The Role of the International Actors in the Resolution of Insurgencies in West Africa

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Abstract: Insurgent activities carried out by terrorist organisations in West Africa continue to escalate, especially in Mali and Nigeria. This has prompted many international actors – including the European Union (EU) –to consider urgent measures towards the subregion. Significant space exists in the knowledge and analysis of the evolving situation, both on the part of international actors and the sub-regional governments themselves. This represents a key short-term challenge which must be addressed. However, the role played by these international actors towards the management of crises caused by insurgent movements has rather been selective and uncoordinated and this could account for ephemeral successes recorded so far in dealing with the insurgency question. To examine the role of international actors in the crises in West Africa, this study beamed its searchlight on the intervention of France in their erstwhile colony, Mali. To carry out a detailed analysis, the Marxian political economy approach was adopted. Generally, the historical method of inquiry was also deployed in the study. During the course of the study, we found out that while Mali promptly appealed to the international community for assistance, other states in the sub-region like Nigeria has embarked on self-help which has so far yielded little results. Consequently, it is recommended that to end insurgency problem in West Africa, governments and the international actors should go after the financiers rather than the combatants. Also, both governments and the international community may have to collaborate to isolate and fight active and core leaders of the insurgency, while offering social and economic measures to pacify the support base (and to compete with social services previously rendered by the insurgent movement).

Keywords: international actors, Insurgent activities, Insurgencies, international community, insurgency.

1. INTRODUCTION

Armed non-state actors represent a critical challenge for security governance. They highlight the instability, insecurity and the unpredictable environment characterised by violence and destruction typical of latent conflict situations. Insurgencies have long moved outside the confines of state borders and make their power and influence felt internationally. Tan and Ramakrishna (2003:19), contend that the internationalization of the insurgents – and in the recent past increasingly terrorist threats make security governance crucial concerns. National security governance is inextricably intertwined with regional and global security governance. From this arises the responsibility of international actors to consider security governance at the state level as integral part of regional and global security considerations. Effective security governance leaves the state in control of security – i.e. a legitimate, responsible and accountable state having the lawful and legitimate accountability for the monopoly of force. If the state is neither legal nor responsible nor legitimate, insurgencies may be the last resort of the population, as well as potential allies of the international community, in fighting illegitimate and oppressive governments.

Insurgent movements consist of both armed opposition groups and their support bases. Insurgents employ guerrilla warfare (attacks against security forces) and terrorism (attacks against civilians). While some insurgent groups engage in domestic attacks, others engage in trans-border operations. Insurgency has been intensified by the resurgence of ethnicity and religiosity; enhanced movement of people and goods across transnational borders; free flow of ideas and technologies; and the black and grey arms market. Moreover, globalisation has given a new momentum to insurgency. In the opinion of Gunaratna and Schnabel (2006:6), the forces of globalisation catalyze and empower existing and emerging insurgent movements. Instead of resisting globalisation, even the most puritanical insurgent groups exploit the forces and opportunities of globalisation to advance their political aims and objectives. Benefiting from this rapidly-changing environment, the phenomenon of insurgency transform regionally and functionally. The forces of globalisation have facilitated the rise, growth, mobility and acquisition of special weapons and dual technologies by insurgent groups.

Insurgencies in the West Africa's post-Cold War period therefore differ markedly from the Cold War period in shape, size, structure and strategy. Contemporary insurgent groups are multi-dimensional organisations. As they challenge state authority ideologically, financially, administratively, and electorally, government and societal responses must be multi-pronged. Therefore, for insurgencies to be managed, both governments and the global community should be prepared to use a variety of instruments. These range from informational, economic, political, military and diplomatic efforts undertaken to influence the spawning, sustenance, escalation and de-escalation of insurgencies. This multi-faceted, multinational approach was adopted recently in Mali to quell the Tuareg's rebellion and in Nigeria where Boko Haram insurgents have carried out large scale terrorist activities and the subsequent response from the government by reaching out to neighbouring states of Niger and Cameron in helping to track down the fleeing guerrilla and terrorist fighters.

It has recently become more difficult for governments to defeat insurgencies, as in a more globalised world, cooperation, arms supplies, training and fund-raising are not limited to an insurgency's particular territory of operation. It is in this context that global efforts to quell insurgencies are as significant as ever and, possibly, may prove very effective than ever in suppressing the danger and aggression fabricated by insurgent activities.

