

**FORUM:** Special Political and Decolonisation Committee

**TOPIC:** The Conflict in Northern Mali

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**POSITION:** Deputy Chair

### **Introduction**

Ethnically, politically and militarily divided Mali is a precarious state in West Africa. Once home to several pre-colonial empires, the landlocked and arid country of Mali is one of the largest on the continent. Historically seeing major African Empires of Songhai and the Mali Empire, the state has been under French colonial rule from 1898 till 1960. After independence from France in 1960, Mali suffered droughts, rebellions, a coup and 23 years of military dictatorship until democratic elections in 1992. In 2013, France intervened militarily upon the government's request following the capture of the town of Konna and its troops overran Islamist strongholds. Authorities agreed a United Nations-sponsored ceasefire with Tuareg separatists in 2015, but parts of the country remain tense, with Tuareg rebels sporadically active.

Meanwhile, a jihadist insurgency in Mali's north and central regions continues, with al-Qaeda-linked militants carrying out attacks. The country's predominant religion, Islam, has led to many groups from Islamic State and Al-Qaeda to the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad being active in the region: especially northern areas. Social division in the country has 4 languages and corresponding ethnic divides: French, Bambara, Berber and Arabic.

Mali has a capital at Bamako, with a total population of 18.5 million and country area of 1.25 million square km (482,077 square miles). The most shocking statistic is due, in part to conflict, the life expectancy is 57 years for men, 84 years for women. While in the United Kingdom it is 79 years for men and 83 years for women.

### **General Overview**

As of peace agreements in 2015, between the Malian government and Tuareg rebels, the majority of the conflict in the region is between Islamist forces and opposition: government and formally militia groups. Rapid expansion by Islamist forces and previous loose alliances with rebel separatists lead to foreign intervention by the United Nations and France in the earlier part of the decade. Since then the region has maintained a now mostly UN force. Despite international security and development cooperation support exceeding 3bn EUR per year, the Malian state has failed to protect its citizens. Human rights violations have increased, with reports of torture, mistreatment, and disappearances, extrajudicial detentions and executions, the recruitment of child soldiers, and gender-based violence.

Thus, the Malian state remains afflicted by a chronic and "extreme" fragility, and there are no simple answers to restoring trust between communities and with the Malian state. Renewing this trust remains the most significant missed opportunity of the 2018 election. Similarly, although the Northern Turag areas are currently at peace, it wouldn't be the first peace to fail, and the regions are still not strongly united.

With an accompanying humanitarian crisis and persistent micro-level violence, Malians' mistrust of their government could feed into broader state failure. Unless violations, corruption, and nepotism are investigated and addressed, 2019 could end even worse than it began.

### **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

#### **Malian Government**

The Malian government main priority is to protect its citizens and restore the rule of law to the entire country. Naturally, the priority here is for the Government to work to eject the Islamic Terrorist Groups and work with the United Nations to do so. However, the Government does want to maintain

involvement in the conflict and at the whim of international forces. Finally, the Government is also desperate to not dissolve the nation with too extensive devolution leading to independence. Having fought against Tuareg separatists for decades, the Southern-based Government is keen to try and work with the Tuareg groups to maintain their commitment to a Malian Government.

### **ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States**

As an economic community, war tends not to be on the agenda of successful business plans. ECOWAS, with Mali as a member, ECOWAS wants to bring around peace and order in Mali by any reasonable means.

### **France**

As a former colonial overlord, France has some obligations to support Mali: financially and militarily. France has large numbers of forces station in Mali and has been quite involved in fighting separatists and insurgents for the past decade. Similarly, France has some strong economic links with Mali; for example France cancelled 40% of debts owed to it by Mali, amounting to some 80m euros (\$79m, £51m).

### **Tuareg Movements:**

#### MNLA - Mouvement National pour la libération de l'Azawad

Formerly fought against the government as a rebel group. However, as of the 2014 peace negotiations, is now supportive of the government while the government maintains its promise to devolve more regional power.

#### GATIA - Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés

A self-defence group, focusing on protecting citizens in the Tuareg region. It hasn't got any political power or motive but is more of a grassroots project to try and strengthen the region against Islamic Insurgency.

#### CMA - Coordination of Movements for Azawad

A greater alliance of Tuareg independence movements, including the MNLA, that previously fought against the government. However, like the MNLA is continuing to support the government, as long as they receive devolved power.

### **Islamic Terrorist Groups:**

#### al-Mulathamun Battalion:

With the aim of implementing a strict, ISIS style, interpretation of Sharia Islam. The al-Mulathamun battalion is aiming to replace the Malian government with an Islamic state. al-Mulathamun battalion is situated primarily in the North and targets international interests: especially Western entities.

#### Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM):

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin wants to establish an Islamic State, not necessarily replacing the Malian government but centred in Mali. Targeting Western and local interests in West Africa and Sahel; has claimed responsibility for attacks in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Worth noting that Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin has pledged allegiance to al-Qa'ida and AQIM, holds Western hostages, wages attacks against security and peacekeeping forces in Mali.

