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Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): Terrorist Networks Infiltrate Northern Mali

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Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): Terrorist Networks Infiltrate Northern Mali

Adebayo E. Adeyemi ^α & Mahmoud N. Musa ^σ

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I. BACKGROUND

The conflict that erupted in Northern Mali in January 2012 was not entirely new and unexpected. It was a continuation of the age-long and deeply rooted Tuareg struggle. Indeed, it has been termed the fourth Tuareg rebellion. What makes the difference between this and the previous insurrections was the way the struggle was coordinated and prosecuted this time around by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and the sudden change in the orientation from the rebellion of autonomy to secession due to the infiltration and hijack of the struggle by Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its allied Islamist militant groups which led to the eventual declaration of the State of Azawad.

destruction of properties, the southern part of the country was seized by young Military juntas who President Amadou Taumani Toure, suspended

constitutional rule and dissolved Government institutions.

Also new, was the way the Malian army were brutally suppressed, humiliated and chased out of their garrison in the northern region thus culminating in the 22nd March 2012 mutiny and coup as well as the foreign military intervention in the crisis, thereby placing the conflict at the top of international political agenda for the first time.

The role played by AQIM and its allied forces which changed the course of the Tuareg's struggle is very crucial. This is the focus of attention of the Paper. In this case, the origin of AQIM, its profile, sources of finance and the nature of the group's terrorist activities in North Africa which led to its expulsion and consequent resurgence in Mali, were examined in the paper. Also, factors conducive for the infiltration of AQIM in North Mali, the hijack of the age-long Tuareg struggle by AQIM and the secession of Azawad from Mali, including the roles played by the dual factors of the return of the Migrant workers and armed Tuareg combatants from Libya, as well as the impact of the 22nd March 2012 mutiny and Coup D'état in Mali, were investigated.

Additionally, the impact of the Malian crisis on the People and Government of the country, and the role of the international community, importantly the French Military intervention alongside the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) which led to the unconditional expulsion of AQIM and its rebel groups and the timely restoration of democratic governance in Mali were highlighted in the Paper.

II. AL-QAEDA IN ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQIM)

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is an Islamic militant organization evolved from the Algerian militant group known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). [1] The GSPC, an offshoot of the Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Arme or GIA) was formed in 1998 following the decline in the popularity of the GIA as a result of its brutal tactics and extreme violence. [2] The GIA it would be recalled launched a brutal insurgency against the Algerian government in 1992, resulting in the killing of thousands of Algerian civilians, when the Algerian's military backed government cancelled the country's electoral processes set to be won by an Islamist Party, Islamic Salvation

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Front (FIS). [3] A combination of the intense pressure from the Algerian Security services and internal divisions over tactics within the group led to its disintegration. [4] Following the announcement by Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda's second in command, the GSPC officially joined forces with Al-Qaeda in September 2006, declaring France an enemy and indicating that they would fight against French and American interests. [5] Consequently, following the "blessed union", in January 2007, the group formally changed its name to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) to reflect its alliance with Al-Qaeda from which it receives material and financial support. [6] With this development the U.S State Department, amended the GSPC designation to reflect the change on February 20, 2008. AQIM is listed on the United Nations Security Council Sanctions Committee's

consolidated list 1267 (Al-Qaeda) as an entity associated with Al-Qaida. AQIM has also been listed as a terrorist organization by Canada and New Zealand while the UK lists the group as the Salafist Group for call and Combat (GSPC). [7]

Adopting the name Al-Qaeda brought the GSPC the instant support of tens of thousands of online Jihadists, many of who now perceive the group as fighting on behalf of Al-Qaeda. [8] As indicated by Ait-Hida and Brinkel, seeing itself as a religiously motivated organization, "AQIM's public declarations begin with citations from the Koran and Hadith Religion plays a role in the recruitment of members, the legitimization of extreme violence and in the internal debate on the selection of targets of attacks". [9]



Figure 1: Map Showing AQIM's Areas of Operation

Source: Global Security, "Pan-Sahel Initiative" Available online from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oefts-maps.htm>

AQIM is essentially a regionally-focused terrorist group [10] located in North Africa drawing its followers largely from the Algerian Islamists group. [11] Its reach has also expanded across the Sahel region South of the Sahara Desert, attracting members from Mauritania, Morocco, Niger and Senegal as well as from within Mali. [12] In an effort to weaken and ultimately overthrow the Algerian government which it seeks to replace with Islamic rule based on a 'pure' interpretation of the Quran, AQIM carried out series of attacks against the Algerian military and attempted to assassinate the

