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Insecurity and Instability in the Sahel Region: The Case of Mali

by

Lieutenant Colonel Oumar Diarra
Mali Army

United States Army War College
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This case study on Mali examines the major internal and external factors of the security challenges as well as the instability threat in its northern regions.

This paper explores approaches to address the security situation on a regional basis with the support of foreign military assistance. It also argues the necessity of social and economic development of the regions with support of international partners in order to establish more governmental control.

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INSECURITY AND INSTABILITY IN THE SAHEL REGION: THE CASE OF MALI

by

Lieutenant Colonel Oumar Diarra
Mali Army

Colonel Thomas P. Galvin
Project Adviser

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INSECURITY AND IN INSTABILITY THE SAHEL REGION: THE CASE OF MALI

Insecurity and instability have been endemic in the African States since the post-colonial independence movements in the 1950s and 1960s. In the following decades since, there have been re-occurring separatist movements, insurgencies, and ethnically-based conflicts. After the Cold War, democratization in the 1990s helped reduce conflict in some regions, but not evenly across Africa. Rwanda's genocide came about, in part, by conditions existing at the end of the Cold War. The ethnic tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi pre-dated the Cold War, whose end merely allowed the two tribes to resume their hatred of each other. Ethnic violence was a common grievance faced by most nations on the continent, sometimes exacerbated by confrontations between extremist groups. However, the winds of democratization following the collapse of the Soviet Union created hope and offered a better future.

Into the second decade of the 21st Century, some countries still struggle with recurrent conflicts that threaten development efforts and national cohesion despite democratic advances. This case study is focused on Mali, a democratic western African State in the Sahel region, and its recurring insurgencies coupled with permanent insecurity in its northern regions. It presents a prime example of the epidemic levels of insecurity and instability faced by many African nations.

For many years, but especially since 2000, Mali has been the site of violent activity originating from "North" Mali that is destabilizing for both the country and its regional neighbors. In this paper, North Mali represents the three northern desert administrative regions of Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao that are mainly populated with

Arabs, Tuaregs (fair skin), Songhais, and Fulanis. It is also the lightly governed region which serves as a safe haven for Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). “South” Mali includes the rest of the country, populated mainly by darker skinned groups. This is an important point, that Mali equals “North” and “South”, so there is no part of Mali not discussed. The root causes of insecurity and instability cannot be viewed simply in ethnic terms between the North and South. It includes the relationship between the desire of unsaid self determination, the lack of economic opportunities and poverty in the North coupled with feelings of marginalization and social grievances stemming from the Tuareg self-perception of superiority to Southern black rule and pre-colonial history.[1] These challenges have led to continuous threats of violence that have exceeded Malian national capabilities to address. The complexity of the situation in the Malian northern regions is the result of the convergence of internal as well as external factors, such as illicit trafficking, kidnapping, AQIM, and northern-based Tuaregs insurgencies against the Malian government. These factors risk to destabilizing the whole Sahel strip. Responding to them requires regional cooperation.

The following are a few examples of threats in this volatile region. Air cargo shipment for drugs is one way the remote northern regions of Mali are increasingly used as transshipment points for illegal operations. In November 2009, the wreckage of a burned-out cargo plane suspected of having carried drugs from South America was found on a rural runway in the region of Bourem.[2] In September 2011, clashes between drugs traffickers along the Mali border with Algeria resulted in the death of four persons.[3]

The kidnapping of westerners by AQIM has affected the tourism trade and other development programs. Western Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) have abandoned the region. In November 2011, the kidnapping of five European tourists and workers led to the evacuation of all Europeans from the Timbuktu region.[4] These evacuations temporarily signaled the end of tourism which represented the main economic activity in the region.

Another example is the Tuaregs insurgency which could form the basis of a pariah state if allowed to secede from Mali. Anti-government demonstrations in the northern cities of Kidal and Menaka in November 2011 make clear the Tuaregs intention of establishing a separate State. The demand for independence by this movement is a new development that is threatening Mali's national cohesion.

