5. The implementation of the peace process in Mali: a complex case of peacebuilding

Overview

The peace process in Mali resulted in the signature of a peace agreement in mid 2015. The aim of the peace process is to resolve the conflict underlying the armed rebellion that started in northern Mali in January 2012 and raged throughout that year, causing large refugee flows that displaced roughly one-quarter of the population in the northern regions to other parts of Mali and to neighbouring countries.

Section I documents the key developments in the conflict between January 2012 and the signing of the declaration of a cessation of hostilities and the consensual roadmap in July 2014, which paved the way for peace talks in Algiers.

Although the finalization of the peace agreement was an important step in the efforts to build peace and achieve national unity in Mali, major challenges remain for its implementation. This was illustrated at the time of the signature, when two groups on the rebel side refused to sign until more of their demands had been addressed, resulting in two different dates of signature. While it is difficult to summarize the challenges ahead, section II seeks to identify and outline the four main ones: (a) the complexity of the conflict; (b) the fragmentation of the actors involved; (c) the increased presence of violent extremist groups in northern Mali over the past two to three decades; and (d) the growth in organized crime.

The primary conflict in Mali stems from the quest for self-determination by the Tuareg-led movement, which has manifested itself through regular uprisings or rebellions since Malian independence in 1960, but which has deeper roots in the history of Mali and the Sahel. Over time, and linked to the core conflict and the mismanagement of its resolution, a number of community conflicts have developed in northern Mali, both between and within communities, resulting in a complex dynamic of conflict. In parallel with the proliferation of conflict, there has also been a proliferation of armed groups to pursue the specific interests of various ethnic or social groups.

Furthermore, the peace process is faced with other sources of violence, especially religious extremism and organized crime, which have complex interlinkages with the armed conflict. These violent extremist groups participated in the fighting and eventually drove back the political Tuareg-led armed rebellion and transformed it into a religious insurgency. This had ominous consequences for

Malian citizens as the victorious groups imposed distorted and violent forms of sharia in the occupied areas of northern Mali.

External military interventions by French, African and United Nations forces pushed the extremist groups into hiding, but they have not been defeated and the population is regularly reminded of their existence. The fact that Libya has become another base for militant extremist groups, and in particular for the Islamic State following the intensified civil war in Syria, is another serious source of concern.

The signing of the 2015 peace agreement was the result of a year-long process of negotiation and consultations in Algiers, led by Algeria and with the participation of a number of international organizations and neighbouring countries. Section III provides an account of the main content, issues and parties to the peace agreement and the peace process. The overall goal is to address the root causes of the conflict as well as promote national reconciliation based on respect for the human diversity of the Malian nation.

The peace agreement itself has a strong emphasis on governance (including within the security sector) and socio-economic and cultural issues. However, overall peace process has a two-pronged approach, focusing on: (a) internal political and human security challenges; and (b) transnational violent extremism and organized crime.

The need for national dialogue and reconciliation has been an important issue in the peace process, and the peace agreement provides for the organization of a national conference ('assises nationales'), modelled after the 1991 national conference that led to the first democratic elections in Mali. The purpose is to facilitate a national political dialogue to renew the relations between state and society in Mali, and to facilitate a broad debate about the root causes of the conflict.

The objectives of the peace agreement are ambitious and their implementation will require consistent and committed participation and support from a broad number of actors. This is the fifth peace agreement between the Malian state and the Tuareg-led armed movement, and the recurring armed rebellions testify to the difficulty of resolving this persistent conflict—even aside from the additional challenges generated by violent extremism and organized crime.

ELISABETH SKÖNS

I. Introduction: a chronology of the crisis in Mali

ELISABETH SKÖNS

The signing of a peace agreement in Mali in mid 2015 marked the end of a more than three-year long process to reach an agreement to address the serious political and security crisis, in the aftermath of the armed rebellion that broke out in northern Mali in January 2012.

The start of the crisis

The current crisis began on 17 January 2012 when the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad, MNLA), a Tuareg-led group, started a series of attacks against government forces in northern Mali.[1] The MNLA were joined by armed religious extremist groups, including Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mouvement pour le Tawhîd et du Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO), as well as by deserters from the Malian armed forces.[2] An important impetus for the 2012 rebellion was the crisis in Libya and the fall of Muammar Qadhafi's regime, with his killing on 20 October 2011. This resulted in the return of hundreds of Malian men who had served in the Libyan armed forces and large flows of arms and ammunition into Mali.[3]

The difficulties faced by the Malian armed forces in northern Mali, with reports of serious shortages of arms, ammunition and supplies, including food, caused public discontent and protests on the streets of Bamako against the government.[4] Following a mutiny by low- and middle-ranking officers on 21 March at a military base in Kati, 16 kilometres from Bamako, the soldiers occupied the presidential palace in Bamako and announced a military coup on 22 March 2012.

The military junta, led by Captain Amadou Sanogo, forced the democratically elected President Amadou Toumani Touré into hiding, suspended the

[1] The build-up to the rebellion began in November 2010 with the formation of the National Movement of the Azawad (Mouvement National de l'Azawad, MNA). For a detailed overview and chronology of the crisis, see Thurston, A. and Lebovich, A., *A Handbook on Mali's 2012–2013 Crisis*, Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA), Working Paper no. 13-001 (ISITA: 2013), pp. 3–6.