Algerian President, Abdul-Aziz Bouteflika in 2007. [13] Over time, AQIM has adopted a more anti-Western rhetoric and ideology with the motivation to carrying out attacks on Western targets in the region and abroad particularly on France and American targets and kidnapping Western tourists for ransom. [14]

According to Jonathan Masters, "most of AQIM's major leaders are believed to have trained in Afghanistan during the 1979-1989 war against the Soviet as part of a group of North African Volunteers known as 'Afghan Arab' that returned to the region and radicalized

Islamist movements in the years that followed". [15] AQIM has called for the freeing of the Maghreb countries of North Africa from Spanish and French influences and for the regaining of the lost Islamic regions of Southern Spain, known as Al-Andalus. AQIM has stated its support for Islamists extremist violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Chechnya and Palestine. It has also called on Muslims across North Africa to forget Western interest. [16]

The basic principles objectives of AQIM in North Africa according to Geoff Porter include ridding the region of western influence (in particular the French and the America) 'apostate unbeliever' governments in countries like Algeria, Mali, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, with the overall goal of installing fundamentalist regimes based on Islamic law or Sharia. [17] Abdelmalek Droukdel popularly known as Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wadoud is an ardent believer and group leader of this ideology. It was under his leadership that France was declared by AQIM as its main target. [18]

AQIM is one of the region's wealthiest and best armed militant group. Its members engage in kidnapping for ransom and criminal activities to finance their operations with limited financial and logistical support from Algerian expatriates and AQIM supporters abroad, mostly in Western Europe. [19] In the words of Oumar Ould Hamaha, a notorious Islamist Commander in the deserts of West Africa, "the source of our (AQIM) financing is the Western countries they are paying for Jihad". [20] Hamaha stated this in reference to the huge ransoms militants collect in exchange for the release of their victims in the region. As noted by Adam Nossiter: Kidnapping is such a lucrative industry for extremists in West Africa, netting them tens of millions of dollars in recent years, that it has reinforced their control over northern Mali ..." [21]

Apart from the huge financial resources realized from kidnapping foreigners for ransom, AQIM also generate enormous funds from other criminal activities in the Sahel-Saharan region to finance its operations. This include, direct involvement in drugs trafficking or through protection offered to smugglers across the desert, arms trafficking, armed robbery, money laundering as well as booty from captured enemy armies in the region. [22] AQIM has also used kidnapping to obtain political concessions such as securing the release of Islamist prisoners. [23] Al-Qaeda also provides material and financial support to AQIM. [24]

In furtherance of its ideology, AQIM continues to perpetrate criminal activities culminating in the 11 December 2007 bombing of the UN Headquarters in Algiers killing 17 UN Staff and numerous innocent Algerians while several others were severely injured. [25] AQIM had also intensified its efforts in kidnapping for ransom and conducted small scale attacks and ambushes on security force. However, in 2011, AQIM intensified its terrorist activities with the attempted

assassination of the Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz on 7 February 2011 when a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) was detonated on his convoy in Nouakchott, injuring nine soldiers. [26]

Following crackdowns by the Algerian government forces in the north and south of the country over the years, a splinter group of AQIM sought refuge in Northern Mali and Niger among the Tuareg where it capitalized on the armed rebellion launched in January 2012 by the MNLA, a Tuareg group, to conquer the Northern part of Mali.

III. AQIM AND THE HIJACK OF THE TUAREG'S STRUGGLE

With the nature of AQIM's ideology, its activities and pressure from the Algerian government forces, coupled with the porous nature of the Tuareg region in northern Mali, it is not difficult therefore, to understand why and how AQIM secured a safe haven in that part of the country, took advantage of the situation of the Tuareg and became very active in the region. The weak security infrastructure and poor economic situation in Northern Mali serve as impetus for the infiltration of AQIM in the region and the eventual hijack of the age-long Tuareg struggle for autonomy from the Central Government in Bamako.

