
Negotiating Stability during Times of Change

The Stakes of the Malian Crisis in Burkina Faso

Daniel J. Eizenga



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Paper Series: The Stakes of the Malian Crisis in the Sahel

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The Sahel Research Group, of the University of Florida's Center for African Studies, is a collaborative effort to understand the political, social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the countries which comprise the West African Sahel. It focuses primarily on the six Francophone countries of the region—Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad—but also on in developments in neighboring countries, to the north and south, whose dynamics frequently intersect with those of the Sahel. The Sahel Research Group brings together faculty and graduate students from various disciplines at the University of Florida, in collaboration with colleagues from the region.

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Paper Series: The Stakes of the Malian Crisis in the Sahel

In January 2012, Tuareg separatists launched a rebellion against the government of Mali in a bid to gain independence for the northern regions of the country. They were quickly joined by groups of Islamist militants seeking to establish control of the region, and dealing significant setbacks to the Malian military in a series of engagements. Following these defeats, on 22 March 2012 frustrated junior officers in the Malian military led a coup d'état which ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré from power. Subsequently, the Islamist groups in the north were able to sideline the Tuareg separatists and take control of the provincial capitals in the northern regions of Mali—Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu. The military coup in Mali and de facto partition of the country were shocking events in a particularly fragile region, and quickly captured the attention of scholars and policy-makers around the world.

While significant interest emerged regarding the Malian crisis and the unfolding events in the country, there has been relatively little discussion of the effects of the crisis and their implications for surrounding countries in the Sahel. Recognizing the lack of information available on the reverberations of the crisis in neighboring countries, the Sahel Research Group set out to write five discussion papers on the responses and reactions of Senegal, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad to the events in Mali.

Fieldwork for these papers was conducted in sets of the countries by three different graduate student researchers during the summer of 2013. After conducting the initial research for these papers they were presented at the African Studies Association's 2013 Annual Meeting and revised with the additional comments of participants from the Sahel Seminar. These discussion papers were written with generous support from the Minerva Initiative Grant to the University of Florida.



Abstract:

Following the March 2012 coup d'état in Mali and the country's de facto partition, Blaise Compaoré positioned himself as the chief negotiator between the Malian government and separatist groups involved in the conflict. By doing so he garnered the support of western powers, and reinforced his image as a broker for peace in West Africa. These strategic moves helped to maintain the stability for which Compaoré's regime has become known and may have increased support for the continued rule of Compaoré despite presidential term limits that are set to expire in 2015. This paper offers an overview of these events as well as other challenges faced by Burkina Faso as a result of the Malian Crisis.

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Introduction

During March 2012 a military coup d'état displaced the democratic government of Mali. The coup sent the country spiraling into a political crisis which rapidly transformed the political environment of Sahelian Africa. The subsequent conflict waged between ethnic separatists and Islamic militants against the Malian state culminated in a *de facto* partition of the territory. The intrinsic weakness of the Malian state highlights the threat of potential destabilization throughout the region. Events in Mali continue to receive attention, especially following the French-led military intervention and return to civilian rule, but the response of elites throughout the region has yet to be discussed at length. Investigating the reactions of leaders and reverberations of the Malian crisis on domestic politics throughout the region illuminates the various challenges faced by those in Sahelian Africa.

This article provides an overview of these reactions in Burkina Faso. It attempts to explain the political stability of the Burkinabè regime, despite its proximity to and the involvement in the crisis. Considering the rapid destabilization of the Malian state and the subsequent military interventions to restore the territorial integrity of the country, focusing on the reactions of leaders in the region and the effects of the crisis on the politics of other Sahelian countries is warranted. The recent past in Burkina Faso has been marked by political stability and slow progress toward political liberalization. The events in Mali, however, pose a potential threat to the liberalization of the state as any destabilizing events could produce an opportunity for the ruling party to further consolidate its control over the system in the name of political stability. Moreover the events of the Malian crisis place further strain on the weak economy of Burkina Faso, by disrupting the movement of migrant Burkinabè workers and causing the relocation of many Malian refugees in northern Burkina Faso.