One of the outcomes of the security challenges necessitated by organized armed movements in West African societies has been the preponderance of theories that attempt to account for the motive of the mutinous groups. For instance, unlike the Niger Delta militancy which predicated its desire for a fair deal from Nigeria on decades of conspiratorial neglect by the Nigerian state and multinational oil prospecting companies in the Niger Delta region, Boko Haram has refrained from articulating and formally table its complaints, besides its stated desire for the stringent interpretation and implementation of Islamic Law in Nigeria. The confusion also stems from the changing dynamics in the modus operandi of the sect. For example, its terror campaign, which at first focused on security outfits and personnel, has shifted to embrace civilians and non-government targets, and the Nigerian public generally.

The security problems in the sub-region have generated theories that are divided into two broad spectrums. One of the views is that the problem is essentially internal. The other sees external forces as the cause. The first view considers socio-economic factors, as well as entrenched political and religious differences in the West African societies. The external forces argument has two planks: one describes the problem as part of worldwide Islamic jihad and focuses on the Boko Haram and Tuareg's links with international terror groups such as al Qaeda or its allies as al Shabaab or the al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, (AQIM); the other, as in the case of Nigeria, views it as conspiratorial – a grand plan to accomplish the forecasted dismemberment of Nigeria as quickly as possible. Within the conspiratorial thesis is the sub-theme that Nigeria is being targeted by jealous and troubled neighbours. This perspective also associates it to the now 'unemployed' mutinous returnees from the Libyan crisis and the assortment of arms emanating from that tumult.

Are Nigeria and Mali merely convulsing from their many internal contradictions that successive leaderships have been unable to manage or resolve, or are external forces actually at work to undermine the two countries; if so, how and for what purpose? How relevant are the international actors to the security complexities in the sub-region? While each of the competing perspectives indeed may offer some valid approximation of the real cause(s) of West Africa's security challenge, the multiplicity has tended to frustrate a clear understanding of the problem and articulation of appropriate response to it. This paper sets out to examine the entire gamut of the propositions with a view to clearing, rather than adding to the confusion.

Objectives of the study:

The general objective of this study is to examine the role of the international community in the settlement of the problems posed by insurgents in West Africa with particular reference to Mali. While the specific objectives are:

1. to ascertain if poor governance, constitutional crisis, institutional and infrastructural decay and growing criminality were among the root causes of the crises in Northern Mali.

2. To examine if the slow response from the international community to the crises from the nascent stage enabled the Islamist fighters in the north to consolidate their control, boost recruitment, and prepare for a drawn-out insurgency.

3. To evaluate if the military option is the only viable option to defeating insurgent groups

4. And to demonstrate that a well coordinated international effort is somewhat effective in combating and confronting modern day sophisticated insurgent groups.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The pervasive trend of insecurity and its impact on development and growth in the West African sub-region, usually manifest in the economic front. Thus, the present crisis presents itself in our consciousness as a crisis of the economy or more precisely, a development crisis. Not surprisingly, it is in its economic manifestation that we see the problem of insecurity in its dramatic form. Thus, the theoretical framework adopted for the study is the political economy theory. The political economy theory as articulated by Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels (1848) and others have however been variously modified. Yet, the basic substance of the theory remains unchanged. For instance, the underlying argument of the political economy theory is that a state is in specific modalities of class interest. According to Karl Marx, the executive committee of the state exists but to promote and preserve the interest of the ruling class in negation of the interest of the masses. Like any other theory, the political economy theory seeks to provide a comprehensive, coherent, and self – correcting body of knowledge capable of the prediction, the evaluation, and the control of relations among socio – political and economic variables.

Political economy as a theory rests on the bedrock of advocating for a strong state and centralized economic planning. This would theoretically make it possible to deliberately influence resource control, mobilization and distribution to ensure non exploitation of the weak by the strong. However, an undeniable outcome of the few decades has been the diminishing authority of states, with far reaching implications for sustainable development in the developing world. Gradually, capital is determining not only policy, but the rate of resource exploitation and of course distribution of wealth. The activities of Transnational Companies (TNCs) for example, bring out this clearly. Such agents of big businesses have entrenched interests in economics, politics, sociology and international relations, besides the accelerating pace of technological innovations in agriculture, manufacturing, provision of services, new products and new processes. The repercussions have been ominous for poor and rural societies dependent on sophisticated Western technology.

Ake [1981:2] while discussing on the primacy of material conditions in political economy asserts that; those who are economically privileged tend to be interested in preserving existing-social order; and those who are disadvantaged by the social order, particularly its distribution of wealth, have a strong interest in altering the social order, in particular its distribution of wealth. In this way, the economic structure sets the general trend of political interest and political alignments. He contended that, in so far as there is economic inequality in a society, such a society cannot have political democracy because political power will tend to polarise around economic power. Furthermore, a society where a high level of economic inequality exists must essentially be repressive. This repression arises from the need to curb the inevitable demand of the have-nots for redistribution. It is obvious here economic and material conditions not only setting the pace of politics but also defining of coercion in society.