Over the years, the Tuareg have been confronted with enormous challenges with grave economic implications. There was the problem of drought and desertification occasioned by climate change, culminating in famine, food shortage, and malnutrition and ultimately resulting into refugee crisis. [27] Despite this, the Malian government remained insensitive to the plight of the Tuaregs as it failed to provide economic support to the people in a way that will ameliorate their suffering and rescue them from a state of perpetual poverty. [28]

In the absence of positive attitude towards their plight from the Malian Government by way of investment and provision of infrastructure that make life worth living, the Tuaregs continue to feel hopeless, frustrated and marginalized. It was not difficult therefore for militant groups and other criminal organizations to exploit the conditions of extreme poverty in the region. Given the level of poverty and frustration especially among the youth in the Tuareg region, there was hardly any alternative to the temptations of getting involved in drugs trafficking, armed robbery, smuggling, kidnapping or some other clandestine activities including militancy and terrorism.

For instance, in an interview with Magharebia in Nouakchott, a former Al-Qaeda member who goes by the alias Nouredine confirmed that "Al-Qaeda relies primarily on the Maghreb region to recruit young healthy elements that are enthusiastic to rush to all kinds of

adventure". [29] He went further to explain the reason for this development. According to him, "what facilitated the task are widespread unemployment, poverty and frustration among young people in the region making them easy prey in the claws of Al-Qaeda". [30]

AQIM exploited the vacuum created by the negligence of the Malian government to gradually supplant itself in the northern part of the country, penetrating the local people and surreptitiously co-opting them to its fold. With time, and in the absence of any viable alternative, the local Tuareg population gradually learns to accommodate their presence "in part, due to the organization's ability to develop the local economy and provide basic services in an impoverished region that felt abandoned by its host government". [31] Making use of monies originating from ransoms paid for the release of kidnapped Westerners and other questionable sources, AQIM bought itself goodwill, friendship and networks by distributing money and medicine, treating the sick and empowering them. These relationships were cemented through marriage, not necessarily into powerful families but to poor local women as a way of winning the support of the impoverished ordinary local Tuareg people. [32]

Gradually, the organization changed its tactics and rule of engagement. In addition to the distribution of raw cash and provision of small welfare benefits, AQIM complemented its efforts with religion indoctrination. Through the use of the Islamic teachers, it began the preaching of its own brand of Islam, 'Salafism' while handsomely rewarding the religious teachers. [33] It was through this combination of strategies – economic, religious, military, political and humanitarian influences that AQIM penetrated the local communities in the Northern region of Mali and co-opted them into its fold. It was not a coincidence therefore, when in 2012, AQIM took advantage of the age-long political crisis in the Tuareg region to consolidate its hold and control on the region by joining forces with the MNLA to wage war against the Malian military forces to prosecute the secession of the Azawad region for the ethnic Tuareg people, through the support of the Ansar Dine, an Islamist militia led by veteran Tuareg fighter Iyad Ag Ghaly. [34] However, shortly after this 'victory', crisis broke out between the MNLA and Ansar Dine. Tensions came to a climax when a dissident splinter group of AQIM members broke off to form the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) and violently expelled the MNLA out of key cities in the region. The group then supported Ansar Dine to entrench its power in the region, imposed Sharia law, levying taxes and issuing papers stamped with the State of Azawad seal. [35]

As Ansar Dine and its allied militant Islamist forces tightened their hold on the northern part of Mali, they engaged in hostage taking, focusing in particular on expatriates from Britain, France, Japan, Ireland and the United States. They also accelerated the

vandalization of tourism and religious sites especially in Timbuktu, classified by UNESCO as protected World Heritage Sites. Such acts of destructions were justified on theological ground based on Salafist Ideology. For instance in an interview with Magharebia, the Ansar Dine spokesman, Sanda Ould Bouamama, justified the destruction of such sites when he stated that:

"What is UNESCO? We don't care about the words of any entity because God is one without partners. All UNESCO's calls are just polytheism. We are Muslims and we don't revere any shrines or idols". [36]

These chains of destruction, the high handedness of the militant Islamist groups and the ambitious encroachment into the southern parts of Mali, attracted the attention of the international community to the crisis situation in Mali and the need for its urgent intervention.

