

II. Challenges to the peace process: complexity, fragmentation, extremism and crime

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The challenges confronting the peace process in Mali are significant, multifold and complex. This section discusses four of the main challenges and how they impact on the peace process.

First, while the core issue is the long-standing conflict between the Tuareg movement and the Malian state over self-determination of the northern regions, there are also a number of community conflicts. The latter are between various population groups, along social and ethnic lines, the root causes of which are also complex. Second, there is a fragmentation of actors that exacerbates the complexity of the conflicts. Allegiances among the armed groups of the rebellion have shifted over time, including during the most recent peace process. Third, violent extremism has become a major problem in Mali and in the wider Sahara-Sahel region, which adds another critical dimension to the crisis. Various non-state actors are engaged in violent extremism under the banners of jihadism and/or salafism. Fourth, organized crime, transnational as well as local, is the main source of revenue for the violent extremist groups. The income generated from engaging in criminal activities turns them into well-resourced groups that in turn buy services from the local population.

A complex conflict

The rebellion that broke out on 17 January 2012 in northern Mali was the latest in a series of rebellions in 1963, 1990–96 and 2006–09, stemming from a long-standing political conflict: the Tuareg-led movement to pursue the cause of self-determination and better living conditions for northern Mali, initially in resistance to French colonization, and after Malian independence in 1960, against the Malian state. There are two root causes of the conflict: (a) the progressive decline in the power and affluence of the Tuareg people; and (b) the marginalization and poverty of northern Mali more generally, which includes other ethnic communities as well.¹

¹ See e.g. Chauzal, G. and van Damme, T., *The Roots of Mali's Conflict: Moving Beyond the 2012 Crisis*, Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, Conflict Research Unit Report (Clingendael Institute: The Hague, Mar. 2015); Høyer, K., *Crisis in Mali: A Peacebuilding Approach*, International Alert, Peace Focus series (International Alert: London, Mar. 2013); Islamic Relief Worldwide, *Mali: An Ongoing Crisis* (Islamic Relief Worldwide: Birmingham, July 2013); and Pezard, S. and Shurkin, M., *Achieving Peace in Northern Mali: Past Agreements, Local Conflicts, and the Prospects for a Durable Settlement*, Research Report, RR-892-OSD (RAND: Santa Monica, 2015).

The Tuareg—a semi-nomadic people, descended from the North African Berbers and who speak a Berber language—live across the Sahara-Sahel, primarily in parts of the territories of Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali and Niger. Historically, they earned their living from stockbreeding and trans-Saharan trade (e.g. caravanning and tax collection). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a large part of the region was colonized by France and incorporated into French West Africa. The Tuareg in Mali, as in other Sahelian states, resisted French rule, which involved the imposition of heavy taxes on their trade and the confiscation of their camels.² Tuareg opposition to the colonizers was quelled and the area was brought under French control.

While the northern regions of what is now Malian territory have a long history of relative affluence and prosperity, during the past century their importance has declined.³ The economic and political marginalization of northern Mali, based on economic inequalities and unequal political representation between the north and the south, began during French rule and has continued during successive Malian governments since independence in 1960. The French colonial power fostered a ruling class of people primarily from the south, which brought about a tension with the north. After independence, this ruling elite of ‘southerners’ in the new state used a range of strategies to control northern Mali as part of their efforts to assert political authority over a united national territory. These strategies included economic marginalization as well as various forms of political divide-and-rule strategies and favouritism and military control. The resentment created by this marginalization is an important factor behind the Tuareg rebellions, especially the most recent ones, which all have been based on grievances related to the economic and political conditions in northern Mali.⁴ The conflicts were later reinforced by the shortcomings of previous efforts to develop appropriate solutions to the rebellions since the first agreements in the 1990s.⁵

Mali, including its northern part, is a multi-ethnic society. For the country as a whole, various sub-Saharan ethnic groups constitute the majority of the population and the Tuareg represent only 5 per cent.⁶ In the three northern regions, however, the Tuareg account for around 33 per cent of the population and sub-Saharan Africans about 63 per cent, with the remainder

² Luengo-Cabrera, J., ‘Symptoms of an enduring crisis: prospects for addressing Mali’s conflict catalysts’, *Harvard Africa Policy Journal* (2 Apr. 2013).

³ Chauzal and van Damme (note 1), pp. 17–29.

⁴ Chauzal and van Damme (note 1), p. 29.