This article offers a brief context for Burkina Faso by summarizing the recent political history of the country along with the current economic situation and social demographics of the country. It provides an overview of the official response and position of the ruling party in Burkina Faso and reviews recent domestic politics in Burkina Faso in an effort to determine the effects of the Malian crisis on the position of the opposition and press. This paper also documents the role the military in the African-led intervention in Mali and discusses the repercussions of the Malian crisis on the Burkinabè state by analyzing the impact of the growing number of refugees coming to Burkina Faso from the northern regions of Mali. Analyzing these events and their effect on the politics of Burkina Faso highlights the stakes of the Malian crisis for the continued political stability of the state and more broadly the region.

Country Background

Burkina Faso, formerly Haute Volta, gained independence from France in 1960. The political trajectory of the former colony was similar to many in sub-Saharan Africa. A military coup d'état in 1966 removed the single party regime of Maurice Yamégo in response to mass demonstrations led by labor unions, students and civil servants. Yet, the coup installed the military regime of Sangoulé Lamizana, who remained in power until 1980.¹ Lamizana attempted to lead a transition to civilian rule in 1978, but his civilian regime was ultimately dislodged by an alliance between trade unions and the military which produced an intervention led by Colonel Saye Zerbo.

This coup d'état was the first of four military coups that would occur in the 1980s, the last of which brought the incumbent president, Blaise Compaoré, to power. Compaoré held the offices of Minister of State at the Presidency and the Minister of State for Justice under the leftist rule of Thomas Sankara, whom he helped to establish as president following a military coup in 1983. After removing Sankara from power in 1987, Compaoré replaced the Marxist-Lennist policies of the former regime with pro-western structural adjustment policies.² In 1990, he established civilian rule over Burkina Faso, but remained the head of state. From his incumbent position Compaoré has won multiparty elections in 1991, 1998, 2005 and 2010. In 2000, several institutional and electoral reforms were made, including changes to the presidential term limits,³ but these were declared non-retroactive by the Constitutional Council prior to the 2005 elections.⁴ This ruling enabled Compaoré to run for his third and fourth terms in 2005 and 2010. Compaoré continues to remain silent on whether he will attempt to run for a fifth term. If he does step down from power in 2015 it would be Burkina Faso's first new head of state in 28 years and potentially the first time a head of state was not initially installed by military coup d'état.

Burkina Faso faces numerous challenges to the survival of its largely agricultural and pastoral economy. As a land-locked Sahelian country, desertification and high levels of soil erosion threaten the country's agricultural regions.⁵ Recently, mining—primarily gold and zinc—has begun to make a contribution to economy, but for the moment the sector is hampered by high transport costs, low consumer buying power, and the narrowness of the

¹ Murison, Katharine. 2013. Recent History (Burkina Faso), in Europa World online. London Routledge. University of Florida Libraries. Retrieved 08 April 2013 from <http://www.europaworld.com/entry/bf.hi>

² Ibid.

³ The term limits were set at a maximum of two terms with presidential elections to be held every five years instead of seven.

⁴ Santiso, Carlos and Augustin Loada. 2003. "Explaining the unexpected: electoral reform and democratic governance in Burkina Faso." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41(3): 395-419.

⁵ Melly, Paul. 2013. Economy (Burkina Faso), in Europa World online. London, Routledge. University of Florida Libraries. Paragraph 1. Retrieved 09 April 2013 from: <http://www.europaworld.com/entry/bf.ec>

natural resource base.⁶ Consequently, over the last several years, the government of Burkina Faso has attempted to tackle rural poverty through a comprehensive approach which incorporates effective grassroots service provision, and stable macroeconomic and fiscal policy.⁷ Nevertheless, soldiers, discontent with their pay in 2011, led temporarily destabilizing mutinies at a time when the country was already suffering from a drought. Further, the Malian crisis directly adds additional economic strain on the country as refugees flee the conflict, seeking humanitarian assistance in Burkina Faso.

Refugee populations in the north and a poor harvests following periods of droughts present challenges to the rural population of Burkina Faso in particular. The country is composed of roughly 17.5 million people, of which roughly 80% live in rural areas.⁸ However, it is estimated that between two and four million Burkinabè work abroad. The majority of these migrant workers make a living in the cocoa sector of Côte d'Ivoire. A smaller population of migrant workers works in the service sectors of Ghana and Mali. Events in Côte d'Ivoire during the December 1999 coup and the September 2002 outbreak of civil war made it especially difficult for these Sahelian populations; roughly 500,000 Burkinabè migrants fled home. While the events in Mali have not produced the same kind of strain on the domestic economy of Burkina Faso, they do pose a threat to those Burkinabè relying on employment opportunities in Mali or trade across the Malian-Burkinabè border.