However, it is important to note that the 'success' achieved in the prosecution of the fourth Tuareg Rebellion which led to the temporary secession of the State of Azawad, was made possible not only by the infiltration of AQIM in the Tuareg's struggle, but additionally, by other related incidences such as the return of Migrant workers and Tuareg combatants following the Libyan revolution as well as the impact of the 22 March 2012 Mutiny and the Coup D'état in Mali. Each of these factors would be briefly discussed for a better appreciation of the dynamics of the Tuareg's struggle in Mali.

IV. THE RETURN OF MIGRANT WORKERS AND FORMER TUAREG COMBATANTS FROM LIBYA

The Libyan revolution which eventually led to the death of its leader, Moammar Gaddafi was accompanied by reverberating impact across the globe. However, the brunt of the challenges that emerged as a result of the crisis bore greater consequences for the neighbouring states of Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Niger, Tunisia, Mauritania and Mali. [37] This is particularly so because of the influx of unemployed returnees, including migrants workers, former combatants from Libya and armed Tuareg and Toubou elements into these countries, as well as the impact that their return have on the Socio-economic and political stability of the affected countries as a result of the inflow of illicit arms and ammunition into the region and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs). [38]

Within a relatively short period of time, these countries and in particular those in the Sahel region had to contend with the influx of hundreds of thousands of traumatized and impoverished returnees as well as the inflow of unspecified and unquantifiable numbers of arms and ammunitions from the Libyan arsenal. [39] The aftermath of the Libyan crisis posed a broader threat to peace and security across northern and western Africa

and is clearly among the many factors that have aggravated the recent rebellion in the northern region of Mali. [40]

As reported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the crisis resulted in some 318,000 third country nationals in five of Libya's neighbouring countries of Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Niger and Tunisia and about 11,230 from Mali. [41] This figure does not include returnees who crossed the borders without the assistance of IOM. According to Government estimates, the total number of returnees, including unregistered cases, is approximately 420,000, out of which 200,000 are in Niger, 150,000 in Chad, 30,000 in Mali and 40,000 from Mauritania of which the vast majority were males of between 20 to 40 years old with low level of education. [42]

As in every humanitarian crisis, migrants left Libya under extremely difficult circumstances. They lost their savings and possessions and became victims of extortion and human rights violation. This led to psychological trauma, feeling of shame and embarrassment. Their inability to earn and provide for their families further compounded their socio-economic situation. [43] Their return therefore further placed additional burden on their home countries especially in the face of chronic food insecurity due to climatic conditions. [44]

In the absence of any gainful employment and with the availability of arms and ammunitions at their disposal, the unemployed youth and returnees in the northern parts of Mali engaged in crimes of all sorts such as car theft and armed attacks including trafficking in drugs. They also became potential recruit by criminal and militant groups in the region and rapidly became radicalized.

When therefore there were attacks on major towns in the northern region of Mali early in 2012, signaling the start of a renewed armed rebellion by the Tuaregs, the services of these jobless teaming Tuareg youths and former combatants including mercenaries became handy. With the array of arms and ammunitions in their possession, they were able to participate effectively in armed insurrection. [45] The greatest beneficiary of this situation was the AQIM which has long been active in the region and which has been looking for opportunities to create a separate state to be governed by Sharia law. AQIM joined hands with the ex-combatants and its MNLA, MUJWA and Ansar Dine Islamist militants to prosecute the Tuareg rebellion, over run northern Mali and ceased control of the region. [46]

V. THE 22 MARCH 2012 MUTINY AND COUP D'ÉTAT

Unlike the situation during the first Tuareg rebellion during which the Malian Government deployed the Military to brutally repel the Tuareg insurrection, this time around, the poorly equipped Malian Army of just

about 7,000 men proved no match for the Tuareg militants who armed with the Libyan arsenals successfully captured major towns and cities in the northern region, including Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal, Tessalit, Aguel, Menaka and Anefis and chased the Malian soldiers out of their garrisons in the region. [47]

The humiliation of the Malian Army in the hand of the rebels led to the 22 March 2012 Mutiny by the disaffected soldiers from the units defeated by the armed Islamist militant groups against the government of President Amadou Toumani Toure for his ineffective response to the Tuareg rebellion. [48] This eventually resulted in a military coup organized by non-commissioned and mid-ranking Officers of the Malian armed forces led by Captain Amadou Sanogo, Chairman of the National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State (Comité National de Redressement pour la Démocratie et la Restauration de l'Etat (CNRDRE) The Coupist immediately suspended constitutional rule and dissolved Government institutions barely a month to the planned April 2012 general elections in Mali. [49] The President was accused of not doing enough to tackle Islamist extremists, drug trafficking and the needs of the armed forces" thus demonstrating its lack of capacity and ability to deal with the new Tuareg rebellion. [50]