⁵ Balt, M. and Lankhorst, M., *Assisting Peacebuilding in Mali: Avoiding the Mistakes of the Past*, The Hague Institute for Global Justice, Policy Brief no. 5 (The Hague Institute: The Hague, Sep. 2013); and Pezard and Shurkin (note 1).

⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC), *An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security*, West African Studies (OECD: Paris, 2014), p. 191.

(about 4 per cent) being Arabs.⁷ In Gao, for example, the main ethnic groups are Arabs, Bambara, Bozo, Dogon, Fulani, Songhai, Soninkés and Tuareg, while in Timbuktu the population is made up of Arabs, Bambara, Bellah, Sarakolles, Peuhl/Fulani, Songhai and Tuareg Sorko.⁸

Over time, the core conflict between the Tuareg and the Malian state has degenerated and fragmented along ethnic lines, resulting in intra-community conflict and violence. Additional causes of intra-community conflict are the dominance of the Ifoghas over other ethnic groups, and ethnic and racial discrimination by the Arab and Tuareg groups. Thus, a complex mix of inter- and intra-community conflicts has developed in the three northern regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu.⁹ These conflicts are over natural resources for subsistence, such as land and water points for nomadic cattle breeding versus sedentary farming, as well as being related to competition for political and social power.¹⁰ They take place in an environment marked by socio-economic marginalization and deteriorating livelihood opportunities, as well as weak governance and lack of political inclusiveness. Furthermore, the failure by various Malian governments to implement their part of previous peace agreements, including pledges of investment for economic development in northern Mali, has spurred new rebellions.

The fragmentation of actors

The number of armed groups involved in the conflict and the relationships and divisions between them constitute another level of complexity in the peace process. The 2012 rebellion was composed of groups representing a combination of political and religious objectives, and these groups went through dramatic shifts in allegiances during the course of the conflict. The main actors are discussed below.

⁷ ‘Understanding Mali’s “Tuareg problem”’, Bridges from Bamako, 25 Feb. 2013.

⁸ Nyirabikali, G., Diarra, A. and Maiga, M. D., *Causes et manifestation des conflits au Mali: Une perspective de la société civile* [Causes and manifestations of conflicts in Mali: a civil society perspective] (CONASCIPAL and SIPRI: Bamako, 2014), pp. 22, 38, 52. This report is from field research in northern Mali conducted by the SIPRI/CONASCIPAL project ‘Civil society contributions to peace, security and development in Mali’.

⁹ Nyirabikali, Diarra and Maiga (note 8).

¹⁰ See e.g. Nyirabikali, Diarra and Maiga (note 8); IMRAP and Interpeace, *Autoportrait du Mali: Les Obstacles à la Paix* [Self-portrait of Mali: the obstacles to peace] (IMRAP/Interpeace: Mar. 2015); and Allegrozzi, I. and Ford, E., *Piecing Together the Jigsaw: Prospects for Improved Social Relations After the Armed Conflict in Northern Mali*, Oxfam Research Reports (Oxfam: Oxford, Oct. 2013). For a detailed study on Kidal, see Maiga, L., *La problématique des conflits inter et intracommunautaires dans la région de Kidal* [The issue of inter and intra-community conflicts in the region of Kidal] (CONASCIPAL: Bamako, Dec. 2015).

National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)

The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad, MNLA), the main Tuareg-led movement in the current rebellion, was founded in October 2011, when hundreds of Malians returned from Libya after the fall of Muammar Qadhafi's regime. It drew on a combination of the National Azawad Movement—one of the main proponents of an autonomous Azawad region—and the North Mali Tuareg Movement, and included returning fighters and rebels from previous uprisings.¹¹ The main goal of the MNLA is self-determination for the northern regions, referred to as Azawad. While the Tuareg people are primarily Muslim, the MNLA has a secular agenda and rejects violent extremist interpretations of Islam.

Ansar Dine

Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith), consisting of local Tuareg, Arab and other ethnic groups in northern Mali, was formed in 2011 by Iyad Ag Ghali—a former leader in all the Tuareg movements since 1991. After being forced to leave his diplomatic post in Saudi Arabia in 2010, Ag Ghali sought a leading role in the MNLA. When this was rejected, he formed his own movement in March 2012. Unlike the MNLA, Ansar Dine supports the goal of implementing sharia.¹²

High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA)

Other groups developed during the course of the conflict, sometimes for tactical reasons related to the peace negotiations. One of these was the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad, HCUA), which was formed in May 2013 by dissident members of Ansar Dine. The HCUA was created to secure political leverage for members of Ansar Dine after the United Nations Security Council made entrance to negotiations with the transitional government (under the Ouagadougou preliminary peace accord) conditional on rebel groups distinguishing themselves from terrorist groups.

Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA)

The Arab Movement of Azawad (Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad, MAA), initially known as the National Liberation Front of Azawad (Front de libération nationale de l'Azawad, FLNA), is an Arab-led rebel group formed in early 2012. The group consists of Arab militia fighters, which organized themselves to defend Timbuktu against the advance of the rebel forces (the MNLA

¹¹ 'Return of Tuareg fighters from Libya worries Mali authorities', The Observers, 11 Nov. 2011.

¹² Institute for Security Studies (ISS), *The Political Economy of Conflicts in Northern Mali*, ECOWAS Peace and Security Report no. 2, (ISS: Dakar, Apr. 2013).

and Ansar Dine). The MAA calls for substantial autonomy for northern Mali and describes itself as a secular organization with the aim of defending the interests of Arab people in that part of the country.¹³

Other armed groups

In response to the armed activities of the rebel groups, a number of self-defence groups or militias were formed, adding a further dimension to the crisis.¹⁴ Formed in 2009, Ganda Iso (Sons of the Land) was the largest of these during the violence in 2012–13. It is an offshoot of, Ganda Koy (Masters of the Land), which was formed in the mid 1990s by the Songhai to resist attacks from other groups.¹⁵ During the armed conflict in 2012–13, Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso received training and logistical support from the Malian Army.¹⁶

Thus, the armed conflict is marked by a significant fragmentation of actors. Furthermore, the constellation of armed groups has changed continuously over time, resulting in a different configuration of non-state armed groups that became the parties and signatories to the 2015 peace agreement. In particular, the three major armed rebel groups—the MNLA, the HCUA and the MAA—joined into a coalition, the Coordination of Azawad Movements (Coordination des Mouvements de l’Azawad, CMA) (see section III).

Violent religious extremism

Islam was introduced in Mali in the 9th century through Muslim Berber and Arab merchants, and was firmly established in the Malian Empire in the 14th century. Today, 90–95 per cent of the Malian population are Muslim (most of which are Sunni), with the remaining 5–10 per cent being Christian, people with indigenous religious beliefs and those with no religious affiliation.¹⁷

After the religious extremist groups defeated the MNLA they imposed a strict and violent interpretation of sharia, including various forms of public punishment, such as beatings, whippings and hand amputations. Religious extremism, in distorted salafist and other jihadist forms, has spread since

¹³ Felix, B. and Diarra, A., ‘New north Mali Arab force seeks to “defend” Timbuktu’, Reuters, 10 Apr. 2012.

¹⁴ ‘Mali civilians vow to take up arms against Islamist extremists’, *The Guardian*, 4 Dec. 2012; and Human Rights Watch, ‘Mali: rising ethnic tensions threaten new violence’, 20 Dec. 2012.

¹⁵ McGregor, A., ‘“The sons of the Land”: tribal challenges to the Touareg conquest of northern Mali’, *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 10, no. 8 (20 Apr. 2012); and Jamestown Foundation, ‘Mali’s self-defence militias take the reconquest of the north into their own hands’, 10 Aug. 2012.

¹⁶ Nossiter, A., ‘Saying Mali “Is our country”, militias train to oust Islamists’, *New York Times*, 5 Aug. 2012.

¹⁷ US State Department, ‘Mali 2014 International Religious Freedom Report’, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 14 Oct. 2015; and Malian Government, Institut National de la Statistique (INSTAT) [National Statistical Institute], *4^{ème} Recensement General de la Population et de L’Habitat du Mali (RGPH-2009)* [4th General Census of Population and Habitat in Mali (2009)] (INSTAT: Bamako, Dec. 2011), p. 74.

the early 2000s, in particular in the northern regions. As such, it is a relatively new phenomenon in Mali, which is a secular state, previously known to practice a moderate and tolerant form of Islam. In fact, Mali's constitution forbids religious discrimination and grants freedom of religion according to law.¹⁸ The recent surge in religious extremism and violence in northern Mali is largely an imported phenomenon, consisting of two main elements: (a) foreign influence over Islamic schools (madrasas); and (b) the rise of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its splinter groups.

