

# P O L I C Y   B R I E F

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## Enhancing sub-regional responses to insecurity in Mali: Issues, challenges, and future direction.

United Nations

### Abstract

The Africa Institute of South Africa, a research Institute within the Human Sciences Research Council, conducts research, and co-ordinates HSRC's engagements in and on Africa. It conducts basic, applied policy-relevant and comparative research while seeking to build capacity and provide policy advice and implementation support to advance South Africa's position on matters of societal development such as governance, peace, and security. As part of the 'Silencing the Guns Project', we embark on research field trip to Mali and engaged with various civil society organizations, academia, and government representatives to gain a deeper understanding of the persistent of intractable armed conflict in the country. In this article, Nicasius Achu Check shares some insights on this research trip.

### Introduction

This Policy Brief is derived from a research field trip to Mali from between 15 – 30 March 2023 within the framework of finding lasting solutions to the intractable armed conflict in Mali. The research team adopted a qualitative research approach and administered semi-structured questionnaires to key stakeholders in the security and development domains in Mali. The results analyzed using the critical content anal-

ysis approach. The ultimate goal of this research was to propose novel policy positions that various stakeholders in Mali could adopt to sustainably address the numerous securities challenges the country has faced since independence from France in 1960.

Our research trip aimed to comprehensively understand the causes of the fourth Tuareg rebellion in Mali, spanning from 2012 to present, and its impact on security and instability in West Africa. While some accounts have referred to Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' theory, however, there is no concrete evidence to support the notion that the current insecurity and governance challenges in Mali are a direct of this conceptual framework. However, tension between Islamic religious movements in Mali and the secular government do indicate a form of discord between religion and the state. This ongoing tension has led to three successive military interventions of the in Malian politics and a sustained armed rebellion in the Northern part of the country. Among other factors, this Policy Brief examines ECOWAS' responses to the conflict, with particularly emphasis on its application of the 1993 ECOWAS protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.



## Contextualizing the conflict in Mali

While the military has been a consistent presence in many West African countries, the region, from 1960 to 1990, was one of the most peaceful areas on the African continent. However, the disputed 2010 presidential elections in Cote d'Ivoire and repetitive terrorist attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Libya, have made the sub-region into a terrorist haven for terrorists. The security challenges in the Sahel region of Africa, the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, and the increasingly complex situation in Mozambique not only raised question about the sustainability of the post-colonial state in Africa but also underscores the fragility under which these states were originally formed.<sup>1</sup>

Acknowledging the formidable security challenging on the continent and recognizing that credible developmental initiatives are difficult to pursue can be in the midst crisis; the Africa Union initiated the 'Silencing the Guns' framework. The initiative aims to end all wars and conflict, prevent genocide, and stop gender-based violence by 2020. However, three years after the target date, the continent is still grappling with some of the most persistent conflicts globally, with Mali being no exception. Our research trip to Mali designed to evaluate the feasibility of the framework and take stock of what progress has been achieved in the addressing insecurity in the country. It also aimed to explore how best to prioritise Africa-inspired conflicts resolution approaches within the context of the ECOWAS protocol on democracy and governance. The study collected local opinions and perceptions on the necessity of a sustained conflict resolution approach and new strategies to embed democratic norms in the country. Employing a critical qualitative research approach, we administered semi-structured questionnaires to key respondents, including government officials; civil society organizations and academia. The focus was on assessing measures the country should adopt to tackle internal conflict and political instability effectively.