The two largest ethnic groups of Burkina Faso are the Mossi, located in the northern regions of the country and the Bobo in the south-west. Along the northern border with Mali and Niger there are semi-nomadic Fulani inhabitants whose traditional grazing lands cross the borders of the three countries.⁹ The religious demographics of the country, at the time of the 2006 census displayed that more than 60% of the population considered themselves Muslim. However, there is also a large Christian minority in Burkina Faso estimated to be over 20% of the total population. Islam first appeared in the area during the 14th–16th centuries and by the end of the 18th century local rulers, notably the leader of the Mossi, adopted Islam, but traditional religious practices among the population remained strong.¹⁰ Islam's expansion was facilitated by the circumstances of French rule in which colonial policies reinforced religious identity as something distinct from other social affiliations.¹¹

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Le Ministre de l'économie et des finances du Burkina Faso. 2010. *Stratégie de Croissance Accélérée et de Développement Durable 2011-2015*. Retrieved from:

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTBURKINAFASO/Resources/SCADD-burkina-faso.pdf>

⁸ Melly, Paul. 2013. Economy (Burkina Faso), in Europa World online. London, Routledge. University of Florida Libraries. Paragraph 3. Retrieved 09 April 2013 from: <http://www.europaworld.com/entry/bf.ec>

⁹ Church, R. J. Harrison. Physical and Social Geography (Burkina Faso), in Europa World online. London, Routledge. University of Florida Libraries. Retrieved 09 April 2013 from <http://www.europaworld.com/entry/bf.ge>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Luanay, Robert and Benjamin Soares. 1999. He formation of an 'Islamic sphere' in French Colonial West Africa." *Economy and Society* 28(4): 497-519.

Keeping this context in mind, I now discuss the involvement and reactions of the Burkinabè government to the Malian crisis of 2012.

The Official Burkinabè Response

Prior to January 2013 and the French military intervention in Mali, the official position of Burkina Faso on the crisis can best be described as one of negotiation and reintegration. When the MNLA launched its rebellion in January 2012 it received little attention from countries in the region because it was not the first time such an event had occurred. Prior to this the press attacked the government of Mali for enabling militant terrorist groups like AQIM to prosper within the northern regions of the country.¹² When the rebellion broke out and the Malian military lost a series of battles to the separatists, the press highlighted the failure of the Malian government again.¹³ Full treatment of these events is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that they inadvertently opened the door of opportunity for Blaise Compaoré to become once again the chief negotiator in a regional crisis.

Compaoré has played the role of regional negotiator and facilitator in many of West Africa's conflicts.¹⁴ Consequently, following the denunciation of the military coup in Mali, ECOWAS designated Compaoré as the chief negotiator for the conflict in Mali.¹⁵ Compaoré's initial role was to facilitate political conversations between ECOWAS and the coup leader Captain Amadou Sanogo.¹⁶ After the transitional government was established in Mali, the Burkinabè government became the first government to reach out to the Islamists and Tuareg separatists in an attempt to start negotiations. At this point the northern regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu were occupied and *de facto* ruled by militant Islamist groups. Compaoré brought leaders from Ansar Dine—a mostly Tuareg Islamist group—and the MNLA to Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, for negotiations prior to the French military intervention.¹⁷ Compaoré also held discussions with members of the Malian

¹² Ouoba, Boundi. 2010. "Lutte Contre AQMI au Mali: Le Général sort l'artillerie lourde." *LeFaso*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article40052>

¹³ Bejot, Jean-Pierre. 2013. "Mali: Et le colonel Alaji Ag-Gamou est arrive (2/2)" *LeFaso*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article53133&rubrique7>

¹⁴ Compaoré help to mediate between Togo's political elites during the political crisis of 2006 and also helped to broker a peace agreement between the Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo and rebel leader Guillaume Soro.