#### The Islamic State of Iraq and ash-sham networks in the Greater Sahara (ISGS):

Aiming local, the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-sham networks in the Greater Sahara wants to replace

regional governments with an Islamic state. They're mostly concentrated along the Mali-Niger border region and target any security forces.

## Timeline

**11th century** - Empire of Mali becomes a dominant force in the upper Niger basin.

**14th-15th centuries** - Decline of the Empire of Mali, which loses dominance of the gold trade to the Songhai Empire.

**Late 16th century** - Moroccans defeat the Songhai, make Timbuktu their capital and rule until their decline in the 18th century.

**1898** - France completes conquest of Mali, then called French Sudan.  
independence

**1960** - Mali becomes independent with Modibo Keita as president. It becomes a one-party, socialist state and withdraws from the Franc zone.

**1968** - Keita ousted in a coup led by Lieutenant Moussa Traore.

**1991** - Traore deposed in a coup and replaced by transitional committee.

Democracy

**1992** - Alpha Konare wins multiparty elections to become Mali's first democratically-elected president.

**1995** - a Peace agreement with Tuareg tribes leads to return of thousands of refugees.

**2000 February** - Konare appoints former International Monetary Fund official Mande Sidibe prime minister.

**2002 October** - Government resigns, without public explanation. New "government of national unity" is unveiled.

**2003 August** - Clashes between rival Muslim groups in west kill at least 10 people.

**2004 September** - Agriculture minister says severe locust plague has cut cereal harvest by up to 45%.

**2005 June** - World Food Programme warns of severe food shortages, the result of drought and locust infestations in 2004.

**2006 June** - The government signs an Algerian-brokered peace deal with Tuareg rebels seeking greater autonomy for their northern desert region. The rebels looted weapons in the town of Kidal in May, raising fears of a new rebellion.

**2007 July** - The ruling coalition, Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ADP), strengthens its hold on parliament in elections.

Rebel activity

**2007 August** - Suspected Tuareg rebels abduct government soldiers in separate incidents near the Niger and Algerian borders.

**2008 May** - Tuareg rebels kill 17 soldiers in an attack on an army post in the northeast, despite a ceasefire agreed a month earlier.

**2008 December** - At least 20 people are killed and several taken hostage in an attack by Tuareg rebels on a military base in northern Mali.

**2009 February** - Government says the army has taken control of all the bases of the most active Tuareg rebel group. A week later, 700 rebels surrender their weapons in a ceremony marking their return to the peace process.

**2009 May** - Algeria begins sending military equipment to Mali in preparation for a joint operation against Islamic militants linked to al-Qaeda.

**2010 April** - Mali, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger set up joint command to tackle the threat of terrorism.

**2012 January** - Fears of new Tuareg rebellion following attacks on northern towns which prompt civilians to flee into Mauritania.

**2012 April** - Tuareg rebels seize control of northern Mali, declare independence.

Military hands over to a civilian interim government, led by President Dioncounda Traore.

**2012 May** - Junta reasserts control after an alleged coup attempt by supporters of ousted President Toure in Bamako. Pro-junta protesters storm presidential compound and beat Mr Traore unconscious. The Tuareg MNLA and Islamist Ansar Dine rebel groups merge and declare northern Mali to be an Islamic state. Ansar Dine begins to impose Islamic law in Timbuktu. Al-Qaeda in North Africa endorses the deal.

**2012 August** - Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra forms a new government of national unity to satisfy regional demands for a transition from military-dominated rule.

**2012 Autumn-Winter** - Northern Islamist rebels consolidate their hold on the north. They seize the strategically important town of Douentza in September, crossing into the central part of Mali and closer to the government-held south-west.

**2012 November** - The West African regional grouping Ecowas agrees a coordinated military expedition to recapture the north, with UN and African Union backing.

**2012 December** - Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra resigns, allegedly under pressure from army leaders who oppose plans for Ecowas military intervention. President Traore appoints a presidential official, Django Sissoko, to succeed him. The UN and US threaten sanctions.

**2013 January** - Islamist fighters capture the central town of Konna and plan to march on the capital. President Traore asks France for help. French troops rapidly capture Gao and Timbuktu and at the end of the month enter Kidal, the last major rebel-held town. European countries pledge to help retrain the Malian army.

**2013 April** - France begins withdrawal of troops. A regional African force helps the Malian army provide security.

**2013 May** - An international conference pledges \$4bn to help rebuild Mali.

**2013 June** - Government signs peace deal with Tuareg nationalist rebels to pave the way for elections. Rebels agree to hand over northern town of Kidal that they captured after French troops forced out Islamists in January.

**2013 July-August** - Ibrahim Boubacar Keita wins presidential elections, defeating Moussa Mara. France formally hands over responsibility for security in the north to the Minusma UN force.

**2013 September** - President Keita appoint banking specialist Oumar Tatam Ly prime minister.

**2013 September-November** - Government relations with Tuareg separatists in the north steadily worsen, with occasional clashes.

**2014 April** - President Keita appoints former rival Moussa Mara prime minister in a bid to curb instability in the north.