One cannot dismiss these three as mere isolated incidents or movements. AQIM and Tuareg insurgencies represent more than single incidents. Past attempts to integrate former rebels into Malian society have shown that the Tuaregs have no interest in pursuing peace with the national government. For example, the peace agreement known as the "National Pact of Reconciliation" reached after the 1992 rebellion is now largely ignored and violated. In that peace agreement, the national government promised investments in developing the North, and in turn the Tuareg fighters were to be integrated into the Malian National Army and other security services. Some rebels thought to have been integrated have deserted the armed forces and rejoined the insurgency. The ongoing tremendous governmental investment in the northern regions is not seen as nearly satisfactory enough by the insurgency to address the development gap between the North and the South.

The marks of the atrocities carried out by the National Movement of the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) against Malian soldiers in the northern city of Aguel Hoc on January 24th, 2012 resembled known AQIM techniques such as tying the hands behind the back and then slaughtering the victims. The MNLA is a Tuareg political and military organization, based in North Mali, demanding the independence of the Azawad, which refers to the desert northern administrative regions of Timbuktu, Kidal, Gao, and also some parts of Niger, Mauritania and south of Algeria. The movement was founded in October, 2011 and is mainly comprised of armed Tuareg tribesmen who previously served in Gaddafi's military and returned home after the 2011 Libyan civil war. The killing of Elmeimoun Ould Meinnouh (alias Khaled Ac-Chinguitti), a Mauritanian citizen and known AQIM leader, during the same attack, proved the connection between AQIM and the Tuareg insurgency.[5] This is exacerbated by the recent return of armed Tuareg combatants from Libya following the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in October 2011. Some of these combatants back the existing Tuareg separatist movements.

Historically, Mali's approach to these crises has been to deal with them bilaterally including the Algerian diplomatic effort; but having failed to make progress, it became clear that a regional approach was the only way. In 2009, the central government reoriented its efforts diplomatically by focusing on regional cooperation with neighboring countries (Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger) and economically by creating the Special Program for Peace, Security, and Development of the northern regions organized by the President of the Republic. The growing desire for self determination and the recent intensification of violence, including kidnapping by AQIM, raise the question of the

efficiency or perhaps the failure of the national strategies to integrate those in the northern regions.

This study explains the complexity of the insecurity in the northern regions due to different factors, internal as well as external, and the possible approaches to solving the problem. It discusses the miscalculation and the failure of the current national authorities to attack the source of the insecurity. The scope of the current insecurity and instability in north Mali is deeply rooted in recent conflicts in the region and shares strong elements of continuity with the Algerian civil war. Also, some recent occurrences such as the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya can also be linked to the present situation.

With regard to the trans-border aspect of the drug traffickers, AQIM threats, and the risk of contagion to neighboring countries of the Malian based Tuareg insurgency, the long term solution to this insecurity and instability is to set conditions for regional integration and cooperation. The specific Malian case requires a strong military action with foreign assistance to chase out the various violent actors and encourage development projects with international investments to mitigate the living condition of the population and better create economic opportunities.

Mali and the Sahel Region

Immense Geography. The Sahel is a strip of land separating the Sahara Desert in North Africa from the sub-Saharan forest region. It stretches from West Africa to the Red Sea, extending through Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Sudan, and Ethiopia. The Sahel countries are named among the “poorest countries in the world, with poverty rates of over 50%, and most are seriously conflict prone.”[6] The Sahel has experienced long periods of extensive drought,

resulting from climate change and the rapid advance of the Sahara desert toward the South. Mali is a typical Sahelian nation with a history of conflict and high poverty rate, listed in 2011 as 47.7%.[7]

Mali also shares porous borders with seven West African countries. Its longest borders are the most problematic, running along Algeria to the north (1,376 km), Niger to the east (821 km), Mauritania to the west (2,237 km), and Burkina Faso (1,000 km) to the south. The desert or semi-desert region inside these borders represents two thirds (65%) of the total size of the country with a population density of less than one inhabitant per square kilometer. Three of the largest administrative regions are affected by the desertification. Great distances separate the three main regional capitals in the area. For example a nomad who knows the region can travel from Kidal to Timbuktu without passing by any hamlets. Mali has a tremendous amount of space to govern with very few people and limited national infrastructure, which makes securing the border and providing government services very difficult. Also, desertification means that locals cannot necessarily rely on agriculture to sustain themselves.