¹⁵ AOuaga. 2012. "Le président Compaoré au Sommet extraordinaire de la CEDEAO sur le Mali." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://news.aouaga.com/h/2401.html>

¹⁶ Jeune Afrique. 2012. "Nord-Mali : Pour Compaoré, une intervention 'efficace' de la CEDEAO n'est pas encore possible." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20120919182548/>

¹⁷ Look, Anne. 2012. "Militant Group in Mali Ready to Negotiate." *Voice of America*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.voafanti.com/gate/gb/www.voanews.com/content/mali-militant-group-negotiation/1540706.html>

transitional government, namely the former interim Prime Minister Cheikh Modibo Diarra, to discuss options for negotiation.¹⁸

Compaoré has not been the only official involved in the negotiations with Malian militant groups. Former Minister of Security and current Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation, Djibrill Bassolé, traveled to northern Mali to meet with leaders of Ansar Dine and initiate negotiations.¹⁹ After the initial trip, Bassolé hosted spokespersons from Ansar Dine in Ouagadougou for the first round of dialogue. Bassolé, representing the official stance of the Burkinabè government, argues that the crisis in northern Mali is the result of poverty and insecurity inherent to the Sahel. Under these conditions, he argues, young people are easily manipulated to accept the proposals of terrorist groups and enlist as jihadi fighters.²⁰ Bassolé's role in these negotiations generated recognition from a variety of international sources. For example, he was selected by the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Jeddah to be their special envoy for the conflict; a role he used to conduct regional meetings with various actors in Mali.²¹ During these attempts at a negotiated peace, debates over the potential success of a non-military based resolution to the crisis in Mali were hopeful. Many members of the United Nations, the Malian government, and ECOWAS advocated for negotiation.

Despite the important role Burkina Faso played in the negotiations between the Malian government and militant Islamist groups, the militants ostensibly decided against negotiations when they took control of the central Malian city of Konna. The subsequent military intervention led by France to prevent the capture of Bamako diminished the relevance of Compaoré's role as negotiator, but the government of Burkina Faso was quick to support the intervention by contributing soldiers to the African intervention force, MISMA, later the UN peacekeeping force MINUSMA, and allowing France to establish their logistical headquarters in Ouagadougou.²² The efforts of the ruling party in Burkina Faso were noticed by officials in France. For example, the French Minister of Defense and Veterans Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, praised Compaoré for his efforts in negotiation and

¹⁸ Agence France-Presse. 2012. "Mali's interim PM says favours negotiation." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5herbtwZNdMYNiOFCuIGPT2iaQFbg?docId=CNG.be5c41bb3664394501f576fa5fe63a65.cf1>

¹⁹ Radio France Internationale. 2012. "Djibrill Bassolé: Ansar Dine confirme son engagement a negocier la paix." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20120808-djibrill-bassole-ansar-dine-confirme-son-engagement-negocier-paix-mujao-dialogue-mali-nord-islamistes>.

²⁰ Sidwaya. 2013. "Organisation de la cooperation islamique (OCI): L'envoyé special Djibrill Bassolé envisage une rencontre sur le Mali." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://news.aouaga.com/h/7186.html>.

²¹ Nana, Bachirou. 2013. "Burkina Faso: Organisation de la Coopération Islamique (OCI) L'envoyé Spécial Djibrill Bassolé Envisage une rencontre sur le Mali." *Sidwaya* Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.sahel-info.com/index.php/burkina-faso/item/2341-burkina-faso--organisation-de-la-coop%C3%A9ration-islamique-oci-l%E2%80%99envoy%C3%A9-sp%C3%A9cial-djibrill-bassol%C3%A9-envisage-une-rencontre-sur-le-mali>.

²² AIB. 2013. "Mali: Jean-Yves Le Drian remercie le président Compaoré pour son appui logistique." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://news.aouaga.com/h/6645.html>

support of the French military intervention. France also continued to look to Burkina Faso for help negotiating with the MNLA in Kidal.²³

On Tuesday April 30th, Compaoré met with the president of Commission for Dialogue and Reconciliation in Mali, Mohamed Salya, in Ouagadougou to discuss the situation of the MNLA—which continued to control Kidal in the northern region of Mali.²⁴ At this meeting the President of the Commission stated that he had come to meet with Compaoré for advice on how to convene an inclusive dialogue between the groups.²⁵ The transitional government of Mali also relied on Compaoré’s connections and expertise to negotiate with the MNLA over the largely peaceful presidential elections which took place in July and August 2013 and subsequent legislative election in November 2013. Despite that Burkina Faso is no longer as involved in negotiations between Malians and the northern separatist, but Compaoré’s role as chief regional negotiator continues to be important for establishing peace in the region and Tuareg leaders continue to call for talks in Burkina Faso.²⁶