**2014 May** - Fragile truce with Tuareg MNLA separatists breaks down in the north. Separatists seize control of Kidal city and the town of Menaka, Agelhok, Anefis and Tessalit.

**2014 September** - Government, separatists begin a new round of talks in Algeria to try end conflict over northern Mali, or Azawad as the secessionists call it. Separatist MNLA opens an "Azawad embassy" in the Netherlands.

**2014 October** - Nine UN peacekeepers killed in the north-east - the deadliest attack so far on its mission in Mali.

**2015 April** - Upsurge in fighting as Coordination of Azawad Movements northern rebels clash with UN peacekeepers in Timbuktu and seize the town of Lere, try to recapture Menaka from a pro-government militia.

**2015 May** - French troops kill leading al-Qaeda commanders Amada Ag Hama and Ibrahim Ag Inawalen in a northern raid. Both were suspected of kidnapping and killing French citizens.

**2015 June** - Government and ethnic Tuareg rebels sign peace deal aimed at ending decades of conflict. The government gives the Tuareg more regional autonomy and drops arrest warrants for their leaders.

**2015 November** - Islamist gunmen attack the luxury Radisson Blu hotel in the capital Bamako, killing 22.

**2016 August** - Several attacks on foreign forces. More than 100 peacekeepers have died since the UN mission's deployment in Mali in 2013, making it one of the deadliest places to serve for the UN.

**2017 January** - At least 37 people are killed by a car bomb at a military camp in Gao housing government troops and former rebels brought together as part of a peace agreement.

**2017 February** - Malian soldiers and rival militia groups including Tuareg separatists take part in a joint patrol, a crucial part of a peace agreement reached in 2015.

**2017 April** - President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita announces a new government, appointing close ally Abdoulaye Idrissa Maiga as prime minister.

**2018 January** - 14 soldiers are killed in a suspected Islamist attack on a military base at Soumpi. Elsewhere, 26 civilians die after their vehicle hits a landmine.

**2018 June** - Mali prepares for a presidential election amid Islamist violence and demonstrations pressing for the vote to be free and fair.

**2018 July** - Malian presidential election see President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita win a second term as president with 67% of the vote, against Soumaila Cisse.

### Relevant United Nations Documents and Other Sources

#### **United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali:**

Abrivated to MINUSMA; it was established by Security Council, resolution 2100 of 25 April 2013, to support political processes in that country and carry out some security-related tasks. The Mission was asked to support the transitional authorities of Mali in the stabilisation of the country. By unanimously adopting resolution 2164 of 25 June 2014, the Council further decided that the Mission should focus on duties, such as ensuring security, stabilization and protection of civilians; supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; and assisting the re-establishment of State authority, the rebuilding of the security sector, and the promotion and protection of human rights in that country.

#### **United Nations Sanctions:**

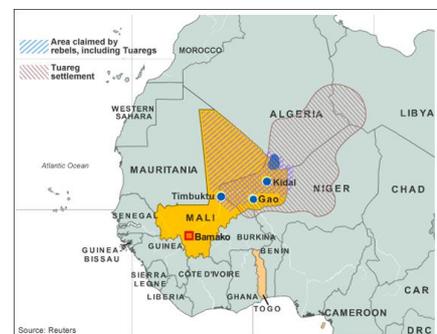
Aimed at combating groups and individuals who fight against the stability in Mali. These sanctions include financial and travel sanctions by United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2374. Most transnational bodies and nations have enforced this, for instance, the European Council Regulation (EU) 2017/1770.

### Questions to Consider

- Are current actions, by the UN and Malian Government enough?
- Is the Malian Government responsible enough to try and reasonably protect its citizens?
- Should further military action be undertaken to downturn violence?
- Is military jurisdiction in the region too extensive, radicalising some local inhabitants, or should there be a reduction in military forces in the region?
- Are current military objectives, and method, realistic and successful?
- Is Mali offered the right amount of international aid to rebuild and develop in both financial and expert advice?
- Is the Malian government responsible enough to accept this aid and not misuse contributions to it?
- What should be the future over the Northern regions, which are under-represented as a Tuareg minority?

### Conclusion:

To conclude, the Malian state is torn between three parts. The two-thirds are in a makeshift alliance, with the Northern tribes from the Tuareg region working with the Southern-based Government, to fight and defeat the Islamic extremists. However, this alliance is only united for the meantime and was at war little over 3 years ago. The problems, relating to devolution of regional autonomy, will have to be met in part soon to secure the survival of the alliance or risk breaking down into an implicit civil war. Additionally, the presence of 15 000+ United Nations personnel brings into question the ability for the Malian Government to stand up for itself. Many of the international bodies involved are keen to ensure that the issue is solved and delegated more to regional powers, while defeating insurgents, to ensure that it doesn't become an international centre of conflict: like Syria.



Additionally, it is essential that the estimated \$4bn of aid going towards the Malian cause isn't misspent.

Such a large amount of funds require some form of accountability. The repeated reports of corruption and human rights abuses does little to reassure those sending the aid that it is being used effectively.

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