[2] United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, S/2012/894, 29 Nov. 2012.

[3] Stewart, S., 'Mali besieged by fighters fleeing Libya', Stratfor, 2 Feb. 2012; Gwin, P., 'Former Qaddafi mercenaries fighting in Libyan war', *The Atlantic*, 31 Aug. 2011; and United Nations, Report of the assessment mission on the impact of the Libyan crisis on the Sahel region: 7 to 23 Dec. 2011, S/2012/42, 18 Jan. 2012.

[4] 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), p. 7.

constitution and dissolved the government. The coup contributed to the retreat of the state in the northern regions, and by late March the rebellion had taken control of the three main cities in northern Mali: Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. On 6 April the MNLA announced that it had accomplished its goals and proclaimed the northern regions—an area covering roughly two-thirds of the national territory of Mali—an independent state, referred to as 'Azawad'. On the same day as the MNLA's announcement, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the military junta reached a framework agreement that provided for the transition of power to civilian rule. It led to the formal resignation of President Touré and to the appointment of an interim president, the Speaker of the National Assembly, with the task of overseeing the return of constitutional order and democratic governance.

Infighting among the non-state actors

Soon after the MNLA declared the independent state of Azawad, a rift developed between the MNLA and the other rebel groups, Ansar Dine, AQIM and MUJAO, due to a clash of ideological and programmatic approaches. While the MNLA wanted to establish a secular state, the goal of the religious extremist groups was to establish extreme forms of sharia. During May to June 2012 the two Tuareg-dominated groups, the MNLA and Ansar Dine, engaged in a dialogue regarding the governing institutions of, and the place of Islam in, a future state of Azawad.[5] However, these efforts failed and were followed by a gradual shift in the balance of power from the MNLA to the extremist groups.

By 18 November 2012 Ansar Dine and the other religious extremist groups had fought and expelled the MNLA from the three major cities in the north, and divided up the occupied areas between themselves: AQIM controlled Timbuktu and the surrounding area; Ansar Dine controlled Kidal; and MUJAO controlled Gao, Menaka and other towns in the Gao region.[6] During the remainder of 2012 the people in these cities, in particular in Timbuktu, were subjected to the imposition of an extremely fundamentalist and violent version of sharia, involving gross violations of human rights.[7]

[5] Gaasholt, O. M., 'Northern Mali 2012: The short-lived triumph of irredentism', *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, vol. 35, no. 2 (Nov. 2013), p. 84.

[6] United Nations (note 2).

[7] Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2013: The State of the World's Human Rights* (Amnesty International: London, 2013), pp. 173–74; Human Rights Watch, 'World report 2013: Mali', [n.d.]; and Casey-Maslen, S. (ed.), *The War Report: 2012* (OUP: Oxford, 2013), pp. 122–23.

The start of the peace talks

As a result of mediation by ECOWAS, constitutional order was re-established in Mali on 25 April 2012. A transitional government was installed and a regional mediator, President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso was appointed for provisional peace talks in Ouagadougou. A significant step was taken on 3–4 December 2012, when the mediators were able to organize a tripartite meeting between the MNLA, Ansar Dine and an official Malian Government delegation, at which they agreed to create a framework for inter-Malian dialogue based on national unity, territorial integrity, religious freedom and the rejection of extremism.[8]

French intervention

On 10 January 2013 the crisis heightened as Ansar Dine advanced to Konna, a town in central Mali, 700 kilometres north-east of Bamako, with the intention of moving further south.[9] This prompted the Malian Government to call for external military intervention by the United Nations and France. On the same day, French President Francois Hollande ordered air strikes to stop the advance of the extremist forces. The French military intervention in Mali, Operation Serval, began on 11 January and over the next few days it cleared extremist forces from the area north of Konna and established bases in northern Mali. Subsequently, ECOWAS decided to accelerate the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), which had been mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 2085 on 20 December 2012—at that time only planned for full deployment by September 2013.[10] However, the deployment of AFISMA was delayed due to logistical, capacity and coordination challenges. France and the United States called on the UN Security Council to establish a UN operation and the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS eventually supported this proposal, although under specific conditions.[11] On 25 April 2013 the Security Council mandated the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), while authorizing French troops in Operation Serval to intervene in support of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat (at the request of

[8] 'Communiqué de presse du médiateur de la CEDEAO pour le Mali à l'occasion de la première rencontre entre le gouvernement de transition, le groupe ANSAR EDDINE et le MNLA' [Press release by the ECOWAS mediator for Mali at the occasion of the first meeting between the transitional government, Ansar Dine and the MNLA], Communications Office, Burkina Faso Presidency, 4 Dec. 2012; and 'Mali rebels agree to respect "national unity"', Al Jazeera, 5 Dec. 2012.

[9] 'Mali Islamists "enter" Konna after clashes with army', BBC News, 10 Jan. 2013.