In corollary to the above, the strength of the political economy theory lies in the fact that it has been able to establish the point that all history is the history of class struggle between the ruling class and the dominated class. Lenin (1917) divided this class into two groups: the oppressed and the oppressor. However, some critics have noted that the theory largely attaches economic factors as the real cause of conflict, thereby marginalizing other important variables, such as ideological, cultural, psychological, and political. Such could be said of situations in Mali and Nigeria in explaining conflicts that have erupted not necessarily due to the class factor, but also based on religion, ethnicity, psychological and political differences. Thus, the theory remains important especially in the contemporary discourse in West Africa where security challenges and armed insurgencies have become a struggle between the oppressed (socially, economically and politically marginalized group of persons in the country) and the state.

From this context, the problems of insurgencies in West Africa on one hand and the roles international actors play in the resolution of the conflicts on the other hand can be located on the nature and character of the sub-saharan elite and the State; and the primordial incentives that push foreign powers to intervene whenever they deem fit. The elite wherever they exist have without doubt become a specific modality of class domination. According to Avweromre (2012:13) the essential features of the state form of domination results from the fact that the state lacks autonomy. The limited autonomy means that the state is weak to perform adequately her essential functions. The state is thus unable to mediate the struggle between classes and even within classes. The net effect of this is that politics, essentially the struggle for control and use of state power becomes warfare. Power is thus overvalued and security lies only in getting more and more power. This helps to explain why the state equally lacks legitimacy. The government in power is thus necessarily based on a very narrow range of interest. Without a veneer of legitimacy, the government is delinked from the society. This makes

the government including the dominant class utterly disinterested in development, equitable distribution of scarce resources and protection of personal liberties but only in keeping its hegemony. The need to hold onto its hegemonic interest means that, state resources are used to satisfy and promote the interest and values of those who support the ideals of the ruling class. Thus, since the people see the state as an alien force, they make no commitment to its policies; rather they seek to exploit them to their own advantage through various means including the use of violence, rebellious tendencies and self-help. It is in these crossroads that the current trends of insecurity and insurgent activities in Nigeria and Mali are located.

International political economy theory also posits that the powerful states in the international community will intervene in states where internal crisis tends to threaten their political, economic and strategic interests. And so, when France felt that both her economic, strategic and citizens' interests were at stake, they felt obliged to intervene in Mali not only to protect the aforementioned interests but also to preserve their hegemony among the francophone countries.

3. INTERNATIONAL ACTORS' INVOLVEMENTS IN INSURGENCY CONFLICTS

It is imperative that we lay a solid foundation of what constitutes the roles, functions, modus oparandi and justifications for the involvement of international actors in insurgency situations. So, in order to decide how to approach the challenges and threats of emerging and active insurgencies, the international actors need to make difficult judgments. In order to help take both moral and prudent decisions, it is essential to understand the justification for an insurgency as well as the justification for external involvement. The following questions are pertinent:

• What are the reasons, motivations, and objectives of an insurgent group?

• Should we differentiate among insurgencies? Are all violent insurgencies unjustified and illegal, or not?

• Are there moral justifications for insurgencies and the resort to violence in furthering their cause?

• Are there moral justifications for the use of violence, even at the expense of civilian casualties?

• Is the international community in some cases justified in using force to support the cause and military campaigns against insurgencies?

At this point, it is useful to draw some parallels with the dilemma that international actors face when challenged by the need (and possible responsibility) to engage in humanitarian intervention. This presents a very similar challenge to intervention for the purpose of preventing and managing insurgencies, representing an assault on the sovereignty over internal affairs of a state, notwithstanding how morally justified the use of force and intervention by external parties may be in redressing gross violations of human rights. However, in the words of Tan and Ramakrishna (2003: 23), there are mitigating factors: first, one must consider the human rights (and human security) record of the government in power. Second, has the government attempted to address reasonable demands of minority groups, of political opposition, or of border communities? Third, has the government sought political and non-violent solutions to existing problems? Fourth, has the government tried to engage groups with legitimate grievances in its attempts to avoid an escalation of violence? Finally, has the government provoked violence and/or counter-violence?

