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Stabilizing Mali: Looking Beyond Military Intervention

Dorina A. Bekoe

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Executive Summary

- One year after a coup d'état led by Captain Amadou Sanogo resulted in the declaration of an independent state of Azawad in northern Mali, the country does not appear closer to reunification.
- The humanitarian toll of the political and security crises is acute: more than 4.3 million Malians face a humanitarian emergency; 1.2 million are in need of food assistance; and the 350,000 people displaced internally and in the region are expected to grow to 500,000 by the end of 2013, according to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees.
- Elections scheduled for July face a number of logistical and institutional hurdles, including a need for a revised electoral list, an accounting of the large number of displaced people, a skeptical public, and a growing gap between the political elite and ordinary people.
- Participants at the IDA Africa Program's *Roundtable on the Sahel* discussed the need to address the humanitarian crises, the danger of creating enduring grievances in the bid to resolve the current political impasse, and the need for a more coherent and holistic approach to understanding and creating a framework for durable peace in Mali.

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Stabilizing Mali: Looking Beyond Military Intervention

Background to the Crisis in Mali

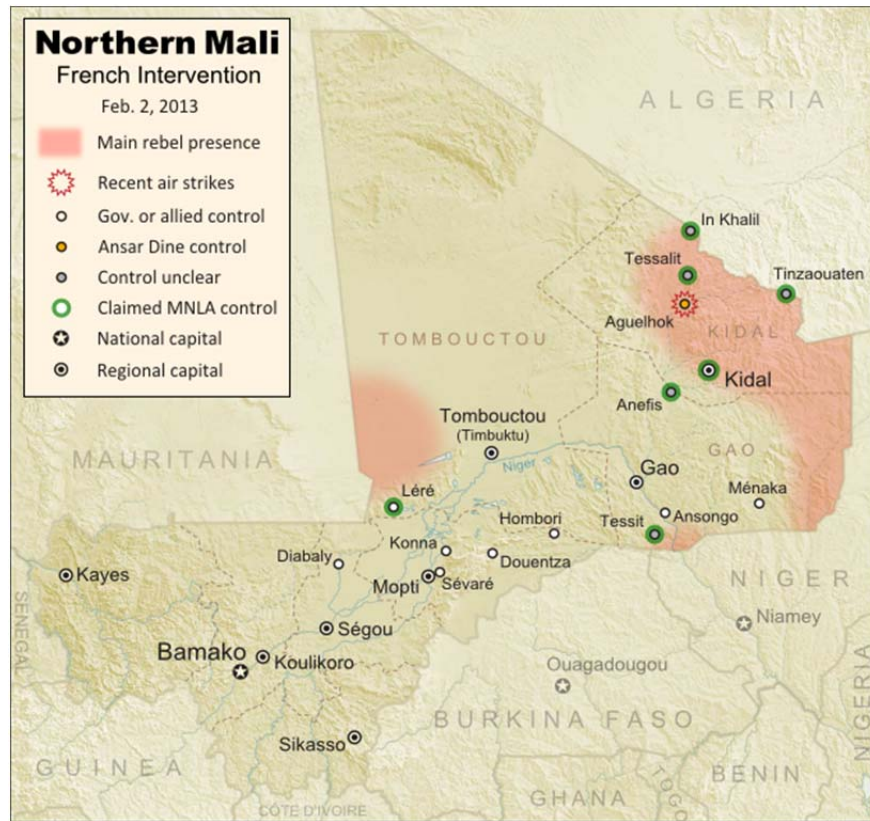
On March 22, 2012, Captain Amadou Sanogo led a coup d'état to overthrow President Amadou Toumani Touré. The coup occurred just one month before presidential elections, in which President Touré would not have been a candidate, having reached his term limits. Captain Sanogo justified the coup by citing the poor resources the Malian government provided to the army for battling separatist movements in the north, mainly the *Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad). Azawad comprised the three main provinces in the north: Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu (see Figure 1). The political and military instability following the coup allowed the MNLA to advance quickly. Within days, Mali was split in two, with the north, renamed Azawad, falling into the hands of the MNLA and the south under government control. The MNLA was soon replaced by other Islamists rebel groups, notably *Ansar Dine* (Defenders of the Faith) and the *Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa).