[10] ECOWAS, 'Communiqué of the ECOWAS Chairman on Mali', 11 Jan. 2013; and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2085, S/RES/2085 (2012), 20 Dec. 2012.

[11] Van der Lijn, J. and Avezov, X., 'Peace operations in Africa', *SIPRI Yearbook 2014*, pp. 115–16.

the UN Secretary-General).[12] On 1 July 2013 authority was transferred from AFISMA to MINUSMA, which also incorporated troops from AFISMA. France started a phased withdrawal of its own forces from May 2013 and by 1 July 2014 Operation Serval was concluded.[13] Subsequently, France instigated a larger regional counterterrorism presence across the Sahel—Operation Barkhane—and French forces remained authorized to intervene in support of MINUSMA.[14]

Humanitarian consequences

The violent conflict had devastating consequences for the population, both as a result of the fighting itself and as a result of gross human rights abuses, in particular by the extremist groups. The UN reported numerous serious human rights violations, including 276 cases of rape (of which 68 involved children), as well as an unknown number of summary executions and forced disappearances without specific statistics.[15] Human Rights Watch reported 26 extrajudicial executions, 11 forced disappearances, and 50 cases of torture or ill treatment by Malian armed forces, and numerous although unspecified cases of human rights abuses by non-state armed groups, including arbitrary detention and assault.[16]

By the end of 2012, human rights and humanitarian organizations had reported several hundred cases of gender-based violence and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had reported 10 victims of punitive amputations by non-state armed groups, attributed to the application of sharia.[17] A November 2013 report from the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) found that a reasonable basis existed to believe that the following war crimes had been committed in Mali since January 2012: murder; mutilation, cruel treatment and torture; passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without due process; intentionally directing attacks against protected objects; and pillaging and rape.[18]

The conflict resulted in large-scale refugee flows. In the period between the start of the rebellion in January 2012 and the military intervention in

[12] United Nations Security Council Resolution 2100, S/RES/2100 (2013), 25 Apr. 2013. See also the MINUSMA website, <http://minusma.unmissions.org/en/about-minusma>; and the UN website on MINUSMA, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minusma/background.shtml>.

[13] Van der Lijn and Avezov (note 11), p. 116.

[14] Van der Lijn, J. and Smit, T., 'Global and regional trends in peace operations', *SIPRI Yearbook 2015*, p. 164.

[15] United Nations, Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali', S/2013/189, 26 Mar. 2013; United Nations, Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali', S/2014/1, 2 Jan. 2014; and Casey-Maslen (note 7).

[16] Human Rights Watch, 'World report 2014: Mali', [n.d.].

[17] Casey-Maslen (note 7), pp. 117, 123.

[18] Casey-Maslen, S., *The War Report: 2013* (OUP: Oxford, Nov. 2014), p. 155.

January 2013, a total of 376 828 people were displaced, including 228 920 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 147 908 persons displaced into neighbouring countries, mainly Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger.[19] This represented almost a quarter of the overall population of the northern regions, estimated at 1.3 million people.[20] In late 2013 there were 254 800 IDPs, with 42 300 IDPs having returned home.[21]

Elections and the start of the Algiers peace process

Early elections were required under the preliminary peace agreement of 18 June 2013 and international pressure for them to take place was also strong. Presidential elections took place on 28 July and 11 August 2013 and resulted in the election of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. Parliamentary elections followed on 24 November and 15 December 2013 and were won by the Rally for Mali (Rassemblement pour le Mali, RPB), a party created by Keita in 2001. The RPB won 115 of the 147 parliamentary seats of the National Assembly, although with a voter turnout of only 39 per cent.

With a democratically elected president and government in place, the scene was set for the formal peace negotiations to begin. On 24 July 2014, after a dialogue between the parties in Algiers (16–24 July 2014), the declaration of a cessation of hostilities was signed and the consensual roadmap was adopted. According to this roadmap, mediation between the parties would be led by the Algerian Government and held in Algiers, and this process started on 1 September 2014. Aside from Algeria, the mediation team consisted of: the AU, ECOWAS, the European Union (EU), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the UN and the neighbouring countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Niger.[22] The outcome of this process is described in section III.

From the outset of the peace process it was clear that there were a number of challenges to building peace in Mali. The signing of the peace agreement on two different dates, 15 May and 20 June 2015, testified to this. Within the coalition of the rebel groups, the Coordination of Azawad Movements (Coordination des Movements de l'Azawad, CMA), the two main groups—the MNLA and the High Council for Unity of Azawad (Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad, HCUA)—were not ready to sign on the first date. Furthermore, while external interventions forced the violent extremist groups into hiding, they remain a major challenge to the peace process in Mali.

[19] International Organization for Migration, 'The Mali migration crisis at a glance', Mar. 2013.
[20] International Organization for Migration (note 19).
[21] UNHCR, 'Global report 2013: Mali', p. 2.
[22] United Nations, Secretary-General, 'Chair's summary of high-level meeting on Malian political process', Press release, SG/2211, 27 Sep. 2014.

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

ELISABETH SKÖNS

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 Movements 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], *4éme 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 Coulderwood, 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] Coulderwood (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.