From the above, it follows that the international order, as much as domestic order, can only function if states and individuals follow the rules that govern their respective communities. Membership of the international community requires adherence to international standards and rules. However, membership also comes with entitlements and rights such as the right of the state to recognition and fair treatment by the international community and the right of the individual to be treated fairly and justly by his/her legitimate government. Poor and irresponsible governance may trigger opposition and – sometimes violent –resistance. In these cases, international sympathy is with those taking up resistance, as demonstrated by widespread international support for ethnic independence and suppressed secessionist movements in the early 1990s. This is in line with the position of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty's (ICISS) report *The Responsibility to Protect* that calls for the international community's responsibility to oppose and to impose sanctions on irresponsible states. In cases where the international community will not respond – it is reasonable to assume that the majority of crises, now and in the future, will continue to remain unanswered – local resistance is often the only and last resort to oppose poor and irresponsible governments.

In the view of Tunstead (1990: 213–218), while a moral case can be made for many insurgencies –particularly those that are fighting oppression and illegitimate governance – the legality of insurgencies and international responses to them must

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nevertheless be questioned. But within a domestic context, and from the perspective of governments, insurgencies are usually illegal and have to expect forceful resistance from governing authorities. And given the fact that some insurgent movements tend to be more powerful than the domestic government they fight against, especially as some of them have contacts with external armed terrorist outfits that can boast of possessing sophisticated armaments. These insurgent groups could pose a daunting task for the national governments to surmount. Hence, the need for the government to reach out to the international community for assistance or intervention. This was the situation that Mali found herself when the Tuaregs and other known militant groups took up arms against the constituted authority in Mali and fearing the worst could happen as a result of the sophistication of the insurgents, she had to seek support from the international actors and her erstwhile colonial master, France, for intervention.

4. THE ROOTS OF THE CRISIS IN MALI: THE TUAREG AGITATION:

According to Kwesi and Sarjoh (2009:5), Mali represents an acute combination of the challenges of poor governance, constitutional crisis, armed rebellion, and growing criminality, especially drug trafficking and illicit flows of small arms and light weapons. It therefore stands to reason at least at the surface that these factors in turn led to Mali's "twin crises": a fragile interim government after a March 2012 military coup and an occupation by Islamist groups in the north that sought to impose their strict application of sharia law.

Following the establishment of a multiparty democracy two decades ago, Mali was, until recently, considered a peaceful and stable country. Regular elections were declared generally free and fair. Wondering what went wrong in Mali, Bruce (2012:17) posited that despite socioeconomic challenges, Mali achieved notable milestones: political space for freedom of expression with numerous political parties and civil society organizations; improved institutions that seemed to strengthen the fledgling democracy; economic development that witnessed the emergence of a new generation of entrepreneurs; and a flourishing tourist industry that attracted foreign investment. However, this democratic and economic growth was interrupted by the March 2012 military coup that overthrew the president, Amadou Toumani Touré.

The coup took place only weeks before the presidential election scheduled for April 29th—an election in which the incumbent had already announced he would not participate, in order to cede power peacefully. In reality, many saw democracy as merely a cover for a corrupt system, and the coup received little condemnation from local groups. According to Bruce (2012:18) a poll conducted one month after the putsch showed that about two-thirds of Bamako residents supported the junta and its leader, the US trained army captain Amadou Sanogo. The junta, which called itself the National Committee for the Recovery of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (CNRDRE), justified its action by citing public disappointment with a corrupt and weak government, especially with regard to the president's handling of the decades-long recurring Tuareg rebellion, the most recent manifestation of which began in January 2012. However, we discovered that soon after the military coup, and encouraged by the political vacuum in Bamako, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), took control of northern Mali. The Tuareg rebel group proclaimed the independence of Azawad, an area that forms about 60 percent of Mali's territory and comprises the regions of Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao. This invalidates the claims of the military junta that their reason for the putsch was to restore the sanctity of Malian territories. In fact, soon after the military interregnum, the government lost more of her territories to the Tuareg rebels.

According to Mireille and Chris (2013: 4), Northern Mali had gone through several rebellions soon after the country's independence in 1960. The most recent northern rebellion ended with the 2006 Algiers Accord brokered by Algeria. This agreement stipulated the reintegration of Tuareg rebels into the Malian army and the reduction of troops in the north. Unfortunately the agreement was never fully implemented, which is considered to have made the situation worse and to have fuelled Tuareg grievances. But our observation is that the January 2012 situation, however, was different in that there was a strong Islamist current running through the traditionally nationalist northern rebel groups. Now, times and trends have changed, as groups like Ansar Dine (Defenders of Faith) had ties to ideologically motivated external groups such as Algeria-based al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Added to that was the proliferation of heavy weapons after the downfall of Libyan leader Qaddafi, making for a volatile situation.