The Domestic Political Climate

Considering the level of involvement of Compaoré and other Burkinabè diplomats, it would not be surprising if local politicians or the opposition criticized the official stance of the ruling party. Instead, the ruling party seems to have capitalized on the Malian crisis by highlighting its relevance in the negotiation process of its resolution. The December 2012 legislative and municipal elections reproduced the continued dominance of Compaoré’s party, the Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (CDP). In the legislative elections the CDP actually lost three seats totaling 70 out of 127, but the ruling coalition added another 27 seats totaling 97 against the opposition’s 30.²⁷ Within the opposition parties the elections produced a schism and a new opposition leader, Zéphirin Diabré former presidential advisor for economic affairs, and his party claimed 19 seats in the parliament.²⁸ The municipal elections produced similar results. The CDP contested the elections along with sixty six other parties in 366 of the 367 communes, taking roughly two

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Radio France Internationale. 2013. “Commission dialogue et reconciliation au Mali: les premières nominations rendues officielles.” Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20130331-commission-dialogue-reconciliation-mali-premieres-nominations-rendues-officielles>

²⁵ Koaci. 2013. “Le president de la commission dialogue et reconciliation prend conseils auprès de Blaise Compaoré.” Accessed 9 May 2013 from: http://www.malijet.com/la_societe_malienne_aujourd'hui/actualite_de_la_nation_malienne/70692-le-president-de-la-commission-dialogue-et-reconciliation-prend-c.html

²⁶ Farge, Emma. 2014. “Tuareg leader to Mali government: start talks or risk new revolt.” *Reuters*. Accessed 1 April 2014 from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/25/us-mali-negotiations-idUSBREA2012420140325>

²⁷ Duhem, Vincent. 2013. “Soungalo Ouattara a été élu président de l’Assemblée nationale burkinabè.” *Jeune Afrique*. Accessed 9 May 2013: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20121228130921/cdp-ceni-zephirin-diabre-burkina-fasosoungalo-ouattara-a-ete-elu-president-de-l-assemblee-nationale-Burkinabè.html>

²⁸ Ibid.

thirds of the total number of seats up for election.²⁹ During the 49th National convention of the CPD, the party reviewed the results of the complimentary municipal elections held in February 2013 and announced that it directs 317 municipal councils of the 369—roughly 86%—in the country.³⁰ The December 2012 elections and the complimentary municipal elections demonstrate the continued dominance of the CDP in the local politics of Burkina Faso.

Prior to the elections, some in the press had speculated that the popular protests and military mutinies of 2011 might produce a more balanced government following the elections of December 2012.³¹ However, the elections only substantiated the dominance of the CDP and the reorganized Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI) found the elections to be free and fair making the results much less controversial than 2010 presidential election.³² Thus, even with the close involvement of Compaoré in the negotiations between militant Islamists and the Malian government, domestic politics in Burkina Faso continues as usual. Instead the major political debates in Burkina focus on the uncertainty around the next presidential elections and who will represent the CDP. Under article thirty seven of the current constitution this should be the final presidential term Compaoré serves, but recently a referendum was proposed to determine whether Compaoré should run for reelection. This caused the resignation of many senior members of the CDP as well as massive protests in the urban areas of Burkina Faso.³³

Opinions of the Burkinabè society vary regarding the crisis to their north. Several press outlets were critical of the Amadou Toumani Touré's government in Mali even before the rebellion of the MNLA, citing his government's approach—or lack thereof—for dealing with AQIM. The majority of those critical of the Touré regime called for more regional coordination to prevent the criminal networks of AQIM from expanding, but the complicity of the Malian regime seems to have only empowered the terrorist and criminal organization.³⁴ In fact, following the coup which removed Touré from power, some in

²⁹ Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante. 2012. *Resultats Provisoires des Elections Municipales au Niveau National*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from:

<http://www.ceni.bf/sites/default/files/municipales2012/Municipale%20National.pdf>

³⁰ Kouanda, Assimi. 2013. "Burkina Faso: Le CDP dirige 317 conseils municipaux sur les 369.