History of Mali from Nomadic Times to Present. The history of North Mali lent itself to today's conditions. With the occupation of North Africa by Arabs around the 7th Century, movements across the Sahara desert started mixing desert nomadic Arab populations to the sedentary black populations in the sub-Saharan forest region. Endemic banditry has long threatened caravans across the Sahara. Contemporary Mali, including its Northern regions, was the central bed of West Africa's greatest empires known as the Empire of Ghana, the Empire of Mali, and the Songhai Empire that chronologically succeeded one another from the 9th Century to the 17th Century ending

with the arrival of Europeans.[8] The reigns of the different emperors have contributed to strengthening ties between Arabic North Africa and the sub-Saharan forest region through the trans-Saharan routes. The conquest of Middle Age cities of Timbuktu in 1285 and Gao in 1300, known as the “centers of African commerce”, by emperor Soundiata Keita of Mali, strengthened the movement of population across the Sahara.[9] The Islamic beliefs of his successor Kankan Moussa deepened trades ties among the religious cities of Timbuktu, Gao and, Djéné with North Africa.[10] These movements of population were made possible by the trans-Saharan commerce routes which linked North Africa to the Sub-Sahara region.

As legitimate commerce grew, various illegal and violent activities grew with it. Caravans changed their ancient routes due to the insecurity along the Trans Saharan routes.[11] The Trans Saharan commerce routes were subject to the effects of “Razzia” carried out by horsemen who seized commercial convoys and caravans. Razzia is described as a form of limited warfare based on raiding and looting, and is one many terms used (ghazi being another). It was not purely random but conducted against one’s rival caravans, which directly explains Tuareg behavior today.[12] Movements across the Sahara became dangerous for the traders who ventured on the route due to Razzia. Also, northern regions of Mali have been subject to various insurgencies during the rule of the Songhai Empire in the 14th and 15th centuries. Velton argues that “the most rebellious part of the Mali Empire was in the Sahelian and desert regions.”[13]

Today, illicit Trans-Saharan commerce includes the trafficking of illegal goods such as cigarettes, oil, arms, and drugs. According to the United Nations Organization for Drugs and Cocaine (UNODC) report in 2009, oil and cocaine are the most traded

illegal product in the sub region, including Mali, with more than a billion Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) francs (US $ 2 million) per annum.[14] Illicit trafficking became a major source of revenue for these dangerous actors who took control of the business. This led to an influx of weapons into North Mali during several conflicts such as the Tuareg/Arabs insurgency in Niger, north Mali in the 1990's, the Algerian civil war in 1992, the civil war in Liberia, Western Sahara, Sierra Leone and Chad. The UNODC report argues that historical Trans- Saharan commerce and its routes are the key factors for the trade.[15]

Difficult Socio-Political Environment. Desertification has put great additional stress on the population. The advance of the Sahara desert has dramatically changed and made the way of life of the inhabitants of the regions very fragile. The region has been subject to various droughts in the past in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, and is "vulnerable to climate change, the absence of rainfall and the growing humanitarian concern about drought in the contemporary period."[16] The region represents the largest portion of Mali, with 60% of the total size of the country, but also the poorest. The inability of the people to sustain themselves has resulted in large migrations into neighboring countries, mainly Algeria and Libya, or joining criminal groups to survive. According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the lack of development in North Mali is one of the main causes of social instability in the region.[17] Sheikh Tourad Ould Eli, a military analyst, argues that "in northern Mali… the absence of state and public service involvement, and lack of economic prospects for young people are factors leading to instability which could cause them to join criminal groups."[18] With few natural resources, the region has limited infrastructural and

economic opportunities. Access to basic needs, such as food and water, is extremely difficult. The patterns of life are nomadic and most of the population lives “within the immediate proximity of the Niger river.”[19] “Physical and economic isolation, environmental vulnerability, soil quality, and the degradation of natural resources are critical sources of stress.”[20]