After a series of successful military victories by the rebels early in the year 2013, the secular MNLA was quickly sidelined by local and external Islamist groups. This was due at least in part to the MNLA's lack of legitimacy vis-à-vis local populations. In fact, in its report on the Mali crisis, Crisis Group (2012) briefing drew the international community's

attention to the fact that none of the three actors sharing power in Bamako, interim President Dioncounda Traoré, Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra and the leader of the ex-junta, Captain Sanogo, enjoyed popular legitimacy. They have no vision to give a clear direction to the transition and formulate a precise and coherent demand for international assistance to regain control over the north, which represents more than two thirds of the country's territory. By mid-July, all major northern towns were under Islamist control and in the process of implementing a strict interpretation of sharia law, serious human rights violations were reported, with cases of arbitrary arrests, torture, public flogging and amputations, sexual and gender-based violence, summary executions, and the use of children in armed groups. Ansar Dine also destroyed a number of ancient holy sites in Timbuktu, some of which were listed as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites.

In the words of Global Counterterrorism Forum (available at www.state.gov/documents/organization/184042), in addition to Ansar Dine and AQIM (which is also active in northeastern Mauritania, Niger, northern Nigeria, and southwestern Algeria), a third Islamist group operating in northern Mali is the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), an offshoot of AQIM. The recruitment of militants from neighbouring countries like Libya, Mauritania, Niger, and Tunisia and the likely existence of dormant Islamist cells in the region have helped to internationalize the crisis, as has the presence of Boko Haram in Nigeria. While making a direct connection to the crises in the sub-region, Mireille and Chris (2013: 5) alluded that since launching sectarian violence in 2009 in northern Nigeria, Boko Haram has carried out terrorist attacks and killed hundreds of people, posing a growing threat to Nigerian national security. These developments have helped to highlight the emergence of terrorism as a serious threat in the West African Sahel-Sahara region, which needs to be taken into account when addressing insecurity in Mali and the region.

Adding to growing security threats in Mali is a flourishing criminal ecosystem, which at times earns the tacit support, and even participation, of Islamist groups. Weak security structures, limited state control over territory, and the previous administration's rampant corruption and collusion with criminal networks facilitated the development of an underground economy based on a range of licit and illicit goods. To this end, Wolfram (2012:3) maintained that exploiting largely porous national borders and building on old social and commercial networks established by nomadic families and communities across the Sahel-Sahara region, armed groups utilize trade routes from the old salt caravans to move various supplies including food, petrol, cigarettes, arms, and cocaine.

In fact, James and Phil (2009:10) argued that West Africa and the Sahel-Sahara region have become major transit hubs for the cocaine trade from South America to Europe and beyond while the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that since 2006, twenty to forty tons of cocaine per year have been trafficked through West Africa to Europe. This amounts to a minimum value of about $1 billion per year (UNODC, 2010: 11). In Mali, MUJAO in particular was identified as being involved in illegal activities and using religion only as a cover for drug and cigarette trafficking. Other criminal activities that generate cash flows include human trafficking (in particular, trafficking of migrants trying to reach Europe through the desert) and hostage taking and the payment of ransoms. These large flows of foreign currencies, especially Euros, illustrate the growing economic power of Islamists and criminal groups across the Sahel-Sahara region and explain why they were able to challenge governments, mount and maintain a vigorous and vicious warfare across the sub-region.

Against this backdrop, it is perhaps not surprising that a coup, an attempted secession, and an Islamist insurgency would derail Mali's budding democracy. However, largely due to the complicated and multifaceted nature of the crisis, the international community needed to intervene.

5. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE CRISES--- THE CASE OF MALI

Regional and international conflict-management efforts in Mali have followed a two-pronged approach. The first, and most preferable, was a political process to find a negotiated solution to both the constitutional crisis and the conflict in the north. Even in light of the military intervention, that process remained necessary for devising a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the conflict. The second prong initially coalesced around plans for a possible military intervention to neutralize the armed groups should the first prong fail. The military alternative was evidently accelerated by the French intervention.

6. THE ECOWAS MEDIATION PROCESS

For eight months after the March 2012 military coup in Mali, regional political attempts to tackle the conflict continued along two corresponding negotiation paths led by the ECOWAS-appointed mediator, President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso. First, negotiations with the coup authors sought to facilitate the reinstatement of constitutional order and complete the transition process; second, negotiations with actors in the north aimed to resolve the crisis there.

Few days after the military coup d'état, ECOWAS leaders placed embargo and suspended Mali from the subregional bloc and imposed legal, economic, and diplomatic sanctions on the country. These were followed by additional AU sanctions imposed against the leaders of the military junta and all those involved in attempts to destabilize Mali. According to the "Statement by H.E. Alassane Ouattara, Chairman of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government on the Positive Development of the Political Situation in Mali," pressure from ECOWAS and the international community quickly led to the signing of a framework agreement in early April, which enjoined the military junta to restore constitutional order by handing power over to the speaker of the National Assembly, Dioncounda Traoré. However, uncertainties about the frequent interference of the junta, an attack on the interim president by a vicious mob, and the prime minister's close links to the junta leader added to weakening the first post-coup government.