Foreign influence over madrasas

Foreign influence over some of the madrasas (Islamic schools) in the region, as well as preaching by some of the foreign Islamic charities that have provided education and health services, is partly a response to the absence of public services and the need for humanitarian aid in northern Mali.¹⁹ While it is an increasingly common perception internationally that madrasas are “‘jihad factories” and outposts of a backward-looking medievalism’, the reality is that madrasas are generally characterized by diversity and are mostly embedded in modern society.²⁰ In general this is also the case in Mali, where some 25 per cent of the school-age population are enrolled in madrasas.²¹ However, the madrasas in the north have been influenced by Wahhabist and Salafist interpretations of Islam, through aid programmes supported by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations.²²

The rise of AQIM

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is by far the largest of the violent extremist groups in Mali. It is a product of a former Algerian group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat, GSPC), which was formed in 1998. The GSPC itself was as an offshoot of an Algerian group called the Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armé, GIA), which violently opposed the Algerian Government in the 1990s.²³ Following an effective counterterrorism campaign by the Algerian Government in the 1990s and early 2000s, the GSPC moved its operational base into Mali and linked up with al-Qaeda. In 2007 it changed its name to AQIM.²⁴ It is present across the Sahel region but primarily in Mali, Mauritania and Niger. However, its leadership is still dominated by

¹⁸ US State Department (note 17).

¹⁹ See e.g. Chauzal and van Damme (note 1), pp. 22–24.

²⁰ Hefner, M. and Zaman, M. Q. (eds), *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Muslim Modern Education* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2007), p. 2.

²¹ Hefner and Zaman (note 20), p. 27.

²² Chauzal and van Damme (note 1), p. 23.

²³ Algeria Watch, ‘Information on the human rights situation in Algeria’, Nov. 2000.

²⁴ Laub, Z. and Masters, J., ‘Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)’, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), CFR Backgrounder, 27 Mar. 2015.

Algerians: since 2004 it has been led by the Algerian Abdelmalek Droukdel, also known as Abou Mossab Abdelwadoud.²⁵

The objectives of AQIM have been described as ‘ridding North Africa of Western influence, overthrowing governments deemed apostate, including those of Algeria, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, and installing fundamentalist regimes based on sharia’.²⁶ Its tactics include guerrilla-style raids, assassinations and suicide bombings of military, government and civilian targets. AQIM raises funds through kidnapping for ransom and trafficking in drugs, arms, vehicles, cigarettes and people. According to some reports, it has raised over \$50 million from kidnappings alone in the past decade.²⁷

AQIM splinter groups

The other main violent extremist group that participated in the 2012 insurgency was the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mouvement pour le Tawhîd et du Jihad en Afrique de l’Ouest (MUJAO), which was formed in 2011 as an offshoot of AQIM. MUJAO imposed an extremely violent version of sharia during its occupation of Gao in late 2012.²⁸

Al-Mourabitoun (The Sentinels) is another offshoot of AQIM, established by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who came to Mali with the GSPC and led the establishment of extensive smuggling networks for cigarettes, drugs and people in order to raise funds for AQIM. Belmokhtar was a leading commander in AQIM until late 2012 when he was ousted and formed his own group, which in August 2013 merged with MUJAO to form al-Mourabitoun.²⁹ Subsequently, al-Mourabitoun has reportedly become a branch of AQIM, while at the same time calling itself ‘Al Qaeda in West Africa’, suggesting that it is, or aspires to become, a regional branch of al-Qaeda, in addition to AQIM.³⁰ Al-Mourabitoun claimed responsibility for the attack on the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako in November 2015, which left 20 people dead.³¹

²⁵ Stanford University, ‘Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’, Mapping Militant Organizations; and Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium (TRAC), ‘Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)’.

²⁶ Laub and Masters (note 24).

²⁷ Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium (TRAC) (note 25).

²⁸ Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium (TRAC), ‘Movement for the Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)’; and ‘Making sense of Mali’s armed groups’, Al Jazeera, 17 Jan. 2013.

²⁹ It was Belmokhtar’s group, called the al-Mulathameen [Those who sign in blood] Battalion, which took responsibility for the attack on the Algerian gas plant in Aménas in Jan. 2013. Morgan, A., “‘Mr Marlboro’ lands a seismic blow”, *The Independent*, 30 Jan. 2013.