Despite the multiple financial investment efforts to mitigate the effects of droughts, the level of poverty is still high. For instance, the Agence de Developpement pour le Nord Mali is the Development Agency in North Mali (ADN).[21] This governmental institution was created in March 2005 to boost the development in the northern regions of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal.[22]

Criminals and armed networks have long taken advantage of the lack of governmental control in the large northern regions and have operated freely. This remained true even during periods of increased Malian military presence combating the Tuareg insurgencies. With the 1992’s National Pact of Reconciliation, signed between the leaders of the second Tuareg insurgency and the government, the resulting withdrawal of military forces further freed the region for criminal activities and illicit trafficking. The cycle of instability has weakened the national government ability to provide basic services to its legitimate citizens. The lack of security has resulted in the inability of people and their goods to move freely in the region. The frequency of kidnapping and attacks carried out by AQIM and other armed groups have progressively increased in the past years. Together, these security issues seriously impact any attempts to bring lasting stability and security in the region. The ongoing military offensive in northern Mali carried out by the MNLA since January 2012 is evident proof.

Actors in North Mali

The complexity of permanent conflict and insecurity in the North resides in the interconnection of several factors including the harsh environment and the presence of illicit trade. These conditions grew over time and resulted in the current state of political, social, and economic instability. The manifestation of insecurity and instability in the region is linked to the unsaid Tuareg desire for self determination, the deepening roots of AQIM with its undesirable consequences, and the illicit trafficking problem.

The Tuareg Issue. The Tuaregs are one of the main inhabitants in North Mali, and include a diaspora spread out through southern Algeria, eastern Mauritania, Niger, northern Burkina Faso and southern Libya. They represent 6% of the total population of Mali. About 500,000 live in the northern desert regions of the country. Despite the tribal differences related to their social organization and hierarchy, Tuaregs are known for their deep attachment to their community, their language “Tamasheq”, and their religion. Rivalries dominate relations between tribes. The hierarchic classification of tribes into nobles, literates, freemen, vassals, artists, free slaves, and slaves is an important aspect in the Tuareg society. In this hierarchy, the “white” Tuareg has high social status and the “black Tuareg” is a slave.

The social organization of tribes in the northern regions of Mali refers to traditional stratification of the nobility, client casts, bonded casts, and slaves. Black Africans are perceived to be among the bonded cast together with slaves known as “Bella” and consequently fall under their command of their chief. Colonial powers and the successive governments since Malian independence in 1960 have supported and strengthened the leadership of the nobility in the region to retain control of the other

tribes and calm down probable insurgencies. The main actors of the insurgencies in North Mali are the Tuaregs.

Dating back to the resistance led by the charismatic leader Firhoun from 1914-1916, Tuaregs resisted colonization and fought the French military. Post-independence of Mali of the 1960s, Tuaregs found themselves under the rule of black leaders from the south region. Some were offended by the rule of their region by black southerners and considered it an invasion. The lack of development strategies by successive central Malian governments over time contributed to the growing feeling of marginalization. Tuaregs refused to be treated as second-class citizens and opposed the new political rules in armed conflicts known as “the first Tuareg rebellion” in 1963. The abuse of the new post-colonial “Southerners” administration toward the Tuaregs was badly received by local leaders and “this military-administrative presence is felt as occupation.”[23] The uprising was consequently crushed by the first President Modibo Keita’s regime.[24] However, 27 years later, a second Tuareg led rebellion against the southern invaders resurfaced in 1990.

