Mali 2013
Overview

This report will focus on the issues faced in the Malian peace settlement. It will examine the dynamics of the peace process and factors that may be hindering stability in the region. A brief synoptic overview of Malian troubles will be provided in order to establish some context to the current situation.

Introduction

In 2012, Mali’s troubles gained global recognition with the Tuareg rebellions once again resurfacing. The Tuareg people, who compose 10% of the population, have been fighting for independence - for the nation of Azawad, northern Mali - ever since the 1960s. This includes the notable rebellions of the 1990s and the years 2007-2009. A more strategically centralized group, the MNLA (the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) emerged from the Tuareg community. The government and MNLA representatives adopted the Ouagadougou Accords on June 18th, 2013 to initiate a ceasefire, the deployment of the Malian Defence and Security Forces in Kidal along with French and MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) troops and the establishment of a joint security commission. However, since the agreement, new clashes have occurred between the Army and Tuareg rebels, who are concerned about the government’s lack of commitment to the peace accords. Moreover, a recent grenade attack in Kidal (a rebel stronghold) and a suicide bombing in Timbuktu, suggests the peace process is breaking down.

Actors and Interests

In June 2013, Richard Gowen, of New York University, stated that MINUSMA is ‘a potentially flawed peace operation’. This is due to the absence of a peace settlement between Mali’s conflicting parties.

There are various groups and factions currently involved in the conflict in Mali. These actors make the peace-building process harder. Firstly, the Tuaregs, who have long felt marginalized by the Malian state with branches developing into the MNLA who fight for Azawad independence. The MNLA is thus ethically driven, fighting mostly for the rights of the Tuareg community. Other actors include Islamic groups in Mali, who support the Movement of Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Their main mission is to impose Islamic law across Mali and liberate Malians from the French colonial legacy. Moreover, the influence of France as a former colonial power has remained a key force within the Malian conflict.

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2. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Bergamaschi, op. cit.
Recent Developments and an Increase in Violence

The Rebels’ attempt to take over the northern part of Mali, in March 2012, resulted in an escalation of violence and ultimately an intervention led by France. Although the French forces pushed the rebels back to the mountains on Mali’s border with Algeria, violence still continues\textsuperscript{10}. For example, in November 2013, two French journalists were kidnapped and killed in Kidal. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have claimed responsibility. They have argued the act was in retaliation for French and African military action in Mali\textsuperscript{11}. Moreover, an ethnic Tuareg separatist group within Mali has said it is ending a ceasefire agreed with the government in June\textsuperscript{12}. This news came a day after clashes between Malian troops and Tuareg protesters, who prevented a visit by Prime Minister Oumar Tatam Ly to the town of Kidal. As MNLA leader said, “What happened is a declaration of war”\textsuperscript{13}.

Is Reconciliation A Possibility?

The commitment to national reconciliation by the new government has been reflected in the successful presidential election of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and the establishment of democratic governance. The elections saw high participation, a record level of 48 percent, with considerable support for the winning candidate\textsuperscript{14}. Boubacak’s new cabinet carries 34 positions and includes the office of National Reconciliation and Northern Development, which aims to repair and rejuvenate Mali\textsuperscript{15}. Similarly a Commission for Dialogue and Reconciliation, which includes 33 members, was set up in March. This is based on a widely used model of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC). It is through TRC that commissioners’ release public reports that recognize human rights violations have been carried out, in the attempt to build bridges between conflicting communities\textsuperscript{16}. In Mali, the army, rebels and Islamic militants have all been accused on human rights abuses. Due to this the establishment of a TRC organization remains an important step. However, a lack of regular meetings has led to the TRC’s effectiveness being questioned.

Cooperation with different factions has been encouraged within government. Ex-rebel leader Zahibi Ould Sidi Mohamed has been appointment to head of the Foreign Ministry\textsuperscript{17}. The government has also said it will hold discussions with all groups living in the north of the country, before opening peace talks with Tuareg rebels. However, some groups have been excluded from negotiations. For example, the Patrouilleurs de Gao, a group involved in non-violent resistance to Tuareg rebels, are discontent due to a lack of recognition from the government. They have asserted that they have not been included in any dialogue aimed at a settling long standing Tuareg grievances\textsuperscript{18}. 

