger. Tuareg attack on Tchintabaradene in Niger.

1988

Mouvement populaire de l'Azawad (MPLA) created in Libya and led by Iyad Ag Ghali.

May 1990

The Tuareg of northern Niger attack Tchintabaradene. Hundreds of Tuareg killed in Niger as a result of severe military reprisals.

June 1990

A Tuareg rebellion in Mali begins with the attack on Ménaka prison and garrison (in the north east, near the border with Niger).

January 1991

The Malian government and the Popular Movement of Azawad (MPA) sign a peace agreement with the Arab Islamic

Front of Azawad (FIAA) in Tamanrasset (southern Algeria).

March 1991

Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, leading the Comité transitoire pour le salut du peuple (CTSP) overthrows Moussa Traoré.

July-August 1991

The CTSP organises a national conference to discuss a new constitution and decide on an electoral timetable.

April 1992

The government signs the National Pact, which provides for an economic revival of the north and the integration of the Tuareg into military and civilian structures.

Alpha Oumar Konaré wins the first democratic elections.

December 1993

Lieutenant-Colonel Oumar Diallo leads an attempted coup.

May 1994

Despite a series of national and local peace initiatives, tension rises in the north, leading to the formation of the Mouvement patriotique Ganda Koy (MPGK), a mainly Songhaï militia.

January 1995

The MPGK and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Azawad (FPLA), a rebel Tuareg movement, sign the Bourem Accords.

May 1997

Alpha Oumar Konaré is re-elected for a second five-year term of office.

June 2002

General Amadou Toumani Touré, former president during the transition in 1991, is elected president.

April 2006

Maliens criticise Colonel Muammar Qadhafi's visit to Timbuktu and accuse him of supporting Tuareg rebellions.

23 May 2006

A new rebel movement, the Democratic Alliance for Change (ADC), led by Ibra-

him Ag Bahanga, attacks the garrison towns of Kidal and Ménaka.

4 July 2006

The government of Mali and the ADC sign the Algiers Accords.

29 April 2007

Amadou Toumani Touré is re-elected after a controversial electoral process. Opposition candidates challenge the results.

May 2007

Violence continues after the Alliance Touareg Niger-Mali (ATNM), a new faction, rejects the Algiers Accords.

February 2009

The government leads a successful counter-insurgency operation in the north.

November 2010

The National Azawad Movement (MNA) is founded. It rejects violence but calls for enthusiastic solidarity with Tuareg living in Mali and abroad.

15 February 2011

The Libyan crisis begins, leading to the fall of Qadhafi and the return of many fighters and civilians living in Libya.

16 October 2011

The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) is founded. It is formed by MNA leaders and Tuareg fighters returning from Libya, led by Colonel Ag Najim.

17 January 2012

The MNLA claims responsibility for attacks on Ménaka in north-eastern Mali.

1-2 February 2012

Demonstrations in the town of Kati, near Bamako. Several Malian army garrisons are located in the town. Wives and relatives of soldiers sent to fight the rebels in the north denounce the lack of arms and resources provided by the government. Criticism focuses on President Amadou Toumani Touré.

8 February 2012

MNLA rebels and the 23 May Alliance for Democracy and Change capture Tin-zawaten, near the border with Algeria.

18 February 2012

The MNLA attacks Hombori, a town located on the main road between Mopti and Gao.

10-11 March 2012

The MNLA takes control of Tessalit as Malian soldiers carry out a “strategic retreat”.

22 March 2012

A group of soldiers overthrow ATT in the name of the National Committee for the Reestablishment of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (CNRDRE). Touré manages to escape from the presidential palace after it is attacked by the mutineers. CNRDRE suspends the constitution.

23 March 2012

The African Union suspends Mali. The leader of the junta, Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, says he is ready to negotiate with the rebels in the north as long as the country’s territorial integrity is preserved.

26 March 2012

The UN Security Council condemns the seizure of power by the CNRDRE and demands the restoration of constitutional order.

29 March 2012

ECOWAS issues a 72-hour ultimatum to CNRDRE to leave power and appoints President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso as mediator.

30 March 2012

MNLA and Ansar Dine capture Kidal.

2 April 2012

ECOWAS leaders establish a complete economic embargo against Mali to put pressure on the junta.

6 April 2012

The MNLA declares the independence of Azawad in northern Mali and calls a unilateral ceasefire.

The military junta led by Sanogo and ECOWAS sign a framework agreement.

12 April 2012

The president of the National Assembly, Dioncounda Traoré, takes office as interim president of the republic, following ATT’s formal resignation.

20 May 2012

ECOWAS and stakeholders seeking a solution to the crisis agree to extend the mandate of the interim president, Dioncounda Traoré, by one year. The Burkina Faso mediator announces that Captain Sanogo will be accorded the status of a former head of state.

21 May 2012

Hostile demonstrators attack President Traoré in the presidential palace in response to the decision to extend his mandate to one year (rather than the 40-day interim period prescribed by the constitution in the event of the president’s resignation).

26 May 2012

The MNLA and Ansar Dine announce they have concluded an agreement to merge the two movements and create the independent Islamic state of Azawad.

1 June 2012

MNLA leaders reject the agreement with Ansar Dine and reaffirm their option for a secular state, incompatible with Ansar Dine’s Islamist project.

12 June 2012

Demonstrators in Kidal call for the departure of Ansar Dine and the return of the MNLA to the town. Ansar Dine’s “Islamic police” use whips to disperse the demonstrators.

17-19 June 2012

MNLA and Ansar Dine representatives and the mediator, Blaise Compaoré, have preliminary talks in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso).

29 June 2012

Clashes with MUJWA fighters allied to Ansar Dine force the MNLA to leave Gao and then Timbuktu.

29-30 June 2012

Ansar Dine attacks the mausoleums of Muslim saints in Timbuktu.

APPENDIX F

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	Graça Machel	Michael Sohlman	
	Jessica T. Mathews	Thorvald Stoltenberg	