The regime of Mali’s second President, Moussa Traoré, failed to manage the consequences of the 1975 and 1985 droughts. The rate of poverty in the Northern region dramatically increased and led many Tuaregs to migrate to Algeria and Libya where they were recruited by the Gaddafi regime to serve in the “Islamic Legion” to fight against Chad.

The end of the Libya – Chad border conflict over “the Aouzou strip” and the fall of oil prices following the end of the Cold War resulted in release of thousand of Tuaregs by Gaddafi. They were encouraged to return to their countries of origin. Accordingly,

almost 20,000 persons returned to the poor northern regions of Mali with personal goods, including arms. In 1990, the conflict known as, “the second rebellion” started. This conflict led mainly by Tuaregs leaders affected the three northern regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. In 1991, a military coup d’état led by Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré drew world-wide attention and resulted in the short term peaceful resolution of that uprising. The government and the Tuaregs signed a National Pact of Reconciliation that allowed many Tuareg combatants access to governmental services. In 1994 and 1996, the integration of former combatants in governmental services through a peaceful resolution of that rebellion calmed the Malian Tuareg issue for a short time. Sporadic insecurity issues remain in the region and have been growing progressively with the infiltration of AQIM.

However, successive governments have lacked strategies to continue and strengthen the gains of the National Pact of Reconciliation. The dissatisfaction of a number of former Tuareg combatants grew because their expectations had not been met. Car hijackings and sporadic attacks against isolated military posts started.

The regimes of the democratically elected Presidents Alpha Oumar Konaré and Amadou Toumani Touré failed to address the issue, which encouraged the rising of the insecurity. Former Tuareg combatant leaders are essentially free to negotiate the release of hostages and to search hijacked vehicles by criminal groups and Tuareg deserters with impunity.

The collapse of the Gaddafi’s regime in October 2011 has allowed many Tuareg combatants who served in the Libyan army to return to their country of origin. Northern regions of Mali have been affected by the presence of these fighters. Numbers of these

trained and armed fighters are playing an increasingly significant role by joining the MNLA. From its military reaction following the attacks of Tuareg insurgency in three northern cities in January 2012, the Malian government reiterated its readiness to dialogue with the insurgents.[25]

AQIM Threat

A new security challenge rose in early 2000 with the arrival of members from the Algerian Salafist Group for Combat and Predication (GSPC) in North Mali. The GSPC was not seriously opposed by the Konare's regime. These were the surrounding conditions that led to the kidnapping of the first westerners in 2000. The large amount of ransom paid to release western hostages has raised and empowered the appetite of the criminals and local community leaders involved in the negotiations process. The mutation of the Algerian GSPC into AQIM in 2006 has seen the continuation of kidnapping. The newly elected president Amadou Toumani Touré (2002) has continued to react to the growing security issues in the northern regions in much the same manner as his predecessors.

AQIM is an Algerian born terrorist organization. The Salafist Group for Predication and Combat (GSPC) was formed from the Groupe Islamic Armé (GIA), the most effective among the various Algerian Islamic groups. Its root origin came from the Algerian civil war in 1992 following the military refusal to hand power to the Islamic Party, the Front Islamic pour le Salut (FIS), who won the presidential election. Violence broke out and signaled the start of civil war between security forces and Islamic groups. In September 2006, Al-Qaeda declared officially the inclusion of the GSPC into its network which was confirmed by its renaming into AQIM in January 2007.[26] Following the successful operations of the Algerian security forces against its members, AQIM

failed to expand its operations in Morocco and Tunisia. The organization was able to "exploit the security vacuum in the Algerian Sahara and the Sahel region, from where it has managed to establish a significant presence in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger."[27] According to Louis Caprioli, the former head of French counter-terrorism, the goal of AQIM is the liberation of the Islamic lands and the end of plundering by the Western countries.[28]

The central location of AQIM activities is in North Mali.[29] AQIM kidnappings are primarily conducted against tourists and NGO workers.[30] Northern region inhabitants depend too much on international aid and investments through development projects to provide for their basic needs. The lack of security for workers raises concerns about the probable withdrawal of some NGOs, and for the hesitation of others to get involved in the region. In 1998 in the Gao region of Mali, the French NGO *Action contre la Faim*, withdrew for a while following an attack on one of its members by armed bandits.[31]

AQIM's attacks and presence has threatened tourism, a vital economic activity. Once a popular tourist destination, Mali's tourism rates have dropped out of fear of kidnapping.[32] The region of Timbuktu has been hardest hit and the economic impact has been large job loss.