From our discussions with various role stakeholders in Mali, we have realized that despite the complex development challenges that Mali has faced for decades,

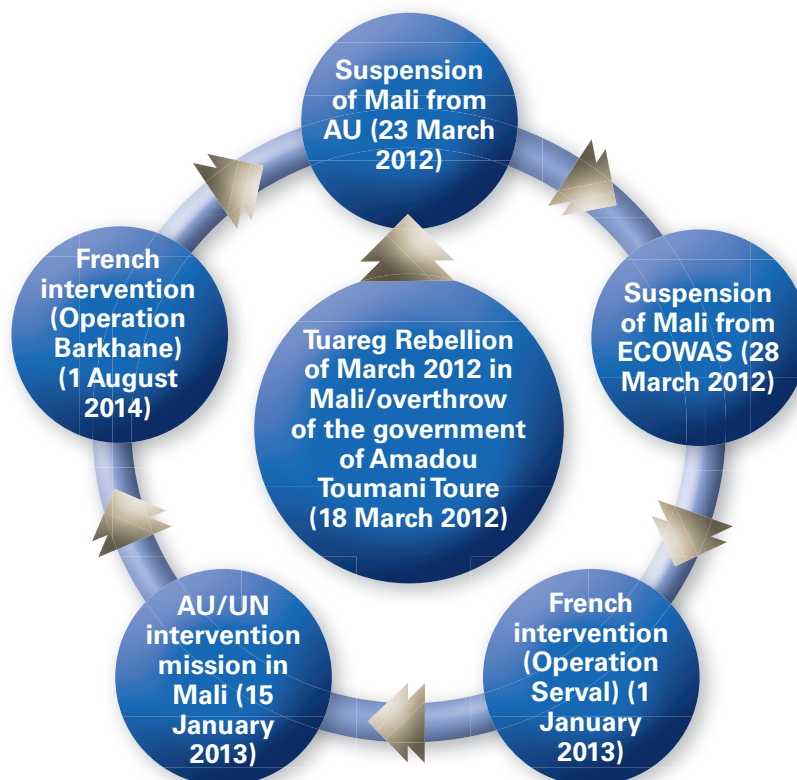
the collapse of the Muammar Ghaddafi administration in Libya and the return of heavily armed fighters to Mali disrupted the already delicate balance of power in northern region. Many of those who returned to Mali were members of the Ansar Dine and AQIM groups, known for solid Islamic tendencies. A splinter group from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) known as the Salafist pour la Predication et le Combat, aligned themselves with al-Qaeda in 2006 after their pledge of loyalty was accepted by the al-Qaeda leadership.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent to countermeasures by the Algerian state, AQIM was compelled to establish a presence in northern Mali. Here, they gained notoriety through a series of kidnappings for ransom, especially targeting UN, EU and US diplomats. Kidnapping for ransom became a lucrative business for AQIM between 2006 and 2011, with estimated earnings reaching around \$70 million.<sup>3</sup>

The research team also uncovered that Ansar Dine, a significant Salafist movement striving assert power and authority over the Malian state, had its roots in the negative economic impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in the country. These globally mandated financial restructuring programmes exacerbated the severe economic, political, and environmental grievances already present in the northern part of Mali. Furthermore, inadequacies in the educational infrastructure of the country had provided fertile ground of madrassas – Quranic schools that impart a Salafi brand of Islam.<sup>4</sup> These schools taught students in Arabic, as opposed to French or the indigenous languages of Mali. This linguistic division created a gap between the Arabic-speaking in the northern region of Mali and the rest of the country, where French is the official language. Ansar Dine, which be loosely translated as "Defenders of the Faith," exploited this cultural and linguistic divide within Malian society and imposed its version of Sharia law on the students and residents in the ungoverned spaces.<sup>5</sup> Leaders of the Ansar Dine movement also ensured to restore the authority of religious elders, known as the Ulama, in matters of faith and customs. The team recognized that these challenges underpinned Tuareg and separatist rebellion in the country since the 1960s.

## Timeline of Regional and Sub-region organisations' intervention in Mali

To address this seemingly challenging security situation, France, the former colonial power and a significant guarantor of Mali's external security, authorized the deployment of an intervention force to halt the advancing rebels towards Bamako and other important cities in the southern part of the country. Operations Serval and subsequently Barkhane, were launched to restore the authority of the Malian state in certain parts of the country, particularly in the north. While these operations were mandated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2085, the response from ECOWAS, primary sub-regional responsible for ensuring peace and security in the region, was delayed and inadequate. Figure one provides a timeline of the responses from global and continental organizations to the Mali crisis.