III. The Mali peace process and the 2015 peace agreement

GAUDENCE NYIRABIKALI

Mali faces a number of challenges in its ongoing peace process to address the political and security crisis that began in 2012. These include the political armed conflict in the northern regions of the country, poor governance, violent extremism and transnational organized crime perpetrated by extremist Islamist groups such as Ansar Dine, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mouvement pour l'Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO) (see section II). Three key steps in the peace process have been: (*a*) the installation in April 2012 of an interim government that ensured the country's leadership until August 2013; (*b*) the conclusion on 18 June 2013 of a preliminary peace agreement that enabled the holding of free and transparent elections leading to a new legitimate government; and (*c*) the negotiation of a comprehensive peace agreement that was officially endorsed by the parties to the political conflict on 15 May and 20 June 2015. This section examines how and to what extent these steps have contributed to addressing the root causes of the conflict and some of the other challenges hindering peace and security in Mali.

The 2013 preliminary peace agreement

On the 18 June 2013 the transitional government concluded a preliminary peace agreement with the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad, MNLA) and the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad, HCUA). This was in order to achieve a ceasefire and a certain level of security necessary for the organization and holding of free and credible presidential elections. Malian citizens across the country, including the three northern regions at the centre of the conflict, were able to register for and take part in the elections in July and August. According to an October 2013 report by the United Nations Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, the voting process was unhindered and free of election-related violence in all regions, with the exception of the Kidal region.[1] Attempts to enable the participation of Malian citizens in refugee camps in neighbouring countries had little success and a very low rate of participation.

In addition to the temporary ceasefire, deliberate efforts to ensure a smooth electoral process and the re-establishment of legitimate authority were made by other key internal actors, such as political parties and civil

[1] United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, S/2013/582, 1 Oct. 2013, para. 17.

society organizations, by engaging in inclusive dialogue and conducting civic education campaigns.[2] Democratic competition was maintained with more than two dozen presidential candidates, in spite of the need for peace and security. One analysis of the presidential elections suggests that most of the candidates who did not make it to the second round called on their supporters to vote for Ibrahim Boubacar Keita—both for personal interests and because they believed a victory for President Keita presented the best option for the country.[3] The involvement of the various political groupings was of crucial importance given the widely shared perception (in relation to previous peace processes) of rewarding belligerent groups and neglecting peaceful voices.

Although both presidential and parliamentary elections took place without violence in most of the country, state authority remained absent in the region of Kidal, which has remained under the control of the rebel groups since the start of the rebellion in 2012.[4] The 2013 French intervention that drove away the extremist groups from the northern regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu created an opportunity for the MNLA and the HCUA to re-establish their control over Kidal and make it their stronghold throughout the peace process.[5] State authority also remained fragile in Gao and Timbuktu, but it was only in Kidal that rebel groups barred access to government forces and representatives until the signing of the peace agreement in June 2015. For example, in May 2014 the Malian armed forces and the rebel groups clashed over an attempted visit to Kidal by the Prime Minister, Moussa Mara. The violence that ensued left 36 people dead and more than 3000 displaced.[6]

The preliminary peace agreement also contributed to the identification of the key issues and the various relevant stakeholders in the political conflict. Thus, although the agreement was only signed by two rebel groups, the MNLA and the HCUA, Article 24 of the agreement formally recognized the existence of other movements and called for their adherence to the terms of the agreement. This identification and recognition—aspects that underlie the foundation of an effective peacebuilding process—were further reinforced through the negotiation of the comprehensive peace agreement con-

[2] National Forum for Civil Society in Mali (FOSC), 'Démarrage du Cadre d'Interpellation des candidats à la présidentielle 2013' [Discussion campaigns with aspiring candidates to the 2013 presidential elections], [n.d.].

[3] Bah, B. and Boås, M., 'The Mali presidential elections: outcomes and challenges', Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 14 Oct. 2013.

[4] Koepf, T., 'Stuck in the desert: negotiations on northern Mali', European Union Institute for Security Studies, Alert no. 42, 13 Dec. 2013.

[5] Tardy, T., 'Mali: restaurer la paix dans un pays en guerre' [Mali: restoring peace in a country at war], European Union Institute for Security Studies, Alert no. 8, 6 Feb. 2015.

[6] UNICEF Mali, 'Unrest in Kidal', Situation Report no. 1, 22 May 2014.

cluded in March 2015 and formally endorsed by the parties to the political conflict on 15 May and 20 June 2015.

The 2015 Algiers peace agreement

Mali's 2015 peace agreement built on the achievements of the 2013 preliminary peace agreement, notably the commitment by two of the Azawad movements—the MNLA and the HCUA—to pursue a political settlement of their self-determination claim within a unitary state respecting the territorial integrity of Mali. The negotiation process was decisively set in motion by the ceasefire agreement on 23 May 2014 between the Malian Government and three Azawad movements—the MNLA, the HCUA and the Arab Movement of Azawad (Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad, MAA)—following clashes on 17–18 May 2014 in relation to the prime minister's attempted visit to Kidal (see above).[7] This agreement broke the status quo that had developed between the elected government and the rebel groups, and prompted a resumption of the political process for a negotiated resolution of the conflict. Although the ceasefire was negotiated by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Mali together with the chair of the African Union (AU), which was at that time assumed by President Abdel Aziz of Mauritania, the Algerian Government was instrumental in reaching a common platform between the three Azawad movements and their recommitment to negotiations.[8] This step initiated the formation of the coalitions that were party to the peace agreement.