On the social sphere, AQIM is building "outstanding community relations with local populations and can be locally popular as it often has its own social welfare programme."[33] Taking advantages of the lack of governmental control, AQIM is integrating communities and developing social relationships with local populations that once practiced peaceful Islam. This strategy aims to "advance its long term strength and viability…to gradually deepen its roots, grow its resources, and develop its operational

strength."[34] One of the most effective ways used to develop strong social ties with the communities is marriage with locals.

AQIM is also reinvesting ransom from kidnapping in the region and generating income and job opportunities for communities and individuals by its illegal activities.[35] The objective is to gain the hearts and minds of the local population and is a long term strategy.

Their success risks the transfer of Islamic extremism to the region. The connection between the MNLA, AQIM and the Islamic movement, led by Iyad Ag Ghali, a former Tuareg rebel leader, is a sign of the radicalization of the insurgency.[36] Iyad Ag Ghali, the undisputed leader of Tuareg rebel movement in 1990 is inspired by the Islamic group "Ansar Eddine" and his willingness for an Islamic state in the desert.

Ineffective Malian Response

Since independence in 1960, policies toward the region are characterized by procrastination. During the ten years of the Konaré's regime, cash-based corruption has been the main policy adopted to manage the Tuareg rebel leaders. Also, the designation of the managers of development projects in the region was influenced by the same Tuareg leaders. In the meantime, the development gap between the north and south region has grown. The region, which represents 3/4 of the country's total size, has less than one percent of upgraded road and other supporting infrastructures. Ignorant and irresponsible contractors hired by national authorities spent billions on development projects which ended up in total failure and left the region in the same status.

Lack of leadership or fear of the military has led political leaders to neglect the development of the military. The twenty-three years of military dictatorship under the regime of General Moussa Traoré, from 1968 to 1991, cultivated civilian fear of the

military. Since 1992, with the establishment of a democratic civilian government, no major military equipment has been purchased. The lack of investment in the military reduced its capabilities and has seriously affected the morale of the troops. Despite the ongoing kidnappings of westerners by AQIM since 2000, the major attacks on the two military camps in Kidal and Menaka in May 2006, the many ambushes led by the Tuareg insurgency in 2008, and the confirmed link between AQIM and Boko Haram, the Malian government has failed to mobilize sufficient national assets, such as the military, to deal with the growing threat and improve the security situation.

Influence of External Actors

The withdrawal of the Malian military from some security positions in the region followed the signing of the National Pact of Reconciliation in 1992. This along with porous national borders has contributed to the influx of criminal trafficking in the region. ‘’Most of the products that are trafficked in the north are produced and consumed outside Mali.”[37] In addition to the AQIM threat, these criminals contribute to the increased presence of small arms, illicit drugs, rebel groups, and bandits.

Many experts believe “that the weapons traffic and circulation in northern Mali can be traced to the presence of armed conflicts in the sub region, including not only Algeria, but also Chad, Libya, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, and Cote d’Ivoire.”[38] Other external actors include the Polisario, the armed branch of West Sahara independence movement from, which some of the Tuareg insurgents received assistance.[39] In December 2011, the incursion and arrest of Malian citizens by the Western Sahara Polisario members following the kidnapping of European aid workers in the West Saharan refugees camp of Tindouf in southern Algeria have provoked the

reaction of the Malian government remarking that “Mali will not accept the violation of its territory by the Polisario group.”[40]