### Timeline of global and continental organisations' intervention in Mali



As per Article 45 of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, if democracy is abruptly terminated by any means or there is a significant violation of human rights in a Member State, ECOWAS may take the following actions:

- (1) impose sanctions in the State concerned.
- (2) The sanctions which will be determined by the Authority, may take various forms, in increasing order of severity:
  - a. Refusal to support the candidates presented by the Member State concerned for elective posts in International Organizations.
  - b. Refusal to organise ECOWAS meetings in the Member State concerned
  - c. Suspension of the Member State concerned from all ECOWAS decision-making bodies. During the period of suspension, the Member State concerned shall be obliged to pay its dues for the period.
- (3) During the period of suspension, ECOWAS will continue to monitor, encourage and support the efforts being made by the suspended Member State to return to normalcy and constitutional order.
- (4) On the recommendation of the Mediation and Security Council, a decision may be taken at the appropriate time to proceed as stipulated in Article 45 of the Protocol of 10, December 1999.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, the team also realised that Article 45, which is meant to be an implementation instrument, employs the word 'may' as a crucial term in the article. It states that the Authority of the Commission 'may' impose sanctions on the recalcitrant state. In all its complexities, the imposition of sanctions and all the other measures aimed at compelling a recalcitrant state to return to constitutional order are contingent on the political will of the Authority.

Deliberately, both ECOWAS and the AU failed to implement the various protocols and declarations that could have enabled these sub-regional and regional organizations to intervene and assist the Malian people and government in restoring constitutional rule. Moreover, these organizations did not establish necessary, security and governance measures to prevent Mali from experiencing unconstitutional changes in its government.

## The way forward and policy recommendations

Based on our discussion with various stakeholders in Mali, there was overwhelming evidence to suggest that the time is ripe for the military to intervene in Malian politics. The data collected indicates a widespread acceptance of the efforts made by the government of Colonel Assimi Goita and civil society organizations to strengthen state institutions that support democracy and security. Considering this, the study recommends that the government, in collaboration with civil society organizations, should focus on reconciling the various religious and ethnic groups in the country are ensuring poverty, inequality, and participatory democracy prevail in Mali.

Accordingly, the study recommends that the government should:

- Collaborate with international partners to initiate comprehensive security sector reforms. These reforms should prioritize enhancing the professionalism of the army, ensuring structured regular pay for the armed forces, establishing a robust pension fund for security forces and implementing a solid social security system for armed forces. Special attention should be given to providing housing and health insurance to the armed forces.
- Ensure that Mali's basic laws incorporated the various AU and ECOWAS protocols relating to peace and security, governance and the judiciary. Processes concerning the election of the president and members of the National Assembly should align with regional and international standards, while remaining mindful of contextual realities in Mali.
- Collaborate with local and regional stakeholders to demobilize fighters associated with AQIM and AZAWAD rebel movements. Efforts should also be deployed to facilitate integration of eligible fighters into the Malian armed forces.
- Assess the existing conditions related to reconciliation, foster participation of young people in the democratic

processes and encourage their leadership roles in the political and socio-economic domains of the country.

- Identify and promote enhancement of youth participation, empowerment, and involvement in science, technology and innovation (STI), leadership and the creation of decent jobs opportunities for the youth in the country.
- Based on the overall assessments conducted as part of this project, develop specific national policy recommendations and best practices that facilitate greater and more meaningful youth participation, empowerment, and leadership in socio-economic development processes. This could include mechanisms such as quota representation in parliament and other provincial assemblies.

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## References

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6. See for example, Article 45 of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. Available at <https://ihrda.uwazi.io/en/entity/gnhvkzf0aw9et1dhcq96n-7b9?page=11> access on 04/09/2023.