The negotiations, which were to start on 1 September in Algiers, were tasked with a broader and more comprehensive mandate for addressing the conflict in Mali—beyond the narrower self-determination issue. Accordingly, the 24 July 2014 Consensual Roadmap for the Algiers negotiations also included other actors, such as the self-defence groups. These groups espoused the poor governance and socio-economic marginalization grievances shared by most of the population in the northern regions, but opposed the separatist aims of the Azawad movements. Therefore, in a quest to include all the relevant stakeholders, two main coalitions of non-state armed groups were identified as parties to the Algiers negotiations, in opposition to the Malian Government. The Azawad movements engaged in the negotiations as the Coordination of Azawad Movements (Coordination des Movements de l'Azawad, CMA), and the self-defence groups and movements as 'the Platform'.

[7] United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali, S/2014/403, 9 June 2014.

[8] United Nations, Security Council, Briefing to the Security Council by Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations in Mali, SC/11443, 18 June 2014.

Table 5.1. The two coalitions of non-state armed groups in Mali's 2015 peace agreement

Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA)	Platform
National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)	Coordination of Patriotic Movements and Fronts for the Resistance–I (CMFPR–I)
High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA)	Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-defence Group (GATIA)
Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA)	Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA)–splinter
Coalition of Azawad People (CPA)–I	Coalition of Azawad People (CPA)–splinter
Coordination of Patriotic Movements and Fronts for the Resistance–II (CMFPR–II)	

Source: United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, S/2015/426, 11 June 2015.

The building of these two coalitions was a significant achievement by the mediation team, which was headed by Algeria and included the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Mali and head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), representatives of the AU, the European Union (EU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OCI), as well as representatives of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Niger, and Nigeria. In addition to increasing the inclusiveness of the negotiations, the formation of the two coalitions reduced the fragmentation among the non-state actors and helped to frame issues into clear and negotiable political claims.

By the time of the conclusion of the 2015 peace agreement, the CMA was comprised of the MNLA, the HCUA, the MAA, a faction of the Coalition of Azawad People (Coalition du Peuple de l'Azawad, CPA) and a splinter group of the Coordination of Patriotic Movements and Fronts for the Resistance (Coordination des Mouvements et Fronts Patriotiques de Résistance, CMFPR–II). The Platform was comprised of the Coordination of Patriotic Movements and Fronts for the Resistance (Coordination des Mouvements et Fronts Patriotiques de Résistance, CMFPR–I), the Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-defence Group (Groupe d'Autodéfense Tuareg Imghad et Alliés, GATIA) and splinter groups of the CPA and the MAA.[9] The two coalitions are shown in table 5.1.

Additional efforts to broaden the negotiation process were made by involving civil society consultations on each side of the three respective parties to the negotiations: the Malian Government, the CMA and the Platform. Some

[9] Malian Government, *Feuille de Route des Négociations d'Alger* [Roadmap for the Algiers negotiations], July 2014. See also, United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali, S/2015/426, 11 June 2015.

popular consultations were also undertaken by the government prior to the launch of the negotiations, with the objectives of debating issues related to: (*a*) national reconciliation, social cohesion and peaceful coexistence; (*b*) local governance and decentralization; and (*c*) the issue of an accelerated development programme for the northern regions.[10] Although these consultations provided some legitimacy to the negotiation process, the brief nature of the meetings raised questions as to whether they allowed for a proper debate of the issues. At best, they emphasized the need for a broad and structured framework for popular consultations that could be implemented as part of the peace process. Within the new government structure, the Ministry of National Reconciliation offers the potential for the realization of such a framework, in collaboration with civil society.

However, despite the inclusiveness that characterized the Algiers negotiations and the involvement of a broad range of non-state actors, some domestic groups were still excluded. One such group was Ansar Dine, which is both locally and internationally considered to be a violent religious extremist group. AQIM and MUJAO were also excluded from the negotiations despite having a presence in Mali, but these two groups are transnational and thus not entirely circumscribable to Malian internal dynamics. The context of excluding violent religious extremist groups raises serious theoretical and practical questions about the inclusiveness principle and the implications for building sustainable peace in Mali. The prevailing complexity of the conflict appears to have led to a two-pronged approach, with differing means to address the internal political and human security challenges, on the one hand, and the violent extremism and other transnational criminal challenges that threaten Malian, regional and international peace and security, on the other hand. More specifically, and with regard to violent extremism, whether locally based or transnational, articles 29 and 30 of the 2015 peace agreement stipulate measures for combatting terrorism and related organized crime and drug trafficking. These measures include the setting up of special units and the development of regional mechanisms and strategies.