On January 10, as MUJAO approached Konna (435 miles from Bamako), the French army intervened in a bid to speed the reconstitution of the Malian state.¹ Over the ensuing several weeks, the French, with assistance by the Malian army and later the Chadian armed forces (part of a regional military force), recaptured most of the north's main cities. The rebels seemed to have melted into the population or fled. The French army, which started withdrawing its forces in April, will give way to the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), the regional force comprising soldiers from Nigeria, Ghana, Chad, Niger, Benin, Burundi, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone.² Thus far, the focus has been on the details of the military intervention. Little has been said about (1) the other societal structures that might have to be reconstructed to guard against a return to rebellion once the French depart, (2)

¹ Reuters, "French, Malian Forces Capture Gao Rebel Stronghold," January 26, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/26/us-mali-rebels-idUSBRE9000C720130126>, accessed March 25, 2013; "Mali Islamists "enter" Konna after Clashes with Army," *BBC Africa*, January 10, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20970604>, accessed March 25, 2013.

² Mehari Taddele Maru, "AFISMA: Military ahead of Politics," *Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies*, February 18, 2013, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2013/02/20132148940690455.htm>, accessed March 25, 2013.

whether the seeds of future conflict are being planted today, and (3) the reforms needed for robust recovery.



Source: Source: *Political Geography Now*, <http://www.polgeonow.com/2013/02/mali-map-update-4-french-take-kidal.html>.

Figure 1. Mali.

The IDA Africa Program’s *Roundtable on the Sahel* convened a meeting on Mali to examine these critical, but little discussed issues. The roundtable featured Professor Jaimie Bleck, of Notre Dame University, and Alex Thurston, of Northwestern University. The roundtable’s agenda and their biographies and appear in the appendixes. This report summarizes the main points discussed at the roundtable, which was held under Chatham House rules. The report considers the humanitarian and security tolls of the crisis; highlights the views of ordinary Malians on politics, the future, and national priorities; reflects on Mali’s democratic transition; and raises several considerations for the way forward. Where possible, the report provides additional references.

The Toll of the Crisis: Humanitarian Costs, Regional Security Threats

The intense focus on the military aspect of the crisis—the capacity of the intervening forces, the spread of regional instability, and the alleged links between Mali’s Islamist rebel groups and others in West Africa—has at times obscured the acute

humanitarian crisis in the region. CARE International estimates that 4.3 million (out of a population of nearly 16 million) face humanitarian crises.³ Northern Mali's population's physical displacement and food insecurity are particularly acute.

In the year since the coup, the already fragile region has absorbed nearly 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. In Mali, there are 230,000 IDPs, while refugees have settled in Niger (50,000), Mauritania (68,385), and Burkina Faso (48,731); much smaller populations have settled in Togo and Guinea. Moreover, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees predicts that there will be nearly 500,000 IDPs and refugees by the end of 2013.⁴ As one participant pointed out, with these trends, by the end of 2013, approximately 3 percent of the Malian population will be either a refugee or an IDP. As one expert pointed out, it is equally significant that many IDPs are afraid to return home.

With the population already suffering the effects of chronic drought, the crisis has exacerbated the number of people facing food insecurity. The World Food Program (WFP) estimated that in the last year, 1.2 million Malians were assisted by its efforts, with 270,000 residing in the north. Apart from the sheer need for assistance, WFP faces challenges in delivering assistance, due to the difficult terrain and the insecurity.⁵

The severe food insecurity and displacement jeopardizes plans the transitional government has for the reconstitution of the state. In particular, if the humanitarian crises are not accounted for, they can threaten the efforts for political resolution and programs to foster reconciliation. Ignoring these crises can lead to dangerous and unstable situations, such as clashes between Islamists and Malian forces; human rights abuses; community-level violence; and ethnic clashes between the Tuareg and Peuls, for example. Furthermore, the acute humanitarian crises can deepen grievances and bitterness toward Malian soldiers and other communities. In short, it can plant seeds of conflict—and any success will likely be fleeting.