³⁰ Al-Qaeda has a number of regional branches in the Middle East and Africa. The leaders of these branches have sworn *bayat* (an oath of allegiance) to Ayman al-Zawari, the leader of al-Qaeda, and each branch is tasked with running al-Qaeda’s insurgency and terrorist operations in its designated location. Joscelyn, T., ‘Mokhtar Belmokhtar now leads “Al Qaeda in West Africa”’, *The Long War Journal*, 13 Aug. 2015.

³¹ ‘Mali attack: more than 20 dead after terrorist raid on Bamako hotel’, *The Guardian*, 20 Nov. 2015; and ‘Profile: Al-Murabitoun’, BBC News, 16 Jan. 2016.

It is primarily through the income generated from organized crime that AQIM, MUJAO, al-Murabitoun and other violent extremist groups have been able to establish a base in northern Mali.

Organized crime

The sparsely populated territory with porous borders in northern Mali, as part of the wider Sahara-Sahel region, has gradually turned into an open space for organized crime, including trafficking in drugs, tobacco, arms and people, as well as other criminal activities, such as kidnapping for ransom.

Drug trafficking

The drug trade, in particular, has become one of the more lucrative criminal activities in Mali. A decade ago, West Africa emerged as a major transit point through which international drug cartels move cocaine from South America (Colombia, Peru and Bolivia) to Europe, subsequently followed by heroin and synthetic drugs.³² The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has estimated that in 2010, 18 tonnes of cocaine was trafficked through West Africa at a value of around \$1.25 billion, much of this through the coastal areas, but with an increasing amount via the Sahel route.³³ In 2011 the UNODC estimated that 30 tonnes of cocaine and almost 400 kilograms of heroin were trafficked in West Africa.³⁴ The UN Security Council has expressed 'growing concern about the serious threats posed by drug trafficking and related transnational organized crime to international peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel, as pointed out in the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel'.³⁵

The expansion of the drug trade in Mali has prospered through the involvement of non-state armed groups, in particular violent religious extremist groups, such as AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJAO. One study notes that 'The religious nature of the conflicts has gradually dissolved into illicit activities', such as during the 1991–2002 Algerian War, and that a 'similar evolution characterises the Islamist protagonists of the conflict in Mali'.³⁶ In recent years, trafficking in people, especially refugees, has also become

³² Gberie, L., 'Crime, violence and politics: Drug trafficking and counternarcotics policies in Mali and Guinea', Foreign Policy at Brookings, 6 May 2015.

³³ United Nations, Secretary-General, 'Statement at UN Security Council meeting on Drug Trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel', 18 Dec. 2013. This estimate is from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment* (UNODC: Vienna, Feb. 2013).

³⁴ Bustelo, M. G., 'A sense of déjà vu: illegal drugs in West Africa and the Sahel', *The Broker*, 28 Jan. 2015. See also Coulterwood, K., 'Drugs and money in the Sahara: how the global cocaine trade is funding North African Jihad', *International Business Times*, 5 June 2015.

³⁵ United Nations, Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2013/22, 18 Dec. 2013.

³⁶ OECD/SWAC (note 6), pp. 190–91.

an increasingly profitable activity. Using the same smuggling routes through the Sahara-Sahel for refugees trying to cross the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy, some 50 000 people were trafficked from sub-Saharan Africa in 2014.³⁷

Winning over the population?

Significantly, violent extremist groups have been able to ‘buy in’ to the ordinary population, through the sources of income they provide as a result of organized crime. For example, AQIM adopted a ‘seduction strategy’, aimed at stimulating the virtually non-existent local economy and providing social services to the local population. The strategy includes: (a) the recruitment of combatants and auxiliaries (e.g. guides, drivers, informers and paramedics); (b) the supply of foodstuffs (e.g. cereals, sugar and tea), fuel, tyres, spare parts and weapons; and (c) subcontracting hostage taking and keeping. It has resulted in whole families deriving their livelihoods from activities generated by AQIM.³⁸ In addition, AQIM has developed family ties through marriage between its men and young local girls.³⁹ Thus, AQIM has been able to take advantage of the weak public services and income-generating opportunities in the north and to gain support from selected parts of the population, while traditional chiefs have had difficulties in maintaining their authority.