<http://www.fasozine.com/index.php/actualite/10202-le-cdp-dirige-317-conseils-municipaux-sur-les-369>

³¹ LeFaso. 2011. "Barthelemy Kere a la Tete de la CENI: Des Raisons d'espérer." Accessed 9 May 2013:

<http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article43293>

³² Observed from Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante reports on the elections of December 2012 and February 2013. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.ceni.bf/>

³³ Hagberg, Sten 2014. "Burkina Faso: Is President Compaoré Finally on the Way Out?" *Think Africa Press*. Accessed 2.21.2014 <http://thinkafricapress.com/burkina-faso/enough-enough-Compaoré-long-rule>

³⁴ Ouoba, Boundi. 2010. "Lutte Contre AQMI au Mali: Le Général sort l'artillerie lourde." *LeFaso*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article40052>.

Bejot, Jean-Pierre. 2013. "Mali: Et le colonel Alaji Ag-Gamou est arrive" *LeFaso*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article53133&rubrique7>

Burkina Faso were supportive of the rebellion because it meant an end to Touré's government, but the vast majority of Burkinabè did not support the temporary partition of Mali.³⁵

In general, the Burkinabè press supports the French intervention in Mali and the removal of the militants from the northern region of the country. Although some argue that France should not be allowed to play a dominant role in the organization of Mali's new government,³⁶ others criticize France for displacing the militants from cities in northern Mali, but failing to pursue and engage them.³⁷ Ultimately, they argue that this will ignite a longer and more destructive guerrilla war, potentially destabilizing other countries. Alternatively, the victories and sacrifices of the Chadian military in Mali are regularly glorified in the press, especially following the announcement that the Chadian forces killed Abou Zeid and allegedly Mokhtar Belmokhtar.³⁸ While it is arguable that France has actually contributed more to the intervention than Chad, the role of the Chadian military has been crucial to the intervention effort and the press in Burkina Faso recognized this frequently.³⁹

The Role of the Military

The direct role of Burkina Faso in the military interventions which dispersed the Islamists in northern Mali was relatively minor. Only 500 troops from the Burkinabè military were sent to northern Mali to participate in MISMA.⁴⁰ The vast majority of these soldiers did not participate in the battles between the intervention forces and militants. Instead, along with much of the MISMA forces, they were stationed in central Mali with the goal of holding cities that were never occupied by the militants.⁴¹ Recently Burkinabè forces were deployed to towns experiencing conflict in northern Mali,⁴² but this is only after the French

³⁵ The comments of the article [Intervention au Nord-Mali: Les menaces de Abdelmalek Droukdel, chef de l'AQMI, à la France et aux chefs d'Etat africains](#) accessed 9 May 2013 suggest that some in Burkina Faso supported the implementation of Sharia in northern Mali.

³⁶ Bejot, Jean-Pierre. 2013. "Mali: Et le colonel Alaji Ag-Gamou est arrive (1/2)" *LeFaso*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article53132&rubrique7>

³⁷ Biiga, Bark. 2013. "Nord-Mali: Dure, dure sera la fin." *Fasozine*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article53132&rubrique7>

³⁸ Berthemet, Tanguy. 2013. "Le Tchad, précieux allié de la France au Mali." *Le Figaro on LeFaso*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article53116&rubrique7>

³⁹ See the news articles: [Mali: Un attentat-suicide à la voiture piégée fait plusieurs morts à Kidal](#), [Mali: Et le colonel Alaji Ag-Gamou est arrive \(1/2\)](#) and

⁴⁰ AIB. 2013. "Mali: Jean-Yves Le Drian remercie le président Compaoré pour son appui logistique." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://news.aouaga.com/h/6645.html>

⁴¹ Le Pays. 2013. "Bataillon Badenya du Burkina a Markala." *Le Pays*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.lepays.bf/?BATAILLON-BADENYA-DU-BURKINA-A>.