\textsuperscript{10} ‘Conflict in Mali and Climate Change’, ICE, May 2013, http://www1.american.edu/ted/ICE/mali.html [accessed 3\textsuperscript{rd} of December 2013].
\textsuperscript{12} ‘Mali Info/News’, Twitter, [accessed 30\textsuperscript{th} November]
\textsuperscript{15}A. Hirsch, ‘Mali’s fight with militants is far from over’, BBC News, October 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22048162 [accessed 4\textsuperscript{th} of December 2013];
\textsuperscript{17}’Mali’s New PM Unveils 34-Member Cabinet’, Voice of America, September 2013, http://www.voanews.com/content/malis-new-pm-unveils-34member-cabinet/1745724.html [accessed 1\textsuperscript{st} of December 2013].
Despite these examples of governmental attempts to encourage reconciliation, tension between the central government and Tuareg separatists remains. In September, government forces clashed with protesters who impeded the Prime Minister’s visit - throwing stones at his convoy, which was heading to the main northern rebel stronghold in the city of Kadil. The MNLA has called for the lifting of the ceasefire with central government, which has been in place for five months. President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita insists the solution will be found through improved government decentralization. Separation or federal independence for Azawad is not an option.

The local populations in the northern areas largely reject the notion of reconciliation. Many have asserted they would not support a policy of forgiveness for the Islamic militants who, in a brutal interpretation of Islamic law, committed acts such as amputations and executions. For many, there is an emphasis on justice, before reconciliation. However, damaged courthouses, police states and other administrative buildings in the north have made this difficult to impose.

A Regional Approach to Reconciliation

Regional approaches to peacebuilding emphasize a country’s specific challenges. With most conflicts now occurring within, rather than among states, peacekeeping in a regional form has become popular. A regional framework appreciates local variation in conflicts.

In Mali, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is the principle regional actor. ECOWAS was established in 1975 to promote economic development and prosperity in the region. It has since expanded to encompass conflict management and peacekeeping intervention. The ECOWAS Standby Force provides support in conflict prevention, humanitarian intervention, enforcement, peacebuilding and the control of organised crime.

However the ECOWAS are limited in their actions. They struggle with financial, military and political difficulties. They must also face the forces’ inability to effectively safeguard civilians under their authority, the poor human rights record of their troops, the lack of neutrality, and their complicity in the exploitation of natural resources of their host countries. These weaknesses, however, allow the UN an opportunity to co-deploy a peacekeeping force with a regional organisation, as was originally envisaged in the UN charter. An example of co-deployment by the UN and ECOWAS was seen in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire. In West Africa ECOWAS typically contributes a rapid response force to stabilise a volatile conflict. Their authority is then handed over to a larger, better-resourced UN mission. This assigns the ECOWAS a leadership role in matters concerning peace and security in the region. This model is seen in Mali today.

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
On December 20th, 2012 the UN Security Council Resolution 2085 passed a mission that authorised the deployment of the African led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) for one year\textsuperscript{28}. The focus of the operation was the protection of the Mali government against Islamist rebels in the Northern Mali conflict. On April 25th, 2013, the US Security Council Resolution 2100 established MINUSMA\textsuperscript{29}. This resolution initiated MINUSMA’s replacement of AFISMA in Mali. On July 1st, 2013 AFISMA transferred its authority in Mali to MINUSMA. This seems to mimic previous relations between the UN and the ECOWAS.

However, the UN and Western powers have to be wary of placing African states in subordinate positions during missions. For example, the former Burundian president and head of AFISMA, Pierre Buyoya, was passed on as head of the mission in Mali. Instead Bert Koenders, a candidate from the Netherlands who carried French support, was awarded the position\textsuperscript{30}. It has been contended that the supporting role given to African states in these operations has caused the withdrawal of some Nigerian troops from MINUSMA\textsuperscript{31}. The UN and Western states must thus be delicate in their intervention. However France’s plans to withdraw the majority of their troops form the conflict, by the end of 2013\textsuperscript{32}, weakens any allegations of Western imperialism. These forces will be replaced by troops from several West African countries.

Regional Interests:

ECOWAS member states

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo have a shared interest in the diplomatic resolution of Mali war. In the Mali conflict they attempted to act as mediators. On June 18th, 2013, the transitional government and armed groups in the northern regions of Mali signed a preliminary agreement for inclusive peace talks with the promise of a presidential election\textsuperscript{33}. After the coup in Mali ECOWAS leaders placed ‘the re-establishment of constitutional order\textsuperscript{34}’ as their principle aim. As stated by Ivory Coast President Alassane Ouattara\textsuperscript{35}, ECOWAS are committed to the use of military force if it is required.