What the People Say: Surveying Views on Politics, the Future, and Mali's Priorities

Given Mali's standing as a "beacon" of democracy, many were surprised by the coup. Scholars and analysts were also surprised by the support the coup received from

³ CARE International, "Mali: CARE and partners distribute food in Timbuktu," February 27, 2013, <http://www.care-international.org/Media-Releases/mali-care-starts-food-distributions-in-timbuktu.html>, accessed March 26, 2013.

⁴ United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), "Opération Mali: Portail de Partage d'Information," <http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/regional.php>, accessed March 27, 2013.

⁵ World Food Program, "Mali: WFP Food Is Lifeline For Families Displaced By Conflict," December 12, 2012, <http://www.wfp.org/stories/mali-wfp-food-lifeline-families-displaced-conflict>, accessed March 26, 2013.

Maliens. In the year since the coup, a number of clues for why the coup took place and why so many people supported it have been revealed. Indeed, many considered the coup a mechanism to correct Mali's democratic process, which they considered deeply damaged by corruption. Surveys also offer a critique for how the Malian state has handled the rebellions by the Tuareg in the past and the way forward.

Distrust of Mali's State Institutions

Surveys and informal interviews reveal that Malians distrust the state's institutions. In particular, many viewed the coup as a means to restore democracy—the coup served to remove the corrupting elements of the political elite, which had distanced the electorate from their leaders. In fact, Sidiki Guindo's April 2012 survey shows that 51.2 percent blamed the country's division on President Touré, while 25.5 and 12 percent placed the responsibility on the rebels and Sanogo, respectively. Perhaps, not surprisingly, 64 percent were satisfied that President Touré's term ended before the elections.⁶ Particularly indicative of Malians' sense of disenfranchisement is the persistent low voter turnout of 40 percent, which is among the lowest in the region and the continent.⁷ Other factors exacerbate the distance between the state and citizens: only 20 percent are fluent in French, the official language; political campaigns appear to be the only time politicians communicate with their constituents; and there is a legitimacy gap between elected officials and rural populations.

Reconstituting the State: Managing the Fourth Tuareg Rebellion

By emphasizing negotiation over military intervention, Mali distinguished itself from Niger in its handling of the past Tuareg rebellions.⁸ Negotiation is not viewed as favorably today. Surveys show progressively more support for military intervention over negotiation to resolve the crisis.⁹ Indeed, a survey shows that approximately 90 percent consider that the unification of Mali is worth a violent conflict.¹⁰

⁶ Sidiki Guindo, "Analyse des Résultats de l'Enquête d'Opinion sur la Crise Malienne," May 2012, http://bamakobruce.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/rapport_sondage_crise_malienne11.pdf, accessed April 1, 2013, p.12.

⁷ See International IDEA, Voter Turnout Database, <http://www.idea.int/vt/viewdata.cfm>, accessed March 29, 2013.

⁸ Stephen A. Emerson, "Desert Insurgency: Lessons from the Third Tuareg Rebellion," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22 (4) (October 2011): 669–687.

⁹ Surveys include the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (November 2012 and January 2013), Jaimie Bleck and Kristin Michelitch (May 2012), and Sidiki Guindo (April 2012 and December 2012), s

¹⁰ Survey taken by Jamie Bleck and Kristen Michelitch, July 2012.