This evolution aligns with the results of an analysis of a broader dynamic in West Africa, according to which poverty, social exclusion and the youth demographic bulge act as ‘key drivers in sustaining West Africa’s increasing profile in the global drug trade’.⁴⁰ The study concludes that ‘the lure of organised crime begins to represent not “greed” but “survival”’, and emphasizes ‘the urgent need to invest in alternative livelihood opportunities for groups vulnerable to organised crime’.⁴¹

Addressing organized crime in West Africa

Over the past decade, a number of international and regional policy frameworks have been developed to address organized crime in West Africa, such as that by the West Africa Strategic Assistance Framework (WASAF) on Serious and Organised Crime.⁴² WASAF points to the need to strengthen

³⁷ Coulterwood (note 34).

³⁸ Institute for Security Studies (note 12).

³⁹ Institute for Security Studies (note 12).

⁴⁰ Banfield, J., *Crime and Conflict: The New Challenge for Peacebuilding*, International Alert (International Alert: London, July 2014), p. 25.

⁴¹ Banfield (note 40), pp. 26–27. See also Shaw, M. and Reitano, T., *Peoples’ Perspectives of Organised Crime in West Africa and the Sahel*, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Paper (ISS: 16 Apr. 2014).

⁴² WASAF is an initiative of the G7 member states, together with Colombia, Portugal and Spain, as well as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Commission, Europol, Interpol, the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre—Narcotics (MAOC-N), UNODC and the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA).

the role of civil society in crime prevention and to increase awareness of the social and economic damage associated with organized crime. A report by the non-governmental organization International Alert on the importance of civil society engagement calls for significantly more funding and attention to ‘community-driven resilience initiatives as well as citizens’ demand for accountability and improved performance by governments in tackling organised crime, on the other’.⁴³

The challenges ahead

The peace process in Mali faces a number of challenges, despite taking a major step forward in June 2015 with the signing of the peace agreement. Longer-term strategies are required to address both the core conflict, related to the quest for self-determination by the Tuareg rebel movement, and the various types of inter- and intra-community conflicts. One challenge is to develop strategies that promote collaboration rather than cause further divisions. This will mean ensuring that decentralization and investment strategies for regional and local economic development, as well as international aid programmes, are free from community bias.

The numerous and fragmented non-state actors also pose challenges to the peace process. Recent research on the impact of the fragmentation of actors on peace processes has shown that internal divisions in non-state actors result in substantial credibility problems, as well as creating ‘incentives for states to pursue limited or partial settlements that are unlikely to resolve the underlying disputes’.⁴⁴ This is of particular relevance to Mali, where there have been divisions among the parties to the 2015 peace agreement (see section III). Moreover, some of the non-state groups and significant parts of the population believe that they have been left out of the peace process.

The linkages between armed political conflict, violent extremism and organized crime will continue to be a major problem for the peace process in Mali. Through external military intervention, the violent extremist groups were driven out of the cities and villages of northern Mali, but a sustainable solution to the problem of violent extremism will require a range of political, social, economic, religious and cultural approaches. Most of all, a shift is needed from the short-term reactive use of force to more preventive measures, including more regionally balanced public policies, increased space

⁴³ International Alert, *Tell it Like it is: The Role of Civil Society in Responding to Serious and Organised Crime in West Africa* (International Alert: London, 2015).

⁴⁴ Pearlman, W. and Gallagher Cunningham, K., ‘Non-state actors, fragmentation and conflict processes’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 56, no. 1 (Feb. 2012), pp. 3–15; and Gallagher Cunningham, K., ‘Actor fragmentation and conflict processes’, Memo, ‘The Political Science of Syria’s War’ conference, 8 Nov. 2013.

for dialogues and programmes for reaching out to youth at risk of being attracted to violent extremism.⁴⁵

Addressing violent extremism will necessarily involve depriving the extremist groups of their sources of funding, in particular from transnational organized crime and other criminal activity. Given the transnational character of most criminal activities and the financing networks, this will require both regional and broader international cooperation. Necessary steps would include (a) increased efforts to address illegal trafficking, in particular drug trafficking; (b) the reform and control of the financial system; (c) the mobilization of religious authorities to call on traditional codes of ethics to mitigate participating in illicit activity at the local level; and (d) measures to increase legal income-generating activities for the population currently involved in the criminal economy.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ International Peace Institute (IPI), 'L'extrémisme violent: Vers une stratégie de prévention dans l'espace francophone' [Violent extremism: towards a strategy of prevention in the Francophone area] (IPI: New York, Jan. 2016).

⁴⁶ Institute for Security Studies (note 12). See also Abderrahmane, A., 'Drug Trafficking and the Crisis in Mali', Institute for Security Studies, 6 Aug. 2012.