⁴² Associated Press. 2013. "Malian military pushes into Ber, hotspot northeast of Timbuktu." *Washington Post*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/malian-military-pushes-into-ber-hotspot-northeast-of-timbuktu/2013/05/07/cf57cc4e-b71d-11e2-b568-6917f6ac6d9d_story.html

and Chadian militaries have begun to withdraw their forces. Domestically, the military of Burkina Faso has increased their border patrols and check points between cities.⁴³ The military's domestic importance has also grown because it is relied on to provide security for refugee populations in the northern regions where displaced persons—many of them ethnic Tuareg or Arab—have arrived primarily from the Timbuktu region. In general, the direct impact of the military intervention in Mali has been small on Burkina Faso, but the effects of the Malian crisis have produced strain on the domestic activities of the military.

This does not mean that Burkina Faso fails to contribute to the intervention effort in other important ways. Compaoré remains the chief negotiator for the conflict, thus the direct military involvement of the country would be problematic for his ability to facilitate potential peace agreements. Instead, the French established their logistical headquarters in Ouagadougou and the United States has contributed logistical support from their intelligence hub based in Ouagadougou since before the intervention began.⁴⁴ By allowing this, Compaoré assisted in gathering intelligence on the Islamists and his rapport with his Western allies continued to grow. Simultaneously, by not committing large numbers of troops to the intervention and keeping his military out of direct conflict he is able to protect his ability to negotiate peace.

Despite this cautious political strategy, any type of attack in Burkina Faso would have unpredictable effects on stability in the country and Compaoré's ability to remain in power. The military mutinies of spring and summer 2011 persist in the memories of the press and opposition. All turnovers of power in Burkina Faso have occurred as a result of a military coup d'état, thus historically the military determines who is in power of the country. In the event that militants were to find their way into Burkina Faso, this could reinitiate the grievances of the military officers who led the mutinies of 2011. Certainly it would provide an opportunity for opposition leaders to argue that Compaoré must step down at the end of his term because of poor leadership in addition to the constitutional term limits.

However, the more than twenty five years in power has generated a strong political party and cadre of ministers loyal to Compaoré. It is not inconceivable that conflict spreading into Burkina Faso might also play to Compaoré's political advantage. Destabilizing events in the country might allow for Compaoré to present the case that the country needs him to remain in power for a third term after 2015 in order to reinstate stability. Indeed, the very

⁴³ United Nations Human Right Council. 2013. "Statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/statement-un-special-rapporteur-promotion-and-protection-human-rights-while>

⁴⁴ Nkala, Oscar. 2013. "US Army seeking private contractors for African commando transportation." *Defence Web*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30403:us-army-seeking-private-contractors-for-african-commando-transportation&catid=47:Logistics&Itemid=110

risk of destabilizing events highlights the importance of Compaoré's rule and facilitates his support domestically and internationally. These various scenarios are difficult to grapple with considering their contingent nature, but the stability that Burkina Faso has experienced under Compaoré unquestionably plays to his advantage.

Refugee Populations

The principal effect of the Mali crisis on the economy of Burkina Faso is the establishment of refugee camps in the northern regions of the country. It is estimated that between forty and seventy thousand Malian refugees have arrived in northern Burkina Faso.⁴⁵ The majority of the population is of Tuareg or Arab descent and they began arriving following the Islamist occupation of the cities of Gao and Timbuktu.⁴⁶ The population of refugees has been steadily rising since March 2012 and UNHCR estimates that the population will continue to grow, despite the success of the French military intervention.⁴⁷ Indeed, some of the refugees express that they will not return to Mali unless there is a territory established specifically for the Tuareg.⁴⁸ They fear reprisals from the Malian military and local communities if they return. Ironically, the majority of refugees in Burkina Faso fled Mali because they did not support the Tuareg separatist movement, but because of the harsh occupation of Tuareg Islamists many non-Tuareg Malians now harbor prejudice against the ethnic group. The resolution of this situation remains tenuous because the Tuareg continue to have *de facto* rule over parts of the region of Kidal, while the Malian government continues to dispute their claims.

In addition to this concern, the growing number of refugees caused the leaders of the refugee assistance campaign to relocate the camps farther south.⁴⁹ Fears regarding the dispersal of militant Islamists into desert and mountain hideouts combined with the proximity of the refugee camps to Gao and Timbuktu generated numerous concerns over the security of the refugees. Many of the Islamist groups fragmented following the military intervention and because many people continue to seek refuge in Burkina Faso it is possible that some of those seeking asylum may have fought as militants in Mali. This obviously poses serious problems for UNHCR regarding the identity of the refugees.