Domestically, the Malian ruling elite was perceived in many quarters as guilty of corruption, nepotism and abuse of power. Within the armed forces, especially among the rank and file, a wide-spread sense developed that the central Government had neglected its obligation, diverting significant resources from the counter-insurgency efforts in the north to enrich a few corrupt senior officers. The capacity of the military units deployed in the north thus became progressively weakened as a result of poor logistics, inoperable equipment and low morale. [51]

The mutiny and the resultant military coup accelerated the total collapse of the northern region of Mali as it provided unfetter opportunity for Ansar Dine and its allied Jihadist AQIM rebels to tighten their grips over the whole of the northern region and eventually declared the independence of the Tuareg state of Azawad. This led to the emergence of a terrorist state under strict Sharia law in the largely secular Muslim northern Mali akin to the Al-Shabaab terrorist state in Somalia and the Taliban Al-Qaeda terrorist state in Afghanistan before the US-led invasion in 2001. [52] This development, coupled with the inability of the Malian military junta to deal with the crisis situation that engulfed the whole of the country, brought tension to bear within and outside Mali and necessitated the intervention of the international community.

VI. IMPACT OF THE MALIAN CRISIS

The insurgency in Mali brought about a considerable impact on the Malian government and its

people. Since clashes erupted in the northern region of the country between armed rebels and government forces in early 2012, hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes, thus adding to the woes of the civilian population already severely affected by the drought and food insecurity that prevails in the Sahel region. [53] As a result of the presence of heavily armed rebel groups, northern Mali remained largely

inaccessible to international humanitarian Agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) while cases of violations and human right abuses continued unabated. [54] This situation triggered the internal displacement of an estimated 204,000 people who were forced to live in extremely difficult circumstances, while more than 200,000 Malian found refuge in neighbouring Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso. [55]

Table 1 : Malian Refugees by Country of Asylum as of 1 November 2012 [56]

S/No.	Country of Asylum	Malian Refugees
1	Niger	61,880
2	Burkina Faso	35,895
3	Mauritania	108,953
4	Algeria	1,550
5	Togo	20
6	Guinea	44
7	IDPs in Mali	203, 840

In the same vein, human rights situation in Mali, especially in the northern region deteriorated as a result of the renewed armed rebellion in January 2012. Extremist Islamist groups of Ansar Dine, MUJWA and AQIM were reported to have committed gross human rights abuses, including "summary and extra-judicial execution, sexual and gender-based violence, recruitment and use of child soldier, torture and looting". [57] Immediately after taking over the northern region of Mali, the group imposed and implemented Sharia law, and in the strict and extreme interpretation of the law, committed extra-judicial execution, flogging and stoning among other crimes. [58]

The political and security situation in Mali also have grave economic implications as key socio-economic indicators and living conditions of the population were grossly affected. Throughout the country, economic and basic public services were severely disrupted, resulting in an economic growth rate of -3.1 per cent in view of revenue shortfall. The Sectors most affected include construction, agro and manufacturing industries, in addition to all branches of the service sector, including trade and financial services. [59] As a result of the crisis, the Government was compelled to write off as unrecoverable, 400 billion CFA francs (\$800 million) of the targeted revenue of 1.34 trillion CFA francs, for 2012 while spending plans were slashed accordingly. Also, the suspension of external

financing by donors as a result of the situation in the country caused a state budget shortfall of 391 billion CFA francs (\$782 million) in 2012. [60]

Due to the rising prices of food and fuel, inflation rate in 2012 rose to 5.3% compared to 3.5% in 2011. This resulted among other things in the closure of many hotels, tourist establishments and tertiary institutions; slowdown in the Secondary Sector particularly in construction industries; and a decline in foreign direct investments. [61]

Also, in view of the poor agricultural production, trade disruption, and the low level of public investments, poverty incidence increased a percentage point from 41.7% in 2011 to 42.7% in 2012. With the decrease in the purchasing power of the population, coupled with the higher food and oil prices it was estimated that the average inflation rate would continue to rise for a while. [62]