Challenges of Achieving Regional Cooperation

Algeria has a large amount of influence through its historic, economic, social and political ties to the region, but its relationship with Mali is strained. Regarding the management of the AQIM issue, the cooperation between Algerian and Malian governments has been complex and difficult since 2005. Following the liberation of the French hostage Pierre Kamate in exchange of the freeing of four AQIM terrorists by Mali in 2010, Algeria and Mauritania protested actively and recalled their ambassador from Bamako.[41]

Algeria shares the second longest border with Mali with 1200 km after Mauritania. The Algerian movement of independence in the 1960’s kept back up bases in North Mali from where they operated against the French colonial troops. Strong trade relations have linked the regions of Northern Mali, particularly the region of Kidal next to the southern regions of Algeria, where most of products originate. Here the local populations are totally dependent on Algerian goods.[42] The social aspect is related to the Tuareg populations. Algeria hosts sizable Tuareg communities in its southern border regions. Some are of Algerian origin and others have migrated from Mali, following the successive droughts and conflicts. These relations have played an important part in Algerian involvement in the resolution and signature of Peace National Pact, of the second rebellion in the 1990’s, and then the Algiers Agreements in 2006 between the rebels and the government. Despite the two countries cooperation to fight the insecurity in the region, mistrust on the AQIM issue has been a diplomatic sticking point. “The Malian’s efforts to broaden the Combined Military Staff to the other Sahel states have

been continually vetoed by Algeria."[43] The mistrust has been highlighted by some "misgivings regarding the sincerity of Algeria's counterterrorism efforts."[44] This refers to "numerous compromising reports circulating in Mali."[45] Reports cite that the "Algerian Intelligence and Security Department is at the heart of AQIM."[46] Some suspicious Sahel observers even claim that AQIM is a false-flag operation run entirely by the Algerian intelligence service.[47]

Another new external threat is the emerging influence of South American drug cartels. According to UNODC, the attention of drug traffickers seems to have been turned to West Africa as the transit point for satisfying the growing demand for cocaine in Europe.[48] Drug traffickers have taken advantages of the large ungoverned desert space and the region "might currently represent one of the main gateways to West Africa for drug traffickers."[49] A stark example of the magnitude of this problem was in November 2009 with "the discovery of the wreckage of a Boeing cargo plane in the desert, which was suspected to have carried a multi-ton cocaine shipment from Latin America."[50] This situation is not isolated because of the complex interconnections among the various criminal actors as "South American drugs gangs are providing millions of pounds of funding for Al-Qaeda terrorists by paying them to ensure the safe passage of cocaine across North Africa and towards Europe."[51]

Proposed Solutions to Insecurity and Instability in North Mali

Despite its democratic advances and experience gained in the resolution of the "second Tuareg rebellion" in 1992, Mali is still at risk of total destabilization in its northern regions. The complexity of the situation requires more than a military solution. As the grievances are principally social and economic, development must be a central aim of any grand strategy for the north. A long term solution first demands the use of the

national military with foreign support as the primary means to deter and contain the dangerous combatants present. Secondly, the government, with international assistance, must establish conditions for economic opportunities for the local populations.

Because the security threats are transnational, regional military solutions should be pursued. “The Sahel states relied primarily on regional co-operation to stave off security threats” stressed the Malian president during his visit to Algeria on October 27th, 2011.[52] States in the region lack resources to control their vast semi-arid or desert territories. Some analysts argue that Sahel states cannot go it alone in their counter-terror efforts.[53] Military analyst Sheikh Tourad Ould Eli, argues that Mali has vast desert areas in its northern regions and it is difficult for the country with scarce resources to control those areas.[54] The future of the region requires a “comprehensive security and development approach to respond to the complexity of the challenges.”[55]