⁴⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2013. "2013 UNHCR country operations profile – Mali situation (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso)." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e483de6.html> And The CIA World Factbook accessed 9 May 2013 from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2194.html>

⁴⁶ Wane, Fatimata and Julien Sauvaget. 2013. "Thousands of Malians seek refuge in Burkina Faso." *France 24*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.france24.com/en/20130303-thousands-malians-seek-refuge-burkina-faso>.

⁴⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2013. "2013 UNHCR country operations profile – Mali situation (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso)." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e483de6.html>

⁴⁸ Wane, Fatimata and Julien Sauvaget. 2013. "Thousands of Malians seek refuge in Burkina Faso." *France 24*. Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.france24.com/en/20130303-thousands-malians-seek-refuge-burkina-faso>.

⁴⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2013. "2013 UNHCR country operations profile – Mali situation (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso)." Accessed 9 May 2013 from: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e483de6.html>

UNHCR also acknowledges that the proliferation of arms throughout the region following the end of Qaddafi's regime in Libya presents a unique challenge to maintaining the security of the refugees.⁵⁰ And finally, the overall situation is complicated by the very poor infrastructure of northern Burkina Faso. Underdeveloped infrastructure in the region makes it more difficult for the Burkinabè state to provide adequate security and increases the costs associated with transporting goods to the refugee camps.

Nevertheless, the Burkinabè state has partnered with UNHCR to facilitate the resettlement of many refugees in Burkina Faso and the two partners continue to work closely in order to ensure the safety of the refugees. UNHCR and the government of Burkina Faso have agreed to several ambitious goals for 2013. In some cases these goals are predictable such as: to increase the amount of water available per person, to produce more durable shelters, or to provide specialized care for at risk youth in the refugee camps.⁵¹ However, other goals highlight the ability of the state to provide services for the population. For instance, the government has agreed to produce national identity cards and birth certificates in order to help resettle the refugees.⁵² Burkina Faso will also provide primary health care services to all refugees in the camps and assist in the training of teachers amongst the refugees in order to begin educational programs for children.⁵³ The ability of the state to provide these services highlights the strength of the regime in Burkina Faso and its resilience, in spite of the added strains on the country because of the Malian crisis.

Conclusion

The reaction of elites in Burkina Faso has remained consistent from the beginning of the crisis throughout the French intervention. The president and his ministers continue to advocate for negotiations between the rebel groups and the Malian state and are recognized as special representatives for the negotiation of peace in the region. This stance served to strengthen the position of the government during the legislative and municipal elections of December 2012 and the complementary February 2013 municipal elections. By demonstrating the regional importance of his position as president of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré helped his party to demonstrate its strength during these elections. Even though many speculated that a reorganized CENI, following popular uprisings and military mutinies in 2011, might produce a different outcome for the political parties of the state.

Similarly, by offering space and support for the logistical operations of France and the United States in Ouagadougou, Compaoré continues to demonstrate his usefulness and ability to maintain stability in Burkina Faso to important Western allies. These factors

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

appear to have contributed a great deal both to Compaoré and his party's strength, but also to the apparent stability of the country. The military appears to be under the control of the government, the opposition accepted the results of the December 2012 elections peacefully, and the press continues to be indifferent to the role of the state in the Malian crisis.

What remains to be seen is whether these political advantages will carry Compaoré into an attempt at a fifth and currently unconstitutional presidential term. If the referendum were to pass allowing Compaoré to run for another term the outcome of those elections could result in complete destabilization of the country. Significant numbers of demonstrators have hit the streets of Ouagadougou protesting the possibility of another term for the president, but it is difficult to know how Burkinabé outside of the capital view the situation. A Compaoré victory in the 2015 elections could result in more of the same, or send the country into social upheaval like the mutinies of 2011. The alternative outcome is equally shrouded by contingencies. If Compaoré were to lose the 2015 elections, it is not clear that he would leave office peacefully, nor is it clear who might replace him. Thus despite the events in Mali, the future political stability of Burkina Faso appears to depend significantly on the decisions of the president who has ruled the country for nearly three decades.