Some neighbouring states, such as Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger, are directly affected by the same transnational conflict dynamics and have therefore committed additional resources in support of the Malian peace process. A special regional cooperation mechanism, the G5 Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger), was initiated on 16 February 2014 to coordinate efforts in tackling security and development challenges that underlie the conflict dynamics prevailing in the Sahel. The G5 Sahel is endowed with a permanent secretariat based in Mauritania,

[10] Malian Government, Ministry of National Reconciliation and the Development of Northern Regions of Mali, *Les Assises Nationales sur le Nord* [National Conference on the North], Bamako, 1–3 Nov. 2013.

with the responsibility for elaborating a priority investment programme and a portfolio of development projects. These are meant to give high priority to security and the consolidation of democracy, including participatory processes in the development of less-developed areas within the respective countries.[11] Hence, the G5 Sahel objectives intersect very closely with those of Mali's 2015 peace agreement, and offer a much-needed constructive and systemic approach to addressing the root causes of conflicts both in Mali and in the Sahel region as a whole.

Addressing the root causes of conflict

The May and June 2015 peace agreement offers opportunities to address pervasive governance and socio-economic inequities that have been hampering the political development of the Malian state since its independence in 1960. In particular, it stipulates the following objectives:

> (a) To address the root causes of conflicts and promote a national reconciliation premised on a national unity respectful of the human diversity of the Malian nation; (b) To undertake an accelerated economic development strategy for northern Mali; (c) To establish a governance system that takes into account the geo-political and socio-cultural dimensions of the northern regions; (d) To restore security and translate into reality the rules of good governance, including transparency in the management of public affairs, respect for human rights, justice and fight against impunity; and (e) To combat terrorism and transnational organised crime.[12]

Self-determination and other governance-related aspects

On the crucial issue of self-determination, the 2015 peace agreement provides for a deeper decentralization of local governance through directly elected local representatives endowed with decision-making powers within the economic and social development of their respective regions, the management of collective goods and taxation, and the development of partnerships with other regions.[13]

Decentralization was a prominent goal in earlier Malian peace processes, especially the National Pact signed in April 1992. However, insufficient financial and human resources appear to have prevented adequate implementation. For example, a 2015 World Bank report on Mali indicates that 'capacity especially outside Bamako and the few urban centers is very weak, and decentralized entities as well as deconcentrated services, which in theory should support the communes, have little financial and technical means to

[11] G5 Permanent Secretariat, 'Le G5 Sahel' [The G5 Sahel], [n.d.].

[12] Malian Government, *Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Mali issu du processus d'Alger* [Accord for Peace and Reconciliation emanating from the Algiers process], May and June 2015.

[13] Malian Government (note 12), Article 8.

operate'.[14] Moreover, while the actual level of decentralized powers would theoretically enable a reasonable degree of self-determination, including collecting local taxes, the same report finds that 'communes receive very little public resources and are not able to collect much partly because of "incivisme" [civil disobedience], as the population perceive municipalities as corrupt, although there are strong local variations'.[15] Both past experiences and the prevailing context suggest the need for civil society to be strongly involved, not least for citizenship education but also to enhance technical skills and promote more collaborative relationships between public institutions and citizens.

Furthermore, and in spite of commendable provisions concerning local governance and the increased inclusion of northern Malians in public institutions, the 2015 peace agreement does not clarify how different social groups will be represented in local governance institutions, or how the northern regions will be represented in central government institutions. Given the prevailing diversity, and the inter- and intra-community conflicts emerging from a competition for economic and political opportunities, more concrete specifications are needed in order to facilitate implementation and avoid furthering conflict and exclusion.[16]

Addressing the military–civilian power relationship through security sector reform

Besides poor local governance and the marginalization of northern regions, another problem is the governance of security, and the relationship between civilian authorities and the military and security forces. Whereas democratic rule was introduced in 1992—with the first elected government and national assembly in office in June 1992—Mali's political development since independence has been dominated by authoritarianism and the involvement of the military in the political process. A generally low availability of technical expertise in the country has also led to an accumulation of responsibilities, with military officers serving as governors and in other public administration positions, often resulting in the abuse of power.[17] Thus, while the political and security crisis that has affected Mali since 2012 is complex and multifaceted, long-standing internal governance inequities persist as a significant cause of conflict. These dynamics are reflected in the 2015 peace agreement, which is characterized by a strong focus on reforms of the gov-

[14] World Bank, *Priorities for Ending Poverty and Boosting Shared Prosperity—Systematic Country Diagnostic: Mali*, Report no. 94191-ML, June 2015, p. 53.

[15] World Bank (note 14).

[16] Nyirabikali, G., 'Mali peace accord: actors, issues and their representation', SIPRI Essay, July–Aug. 2015.

[17] Poulton, R. and ag Youssouf, I., *A Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking*, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), UNIDIR/98/2 (UNIDIR: Geneva, 1998), p. 13.

ernance system and of the security sector, with emphasis on the inclusion and participation of citizens in the management of public affairs, including civilian oversight of the security sector.