As the size of the population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Mali and the number of people fleeing the country look set to grow in 2013, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners have been working on contingency plans. Such plans include protection and assistance of refugees in neighbouring countries, as well as coordination of humanitarian actions for IDPs in Mali. [63]

Table 2 : UNHCR 2013 Planning Figures for the Situation in Mali [64]

S/No	Type of Population	January 2013		December 2013	
		Total in Country	Total Assisted by UNHCR	Total in Country	Total Assisted by UNHCR
1	Malian Refugees in Burkina Faso	40,000	40,000	50,000	50,000
2	Malian Refugees in Niger	50,000	50,000	60,000	60,000
3	Malian Refugees in Mauritania	70,000	70,000	80,000	80,000
4	IDPs in Mali	203,840	15,000	350,000	70,000

VII. DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY INTERVENTIONS IN MALI

International action aimed at assisting the Malian regular forces retake the lost Northern region and return the

country into a democratic government was well coordinated. Immediately after the Malian coup, the Heads of State and Government of the ECOWAS suspended Mali from participating in all the Community's activities and imposed a range of political, diplomatic and economic sanctions on the Military Junta. The Organization thereafter, on 27 March 2012, appointed President Blaise Compaoré, of Burkina Faso, to mediate in the crisis and impressed upon the coup makers to revert to constitutional order. [65] At their Extraordinary Summit in Abidjan on 29th March 2012, ECOWAS leaders served the notice of the possibility of the deployment of a 3,000 regional standby force to assist in securing the territorial integrity of Mali against the Tuareg rebellion if the rebels refused to accept a peaceful solution to the conflict in the north. [66]

On 6 April the Military junta and ECOWAS signed a Framework Agreement which provided for a series of steps for the restoration of constitutional order in Mali as consistently called for by the UN Security Council and the international community as a whole. The Ouagadougou political framework of agreement among other things led to the formation of the Government of National Unity (GoNU) backed by a Presidential Decree in August 2012. [67] Headed by Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra, the government has 31 Ministers drawn from the representatives of almost all the registered Malian's Political Parties, including four women and five close allies of Captain Sanogo, the junta's leader. [68] However, as argued by David J. Francis, this arrangement did not help the political and military situation on ground but rather emboldened the Ansar Dine rebels and their Islamic allies who took advantage of the situation not only to consolidate their military control over the Azawad region, but also continue to advance southward. [69] According to him, this imminent advance on Bamako by the military strong and coordinated Islamist extremists and their AQIM allies, forced the international community into action. [70]

In view of the gravity of the threat the activities of terrorism and criminal groups in northern Mali poses not only to the region but as well to the entire international community, the United Nations Security Council at its 6898th Meeting held on 20 December 2012, unanimously adopted Resolution 2085 (2012) under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to authorize the deployment of an African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) to support efforts by national authorities to recover the North. [71]

Prior to the authorization of the deployment of AFISMA and the call for contribution of troops, an

Extraordinary Summit of West African leaders was held in Abuja, Nigeria, on 11 November 2012 to discuss the modalities of an international military intervention in the political crisis in Mali. The Summit was preceded by the Meeting of Officials of ECOWAS, the AU, UN, EU and other partners in Bamako as part of the efforts to wrap up the details of the operation to flush out the rebels. [72]

Guided by the provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution 2071 of 12 October 2012, the Summit adopted the harmonized concept of operations for the deployment of the African led international force in Mali as developed by the Malian Military and ECOWAS Officials with the assistance of military experts from other countries and international partners and organizations. [73] It was this ECOWAS-AU-facilitated strategic concept of operation that formed the basis of the French-backed UN Security Council Resolution 2085 for the authorization of Military intervention in Mali.

However, while efforts were being made at all levels to help Mali find solution to the raging conflicts and security situation in the country, and whereas ECOWAS mediatory efforts were ongoing and indeed AFISMA was scheduled for deployment in September 2013, the extremist Jihadist militant groups in the northern region of the country continued to gain more grounds as they pushed southward from their strongholds in the north and were progressively advancing on Bamako. The militants' advance led the Interim President Dioncounda Traore to declare a state of emergency and appeal to the French President and regional leaders like Nigeria and Senegal to help repel the militants. [74] This development necessitated swift and decisive military intervention in Mali, changing the focus of engagement from diplomatic to military action. It was not difficult for France to respond immediately to the call for help from Mali more so that French hostages have been taken in neighbouring Niger by AQIM. France appears decided on containing any further military expansion in the region and assists the Malian Government to reestablish its control over the lost territory. [75] On 11 January 2013, France swiftly responded to the Malian Interim President's pleas for military assistance with air strikes and ground troops, with a view to preventing the takeover of Bamako by AQIM and its militant Islamist allies.