Underscoring these attitudes, a broad set of surveys also show increasing support for military and foreign intervention to free the north.¹¹ Whereas in April 2012, Guindo's survey of Bamako residents measured 54.3 percent in favor of military intervention,¹² in the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's January 2013 survey, nearly 70 percent were in favor of military intervention. Likewise, surveys also show progressively more in favor of foreign forces (Friedrich Ebert Foundations' February 2013 survey shows nearly 100 percent) over the deployment of Malian forces exclusively to resolve the crisis in the north.¹³

Equally important, a negotiated settlement would not just fail to obtain public support, but it would face organizational and political difficulties as well. First, it is not clear which groups represent northern Mali. Thus, the practical question of who would participate in a negotiated settlement is not easily answered. Second, one scholar blamed the widely praised peace agreement, which ended the 1996 Tuareg rebellion, for the resumption of hostilities. A key concession in the agreement was the withdrawal of the Malian forces from the north and the continued decentralization of the state's power. Successive abuses by the Malian army had generated hostilities among the local population and northern elites wanted—and received—more control over their affairs.¹⁴ It also led to weaker national oversight. Thus, another negotiated settlement will likely be unpopular.

Skepticism of the Transitional Government's Road Map

In January 2013, the transitional government proposed a seven-month road map, which would culminate with elections in July 2013. Despite this forward-looking agenda, according to a December 2012 *Afrobarometer Survey*, 75 percent of people surveyed viewed the country as moving in the wrong direction.¹⁵ A February 2013 survey by the

¹¹ The term “intervention” was asked in different ways. Some surveys specifically asked about French intervention, others left it open-ended, and others still mentioned specific actors. The presentation at the meeting omitted these nuances in an effort to compare across surveys. Surveys consulted: Cisse, Ibrahima. (2012). *Que veut les Maliens?* Friedrich Ebert Stiftung November 2012, Working Paper; Guindo, Sidiki. (2013). “Résultats d’un sondage d’opinion publique après le départ de Cheik Modibo Diarra et sur le processus de sortie de crise.” *Independent*, 8 Janvier 2013 ; Guindo, Sidiki. (2012). “Analyse des résultats de l’enquête d’opinion sur la crise Malienne. Working Paper May 2012.” Contact: guindosidiki@yahoo.fr. And new Afrobarometer data on Mali: www.afrobarometer.org.

¹² Guindo, “Analyse des Résultats,” p. 21.

¹³ The surveys measuring support for foreign intervention over exclusively deploying Malian troops were Jaimie Bleck and Kristin Michelitch (May 2012), Friedrich Ebert Foundation (November 2012 and February 2013), and Sidiki Guindo (December 2012).

¹⁴ David Gutelius, “Islam in Northern Mali and the War on Terror,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 25, no. 1 (2007): 61–62.

¹⁵ Massa Coulibaly and Michael Bratton, “Crisis in Mali: Ambivalent Popular Attitudes on the Way Forward,” *Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 113*, February 2013, p. 5, http://www.afrobarometer.org/files/documents/briefing_papers/afrobriefno113en.pdf, accessed April 1, 2013.

Friedrich Ebert Foundation indicates that 50 percent of Malians surveyed believed that elections by July are impossible; only 37 percent believe they are possible.

Malians identify a number of other issues that need resolving before elections can take place. In particular, many cite the need to stabilize the security of the country, reach out to displaced populations and resettle them, reform the electoral list, and increase the government's transparency. Furthermore, 80 percent of people surveyed in Mopti by Bleck and Michelitch (May 2012) specified that elections should only take place once the north and south are reunited. Not surprisingly, political matters are the lowest priorities identified by some. A July 2012 poll conducted by Bleck and Michelitch between Mopti and Timbuktu indicated that villagers were more concerned over the availability of food and water, the state of infrastructure, agriculture, and "other issues" than the political crisis at hand.