Following further ECOWAS pressure, the interim government was expanded in August 2012 to mobilize broader political forces and civil society. Though radical Islamists in the north were sidelined, the new cabinet included a minister of religious affairs—an attempt to account for the rise of Islam in a traditionally secular society. Five ministers close to the military junta kept their posts, as did the then ousted Prime Minister, Modibo Diarra. Despite his initial lack of experience, the prime minister retained power principally due to his perceived legitimacy, derived from his familial legacy. However, the ex-junta leader later deposed him, and Diango Cissoko was appointed as the new prime minister in December 2012.

Having facilitated the restoration of constitutional order with the appointment of an interim government, the mediation role saddled with President Compaoré seemed to temporarily lose momentum with regard to the situation in the north. Some Malians, particularly those concerned about regional leaders' interests, criticized the process. For the interim government, negotiation was only possible with the Tuareg rebels on the basis of respect for Mali's territorial integrity. Initially, only the MNLA was recognized as a rebel group, while AQIM, Ansar Dine, and MUJAO were considered criminal factions. The question of a specific part of the territory that would be considered as Tuareg was also omitted, on the grounds that northern Mali is home to other non-Tuareg ethnicities.

According to participant remarks during the roundtable discussion "Peace and Security Threats in the Sahel-Sahara Region: Assessing the Response, Devising the Way Forward," held at the International Peace Institute in New York on September 7, 2012, it had been suggested that serious negotiations were not possible as long as the Malian government was unable to exert pressure on the various armed groups.

Nonetheless, the ECOWAS mediator, the UN Office for West Africa, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General in West Africa Said Djinnit began talks with secular MNLA and the Islamist Ansar Dine in November 2012, with the support of Algeria and Mauritania. The two groups were encouraged to disassociate themselves from terrorists and engage in negotiations with the transitional authorities. Ansar Dine in turn affirmed its denunciation of terrorism and organized crime, and its readiness to join the political dialogue. These efforts led to direct talks between MNLA, Ansar Dine, and the transitional government: a preliminary meeting took place in early December in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, which brought representatives from the three parties together for the first time.

The Malian government, the MNLA, and Ansar Dine recognized the need to establish an inter-Malian dialogue framework, comprising representatives from the multifaceted communities in the north. In preparation for this dialogue, the parties committed to ending hostilities, avoiding all forms of abuses and violence against civilians, facilitating the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, and establishing a secure environment devoid of terrorism and transnational organized crime. Far from gaining the agreement of all Malian actors, these initial talks broke down in early January 2013, after Ansar Dine called off a ceasefire and launched an attack on the central town of Konna on January 10th.

The new split within Ansar Dine between moderates seeking a political solution and radicals with strong links to al-Qaida made prospects for a political resolutions look dim. This is especially true in light of the ongoing military offensive. According to Xan Rice, negotiators will now likely need to focus on the newly formed Islamic Movement for Azawad, which called for negotiations and asked for autonomy rather than independence for northern Mali.

7. MILITARY INTERVENTION

In parallel to the ECOWAS negotiation track, a military strategy was devised. This track, cautiously agreed on by multiple international actors, threatened the possible deployment of an ECOWAS-led international force to resolve the situation in the north if the rebels did not cede power peacefully. The plan was soon superseded, however, when the sudden southward move by Islamists toward Bamako and the strategic Sévaré military airport precipitated France's swift decision to respond to Interim President Traoré's call for military assistance.

With the understanding that a peaceful solution was the ideal and that the use of force should remain the last resort for dealing with terrorist groups that are excluded from the political process, the UN Security Council provided the legal framework for the planned intervention. Since the beginning of the Malian crisis in 2012, the Security Council has adopted three resolutions on the situation: Resolutions 2056 (July 2012), 2071(October 2012), and 2085 (December 2012). In Resolution 2071, the Security Council declared its readiness to respond to the Malian transitional authorities' request for an international military force to assist the national armed forces in recovering the occupied territories in the north. Following the UN Secretariat's presentation of a "strategic concept" for resolving the crisis and a harmonized concept of operations (CONOPs) in compliance with Security Council Resolution 2071, the Security Council authorized the deployment of the proposed African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) for an initial period of one year in Resolution 2085. The Council called on member states to contribute troops to the international force and on regional and international organizations to provide training, equipment, and other logistical support.