With nearly 4,000 troops, [76] the French military intervention in Mali was swift, decisive and précised. In less than three weeks, the rebellion in Northern Mali was scuttled with the recapture of all the major cities in the region under the control of AQIM and its rebel allies. The success recorded by France in this endeavour was however not without the support of the Malian troops, the ECOWAS, as well as the assistance received from other Western countries. Even though AFISMA's deployment was initially to begin in September 2013, however, with the unexpected advance by AQIM and its

allied forces towards the southern parts of Mali and the subsequent intervention from France, ECOWAS was compelled to deploy on 17 January 2013, beginning with the contingency from Nigeria. [77] Subsequently, the contingents from other AFISMA troops contributing countries like Burkina Faso, Benin, Chad, Togo and Senegal later joined the French and Nigeria's troops, while Major General Abdulkadir Shehu, a Nigerian was appointed the first Commandant of the Mission. [78]

Table 3 : AFISMA Troops Contributing Countries [79]

S/No.	Name of Country	Personnel
	Benin	650
2	Burkina Faso	500
	Cape Verde	unknown
4	Chad	2,000
	Gabon	900
6	Gambia	Unknown
	Ghana	120
8	Guinea	144
	Guinea Bissat	Unknown
10	Ivory Coast	500
	Liberia	One Platoon
12	Niger	500
	Nigeria	1,200
14	Rwanda	Unknown
	Senegal	500
16	Sierra Leone	500
	South Africa	Unknown
18	Tanzania	Unknown
	Togo	733
20	Uganda	unknown

On their parts, the Western nations made remarkable contributions either directly in support of their bilateral obligations to Mali; treaty obligation to France; commitment to the European Union; and support to Commonwealth countries in West Africa who are Members of the ECOWAS or like in the case of the United Kingdom, a combination of these factors. Both the AU and the EU organized Donors Conferences in support of AFISMA and the Malian Defence and Security Forces (MDSF) respectively in Addis Ababa and Brussels. The two Conferences provided opportunity for the international community to further demonstrate its support to Mali and assist in the early resolution of the crisis facing the country.

With these crucial supports from the international community and in particular, France's military intervention, the efforts of the African nations, the international organizations and institutions as well as those of the partner countries involved in the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), the unity, stability and integrity of Mali was once again restored. Consequently, AFISMA was transformed to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Against this background, and with the supports and goodwill of the international community, it was thus possible to open negotiations with the North and conduct the Presidential elections as stipulated in the Transition Roadmap unanimously adopted by Mali's National Assembly on 29 January 2013. [81] On Thursday, 19 September 2013, Mali's new President, Ibrahim Boubacar Kaita was inaugurated in Bamako, thus marking the beginning of a new era in Mali's history. [82]

The task before the new government nonetheless remains daunting. It must address the country's most pressing challenges including fostering national reconciliation; strengthening democratic institutions; spearheading security sector reforms; and training of its army to be able to ultimately defend its territorial integrity.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The intervention of the international community in the crisis that engulfed Mali is remarkable and commendable, especially those of the ECOWAS, AU, UN and the French Government and it's allied. The foreign military intervention facilitated the unconditional retreat of the extremist Jihadist groups from the northern parts of Mali; the recapture of the loss territory; as well as the timely restoration of democratic governance in Mali. However, the problem in the northern region of Mali would not suddenly disappear merely because of the return of the country to a democratic rule. Malians are not alien to democratic rule. Indeed, more than any country in the West African sub-region, Mali had