Security sector reform (SSR) involves, among other things, the setting up of a national council for SSR with the responsibility for conducting an inclusive and deep review of national security and defence, taking into account the prevailing local, regional, national and international factors. Another innovative SSR mechanism is the establishment of local consultative committees on security, comprising state, local authority and community representatives, as well as representatives of traditional leaders.[18] Conceived to facilitate inclusion and informed policymaking within the security sector, these mechanisms may also reinforce civilian control of the security forces, which has remained weak within the emerging democratic process. They are also part of the local governance reform process as they seek to involve various representatives of the local population.

The relevance of the proposed SSR reforms will depend on their successful implementation. Among other things, this will depend on the abilities and involvement of citizens in taking advantage and making use of the participatory mechanisms. In this regard, civil society organizations have an important role to play in mobilizing engagement and enhancing citizen capacities to make an informed contribution to these new mechanisms.

National reconciliation and national unity

References to national reconciliation and national unity have been prominent both in the domestic discourse and in policy recommendations of many international organizations intervening in Mali since the 2012 rebellion. While the first two months of the rebellion were characterized by confusion and a lack of adequate information on the internal political dynamics, the 22 March 2012 coup revealed the extent of fragility, corruption and insecurity facing the Malian state and prompted quick reactions by ECOWAS, the AU and the UN to support the re-establishment of constitutional order and the democratic process.

The coup exposed the poor state of Mali's democratic project, which had been undermined by pervasive corruption, a lack of political inclusiveness and the lack of an effective political opposition. Recent research suggests that the achievements of the participatory democratic period of the 1990s were eroded by the politics of consensus that characterized President Amadou Toumani Touré's 10-year rule from 2002.[19] Against this back-

[18] Malian Government (note 12), articles 23–27.

[19] 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), p. 13.

ground, the national dialogue and reconciliation discourse that pervades the peace process may be interpreted as a call for and a commitment to a renewal of relations between the state and the society, especially in the light of the 1991 national conference that led to the first democratic elections.[20] Moreover, Article 5 of the 2015 peace agreement suggests the organization of a similar national conference during the interim period of its implementation.

The purpose of the envisaged national conference is to enable a debate among the various segments of the Malian nation on the root causes of the conflict, including the Azawad issue. This national political dialogue is expected to produce key elements for a solution that could help to transcend the country's painful past and value the contributions of its diverse identity groups in the promotion of a genuine national reconciliation. The realization of this national conference therefore constitutes an important step in the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement, given the level of expectations it raises among the Malian population and its significance in relation to other mechanisms to be developed as part of the peace process, especially the reform of local governance.

Pending its realization, some steps towards national reconciliation have been undertaken by both the interim government and by the elected government, in power since September 2013. One step is that a Commission for Dialogue and Reconciliation (CDR) was established by the interim government on 6 March 2013, with the purpose of facilitating dialogue for reconciliation among all the communities within Malian society. This institution has been carried forward by the elected government, albeit with a broadened mission, following its transformation in January 2014 into a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR).[21] In contrast to the CDR, the CVJR comprises a transitional justice dimension that emphasizes legal retribution, in addition to the promotion of community dialogue and understanding that was the main focus of the CDR.[22] Although the CVJR mandate incorporates a community mediation dimension, its emphasis on retributive justice may militate against national unity and peacebuilding, especially in the event of one-sided legal pursuits—so called 'victor's justice'.

The re-establishment of national territorial integrity

Acceptance of the principle of national territorial integrity was a precondition set for the non-state armed groups in order for them to engage in negotiations with the Malian Government. This principle also constituted an aim

[20] Wing, S. D., 'Briefing Mali: politics of a crisis', *African Affairs*, 29 May 2013.

[21] Malian Government, Decree no. 2014-0013/P-RM, Bamako, 15 Jan. 2014. See also 'De la CDR à la CVJR: ce qui va changer' [From the CDR to the CVJR: what will change], MaliActu, 10 Feb. 2014.

[22] Bratton, M., Coulibaly, M. and Dulani, B., *Malians Want a United Country, Post-Conflict Justice*, Afrobarometer Policy Paper no. 13 (Afrobarometer: 2014).

of the peace process, both under the transitional government and through the 2015 peace agreement concluded by the elected government.

Up until the end of 2015, however, national territorial integrity was not completely recovered. The government did not fully control the northern regions that were previously occupied by the rebels, nor did it hold the monopoly of force on the national territory. Since the signing of the peace agreement, terrorist attacks by violent extremist groups have intensified both in the north—including in areas controlled by the CMA and the Platform—and in the south of the country. The two rebel coalitions had also continued fighting each other, particularly in the Kidal and Gao regions, so the achievement of a ceasefire between them constitutes an important step forward in the peace process.[23]

Notwithstanding the security threats caused by violent extremist groups, improved cooperation between the three signatories of the agreement—the Malian Government, the CMA and the Platform—is needed in order to at least facilitate the reopening of public administration and the provision of basic services throughout the country. As a result of the conflict, shortages in education, health and justice-related services have heightened, and this has reinforced the sentiment among the population of a lack of progress in the implementation of the peace agreement.