AFISMA

Set up by the ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staffs (CCDS) with a purpose of deploying 11,200 and 1,440 police officers to work for the UN counter-insurgency operation in Mali\textsuperscript{36}.


\textsuperscript{29}I. Bergamaschi, ‘MINUSMA: initial steps, achievements and challenges’, NOREF, September 2013, http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/89da563832be4b62d09bc99edc0cf080.pdf [accessed December 3\textsuperscript{rd} 2013].

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.

Algeria

Algeria is dealing simultaneously with the refugee influx caused by the civil war in Mali and, from this level of migration, the expected food crisis in Sahel-Saharan Africa\(^\text{37}\). Co-operating and maintaining good relations with the U.S. and France through the 'pacification' of Northern Mali is in the country’s best interests\(^\text{38}\). This is being achieved in the containment of internal demonstrations against intervention in Mali\(^\text{39}\). Algeria are also participating in the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership established by the U.S. in 2005.\(^\text{9}\)

Burkina Faso

This country is also dealing with the refugee crisis\(^\text{40}\) and participating in the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership established by the U.S. in 2005\(^\text{41}\)

Chad

In April 2013, Chad’s president, Idris Deby, announced his decision to pull out the Chadian troops supporting France in Mali. Chad was not sufficiently equipped to fight a guerilla-style war in Mali\(^\text{42}\). Nevertheless, the President stated that Chad would continue to contribute to the UN peacekeeping force currently operating in Mali.

In March 2013, a rebel coalition operating in Chad - the l’Union des Forces de la Resistance (UFR) – announced the end to a two-year truce and the intention to take up arms\(^\text{43}\). Thus, to ensure the UN’s support in an internal conflict, it is in Chad’s best interest to cooperate with the UN and contribute to the peacekeeping operation in Mali.

Most recently, on October 24\(^\text{th}\), 2013, BBC News reported that the UN has called for more troops to be deployed to Mali. This occurred after two peacekeepers from Chad had been killed and six wounded, in a suicide attack in northern Mali\(^\text{44}\).

Mauritania

This country has pushed diplomatic resolutions to the conflict in Mali. On August 6\(^\text{th}\), 2013, a meeting was facilitated between the MNLA, the Haut conseil pour l’unité de l’Azawad (HCUA) and the Mouvement arabe de l’Azawad (MAA). This resulted in an agreement on the cessation of inter-group attacks and security collaboration in northern Mali\(^\text{45}\). The country is also preoccupied containing the widespread opposition from various political parties from the Islamic community, who are critical of the France’s involvement in Mali\(^\text{46}\).

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40 Mezyaev, op. cit.
41 Annis, op. cit.
43 Ibid.
44 ‘UN troops from Chad killed in Mali’s Tessalit town’, BBC News, October 2013 [accessed 2\(^\text{nd}\) December, 2013].
Niger

This country acts to contain the threat of spreading terrorism that is caused by widely roaming radical militants – especially after an increase in kidnapping cases\(^47\). It also cooperates with both France and the US. At the beginning of 2013 the US opened a drone airbase in Niger, with around 100 American troops being sent to help set up this base\(^48\).

Due to a limited US military presence in Africa - the only other military base being located in Dijbouti\(^49\) - opening an airbase in Niger signifies an increasing US presence in the countries bordering with Mali. This was confirmed by the status-of-forces agreement with the US, signed by Niger in January 2013. This agreement legally safeguards the presence of American troops and enables the US military to increase its involvement in Niger\(^50\). According to President Obama, troops were sent to support the French-led operation against Al-Qaeda\(^51\). Niger’s President Mahamadou Issoufou justified this agreement by emphasizing the need to contain the terrorist threat coming from both Mali and its fleeing refugees\(^52\).

Qatar

Qatar’s interests can be divided into 2 groups - the first focusing on religion, the second on geo-strategic concerns.

Qatar is involved in the promotion of Islamic fundamentalism in Africa\(^53\). An unnamed source in French military intelligence stated, ‘the MNLA, al Qaeda-linked Ansar Dine and MUJAO have all received cash from Doha’\(^54\). The mayor of the north, Sadou Diallo, supported this, accusing Qatar of aiding Islamists in Gao and Timbuktu\(^55\).