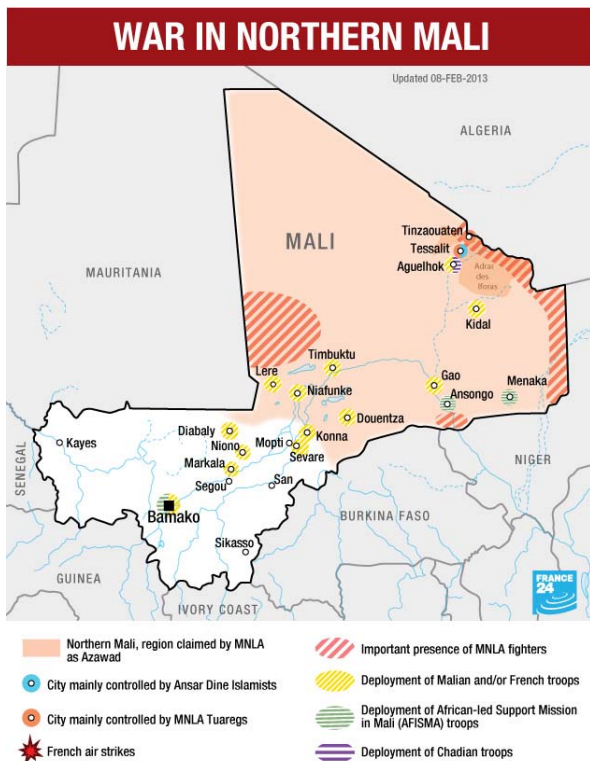


Figure 2 : Map Showing the Battle Zone in Mali [80]

experienced enduring democratic governance. Yet successive Malian administrations have not done enough to promote the unity and proper integration of the entire country but rather fanned the embers of discord and rebellion.

For a start, Mali's new President, Ibrahim Boubacar Kaita, should be encouraged to form a broad-based National Unity Government that would ensure the participation of all the stakeholders especially the Tuareg, in the administration of the country. This step would give all the regions of the country a sense of belonging and form the basis for the much anticipated national reconciliation in Mali. The international community must strengthen this process by facilitating a prompt dialogue between the Central Government in Bamako and the Tuareg people in north Mali who recognizes the country's secular nature and territorial integrity and who indeed rejected terrorism thus facilitating the isolation and early defeat of AQIM and its allied militant Islamist groups.

The sensitivity of Mali's neighbouring countries like Algeria, Niger and Mauritania must be taken into account in this negotiation. They are involved in the crisis and indeed are affected by it. They should therefore be involved in the dialogues that could lead to the resolution of the Tuareg problem. Their participation would be crucial to finding lasting solution to the situation not only in the northern part of Mali but also the plight of the Tuaregs in the Sahel region as a whole.

To ensure a lasting peace and stability in the country, the Malian Government can only ill-afford to continue to rely solely on military solution in the fight against the Tuareg insurgency as it did in the past. While recognizing the inevitability of the use of force in tackling the recent terrorist threat and instability in Mali, military answer cannot be an effective long-term strategy or solution to the problem in northern Mali. The fight for peace cannot be won through war. The solution to the recurrent rebellion in the region lies in recognizing the fact that the Tuaregs have legitimate political, socio-economic, security, environmental, humanitarian and human rights grievances that must be addressed.

The problem of the Tuareg people in Mali is not about religious extremism or terrorism. Indeed, it was to the credit of the Tuaregs whose way of life and culture is at variance with the extremist Jihadist groups and who promptly denounced terrorism that led to the successful isolation and consequent ejection of AQIM and its allied forces from the northern region. The challenges facing the Tuaregs stem from the long term insensitivity of the Malian Central Government to the plights of its people in the northern region of the country. It is a question of protracted economic inequality, extreme marginalization, and total exclusion from the management of their own local affairs, abject poverty, gross underdevelopment and infrastructural deficit among others. A problem exacerbated by extreme and

unfavourable climatic condition leading to environmental degradation, food shortages, malnutrition and displacement.

It was this consistent neglect and marginalization of the Tuareg by its own government that have made the northern region of the country a magnet for foreign Islamist fighters like AQIM and an ideal environment in which violent extremist thrive, illicit arms and ammunition are proliferated and a place of abode for mercenaries and all manners of transnational organized criminal gangs.

In the absence of concerted, deliberate and sincere efforts to addressing the age-long and deep rooted challenges facing the Tuaregs in ways that would reverse the threat that plagues the people, ameliorate the impact of the negative climatic condition in the region and preserve their way of life and culture, the Tuareg rebellion will continue to resurrect from time to time.

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