Upon the request of the UN Security Council, the ECOWAS leaders adopted harmonized CONOPs for the deployment of AFISMA. The CONOPs was developed by the Malian military and ECOWAS officers and planners, with the assistance of military experts from the AU, the United Nations, and the European Union, as well as Algeria, Canada, France, Germany, Mauritania, Niger, and the United States. The regional bloc announced the availability of a 3,300 inter-African force ready to intervene as soon as it would be authorized, with troops coming mostly from Nigeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso, as well as other West African countries and some non-African states.

Despite ECOWAS's insistence on the urgency of the planned intervention, some observers and countries in the Sahel and Sahara considered the regional bloc inadequate to intervene in northern Mali. Many of those who would contribute to a force face their own interrelated challenges domestically. Niger, for instance, has a similarly marginalized Tuareg population and a history of northern rebellions that is intertwined with Mali's. Likewise, both Algeria and Mauritania face an insurgency by AQIM and initially expressed reservations about a military intervention. Algeria's fears materialized in January 2013, when al-Qaida linked militants seized dozens of hostages at an internationally managed gas field for four days, leading to the deaths of thirty-nine hostages and twenty-nine kidnappers. Though the Algerian government indicated the attack had been planned for more than two months, likely for ransom motives, the kidnappers claimed their action was in retaliation for the French intervention against

Islamist militants in northern Mali launched five days prior and in reaction to Algeria granting France permission to use its airspace.

Due to its military capabilities, intelligence services, and experience battling Islamist extremism along its lengthy border, Algeria is one of the most important actors for any military operation aimed at neutralizing the Islamist and criminal groups operating in northern Mali. Before the French intervention, any military action by ECOWAS without Algeria's explicit support was deemed to carry serious risks of failure and indeed of escalation, with Algiers possibly playing a proxy game with any of the myriad groups active in the region. With the need to include a reluctant Algeria in a regional strategy, an effective response to the Malian crisis will probably need to be found with the inclusion of the Sahel's "core" countries or in conjunction with the AU. ECOWAS would continue to support the restoration of constitutional order, while the AU would handle the situation in the north.

The AU provides a broader forum than ECOWAS, bringing together the core countries from the Sahel that are not ECOWAS members. The AU can also play a key coordinating role, as it facilitates the involvement and support of powers further afield, like South Africa and Egypt, in a pan-African effort. In addition, the AU serves as a bridge between the sub-regional ECOWAS and the international community. For instance, the AU endorsed the ECOWAS CONOPs prior to its submission to the UN Security Council. The AU Peace and Security Council also requested that the UN Security Council authorize the planned deployment of AFISMA for an initial period of one year.

With CONOPS, the AU also submitted a Strategic Concept for the Resolution of the Crises in Mali to the UN Secretary-General, which backstops the two-pronged efforts taking place under the auspices of ECOWAS. The strategic concept was presented as an important step toward greater coordination between Mali and the international community in efforts to restore stability in Mali and the Sahel-Sahara region as a whole.

 One critical issue is the funding of a proposed operation, initially estimated to cost $300–500 million. To this end, the UN Security Council invited member states to provide financial support and in-kind contributions to facilitate the deployment and implementation of its mandate by AFISMA. The council also planned to consider options for the provision of voluntary and UN funded logistics support packages to the mission. It further requested the establishment of a trust fund through which member states could provide earmarked and non-earmarked financial support to AFISMA, and it called for the organization of a donor conference to solicit contributions to the trust fund.

Organized on the margins of the AU summit in late January 2013 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the donor conference concluded with pledges amounting to $455 million. The AU itself earmarked $40 million for both AFISMA and the Malian Defense and Security Forces, and pledges were made by the European Union, China, Germany, India, Japan, Sierra Leone, and the US, among others. Additional contributions were promised in the form of training, equipment, and ammunition. With the number of troops raised to 5,700 by ECOWAS leaders and additional troops pledged by Chad, Burundi, and Tanzania, the initial mission's budget has more than doubled and now stands at $950 million. The AU has asked the UN Security Council to provide AFISMA with the necessary support package funded through assessed contributions, to ensure its reliability and sustainability.

At the EU level, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and France endorsed the ECOWAS CONOPs following its adoption. In December 2012, the EU approved a Crisis Management Concept for a fifteen-month military operation, which will see up to 500 troops sent to Mali for training and reorganization of the national security and defense forces to allow for the restoration of the country's territorial integrity under civilian authority. Following the French intervention, European countries—including Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom—also committed to contribute to military efforts by France and West African countries present in northern Mali by offering logistical and material support, as well as financial assistance for the

Africa-led intervention force being set up.