Still, experts at the roundtable viewed the 2013 elections (whether they are held in July or later) as a critical juncture for Mali. They present a chance for Mali to return to the democratic ideals many aspired to at the start of the country's democratization process in the 1990s. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) is the front runner; in Guindo's poll, IBK received a 75 percent positive opinion rating.¹⁶ In contrast, there is declining support for the Junta and Sanogo: immediately following the coup, 60 percent supported the Junta and Sanogo, but that support currently stands at 36 percent.¹⁷ The current political environment must also contend with heightened ethnic, religious, and intra-military tension (brought on by racial divisions in the armed forces); the closure of a well-known mosque and seclusion of its leaders serves as a case in point.

Considerations for the Way Forward

Understanding the unique causes of Mali's crises is important in prescribing the correct solution. For this reason, one panelist cautioned that Mali should be evaluated by its own history and local dynamics. Thus far, Mali has been understood by faulty analogies, which has distorted analysis of its problems. Often, Mali has been compared to Afghanistan, leading to a policy that focuses on the prevention of a terrorist safe haven. In other instances, Mali has been compared to Somalia, which leads to a recommendation to use an AMISOM-like force to intervene and support a transition government.

¹⁶ Guindo, May 2012, p. 24.

¹⁷ Guindo Sidiki, "Résultats d'un sondage d'opinion après le départ de Cheick Modibo Diarra et sur le processus de sortie de crise: —73% des sondés pour la guerre au Nord et les élections après—IBK, Cheick Modibo, Dioncounda, Amadou Haya Sanogo, acteurs préférés des Bamakois, » January 8, 2013 (<http://www.maliweb.net/news/societe/2013/01/08/article,116167.html>, accessed April 1, 2013).

Neither the Afghanistan nor the Somalia scenarios necessarily apply to Mali, nor are the prescriptions for those countries best suited for resolving the political and security crises in Mali. Rather, resolutions to Mali's crises must account for the following:

- It has had three Tuareg rebellions (before this current one).
- AQIM tried to integrate itself in local situations (e.g., through intermarriages, drug smuggling, and exploiting grievances).
- A diverse set of Muslim actors are present.
- Economic development is a priority for the local population.

Viewing Mali through the prism of being purely a safe haven for terrorists leads to a policy of killing suspected terrorists, without attention to the other grievances or local dynamics. In addressing Mali's future and measures needed for resolving the political and security crises, the discussion turned to the needs of northern Mali and the possible effects of the July elections.

Addressing the Needs of Northern Mali

Participants discussed Niger's *Strategy for Development and Security* (SDS Sahel Niger, *Stratégie de Développement et de Sécurité dans les zones Sahélo-Sahariennes du Niger*) as a possible solution to reconstitute the Malian state. In the wake of the Malian crisis, Niger established the SDS Sahel Niger in October 2012 in the country's Sahel regions, in a bid to avert another Tuareg rebellion.¹⁸ Mindful of understanding Mali according to its own unique circumstances, many affirmed the need for a massive investment in security and development in northern Mali. Still, some were critical of the SDS Sahel Niger program, suggesting that it was too early to evaluate its effectiveness. They drew comparisons to Mali in 1990, which seemed to have successfully resolved the rebellions launched by the Tuaregs, only to face another rebellion in 2006, and the splintering of the country in 2012.

Proceeding Cautiously with Elections

Perhaps one of the most striking revelations from Mali's debacle has been the undoing of Mali's reputation as a successful democracy. Many scholars and analysts had praised Mali for its successful democratic transition. But, as the postmortems into the coup d'état reveal, Mali's citizens have not been engaged in the democratic process, do not have a high regard for their political leaders or institutions, and feel that democracy in Mali is deeply flawed.

¹⁸ "Niger launches \$2.5 Billion to Secure, Develop North," Reuters, October 2, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/02/niger-security-north-idAFL6E8L2ALG20121002>, accessed March 29, 2013.