Nations differ in their approaches in how to deal with the AQIM. These differences have led to raising tensions and rivalries. Mali preaches the development option in opposition to its neighbors, especially Algeria and Mauritania which have suffered deadly attacks from AQIM. Despite these differences, nations have recognized the necessity of creating a regional approach with foreign support. An opportunity for regional military cooperation comes from the April 2010 creation of a Combined Staff Command, including Mali, Mauritania, Algeria and Niger based in the southern Algerian city of Tamanrasset, with the mission to fight AQIM. The objective of the Combined Staff Command is to have better coordination of the counterterrorism actions and conduct combined operations in each of these countries.[56] Military and diplomatic sources in

Bamako have confirmed the presence of Algerian military in Northern Mali to assist the Malian military in its fight against insecurity and terrorism.[57] These countries are seen as the most affected by the AQIM activities which have bases in North Mali. But given the cross-border activities of the challenges, there is a need to broaden this initiative to other regional states in order to strengthen its efficiency. The absence of Morocco, Chad, and Libya from the new cooperative security infrastructure will certainly hinder efforts to eliminate AQIM from the region.[58] Foreign military assistance from developed countries would support the initiative. The Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), which is strongly supported by the United States, is an example of an external diplomatic and military support. Most of the Sahel-Sahara countries are part of the program including, Mali, Mauritania, Chad, Niger, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and Morocco.[59] "In addition to training and supply, the program dedicates resources for development and emphasizes regional cooperation."[60]

The other root causes of insecurity and instability in the northern regions of Mali, the high rate of poverty and the lack of basic needs, must be dealt with. If the government could create economic opportunities to improve the living conditions of the people, it would challenge the capabilities of dangerous actors to recruit from the local population. In October 2012, the initiation of a program by the Malian government to respond to the underdevelopment challenges in its northern desert regions is evidence of the will of the highest national authorities to address the situation. The program called Special Program for Peace, Security, and Development of the Northern Regions (PSPSDN) is a presidential initiative to strengthen several ongoing projects operating in the region."[61] The program, funded by the European Union (EU), addresses the

situation by establishing a link between security and development. President Amadou Toumani Touré believes that the solution of the crisis in the northern regions cannot be solved solely by the military. Along with the Malian President strategy, the EU particularly "emphasizes on development projects in the regions experiencing insecurity to help bring the state back into these regions."[62] Mr. Manuel Lopez-Blanco, the EU External Action Director for West and Central Africa, met with the Malian President in May 2011 for the signature of a contract of four million Euros for the PSPSDN.[63]

There is no guarantee that this program will be successful and achieve the desired results because the interests of the Tuareg insurgency may interfere. Left unchecked, the insurgency could sabotage the initiative because the project is a response to solve the marginalization. But it is an obstacle to the undeclared intention of independence of the insurgency. A prior comprehensive military option is required to set a better security environment before any development initiative.

Conclusion

The insecurity and instability in the northern regions of Mali are the result of the combination of internal and external factors which have been mismanaged and neglected by successive governments over time. AQIM threat and the increase of drug trafficking have been exacerbated by the return of Libyan armed combatants to the region. The addition of armed combatants to the Tuareg insurgency in the region of Kidal has strengthened and radicalized the rebellion whose goal is forced independence. The attacked, on governmental forces in the northern cities, by the Tuareg independence movement is typical evidence. The poverty, lack of opportunities, and infrastructures in the regions are real issues which have disrupted the way of life of

the inhabitants. The current cycle of insecurity and instability includes many actors with different agendas. It has also contributed to aggravating the rate of poverty.

The solution to the situation is to be addressed in an option combining the use of military and development aspects in the region. The use of the military should be done on a regional basis regarding the trans-border activities of the actors. The lack of resources by regional states requires foreign military support and international assistance.

In addition to the internal factors cited above, there is a need to improve Malian governance. The high rate of corruption in governmental services and the incapability of the government to address the basic social needs such as education, health, and employment have created a general lack of trust in National Institutions. The government rarely acknowledges this challenge, but it is certainly a major problem in the northern regions, fostering the spread of general malaise that, if nothing is done, could lead to even more danger of insecurity and instability.

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