Moreover, as part of its partnership with the AU, the EU has replenished its funding allocations for activities supported under the African Peace Facility to about $250 million until 2014, of which more than $150 million has been earmarked for peace support operations, including the operation in Mali. For AFISMA, the African Peace Facility will cover non-military expenditures including daily allowances and transport costs of the troops deployed on the ground.

As of late February, close to 5,800 African troops and nearly 4,000 French troops have been deployed to Mali. Having retaken the main cities of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal, France has handed over responsibility to African forces, while rendering some skeletal and backroom military services. However, the relative ease with which France, the Malian army, and African troops retook the north after nearly a year of occupation has caused concern that rebels are biding time to launch an insurgency-style conflict. Additionally, worries about human rights compliance by various national contingents, the unpredictability of funding, and the ability to draw in more diverse troop contributions have all led some UN Security Council members, including France, to suggest the establishment of a UN peacekeeping force.

Regardless of the final composition of the new peacekeeping force, the critical challenge remains to create the political conditions necessary for a consolidated and sustainable peace. The Malian crisis is considered by many to be the tip of an iceberg that carries serious long-term consequences for physical and human security in other Sahelian countries.

8. CONCLUSION

International policymakers face complex challenges in addressing the situation in Mali because the threads of Mali's political and security crises are entwined, and are also intertwined to a tricky regional context.

However, the fact that the Sahel-Sahara region—one that for so long has undergone slow-motion crises with little attention—is now finding a more prominent place on the agenda of the international community is, on the whole, a positive development. But, the multiplicity of actors, positions, and strategies seeking to resolve the crises in Mali and the Sahel-Sahara region add new challenges to the multi-pronged nature of the cross-border threats to peace, stability, and

development in the region. While the French intervention in Mali has shown some initial success, responsibility for a long-term solution to the persistent insecurity in the country and the broader Sub-Sahara region ultimately lies with the governments in the region. The divergence of views among these countries over the most appropriate approaches demands a step forward from the authorities in Mali, whose ownership and leadership in addressing the crisis have been acknowledged, despite their limited capacity and resources. In the same vein, because the government is highly unlikely to succeed if it acts alone, enhanced support and continuous mobilization of the international community remain essential.

At the regional level, an agreement seems to have surfaced, which advocates for a combination of national efforts to restore constitutional order and facilitate reconciliation while also pursuing military action in Mali's north to enforce peace and tackle the growing threat of terrorism. While intervention temporarily weakened the joint criminal and Islamist threat in Mali, the military intervention will not resolve the structural causes of the conflict in the West African countries, nor the chronic crises in the Sahel and Sahara. The Malian crises have helped to throw more light on the region's multifaceted challenges. However, for nations in the subregion and the international community, the problem remains to make a choice to establish investments that will guarantee enduring growth, strengthen state institutions, and assist broad popular participation as basic conditions for long-term peace, stability, and development.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The international community engagement must prioritize a national dialogue on reconciliation, social inclusion, effective representation and power sharing. Current proposals on EU assistance include support to energy reform, educational improvement in northern Mali, strengthening intelligence gathering, justice sector reform and arms control are encouraging. However, all of these proposals address the symptoms of political dysfunction rather than the root causes. The international community could show real ambition by supporting reinstatement of the rotational presidency to cement stability.

More specific initiatives must be explored within existing bilateral cooperation to promote social regeneration in the northern parts of Mali and break the vicious cycle of poverty, inequality and industrial stagnation that blights the region. The international community, particularly the EU, should clearly reflect this priority in its next development programming cycle. For national actors in Mali, Nigeria and their global partners to best tackle the Boko Haram and Tuareg insurgencies, it must be viewed within the context of wider political, economic and security challenges facing them. An approach must be fashioned out to help Nigeria address macro-level issues that breed recurrent national instability beyond Boko Haram itself.

A more imaginative use of sub-regional body ECOWAS is required, given the implications of challenges in Nigeria and other West African countries for the Sahel region and vice-versa. Clearly, Nigeria's regional weight dictates that it will play a major role in the implementation of the European Sahel Strategy (ESS), alongside other smaller but important states in the southern fringes of the Sahel including Senegal, Burkina Faso and Chad. An expanded strategy should take account of interlinked insecurity drivers including Boko Haram, drug trafficking and chronic state weakness in the region, and more systematically link them to addressing insecurity in the wider Sahel. A broader regional approach also has the potential to prevent insurgents from establishing their presence in Cameroon, Chad and Niger, where close ethnic affinities with northern Nigeria portend heightened risks. This could also mitigate the destabilizing effects of arms and militants dispersed southwards from Libya, a development already fuelling a secessionist war in Mali.

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