Prioritizing socio-economic development for the northern regions

The Malian Government and many other stakeholders have recognized the socio-economic neglect and marginalization of Mali's northern regions. As previous peace agreements have, the 2015 peace agreement includes measures to accelerate the development of these regions and to raise them to the level of other regions in the country. Yet despite both national and international commitments in this regard, a number of reports stress a continued pattern of prioritizing traditional security over social and economic development, while deteriorating welfare conditions and a lack of livelihood opportunities (especially for the youth) reinforce insecurity.[24]

The EU's Sahel Strategy for Security and Development, for example, highlights three important but still 'hard' security-oriented initiatives: (*a*) the EU Training Mission Mali (EUTM Mali); (*b*) the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali); and (*c*) the EU CSDP Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger).[25] While acknowledging the interconnectedness between security and development, a field-based study on the Special Programme for Peace, Security and Development of Northern

[23] United Nations, Security Council, Secretary-General's Report on the Situation in Mali, S/2015/1030, 24 Dec. 2015.

[24] Helly, D. and Galeazzi, G., 'Making sense of the funding and implementation of Sahel strategies: part 2', Blog post, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), July 2014.

[25] European Union, 'The European Union and the Sahel', Fact Sheet, [n.d.].

Mali (PSPSDN)—a flagship multilateral development project launched in 2011—highlights a lack of effectiveness of projects already initiated and suggests that overcoming insecurity could be best achieved through enhanced socio-economic development.[26] The World Bank also indicates that implementation of the PSPSDN disproportionately supported military projects rather than development ones.[27] Given the extent of the socio-economic challenges faced by ordinary citizens in Mali, a more robust socio-economic focus is needed in order to achieve a visible peace dividend for the population.

The implementation of the 2015 peace agreement

Six months after the signing of the peace agreement, the implementation process has mainly focused on establishing the different institutions aimed at facilitating the implementation of the agreement and the reinforcement of security, including mediation and reconciliation between the three signatory parties.[28] For example, the CMA and the Platform engaged in direct talks in September and October 2015, which resulted in a common 'roadmap comprising the cessation of hostilities between the two groups, joint initiatives for inter- and intra-communal reconciliation, and the establishment of interim local administrations in the northern regions of Gao, Kidal and Tombouctou'.[29]

Achieving a permanent ceasefire and collaboration among the belligerent parties constitutes a significant positive step towards national reconciliation, which is a key objective of the peace agreement. Peaceful relations between the two main rebel coalitions will also facilitate understanding and peaceful coexistence in their respective communities and constituencies. Furthermore, collaborative relationships between these two parties will help to facilitate the implementation of other planned mechanisms, as exemplified above by their collaboration in the establishment of interim local administrations.

Despite this progress, however, a December 2015 report by the UN Secretary-General on the situation in Mali underlines complaints by the two coalitions about the continued lack of inclusivity regarding the integration of northern citizens in government and other public institutions, as well as insufficient consultation on institutional reforms. While the 2015 peace agreement offers opportunities for adequate redress of the inclusivity and participation issues that have marked all episodes of violent conflict in Mali,

[26] Ag Youssouf, I. et al., *Étude sur les Stratégies de Développement Économique et Social des Régions Nord du Mali (mai 2011–mars 2012)* [A study on economic and social development strategies for northern regions of Mali (May 2011–Mar. 2012)], Malian Government, Bamako, 2013.

[27] World Bank (note 14), p. 54.

[28] Malian Government (note 12), articles 57–62.

[29] United Nations (note 23), para. 5.

it also presents serious weaknesses as to the representation modalities that should accompany and facilitate the targeted inclusion and participation of the diverse groups of Malian society. As mentioned above, clearly defined modes of representation within the agreed governance reforms could facilitate the implementation of such reforms and reduce the risk of the re-emergence of rebel movements.

Finally, while some steps have been taken towards the elaboration of a specific socio-economic development strategy for the northern regions—in accordance with Article 36 of the 2015 peace agreement—the Joint Evaluation Mission in northern Mali (Mission d'Évaluation Conjointe, MIEC/Nord Mali), conducted from July to October 2015, stresses the need for an adequate response to the immediate needs of the population alongside the strategic planning for longer-term interventions.[30] It indicates that public administration prioritizes infrastructure and the reinforcement of capacities, while a quick recovery for local populations, particularly in rural areas, requires improvement in the delivery of basic social services such as water and health services. Although much policy research has highlighted the negative effects of compartmentalized and fragmented interventions on recovery, the prevailing context in Mali points to the persistence of this challenge. National and international actors alike need to incorporate both short-term and long-term perspectives in their interventions, in ways that provide relief and create resilience for the Malian population.[31]

[30] MIEC is one of the institutions planned in Mali's 2015 peace agreement to support its implementation. Article 36 stipulates that MIEC's role is to identify both the immediate needs, in terms of rapid recovery and poverty reduction, and the medium- to long-term development needs of the three northern regions. MIEC is comprised of representatives of the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and the United Nations. OECD, [Findings from the Joint Evaluation Mission in Northern Mali] (MIEC: African Development Bank, World Bank, Islamic Development Bank), July–Oct. 2015 (in French).

[31] Mosel, I. and Levine, S., *Remaking the Case for Linking Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development*, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) Commissioned Report (ODI: London, Mar. 2014); and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Transition Financing: Building a Better Response* (OECD: 2010).