In that regard, Mali should tread cautiously with elections. It is important to recognize that elections are not democracy. In fact, elections can elevate tensions, rather than reduce them. They can leave lingering bitterness and create new grievances. Thus, when holding elections, it is important to temper expectations and anticipate negative or unintended consequences. Particularly worrying, in situations such as Mali's—where the state does not have full control over the national territory—elections can lead to a practice best described by one participant as “shoot and vote”: protagonists grab territory then hold elections to secure it. While elections will provide the international community with seemingly legitimate leaders, they do not answer questions at the micro level: Will there be jobs? What type of personal security will be available? Will food be available? These are the everyday concerns of northern Malians.

Together, these concerns underscore the need for greater understanding of Mali's specific circumstances and history, the possible unintended consequences of interventions by both the international and national governments, and the need for the state to connect with its constituents in a more meaningful way.

Appendix A. Agenda



IDA Africa Program

Roundtable on the Sahel

Stabilizing Mali: Looking Beyond Military Intervention

Cosmos Club

2121 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

Washington, D.C. 20008

Friday, March 22, 2013

AGENDA

- 9:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.:** Welcome and Introductions
Dorina Bekoe, IDA Africa Program
- 9:45 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.:** Panel presentations
Jaimie Bleck, Notre Dame University
Alex Thurston, Northwestern University and the Sahel Blog
- 10:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.:** Break
- 10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.:** Discussion session
- 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.:** Working Lunch

Appendix B. Biographies



IDA Africa Program

Roundtable on the Sahel

Stabilizing Mali: Looking Beyond Military Intervention

BIOGRAPHIES

Dorina A. Bekoe

Dorina A. Bekoe is a Research Staff Member in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses. Prior to this, she was a Senior Program Officer in the Center for Conflict Management at the United States Institute of Peace. She specializes in Africa's conflicts; political development; institutional reform, including the New Partnership for Africa's Development and its related African Peer Review Mechanism; peace agreements; and electoral violence. Her research and fieldwork has included work in Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, Liberia, Togo, and Zanzibar. She is the author of *Implementing Peace Agreements: Lessons from Mozambique, Angola, and Liberia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) and the editor of *East Africa and the Horn: Confronting Challenges to Good Governance* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005). Her most recent book, *Voting in Fear: Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa*, an edited volume, was published by the USIP press in 2012. She has a BA in economics from Franklin and Marshall College, an MS in public policy from Carnegie Mellon University, and a PhD in public policy from Harvard University.

Jaimie Bleck

Jaimie Bleck is a Ford Family Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame. She specializes in African politics with a focus on democratization, education, and citizenship. Her article with Nicolas van de Walle, "Parties and Issues in Francophone West Africa: Towards a Theory of Non-mobilization," appeared in *Democratization*. Another article with van de Walle, "Valence

Issues in African Elections: Navigating Uncertainty and the Weight of the Past,” is forthcoming in *Comparative Political Studies*. Her current research in Mali is funded by grants from the Spencer Foundation, NSF, and USAID. She received a BA in Political Science at the University of Chicago and a PhD in Government from Cornell University. She has consulted for Freedom House, Winrock International, CARE, and the World Bank. Before attending graduate school, she worked on the Ambassadors Girls Scholarship Program in Central and Southern Africa.

Alex Thurston

Alex Thurston is a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at Northwestern University. His research focuses on Muslim movements and intellectuals in West Africa, especially in northern Nigeria. His writing has appeared in *Foreign Policy*, *The American Interest*, *World Politics Review*, and at his website, Sahel Blog (<http://sahelblog.wordpress.com/>).

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14. ABSTRACT The coup d'état led by Captain Amadou Sanogo which resulted in the declaration of an independent state of Azawad in northern Mali has engendered a humanitarian, political, and security crises for Mali. This report summaries the discussions at the IDA Africa Program's Roundtable on the Sahel on need to address the humanitarian crises; the danger of creating enduring grievances, in the bid to resolve the current political impasse; and the need for a more coherent and holistic approach to understanding and creating a framework for durable peace in Mali.					
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