In terms of Qatar’s geo-strategic interests, the increase in the Emirate’s influence in West Africa and the Sahel region - who aim to replace Saudi Arabia as the centre of Sunni Islam – and the ensuing competition between Sunni and Shi’ite, is at the forefront of the country’s agenda and concerns\(^56\).

Senegal

This country is contributing troops to UN peacekeeping forces in Mali despite growing fears of terrorist reprisals by Islamist militants\(^57\).

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\(^{49}\) Ibid.

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) Ibid.


\(^{54}\) Ibid.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

Preservation of Borders

The status and government’s perception of borders within Mali, can be linked to the general features of the Malian post-colonial political culture. The lack of commitment to the preservation and control of borders can be explained by two factors. The first of these refers to the character of the borders themselves and the second examines the perception of both borders and territory in Malian society.

Mali has an extensive land border than runs for 7.2 thousand kilometers, with seven neighboring countries. Modern Mali inherited its borders from the former colony of French Sudan. This territory was constantly re-shaped by the French West Africa’s colonial administration prior to 1960. This resulted in numerous changes in administrative borders.

It can be observed that today, Malian borders in different sectors carry different de-facto statuses. For example the northern borders, which lie within three large, scarcely populated provinces, receive far less attention from the central government.

Indeed, there are several factors behind the Government’s inability to effectively control the borders in the north: Borders in Mali are extensive and most are not demarcated (especially when they have been delimited by abstract lines rather than geography). The Government has little capacity to effectively control the northern borders and frontier areas due to a small-sized military and poor road infrastructure in northern areas.

Historically in Mali, borders have been porous and unprotected in the north due to geographical features: cross-border Saharan trade and migrations of nomadic tribes, as well as cross-border communication of split ethnic communities (e.g. Tuaregs in Mali, Algeria, Niger). The movement of refugees across Malian borders has further lowered the status of these boundaries.

Militant groups in the North of Mali transcend borders, using the territories of several governments that have little capacity to prevent their movement. This also affects the value of borders.

Malian governments have previously authorized military operations by the armies of neighboring states (for example Maurentania, Algeria and Niger), against the militant Islamist and Tuareg groups. The easy movement of foreign troops through the Malian borders has undermined the significance of borders.

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59 P. J. Imperato and G. H. Imperato. Historical dictionary of Mali (Lanham, Scarecrow Press, 2008), XXII-XXVII.
61 Imperato, op. cit, p. 234.
65 ‘Algerian troops ’in Mali to combat Qaeda groups’, AFP, December 2011, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jSHSU0tgQ43HuoFm20WiYwGbhJ3uh1g?docid=CNG.1dc0f09c74210a2ec079517c86453b7.451&hl=en [accessed December 3rd 2013].
There are also factors related to the perception of borders by the Malian society and political elites:

Malian borders are artificial and do not match the divisions of the West-African population. The government of Mali had no influence in the delineating of the borders of the country. This imposition of borders at independence created a mismatch between the identities of the population and political elites, on one side, and the actual configuration of the country, on the other. There is a certain level of alienation felt by the majority of the population of Mali and the ruling elite towards northern areas inhabited by the Tuaregs. This is a result of continuing conflict between the Tuaregs and the central government, as well as the history of racial conflict between Tuareg and black population. Consequently, the northern areas are perceived as the ‘other’ non-native part of the country opposing the rest.

As there exists no formal border-crossing regime for individuals between Mali and neighboring countries, the majority of the population does not regard the border as a line of division when engaging in large-scale seasonal labour migrations.

Conclusion

To conclude, the situation in Mali appears to have no imminent solutions. Barriers to peace reconciliation remain and must be addressed before real progress can be made. For instance, the need for justice is, for many, the priority before bridges can be mended. Furthermore, the Tuareg populations will continue to call a platform to voice their grievances and the need for political recognition and respect from the government. Therefore, a level of respect, honesty and integrity is needed from all the actors involved in Malian conflict, to create a space to build on. Due to this, the peace process in Mali must not be dictated by regional powers with vested interests or the wider international community that may appear as interventionists. The Malian road to peace should concern the key actors involved in the conflict. Thus, a grassroots approach appears to be the best solution in the prevention of escalating violence.

Bibliography


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